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BEAUVOIR'S MORAL PERIOD PHILOSOPHY

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by

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Abstract

My dissertation is about Simone de Beauvoir's moral period works, a series of works she wrote in the mid-1940's, including *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, in which she tries to develop a workable version of existentialist ethics. I argue that Beauvoir's moral period works exhibit a complex relation to the tradition of ethical philosophy beginning with Kant and continuing through Hegel. On the one hand, Beauvoir, like Kant and Hegel, builds her ethics around the freedom and autonomy of the self, which in turn grounds the dignity of the self, and its demands for respect and recognition. On the other hand, Beauvoir rejects Kantian and Hegelian metaphysics in favor of phenomenology, and this has consequences for her ethics. For Beauvoir, we need to realize the ideals of dignity, respect, and recognition through action in the concrete world of particular and situated human beings. This position creates a tension in her work. Because people are heterogeneous, it is impossible to act for some without simultaneously acting against others, so that the ideal of universal respect and recognition in a kingdom of ends or a community of mutual recognition turns out to be impossible. Beauvoir responds to this tension by offering a loose set of guidelines to help us navigate the complex ethical dilemmas we face in our everyday lives. Beauvoir's project, if successful, would preserve the powerful normative ethics of Kant and Hegel, but without the need to accept problematic metaphysical positions such as the noumena/phenomena distinction or the completion of the System.

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Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir identified the years 1942-1946 as a distinct “moral period” in her career as a writer.¹ During this time, she produced two major philosophical essays, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, two novels, *The Blood of Others* and *All Men Are Mortal*, and several shorter works in a variety of genres. All of these works, as the label “moral period” suggests, somehow concern matters of ethics. Many of them directly address the historical events that were happening in France at the time – the war, occupation, liberation, and purge – and all of them were influenced by these events. The moral period works fit within the intellectual movement in mid-20th century France that ultimately became known as Existentialism, although Beauvoir herself tried to resist the label, and only reluctantly accepts the term in her 1945 essay “Existentialism and Popular Wisdom.”²

Beauvoir’s moral period works exhibit a complex relationship to the tradition of modern ethical philosophy beginning with Kant and continuing through Hegel. On the one hand, Beauvoir accepts the basic concepts of Kantian and Hegelian normative ethics. Beauvoir, like Kant and Hegel, builds her ethics around the freedom and autonomy of the self. This freedom and autonomy, as in Kant and Hegel, grounds the dignity of the self, which must be respected and recognized. Beauvoir’s underlying agreement with Kant and Hegel also leads her to agree with them about smaller points such as paternalism and the purpose of punishment. Beauvoir is quite open about these connections. She says that, in the early 1940’s, she took extensive notes on Kant, and used Kant as “a focal point or sounding board, or the standard upon which my own arguments and the arguments of other philosophers must be judged.”³ In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir explicitly states that existentialism “carries on the tradition of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel”; she also explicitly identifies her philosophy as a form of radical humanism, in the

tradition of Kant, Hegel, and Marx⁴ Later in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she seems to imply that her position is an ethics of autonomy, a tradition which she sees as starting with Kantian ethics,⁵ and in good Kantian fashion she announces that she intends to formulate ethical principles which can apply universally to all human beings.⁶ Throughout her moral period works, Beauvoir often calls attention to smaller points of agreement with these philosophers, or marks her agreement by using obviously Kantian and Hegelian language, such as dignity, respect, recognition, and the ends/means distinction.

On the other hand, Beauvoir rejects the metaphysical claims Kant and Hegel use to ground their ethics. She rejects both Kant's noumenal world and Hegel's System and instead proposes her own version of phenomenology. Because metaphysics has consequences for ethics, Beauvoir's rejection of Kantian and Hegelian metaphysics leads her to reject those parts of their ethical systems which are implied by their metaphysics. Against Kant, Beauvoir argues that Kant does not succeed in making the move from the noumenal world, in which he develops his ethical principles, to the phenomenal world, in which these principles would have to be applied. Against Hegel, she argues that Hegel never takes the particularity of people seriously enough before they get swept up into the System. Beauvoir, in contrast, grounds her ethics in phenomenology, and this implies that she needs to bring ethics down to earth. She insists on realizing the ideals of freedom, respect, and recognition through action in the concrete world of particular and situated human beings. Therefore she attempts to take people seriously in both their general and particular features. She demands that we see people as ambiguous beings: both as free subjects who possess universal human dignity, and as vulnerable embodied beings enmeshed in webs of connections with other vulnerable embodied beings.

Beauvoir's complex position toward Kant and Hegel creates a tension in her work. Dignity, respect, and recognition are metaphysical concepts. They are ideals; they appeal to formal features shared by all human beings. The real world, in contrast, is messy and complicated, and full of shades of gray. It is simply impossible to act in the real world in such a way that we always treat everyone as an end and not merely as a means. We will always have to sacrifice somebody; we will always need to make compromises. Beauvoir is aware of this tension, but rather than try to eliminate it, she tries to help us assume it. Beauvoir sees the need to make compromises and sacrifices as ineradicable. Partial failure is simply the inevitable price of acting authentically in the world. This does not, however, make ethical action impossible. All action involves partial failure, but we can still act, and act with varying degrees of success. Because she thinks every situation is unique and requires an original solution, Beauvoir does not provide any hard-and-fast rules to tell us how to act, but instead provides us with a set of general guidelines to help us navigate the complex ethical situations we encounter in our everyday lives. These guidelines serve as Beauvoir's solution to the problems raised by combining Kantian and Hegelian normative ideals with an account of ethical action derived from phenomenology.

There are several reasons for looking at Beauvoir's moral period works in the light of her complex relation to modern philosophy. Beauvoir's moral period philosophy might provide a surer philosophical grounding to a very powerful set of ideas. Catherine Wilson has tried to illustrate this point by distinguishing between ethical systems built around concepts of human dignity and ethical systems built around concepts of human rights. Beauvoir and Kant both base their ethics on human dignity; in contrast most contemporary Anglo-American ethical discourse centers around discussions of human rights. An ethics based on human dignity gives us a much richer conception of what it means to be human than an ethics based on human rights. Kant and

Beauvoir write in almost religious terms about the significance of every individual; in contrast the self of rights-based discourse is little more than a rational economic agent. At a practical level, this means that ethical systems based on human dignity allow us to make much more extensive claims than ethical systems based on human rights. Ethical systems based on human dignity do, however, present us with a problem: they are harder to ground and apply than ethical systems based on human rights. Kant grounds his ethics in claims about a supersensible world, while Hegel grounds his ethics in the claim that the real is the rational, both of which are debatable to say the least. Kantian and Hegelian ethics are also hard, or even dangerous, to put into practice. There are many philosophers who have said that Kant's categorical imperative cannot provide any concrete guide to action, or that Hegel's State amounts to a form of totalitarianism, and although these are oversimplifications, their prevalence suggests they contain some grains of truth.⁷

Beauvoir's moral period philosophy, if successful, would escape most of these difficulties. Her ethics is grounded in phenomenology, and phenomenology, in Beauvoir's view, is simply a philosophically rigorous account of our everyday experience of living in the world.⁸ Thus Beauvoir would give us the powerful normative ethics of Kant and Hegel, but without the metaphysical baggage. In order to accept Beauvoir's ethics, we would only need to recognize ourselves in her phenomenological descriptions, and in this respect it is important to note that Beauvoir does not share some of the more controversial claims of Sartrean ontology. Beauvoir's ethics should also be easier to put into practice than the ethics of Kant or Hegel. Because Beauvoir does not believe in a noumenal world or a Hegelian future, she focuses instead on the question of how to act in the phenomenal world as it currently exists. Her loose set of guidelines should therefore lead us to act in a manner that will be more successful than action based on

Kantian or Hegelian principles. Beauvoir's literary works from the moral period provide us with several examples of people who try to lead their lives along Kantian or Hegelian lines and end up engaging in counterproductive courses of action.

On a more general level, Beauvoir's attempt to combine universal ethical norms with concrete and particular subjects seems to fit with the post-postmodern tenor of contemporary philosophy. For all its faults, Enlightenment humanism was very effective at producing ethical and political norms, which could then be "cashed out" as concrete changes in political, economic, and social relations.⁹ Postmodernism replaced the subject with discourse and universalism with identity, and thereby may have foreclosed the possibility of a constructive philosophical or political project. Derrida, for example, acknowledged that his political activity was incommensurate with his deconstructionist project.¹⁰ As the weaknesses of postmodernism have become more apparent, there have been attempts to move beyond postmodernism, toward what for lack of a better word we might call post-postmodernism. Sonia Kruks describes the post-postmodern project as a "revision of humanism." The post-postmodern project seeks to formulate "a political discourse that asserts freedom and human potentiality as universal values, even as it remains attuned to the dangers of universalism."¹¹ This is essentially the same project Beauvoir was engaged in back in the 1940's. Beauvoir works with a subject that possesses the formal features common to all Enlightenment subjects but also acts out of a particular embodied situation toward particular ends. Kruks has suggested that much of the recent interest in *The Second Sex* may be due to its usefulness as a resource for developing a post-postmodern feminism.¹² There is no reason why we could not carry out an analogous project in ethics. Just as feminists have used *The Second Sex* as a resource for a post-postmodern feminism, ethicists could use the moral period as a resource for formulating a post-postmodern ethics.

There is a tremendous amount of secondary literature on Beauvoir, but very little that looks at her moral period works, or at her contributions to ethics. The earliest secondary literature on Beauvoir was tainted by the assumption (which Beauvoir herself fostered) that her own work was merely an application of Sartre's philosophy. Because of this assumption, Beauvoir's moral period works were seen primarily as resources for understanding Sartre's ethics, rather than contributions to philosophy in their own right. For instance, Thomas Flynn, in *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*, calls *The Ethics of Ambiguity* the "official commentary on his [Sartre's] existentialist ethic." Both Thomas Anderson, in *The Foundation and Structure of Sartrean Ethics*, and David Detmer, in *Freedom as a Value*, call attention to the fact that Beauvoir said *The Ethics of Ambiguity* was based on Sartre's ontology in *Being and Nothingness*. Anderson takes this to mean that *The Ethics of Ambiguity* "can offer invaluable assistance in determining the character of his [Sartre's] ethics," while Detmer uses quotes from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* to justify his reading of Sartre. Hazel Barnes, in general surveys of existentialism such as *An Existentialist Ethics* and *Humanistic Existentialism: The Literature of Possibility*, is more scrupulous about attributing ideas to the author of record, and more open to the possibility that Beauvoir may have significantly influenced Sartre's works just as Sartre significantly influenced hers. Barnes does, however, still accept Beauvoir's claim that Sartre was the original and creative philosopher and she was more interested in literature.¹³

The assumption that Beauvoir's moral period works were derivative meant that there was not much secondary literature about them. In general, the early secondary literature tended to substitute discussions of Beauvoir's life for analyses of her works, a phenomenon which Toril Moi commented on in *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*.¹⁴ The assumption that Beauvoir was derivative also meant that there was not any perceived need to

produce philosophically competent translations of her works. *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and Beauvoir's *Les temps modernes* articles did not appear in translation until 2004. The English translation of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* mistranslates basic terms: "bonne foi" and "mauvaise foi" become "honesty" and "dishonesty;" "authentique" and "inauthentique" become "genuine" and "not genuine." Even the title is a mistranslation: "Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté" should be the less definite "Toward an Ethics of Ambiguity."¹⁵

More recently several major works have challenged this picture of Beauvoir as Sartre's disciple. The recent interest in Beauvoir is probably due to the rise of feminism both inside and outside the academy. Most of the writers are women, most are Anglo-American or Scandinavian. Until recently there was not much work from France, where the intellectual culture is comparatively less feminist.¹⁶ Many of these works attempt to show that Beauvoir's philosophical position is in fact different from Sartre's, and to draw connections between Beauvoir and other figures in the history of philosophy.¹⁷ Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, in *Sex and Existence*, traces the myriad philosophical influences on *The Second Sex*, most notably Hegel, Marx, but also Kierkegaard, Husserl, Heidegger. Toril Moi, in *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, integrates biographical work on Beauvoir with close readings of *She Came to Stay* and *The Second Sex*. Moi's later *What Is a Woman?* and Nancy Bauer's *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism* primarily discuss Beauvoir's methodology in *The Second Sex*. Both see Beauvoir's writing as an act of humility: rather than elevating her own perceptions to the status of a universal law, Beauvoir simply offers herself as an example in the hope that others will recognize themselves in her words.¹⁸ Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, situates *The Second Sex* in the context of phenomenology, particularly Merleau-Ponty's development of Husserl's notion of the lived body. Debra Bergoffen, in *The*

Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir, and Karen Vintges, in *Philosophy as Passion*, present innovative readings of Beauvoir's works. Bergoffen finds in Beauvoir an ethics of erotic generosity which connects her to Irigaray; Vintges finds an "art of living" ethic which places Beauvoir near Foucault. Margaret Simons, in *Beauvoir and "The Second Sex": Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism*, traces Beauvoir's concept of internalized oppression from *The Second Sex* to Richard Wright's analysis of American racism.¹⁹

These and other works decisively established Beauvoir as an original and independent thinker in her own right. But the renewed appreciation for Beauvoir as a philosopher has not led to a renewed interest in her moral period works or her contributions to ethics. Because most of the recent commentators came to Beauvoir through an interest in feminism, there is not much interest, understandably enough, in other aspects of her work.²⁰ Most of the secondary literature on Beauvoir devotes little or no attention to her moral period works. For instance, Michèle LeDoeuff, in *Hipparchia's Choice*, and Toril Moi, in *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*, do not discuss the moral period works at all. Moi does discuss the moral period very briefly in *What Is a Woman?*, but she also mentions that the moral period works seem to have a different style from *The Second Sex*, which means that her discussion of the style of *The Second Sex*, which is her principal topic in *What Is a Woman?*, would not apply to the moral period.²¹ When commentators do address the moral period works, they often do so because a discussion of the moral period works is necessary to some larger project, and not because they are interested in the moral period works as contributions to philosophy in their own right. Thus, for instance, Lundgren-Gothlin discusses phenomenology as one of the three main influences on *The Second Sex*, and to do this traces the development of phenomenology from Husserl to Heidegger to Sartre to the moral period to *The Second Sex*. To take another example,

Bauer wants to show how Beauvoir appropriated the master-slave dialectic in *The Second Sex*, and in order to do this, she traces the transformation of the master-slave dialectic from Hegel through Sartre to *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* to *The Second Sex*. Ursula Tidd discusses the moral period to set up a discussion of Beauvoir's literature. Of course, because most of the books which are written on Beauvoir are not focused on the moral period, the discussion of the moral period occupies very little space in these books. Thus, for instance, the moral period rates one chapter out of seven in Bauer, and one chapter out of sixteen in Lundgren-Gothlin.

Furthermore even those commentators who seem to be sympathetic toward Beauvoir in general are often unsympathetic toward her moral period works in particular. The rise of Beauvoir studies coincided with the rise of postmodernism, and with newer forms of feminism, both of which were inimical to Existentialism and to classical ways of philosophizing generally. Thus, in order to save Beauvoir from herself, it was necessary to deny the significance of the moral period works, generally by attributing them to the pernicious influence of Sartre.²² Thus Michele LeDoeuff, repeating Beauvoir's own unfavorable comments on *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, holds that the entire moral period was a false step caused by Beauvoir's continuing allegiance to Sartre:

It rests with her male and female readers of today to say whether they subscribe to this judgment, which for me testifies to the taste of ashes left by a book written on the side or against the grain of that which one had begun to elaborate oneself. To say it straight out: Why did she have to get involved in this Existentialism business, when, from July 1940, she held the thread that would lead her directly from *She Came to Stay* to *The Second Sex*?²³

Nancy Bauer, on the other hand, regards the moral period as merely the lead-up to *The Second Sex*, in which Beauvoir has not yet moved beyond an abstract way of doing philosophy which she shared with Sartre:

In the pre-Second Sex material... Beauvoir has not found her philosophical voice. She cannot articulate clearly why she finds herself attracted to the thinkers whose works inspire her to write. For this reason, the early works are marked by a certain vagueness, an imprecision of thought that disqualifies them ... from serious independent philosophical consideration.²⁴

Many of the works on Beauvoir do, however, contain useful commentary on the moral period works, even if they are not focused on the moral period or not sympathetic to the moral period. Bauer, in particular, has been a valuable resource for understanding the way Beauvoir adapts the master-slave dialectic in her moral period works and the relationship of Beauvoir's moral period works to *Being and Nothingness*. Heinämaa and Lundgren-Gothlin have both commented on Beauvoir's connections to Kierkegaard.²⁵ To the best of my knowledge, the connection between Beauvoir and Kant remains largely unstudied, although both Hazel Barnes and Kristana Arp have suggested that there is a connection, and Catherine Wilson has connected Kant with *The Second Sex*.²⁶ Barnes says that the emphasis on treating the other as a subject, which she finds in existentialist ethics generally, suggests the Kantian Kingdom of Ends. Barnes also, with qualifications, accepts the idea that *The Ethics of Ambiguity* can be seen as a neo-Kantian text.²⁷ Arp argues that Beauvoir's main contribution to existential ethics is to introduce a concept of moral freedom, a third level of freedom which is distinct from both our arbitrary free will and our power to concretely change the world, and then suggests that an earlier version of moral freedom can be found in Kant.²⁸

There are also some commentators who take Beauvoir's works seriously as contributions to ethics and political philosophy in their own right. Sonia Kruks came to Beauvoir after writing her first book on Merleau-Ponty's political philosophy. In her 1990 book *Situation and Human Existence*, Kruks showed that Beauvoir's ontology in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* differs from the ontology of *Being and Nothingness*. Beauvoir, in contrast to Sartre,

admits the possibility that our freedom can be limited by our situation. Beauvoir's account of freedom thus places her closer to Merleau-Ponty: freedom is not a hole in being but rather a fold, a hollow. In her next book, *Retrieving Experience*, Kruks builds on her previous work, using the later Beauvoir to develop an account of how separate people can build coalitions while still respecting each other's differences. The account in *Retrieving Experience* fills a gap Kruks sees in Beauvoir's earlier work: the early Beauvoir has no account of how our decisions are socially mediated. Kruks is currently working on a book on Beauvoir's political philosophy. My own work owes much to Kruks, though Kruks focuses more on Beauvoir's political philosophy and I am more interested in Beauvoir's ethics.

The first and (to the best of my knowledge) still the only book-length study devoted specifically to Beauvoir's ethics is *The Bonds of Freedom*, written by Kristana Arp in 2001. Before writing on Beauvoir, Arp had previously written articles about Husserl, Sartre, and ethics. Arp argues that *The Ethics of Ambiguity* should be viewed as "the most philosophically consistent and workable version of an existentialist ethics," and therefore her main approach is to read *The Ethics of Ambiguity* against the background of attempts to develop an ethics from suggestions found in Sartre's works from the 1940's, and against the background of critiques which have been made of existential ethics in general. *The Bonds of Freedom* has significantly influenced my own work: for instance, I largely follow Arp's view that Beauvoir posits a specifically moral level of freedom. Nevertheless my project is differs in focus and scope from Arp's. Arp is mainly interested in situating *The Ethics of Ambiguity* with respect to Sartre; I am mainly interested in situating the moral period as a whole with respect to Kant and Hegel.²⁹

My dissertation breaks into four chapters. The first chapter consists of introductory work. I briefly review Kant and Hegel to set out the philosophical background Beauvoir was

responding to. I then do biographical work on Beauvoir to show that she knew about Kant and Hegel before the moral period, reacted strongly to them, and had them in mind when the moral period began. Chapters two and three will be based in readings of Beauvoir's moral period philosophy. In chapter two, I will discuss Beauvoir's agreement with Kant and Hegel, looking first at her views on freedom and autonomy, then at her views on dignity and respect and recognition, and finally at more particular points of agreement with Kant and Hegel. In chapter three I will look at Beauvoir's critiques of Kant and Hegel and then present her own views; my main concern is to show how the differences between Kant, Hegel, and Beauvoir at the level of metaphysics play out as differences in the way the three think we should act in the concrete world. I will then discuss the problems raised by Beauvoir's call to realize the ideals of dignity, respect, and recognition in the real world, and her attempted solution to these problems. In chapter four I look at Beauvoir's literary works from the moral period to show how she uses many of the ideas from her philosophical works in a literary medium. I will conclude by critically assessing Beauvoir's solution and suggesting lines of further research.

Chapter 1. Preparatory Material

In this first chapter, I will briefly review the philosophies of Kant and Hegel, and then set out some biographical details of Beauvoir's life and work before the moral period. Both the philosophy review and the biography are meant to serve as preparation for the work in chapters two through four. My goal in the philosophy review is to set out the normative ideals from Kant and Hegel – freedom, autonomy, dignity, respect, recognition – which Beauvoir will retain, as well as the metaphysical claims Kant and Hegel use to ground their ethics, and the way Kant and Hegel think their normative ideals should be put into practice, both of which Beauvoir will reject. I have chosen to write on Beauvoir's biography because the early work foreshadows much of the work Beauvoir did in her moral period, and because the moral period works were written in a particular context – personal, philosophical, political – which shaped them decisively.

Kant and Hegel

Kant's speculative philosophy is built around a distinction between noumena and phenomena. The phenomenal world is the world of things as they appear to us. By looking at the structure of our perceptual and conceptual apparatus, Kant can make claims about all the phenomena which appear to us through this apparatus, for instance that they appear in space and time and are linked together as causes and effects. Beyond this world, however, there is some suggestion of a noumenal world, a world of things as they really are. In other words, the phenomenal world is the world imposed on human beings by their own limitations, and the noumenal world is somehow more real than the phenomenal world. It is not totally wrong to think about this in religious terms as a separation from God through reliance on the senses, and

indeed God turns out to be a purely noumenal being for Kant. From a speculative point of view, however, the noumenal world has to be regarded as a blank space beyond the bounds of possible experience.³⁰ When we try to fill this blank space by reasoning about things beyond the bounds of experience, things for which no sensible intuition can be given, we either fail to produce any meaningful thoughts about them, or become stuck in antinomies where we can see valid arguments for both sides of the question. Included in this category are freedom, God, and the soul, some of the basic concepts of ethics. Even the ethical self would fall within the noumenal world. Kant's speculative philosophy does include a transcendental I, but we can know nothing more about this transcendental I than the fact that it is there, and the transcendental I is not necessarily the noumenal I. Nevertheless the mere possibility of a noumenal world provides the grounding for Kant's ethics. We must see every event in the phenomenal world as having a prior phenomenal cause. The fact that every phenomenal event must be linked into a chain of causes seems to conflict with the freedom of the will and therefore the possibility of ethics. Kant's solution is to locate moral agents and the moral law within the noumenal realm. The noumenal realm is not subject to the same restrictions as the phenomenal realm, thus it is possible for us to see a noumenal agent as free and morally responsible.³¹

The central concepts of Kant's ethical philosophy are autonomy, freedom, and reason. These concepts can best be understood by contrast with everyday actions. Everyday actions have several characteristics. My action is directed toward some further phenomenal good, this good is separate from me, I am guided to pursue this good by my inclination for happiness, and I only feel an inclination to act so long as I feel an inclination for the good my action will bring about. In technical terms, my pathological desire for happiness leads me to follow a hypothetical imperative, the determining ground of my will is external, and my will is therefore

heteronomous.³² Everything that happens in everyday actions is consistent with our existence as a purely phenomenal creature. It is consistent, to put it in crass form, with animal life. Kant does not necessarily mean to denigrate this kind of existence, and he admits that humans have more complex pleasures than most animals. We feel intellectual pleasures, and feel benevolence and sympathy toward our fellow creatures. Kant does, however, think that actions which concern us merely insofar as we are phenomenal beings have no moral worth.³³

Moral actions, in contrast, are actions we undertake because our reason tells us to do so, without any input from the inclinations we feel as phenomenal beings.³⁴ The law which we follow when using our reason is the categorical imperative, to act only in a manner consistent with that action becoming a universal law of nature.³⁵ Moral actions are free actions in a negative sense, because we are guided to act only by our reason, and reason is capable of acting independently of the phenomenal world. The main job of reason is to critique and regulate itself as well as the sensibility and understanding. Of course one could say that reason is connected to the phenomenal world through its connection to the sensibility and the understanding, but the important point is that reason, in its activity, rules over the sensibility and the understanding and is not subject to them. The ideas produced by reason are produced spontaneously; they are not derived from the representations of the sensibility or even the concepts of the understanding, and yet they set the rules for both. Actions guided by reason therefore share in this independence from the phenomenal world and the causal determinism the phenomenal world entails.³⁶

Moral actions are also free in a positive sense, because the will is not simply a lawless causality, but rather it follows the laws that it gives to itself. To be more specific, it follows the categorical imperative, which it gives to itself through the use of reason. Kant calls this positive conception of freedom autonomy.³⁷ In essence, Kant says that through being guided in our

actions by reason, we take ourselves out of the phenomenal world and put ourselves into the noumenal world.³⁸ This noumenal world now has a positive content. Instead of being merely *not* the phenomenal world, as in Kant's speculative philosophy, the noumenal world now has a law of its own, the law of autonomy, the moral law. Kant takes credit for autonomy as the central concept of his ethics and the concept that sets his ethics apart from all his predecessors. In all his predecessors, there is an ethical law that exists independently of humans (say through God's fiat) and humans have the free will to follow or not follow this law. Such an ethics, according to Kant, must be a form of heteronomy, because some interest must connect the agent and the moral law. Kant's self-imposed moral law faces no such objections. The categorical imperative satisfies all the demands of freedom and autonomy, because we give the law to ourselves without being subject to any external constraint, and the law is known purely by reason without the need for consulting our sensibility or understanding.³⁹

The concepts of freedom, autonomy and rationality lead to the concept of dignity. The concept of dignity is again best understood by contrast to everyday measures of value. The ends we pursue when following a hypothetical imperative have only a conditional worth. We only need to take an action if we consider the end brought about by that action worthwhile. The categorical imperative, in contrast, commands without qualification. You cannot question a categorical imperative; you cannot ask why you should follow it. The end toward which the categorical imperative is directed must therefore have an absolute worth. This is a qualitative, not quantitative, distinction. It is always possible to weigh pleasures against each other, to determine which hypothetical imperative will bring you the most happiness. Dignity, in contrast, admits of no calculation or measurement. It has no price. It is, ultimately, the dignity of being something more than an animal, the dignity of being a member of the noumenal world, and this

automatically outweighs merely phenomenal pleasures. Furthermore, we are not merely members of the noumenal world; we are rulers in the noumenal world. In autonomous action, you give the law to yourself, and are thus the lawgiver as well as the subject who must obey the law. Thus we acquire a dignity very like the dignity accorded to Enlightenment kings.⁴⁰

The dignity of the moral law is practical, that is, it determines our will so that we act according to the moral law. The basic idea here is that the perception of the absolute worth of acting according to the categorical imperative simply overrides all claims of prudence, as indeed it always must, being qualitatively elevated above them.⁴¹ Dignity inheres in the categorical imperative itself, but also in rational nature as such, which determines itself to act through the categorical imperative, and in rational beings that follow the categorical imperative. The perception of dignity in someone is really the perception of the dignity in the moral law that he or she follows.⁴² This dignity is found only in rational beings. It is inalienable: a rational being has dignity by virtue of its nature as a rational being, and it cannot change its nature, even if it acts in an undignified way.⁴³ This leads to a notion of equality. All rational beings are equally rational beings and so equally possessors of dignity. Or rather, as dignity is beyond all calculation, we cannot calculate the worth of one person against another, and so must treat all people as having equal worth.⁴⁴

The concept of dignity leads to the concept of respect. We are obligated to show respect toward all beings which possess dignity.⁴⁵ Respect is fundamentally a negative concept.⁴⁶ It cannot be positive, because respect is ultimately respect for a noumenon, and you can't do anything for a noumenon. A noumenon has no reliance on the phenomenal world and therefore no needs or wants that we could satisfy by acting in the phenomenal world. The only thing you can do to a noumenon is reduce it to the level of a phenomenon, for instance by killing it or

otherwise using it as a means, and respect is the refusal to do this, because of the perception of the dignity that would be lost in the process. We must show respect both towards ourselves and towards all other rational beings. You show respect for yourself by not making yourself dependent on others, not currying favor with people by demeaning yourself in front of them, and standing up for yourself when other people try to trample on your rights. To do otherwise would be to reduce oneself to one's phenomenal aspect, ruled by the desire for happiness or by prudence. Kant even says we should not cry out in physical pain; this proves that we are ruled by the needs of our phenomenal bodies.⁴⁷ The description of showing respect to others is pretty much the same. You must not trample on other people, encourage them to demean themselves, or try to make them dependent upon you.⁴⁸

This idea of respect is relational: it is shown by one person toward another. By showing respect toward another, we show we recognize him as possessing dignity, and therefore entitled to respect. This raises the question of whether we should show respect toward someone who, for whatever reason, fails to show respect toward himself. Catherine Wilson, in part relying on an older essay by Thomas Hill, has suggested that Kant's response to this question is equivocal, and it is true that Kant sometimes speaks as we could forfeit the right to respect by behaving in an undignified way.⁴⁹ Kant does, for instance, say that "one who makes himself a worm cannot complain afterwards if people step on him."⁵⁰ My own view, however, is that Kant thinks treating someone in a disrespectful manner is always wrong, no matter how they treat themselves. Dignity is inalienable. Even if somebody else voluntarily lowers himself, or happens to be in an undignified condition, he is still a rational being and, as such, entitled to respect from us, even if he does not show it to himself. It does not follow, from the fact that the other person would have no right to complain, that I have the right to step on him. No matter

what he may do, I am still bound by the categorical imperative, and the categorical imperative tells me to respect rational nature as such. I have no right to disrespect a lackey, just as I have no right to lie to a liar, or to steal from a thief.⁵¹

Kant says that we should treat others also as ends and not only as means in all our actions. This is another way of expressing the concept of dignity. Rational nature is an end in itself. All people are rational beings, so we are obligated to treat all other people as ends in themselves. I have an obligation to treat every other person I meet as an end in himself. Of course the situation is reciprocal: every other person has an obligation to treat me as an end in myself. This leads to the idea of the kingdom of ends, the idea of a world in which all people relate to each other as ends as well as means. The kingdom of ends, according to Kant, is only an ideal. Phenomenal beings have personal differences and private ends; the kingdom of ends only becomes possible when we abstract from these. Nevertheless, when we act according to the categorical imperative, we do make such an abstraction, and thereby make ourselves into members and sovereigns in the kingdom of ends.⁵²

It is important thing to note that Kant says we should treat people *also* as ends and *not only* as means.⁵³ We are all phenomenal beings, and so when we interact, we must interact on a phenomenal level, and this entails using each other as means to some further end. The trick is to act in such a way that, though we use the other as a means, this is not inconsistent with treating the other being, at the same time, as an end in itself. We cannot do anything for a noumenon, but we can refrain from reducing it to the level of a phenomenon. So, for instance, in an economic exchange, I treat the other as a means to get the good I purchase from him. By purchasing the good, however, I appeal to the other as a free subject who pursues his own ends. The other only agrees to sell me the good because he feels he can use the money to better realize his own ends.

If, on the other hand, I were to steal the good or make a false promise and trick the other into giving it to me, then I would still treat him as a means, but I would not treat him also as an end, because I would completely ignore the question of how the loss of the good fit into his plans.

Kant uses the idea that we should treat others also as ends and not merely as means to derive specific rules for how the kingdom of ends should be ordered. Kant seems to think that economic inequality is consistent with human dignity, but also says that the rich have a duty to help the poor. None of us could wish not to be helped out if we are poor, so there is an imperfect duty of the rich to help the poor, and those who fail to fulfill this imperfect duty are treating the poor merely as a means to an end.⁵⁴ Paternalism in general is unacceptable because it conflicts with the basic principle that people should autonomously guide their own lives.⁵⁵ Paternalism toward children is acceptable, because they are not yet at the point where they can act autonomously, but this kind of paternalism should be as limited as possible, and must be directed toward producing free adults.⁵⁶ Kant also uses the distinction between treating someone only as a means and treating someone also as an end to develop a strictly retributive theory of punishment. Murder, as the destruction of a rational nature with an absolute worth, is an absolute crime, and as such demands the death penalty, which is an absolute punishment.⁵⁷

Kant holds that the noumenal world is the ground of the phenomenal world, and so we should do what is right – a concept that appeals to our nature as noumenal beings – regardless of the circumstances in the phenomenal world.⁵⁸ There are several problems that Kant would face if he allowed the phenomenal world to serve as the site of ethical action. First, the phenomenal consequences of our actions are always uncertain, so if we had to take them into account, we would never know what to do. Second, our ability to act in the phenomenal world is always limited, and this would conflict with the universality of the categorical imperative. Ought

implies can: if we were unable to act then the categorical imperative could not bind us.⁵⁹ Third, if we had to hope for justice in the phenomenal world, we would inevitably be disappointed. Good people may be miserable and bad people may be happy.⁶⁰ It is not even clear what will make us happy in the phenomenal world.⁶¹ The kingdom of ends may never come about.⁶² By saying that we should do what is right regardless of phenomenal circumstances, Kant takes these complications out of play. Of course there is the possibility that we will be hindered from doing what is right, or that there will be unintended consequences to our action. Kant answers that it is the intent which matters, so that even if nothing comes of our attempts to do the right thing, the internal motivation of the action will still shine forth with an absolute worth.⁶³ We may not get happiness but we can reliably become worthy of happiness. We may not realize the kingdom of ends, but we can reliably become worthy to be members of the kingdom of ends.⁶⁴

Hegel builds upon and modifies Kant's position. Hegel begins by challenging Kant's distinction between noumena and phenomena. In order to make such a distinction, Hegel argues, we must first presuppose that there is a noumenal world to which our own perceptual faculties give us only imperfect access, but by what faculty can we come to realize that our faculties are limited? To paraphrase the early Wittgenstein, there is no way, from inside a limit, to see the limit: one would have to see both sides.⁶⁵ Therefore Hegel, in contrast to Kant, says there is only one world, which combines elements of Kant's noumenal and phenomenal worlds. The world of Hegel resembles Kant's phenomenal world, in that it is the world of things and people, the world in which we live and in which history takes place. This world, however, is a world shaped by human activity, and therefore a rational world, and one with humanity as its *telos*. Hegel recasts the kingdom of ends as an idea that has come to light over the course of history. Kant's philosophy asserts that people are free and dignified beings – in the noumenal world –

and expresses the hope that the phenomenal world may be made like this, or that God may even the playing field in the next world. Hegel's philosophy, in contrast, presents a developmental account of how humans in the historical world have come to realize that they are free and dignified beings.

The beginning stage for Hegel is basically consciousness of things outside of oneself. In this stage we have a lone subject confronting objects in its world. The objects themselves are distinct from the subject, and in this sense they can serve as foils to the subject, but the subject can always reduce this distinction by eating the objects, or otherwise ordering the objects to suit its own ends. In this stage, our attention is turned toward external objects, and so we have only a dim and unexpressed awareness of ourselves. Hegel's point is that a lone subject could not reflect upon itself and would have no reason to do so. We do not bother to think about what we would look like "from the outside." In technical terms it has certainty of itself but not truth. It may be dimly aware of itself as a subject, but there is nothing that confirms this picture of itself to itself, because as yet there is nothing in its world that provide such a confirmation.⁶⁶ This corresponds, of course, to Sartre's claim in *Being and Nothingness* that a lone consciousness can never take itself as an object. Nancy Bauer describes this stage as a kind of primary narcissism: we adopt a self-centered worldview but have not yet reached the mirror stage where we think about ourselves from the outside. Hegel goes through several stages of consciousness, including immediate sensory awareness, the idea of substance and accident, and finally the Enlightenment world of unseen forces and supersensible worlds.⁶⁷

A major change occurs when two consciousnesses encounter each other. Each consciousness takes the other as its object, and in so doing, consciousness takes itself as its object, because from a formal level the two consciousnesses are the same. The consciousnesses

themselves, however, have not yet come to the point where they realize this. Instead each consciousness experiences the other as the origin of a divide within itself. Each consciousness now has to confront two views of itself instead of one. There is its internal certainty of itself as a subject, and there is the view the other subject has of it as an object in that other subject's world. Or rather there are two aspects to oneself, one's being-for-self as a subject, and one's being-for-others as an object, and the encounter with the other makes one aware of this second aspect of oneself.⁶⁸ This is the moment in *Being and Nothingness* where the other consciousness looks at me, and I prereflectively recognize myself in the image the other has of me as an object in his world.⁶⁹ For Nancy Bauer, this is the moment where I abandon my primary narcissism, and experience myself as a being who lives a public existence before other subjects who are capable of determining the meanings of my actions. The slavery in the master-slave dialectic (the German word is *Knechtschaft*, "bondage" in some translations) corresponds to the fact that I am "bound" by the judgments of others.⁷⁰

The two consciousnesses could, in theory, peacefully coexist with each other, but at this stage neither consciousness is able to see this or willing to settle for it. Each consciousness experiences a split within itself and wants to do away with this split. At the same time, each consciousness sees the other as a being that could provide it with truth as well as certainty. Each wants its own view of itself as subject confirmed by the other. Now that it has encountered the other, and seen its view of the world challenged, neither consciousness is willing to settle merely for subjective self-certainty anymore. Therefore the encounter of consciousnesses results in a fight to the death in which each consciousness seeks to be recognized by the other as the sole and sovereign consciousness. In the fight to the death, each subject tries to make the case that the view it has of itself is the right one, for both parties, and the view that the other subject has of it

is the wrong one, for both parties. The way to make this case is to risk one's life. The other sees me as a physically existing animal being, but I am willing to risk that animal being in a fight to the death, and so this aspect of myself must be inessential, whereas my view of myself as subject views me in my essential aspect. I do not literally try to deny the other's view of myself as an object, but rather try to prove that this view of myself is not important.⁷¹

This fight to the death bears similarities to Kant's qualitative distinction between noumena and phenomena. For Kant, it is through ignoring phenomenal motivations, and being motivated by reason to act in a way that may even contradict our phenomenal well-being, that we prove ourselves to be members of an intelligible world and thus entitled to recognition. Similarly, in Hegel, the consciousnesses that engage in a fight to the death risk their own life in the process. They do so because being recognized, which is a distinctly human value, is simply more important to them than life, which is a value they share with the animals.⁷² Recognition itself seems to be a radicalized version of Kant's concept of respect. Each consciousness wants the other to see it as free and autonomous. Recognition entails everything that Kantian respect entails. Kantian respect is fundamentally the refusal to trample on noumenal freedom; Hegelian recognition is the granting of space for a free being to exercise its arbitrary free will.⁷³ Hegelian recognition also, however, has a positive and social dimension which Kantian respect lacks. For Kant, the self really is a noumenal being, and respect simply recognizes this preexisting fact. We would be dignified beings even if we were not respected. For Hegel, with no noumenal world, and only limited pre-social self-awareness, recognition in some sense creates us as free beings. We could not be satisfied merely with possessing dignity in a noumenal world that does not exist, and we could not grasp the truth of ourselves as free beings if it were not recognized by others.⁷⁴

If this fight to the death were carried to the end, and one of the parties died, then we would be back where we started with a lone consciousness. This is what happens (of course in a figurative sense) in the discussion of the Look from *Being and Nothingness*. Because there is no possibility of a reconciliation between the two consciousnesses, it is always the case that one of them must take the position of the subject and the other must take the position of the object, and they keep trading positions *ad indefinitum*.⁷⁵ Hegel, in contrast, believes that a reconciliation is possible. This reconciliation begins when one of the consciousnesses comes to see that physical life, while not worthwhile in itself like being a sovereign self-consciousness, is the foundation of consciousness and a necessary condition for consciousness, and on this ground must consent to grant its opponent recognition, in order to be allowed to live. This consciousness becomes the slave, whereas the consciousness that was willing to go all the way in a fight to the death becomes the master. The slave then works for the master, shaping the world into products, which the master consumes. In effect what happens is that the subject/object split within the self is divided up among two people, with the master serving as the subject and the slave as the object. The master tries to see the fact that the slave is willing to be a slave as confirmation that the master is the master. From a longer perspective, however, the slave is actually in a more promising position. The master, by reducing the slave to dependence, in effect winds up back where he started as a sole consciousness. The master cannot get recognition from the slave, because he views the slave as a merely animal being, and recognition can only be granted by a free being. Similarly the master cannot recognize himself in foreign objects, which he simply consumes without working on them. The master's position is a dialectical dead-end: he does not achieve what he wants and his position does not allow him to develop the resources he would need to move on. The slave, in contrast, has the experience of a sovereign self-consciousness, in

the form of the master he serves, and he has an experience of his own activity in the work he does for the master, which he sees as alien to himself, given that the master consumes it. In the rest of the dialectic, the slave will use these experiences, not fully understood by himself yet, to move beyond his condition as a slave.⁷⁶

The slave's first response to his situation is Stoicism. He holds that everyone is free at a purely abstract level regardless of their external circumstances. When the external world interferes and reminds him that he is a slave, he turns to scepticism to reject the external world, but finding this unsatisfactory he turns to Christianity. In Christianity, everyone is free and equal, not in this world but in some sort of beyond. Christianity is essentially an internalized slavery, in which God serves as an absolute master, and the Christian lives in fear for his eternal as opposed to temporal life.⁷⁷ Christianity does, however, overcome the dichotomy of the universal and particular. God cares about each one of us as individuals and in that sense gives us universal recognition; we may be slaves and thus mired in the particular but we do universal work in working for God. All that remains is to take this ideal out of the transcendent world and bring it down to earth. For Hegel this takes place in the State.⁷⁸ Hegel's State is, among other things, a community of mutual recognition, in which everybody recognizes everyone else as free beings.⁷⁹ For Nancy Bauer, the important point about the community of mutual recognition is that everyone in the community must see both himself and others as simultaneously both subject and object. We can become genuine subjects only on the condition that we also accept our status as objects for others. To accomplish this we must renounce our desire for mastery – our desire to be a subject in a world of objects – and place ourselves on equal footing with everyone else. On this reading, we first experience ourselves as objects for others in the “slavery” stage, and in the

second half of the dialectic – stoicism, skepticism, and the unhappy consciousness – we integrate this external perspective into our sense of ourselves.⁸⁰

As recognition is a positive and social version of respect, so the community of mutual recognition is a positive and social version of the kingdom of ends. In the kingdom of ends everyone respects everyone else; in the community of mutual recognition everybody recognizes everybody else. The reciprocity of recognition in the State solves the problems associated with the master-slave dialectic. In the master-slave dialectic, the master cannot get recognition from the slave, because he sees the slave as a purely animal being. In the State, where every person sees every other as free, every person is universally recognized and every person is seen as capable of granting recognition. The equality in the community of mutual recognition, and the fact that everyone sees everyone else as both subject and object, parallels the Kantian kingdom of ends, in which everyone treats everyone else as both end and means. The difference is that, for Kant, the kingdom of ends is not strictly necessary. For Kant, we could be free and ethical beings all by ourselves, and the kingdom of ends results from the fact that we respect rational nature generally, and there happen to be other people who share in this rational nature. For Hegel, in contrast, if we did not live in a community of mutual recognition, we really could not be ethical or even free, except in a qualified sense.

Hegel discusses the conditions prevailing in the State in the *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel's position here builds upon Kant's ethics. Hegel says that freedom is both the end and the substance of action. The will must take freedom as its end in addition to simply being free. It must, in technical terms, have truth as well as certainty. Right is simply freedom realized in the concrete world. Hegel thus accepts the basic Kantian structure of an ethics based on freedom and autonomy. Ethical truths are not found "out there" but rather developed from the self.⁸¹

Hegel begins by viewing the self as a “person” in the technical sense that it possesses a purely abstract arbitrary free will.⁸² Hegel claims that Kant’s conception of the self ultimately boils down to personhood in this sense.⁸³ Therefore the first section of the *Philosophy of Right*, in which Hegel looks at right from the standpoint of personhood, largely follows Kant. Kant’s second formulation of the categorical imperative is to respect rational nature in ourselves and others; Hegel’s imperative of abstract right is “be a person and respect others as persons.”⁸⁴ Respect in Kant is purely negative. We are obligated not to infringe on the dignity of others. Similarly respect in Hegel is purely negative: “Do not infringe on personality [Persönlichkeit] and what personality entails.”⁸⁵ In both Kant and Hegel this restriction makes it possible for multiple free beings to coexist without treating each other merely as means.⁸⁶ Kant’s categorical imperative rules out maxims which cannot be universalized; Hegel says that our actions have a universal character and establish laws which can be applied to ourselves as well as others.⁸⁷ Both Kant and Hegel have purely retributive theories of punishment.⁸⁸ Hegel agrees with Kant that respect for freedom should outweigh practical considerations.⁸⁹

Hegel also, however, disagrees sharply with Kant. Kant’s ethics, according to Hegel, is far too abstract to serve as a practical guide. Inherently almost anything can meet the test of the law of non-contradiction. Kant’s categorical imperative only works because, in applying it to particular cases, we make use of already established principles such as respect for property, respect for human life, and so on. This implies, contrary to Kant, that ethics is properly about these antecedent norms and not about the categorical imperative itself.⁹⁰ Hegel also objects to Kant’s demand that we act from duty, both because it supposes a noumenal world which does not exist, and because it is psychologically false that people can act without any end in view.⁹¹

Finally, Hegel is utterly dismissive of Kant's metaphysical arguments in third section of the Groundwork and the supposed "fact of reason" from the second Critique.⁹²

These problems are due, Hegel thinks, mostly to Kant's impoverished notion of freedom. Kant considers free individuals as "persons" who possess an arbitrary free will, or else as "subjects" who achieve a purely formal self-agreement in the categorical imperative. In contrast, Hegel asserts a much richer conception of freedom as active self-realization, which is only possible by working toward common ends within a rationally ordered state that harmonizes the individual and social needs and desires of all its members. Personhood and subjectivity are only moments of this true freedom. They are only ways of looking at freedom in relation to certain objects. They are abstractions from freedom; they are not freedom itself.⁹³ This means that Kant, on Hegel's reading, is not so much wrong as limited. Hegel's account of freedom is meant to include Kant's; therefore Hegel's normative ethics includes Kant's normative ethics. We must still respect others, not because of some supposed noumenal existence or fact of reason, but because personality is a part of true freedom. To put it in different terms, a state that enables us to fully realize our freedom will, among other things, ensure that our abstract rights as persons are respected. Because Hegel has a positive notion of freedom, however, this is hardly all that we need from the State, or all that the State does for us. The State also has positive functions which are much more important, and in fact serve to ground our abstract rights.⁹⁴

Beauvoir Biography

Beauvoir was born in Paris on January 9, 1908, the elder of two sisters. Her family occupied a relatively high position in the social hierarchy. Her father was a member of the aristocracy, and her mother came from a wealthy bourgeois family. They associated primarily

with other members of the lower aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie.⁹⁵ Their financial circumstances became increasingly strained as time went on, due both to the First World War and to bad financial management on the part of Beauvoir's father and maternal grandfather.⁹⁶ Both parents subscribed to the belief system common to the upper classes in the Third Republic. This included a fair amount of nationalist pride, classism and sexism. They both expressed approval of France's military ambitions in the First World War; Beauvoir's father also expressed his belief in the superiority of French culture.⁹⁷ They thought the lower classes were morally inferior and did not suffer as much from economic want as people of the upper classes would.⁹⁸ Both subscribed to the traditional notion of a family headed by a male breadwinner with a subordinate wife and mother.⁹⁹ Beauvoir's parents also, however, differed in ways that had an important impact on her development. Her father was an intellectual and an unbeliever; her mother was a devout convent-bred Catholic. Beauvoir's intellectual development was handled by her father and her moral development by her mother.¹⁰⁰ Beauvoir says that she became an intellectual because the divided nature of her upbringing made her life an "endless disputation."¹⁰¹

Beauvoir, in her autobiography, recounts certain beliefs from her childhood that would stay with her in some form for the rest of her life. From Catholicism, she drew the idea that every person had a soul, and therefore had some worth: "My Catholic upbringing had taught me never to look upon any individual, however lowly, as of no account."¹⁰² This further led to a notion of equality. Everyone had a soul, so everyone was equal in the eyes of God, and personal differences such as class and sex didn't matter because they only existed in the temporal world.¹⁰³ Later in her childhood Beauvoir converted to a version of classical liberalism, favoring democracy, equal rights, freedom of conscience, and the rule of reason; her earlier belief in

equality may have paved the way for this.¹⁰⁴ Beauvoir also acquired a certain anti-materialist bent to her thought. To Beauvoir, spiritual issues such as God, the self, and the meaning of life could take precedence over more earthly considerations.¹⁰⁵

Beauvoir also, however, had an intense attachment to the world around her, particularly the natural world, and a sense that the temporal world possessed a concrete thickness that could never be adequately captured by the abstractions of language.¹⁰⁶ Beauvoir's intense love of the real world led her, at the age of fourteen, to permanently reject her belief in God. Beauvoir's conception of God was very elevated. She did not think of God as a personal God who answered her prayers and intervened in her daily life. Rather, there were two worlds, a divine and a mundane one, and no interaction between the two. God was so elevated that He had no impact on the mundane world. Thus one needed to choose between them. Beauvoir had always figured that the divine world was more important, until one day she thought it over and realized she like the mundane world so much she would jettison God, if God had no impact on it.¹⁰⁷ Beauvoir's rejection of God was not an outright assertion that God didn't exist, but rather a realization that God did not have any impact on her and so was not worth bothering about. The question of God's existence had simply ceased to trouble her.¹⁰⁸ Beauvoir would hold this position for the rest of her life. Discussing God in 1944 in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, Beauvoir argues that there is no point in devoting one's life to God because God, as a perfect being, cannot need our help.¹⁰⁹

Beauvoir's Catholic upbringing, however, seems to have influenced her even after she had given up her formal belief in God. In her diary from 1925-1927, Beauvoir uses religious concepts such as God and the soul, and writes about needing to find a substitute for the absolute justification which God had provided her, and also writes about being "tempted" by religion.¹¹⁰ Even in her moral period works, she occasionally uses religious language, or cites points where

her own views agree with Christianity.¹¹¹ Anne Dubreuilh from *The Mandarins* refers to the lingering influence of Catholicism; although the details are much altered, the novel is semiautobiographical and that may possibly be a comment on Beauvoir herself.¹¹² There are a few commentators who remark more specifically on the influence of Catholicism on Beauvoir. Anne Whitmarsh traces Beauvoir's "austere morality" and strict work ethic to her Catholic upbringing.¹¹³ Joseph Mahon, quoting Renée Winegarten, says that "marked by Catholicism for life, not only by her *timor mortis* but by the high standards of strict soul-searching, by the desire for and satisfaction in rectitude, by the quest for absolute perfection, and by a deep awareness of the vanity of all human endeavor." Mahon also sees the influence of Catholicism in the fact that Beauvoir spends much more time discussing vices than virtues.¹¹⁴

Education in Third Republic France was sex-segregated, reflecting the norms for the upper classes in that society. Males were expected to enter some profession, so they prepared for the baccalauréat exam. Passage of the baccalauréat exam granted admission to all the professional schools and also to the higher reaches of academia. Females were generally expected to marry and raise a family, so they took an abbreviated curriculum leading to a separate degree, although some women took a degree allowing them to teach girls' primary school, the one profession deemed suitable for women.¹¹⁵ Every French citizen was guaranteed a free primary and secondary education at a state-run school. These schools actually provided a high-quality education, even for girls, but from the point of view of Beauvoir's parents they suffered from two severe drawbacks: they were resolutely secular and one had to associate with the commoners who could not afford a private education. Therefore Beauvoir was sent to the Cours Adeline Désir, a private Catholic school for girls, even though her parents could barely afford it.¹¹⁶ Instruction was by rote, and the undemanding curriculum included no philosophy,

although the students did read classical Greek and Roman authors in translation.¹¹⁷ Beauvoir consistently placed at the top of her class.

The First World War had a profound influence on the education of women in France. The war created a shortage of marriageable men and also ruined many respectable families so that they could no longer afford dowries for their daughters. At this point the decision was made that both men and women would prepare for the *baccalauréat* as the capstone of their basic education. The idea was that the surplus of unmarried women would take the *baccalauréat* and enter the workforce.¹¹⁸ The *baccalauréat* exam itself underwent several transformations that made it gradually more practical and more streamlined. Originally there was a heavy emphasis on Greek and Roman authors. The classical angle was deemphasized in subsequent revisions. In the 1902 format, the exam was two-tiered. One first prepared for an exam in one of four tracks: Greek-Latin, Latin-Modern Languages, Latin-Science, or Modern Languages-Science. The exam had both written and oral components. After passing this initial stage of exams, one then spent the next year preparing for the second tier of exams. Again there were four options: two in Philosophy and two in Mathematics.¹¹⁹ The *baccalauréat* was reconfigured again in 1923 in the same political move that opened education in the *baccalauréat* exam to women. In the 1923 revision, there were only two tracks – classical and modern. Beauvoir herself, having been educated under the 1902 format, was grandfathered in the old system. When she became a teacher, however, she prepared her students for the 1923 format.¹²⁰

The change in policy was fortunate for Beauvoir. Her family could not afford a dowry, so she pursued the career path that the new policy opened up. This became much easier when the exam was opened to women in 1923 and the Cours Désir offered the prep course.¹²¹ Beauvoir knew that a degree earned at the Cours Désir did not carry much weight, so she

compensated by doing extra work. Much of this work, surprisingly enough, was in math and science. Beauvoir took extra lessons in mathematics to prepare for her *baccalauréat*, and the one paper which has survived from Beauvoir's secondary education is a review of a work on the philosophy of science.¹²² She passed two exams at the first tier – Latin-Modern Languages and one of the science exams – and two exams at the second tier – one in Philosophy and the other in Mathematics.¹²³ Beauvoir first encountered philosophy in the 1924-1925 school year, her last year of secondary education, as she prepared for the philosophy *baccalauréat*. The course was undemanding and the instruction deficient.¹²⁴ The exam demanded mastering an enormous amount of material, but without a very deep level of understanding.¹²⁵ The textbook for the class covers a large number of philosophers, but simply states the positions those philosophers take on various issues, without making any attempt to show how these positions fit together into a coherent system. In the final tier of testing, Beauvoir barely passed her philosophy exams, and made up for it with high scores in mathematics.¹²⁶

The philosophy class, despite its deficiencies, exposed Beauvoir to a host of ancient and modern philosophers, as well as 19th and early 20th Century British and French philosophy. The textbook includes a four-page summary of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and more specific remarks on Kant's ethics. These remarks touch upon all the major concepts of Kant's ethics, including the distinction between acting from and acting in accordance with duty, the distinction between autonomy and heteronomy, the absolute value of the human person, and the kingdom of ends. Hegel is mentioned briefly and grouped with Spinoza as a pantheist, and there is no discussion of post-Hegelians such as Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche, nor of what we would now recognize as early Phenomenology.¹²⁷ For the exam itself, students were expected to know the *Groundwork* and the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹²⁸

Beauvoir says that, despite the deficiencies of the course, she “conceived a passion for philosophy.”¹²⁹

After passing her *baccalauréat* exams, Beauvoir decided to pursue an academic career. The higher reaches of academia were sex-segregated in the same manner as primary and secondary schools. Males who wanted to enter academia first prepared a *licence*. A *licence* generally consisted of four *certificats*, and students generally aimed to earn one *certificat* per year. Students then earned a *diplôme* which entitled them to teach secondary school. The *diplôme* required the presentation of a *dissertation* and some student teaching. Ambitious students could attempt to earn an *agrégation*, which was awarded on a competitive basis and carried with it a guaranteed job for life, better pay, shorter hours, and more prestige. There was a separate school set up at Sèvres to train female teachers for girls’ secondary schools. Sèvres awarded a separate *licence*, followed by a separate and more general *agrégation*. Female students were allowed to sit for the male *agrégation* but derived no benefit from doing so: because the *agrégation* was meant to identify male teachers for boys’ schools, female *agrégées* were ranked alongside their male colleagues but passed over for jobs in favor of lower-ranking males. By the time Beauvoir entered the scene, however, secondary education for girls followed the same program as secondary education for boys, so a female teacher with a male *agrégation* could count on a stable teaching job in a girls’ school. In Beauvoir’s case this financial argument proved decisive, and her parents allowed her to study for the male *agrégation*.¹³⁰

There were several schools which provided preparation for the *agrégation*, and although they all taught the same standardized curriculum, the school one attended significantly affected one’s educational capital. Intellectual culture in France was (and still is) dominated by the Ecole Normale Supérieure. The prestige of the ENS also extended to the secondary schools which

prepared students to take the highly competitive entrance exam, and even (in the hyperbolic opinion of some *normaliens*) to anybody who had so much as tried to gain entrance to the ENS. Unfortunately for Beauvoir, the ENS was not opened to women until 1927, by which point she was already well on her way toward her *agrégation*, and even then women were denied access to the informal life of the place in order to protect them from the crude language of the male students. The Sorbonne was less prestigious but coeducational, a Catholic women's college provided still less educational capital, and a degree from Sèvres carried no weight at all. The field one studied also affected one's educational capital. Philosophy was considered the queen of the disciplines and therefore unsuitable for women. It also, allegedly, had deleterious effects on one's morality. Women tended to gravitate toward literature or classics, which conferred less educational capital than philosophy, but were considered more suitable. Beauvoir's own educational path seems to show a gradually renegotiated compromise between her academic ambitions and the demands of upper-class respectability imposed by her parents. Her parents did not want her to study philosophy, or to attend the secular Sorbonne, so she began her tertiary education by pursuing two programs of study simultaneously, one in mathematics at the Institut Catholique and the other in literature at the Institut Sainte Marie. She earned three *certificats* in the 1925-26 school year, in literature, mathematics, and Latin. Nevertheless this program was a concession in some ways. The Institut Sainte-Marie was Catholic single-sex, and of course the Institut Catholique, though coeducational, was Catholic. Neither the schools she went to, nor the topics she studied, conferred much educational capital, and Beauvoir may have pursued a spectacular double course of studies in order to compensate.¹³¹

In her second year at the Institut Sainte-Marie, the 1926-27 school year, Beauvoir studied philosophy again, this time engaging in serious study of primary texts.¹³² Beauvoir had already

read Bergson and a secondary source on Kant the previous summer.¹³³ Once the school year began she studied classical authors such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant.¹³⁴ Her diary from this time contains numerous references to Schopenhauer, and she says she read Nietzsche with passionate interest.¹³⁵ She did not directly study Hegel's philosophy, although she did encounter it secondhand in some of the literary works she read.¹³⁶ She talked to Communists but does not give evidence of engaging seriously with Marx. She did not read Kierkegaard.¹³⁷ Beauvoir earned *certificats* in history of philosophy in March 1927 and general philosophy in June 1927, and also earned a *certificat* in Greek this school year. She finished second in the exam for the general philosophy *certificat*, behind Simone Weil and immediately ahead of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.¹³⁸

In addition to reading philosophy, Beauvoir was now able to have serious discussions about philosophy, both with her teachers and her fellow students. The most significant of the latter group was Merleau-Ponty, who sought out Beauvoir after the general philosophy exam, and quickly became a friend and philosophical interlocutor in July 1927.¹³⁹ Beauvoir and Weil had almost nothing in common aside from being the first generation of women in academia. In their one conversation, Weil insisted that the most important thing was to eliminate hunger, Beauvoir said it was more important for people to give meaning to their lives than to be happy, and Weil replied that Beauvoir had obviously never been hungry.¹⁴⁰ Beauvoir's teacher at the Institut Sainte-Marie, Jeanne Mercier, was herself a philosophy *agrégée* and served as a role model for Beauvoir. Mercier was a Catholic, however, and this eventually led to a split with Beauvoir. In her diary, Beauvoir writes that "Mademoiselle Mercier is trying to convert me."¹⁴¹

While at the Institut Sainte-Marie, Beauvoir also had her first experience with social activism. Robert Garric was a teacher at the Institut Sainte-Marie.¹⁴² He had served in the

trenches in the First World War and believed the experience had taught him solidarity with his fellow men. He therefore set up a program in which students would teach working-class adults. The idea was for the two groups to interact; the educated elite would gain the fellowship of their working class counterparts, while the working class would gain the culture of the elites.¹⁴³ Beauvoir taught briefly in the program but gave up when she realized it didn't work in practice. The working people came simply to get together and have something to do; the educated teachers came simply to assuage their guilty bourgeois consciences.¹⁴⁴ The Garric affair shows that Beauvoir had some level of commitment to egalitarianism, and a sense that reaching out to others could give meaning to life. At the same time it was her first experience with misguided idealism. In her moral period works she mocks bourgeois activists with guilty consciences; this was her first encounter with the personality type.

Beauvoir's student diary shows extensive engagement with Kant during this time. Beauvoir seems to read Kant as drawing a relatively strong distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds. Beauvoir writes: "I believe with Kant that one cannot attain the world of noumena."¹⁴⁵ In response to this inability to attain the world of noumena, Beauvoir makes a phenomenological move: "But knowing that this noumenal world exists, that I cannot attain, in which alone it can be explained to me why I live, I will build my life in the phenomenal world, which is nevertheless not negligible."¹⁴⁶ "There is some being in the order of phenomenon."¹⁴⁷ "I will accept the given and live in the given without expecting to possess the absolute."¹⁴⁸ This is not, of course, to suggest that Beauvoir independently invented phenomenology in 1927, but rather that her interpretation of Kant would have predisposed her to take an interest in phenomenology when she did encounter it.¹⁴⁹

Beauvoir uses Kant to reflect on ethics as well as metaphysics. She says “I will take myself as an end.”¹⁵⁰ One way of doing this is through autonomy. Beauvoir writes “I myself suffice for imposing laws on myself.”¹⁵¹ “You must treat yourself as an end, it is on that ground that you must build...this will be justified in itself, this bears in itself the reason for being.”¹⁵² Of course other people exist too. And all of these others also “carry an infinity within themselves.”¹⁵³ This makes them ends just like Beauvoir. At one point, for instance, she refers to her cousin Jacques as “this other end.”¹⁵⁴ The question then becomes what to do about the existence of multiple ends. Beauvoir reports that, in the past eighteen months, the theme on which her thought centers is “almost always the opposition of self and others that I felt upon starting to live.”¹⁵⁵ Writing about love, Beauvoir suggests the possibility of “reciprocity,” which could serve as a solution.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, Beauvoir thinks that any solution to the opposition of self and others would have to take account of their particularity as well as their absolute value as people. She rejects religion because “this infinite God saves me only as a *person*; and it is my entire individual I want to save.”¹⁵⁷ The particularity of people is not the sum of their tendencies but an “irreducible given that constitutes the individuality of each man.”¹⁵⁸ In other words, individuals are qualitatively, rather than quantitatively, distinct.¹⁵⁹ All this philosophical work is rudimentary, at one level, but it foreshadows Beauvoir’s later views in her moral period. Beauvoir proposes an ethics of autonomy where all people are treated as ends and this is accomplished in reciprocal relations between them, but she views people in terms of their particularity as well as their abstract essence as people.

In the summer of 1927 Beauvoir transferred to the Sorbonne to continue her studies in philosophy. Beauvoir’s advisor at the Sorbonne was Léon Brunschvicg, one of the leading philosophers of the day, who espoused a version of neo-Kantianism called critical idealism.

Critical idealism was essentially an attempt to philosophically address new developments being made in science, such as Einstein's theory of relativity. In good Kantian fashion it is anti-metaphysical: there is no access to an objective world of things. Brunschvicg thus rejects French neo-scholasticism, the Empiricist reliance on supposedly transparent sense-data, and Bergson's quasi-mystical notion of intuition. Instead Brunschvicg begins with science, which he sees as an activity of the human mind, in which the mind primarily makes judgments and strives to bring unity to its scientific ideas. This process is ongoing. Science makes progress but it will never reach a final totalized form. Therefore Brunschvicg does not believe in fixed forms such as Kant's categories or Hegel's logic. Philosophy is a critical reflection on the mind's activity in science. At a deeper level, science is just one form of "the continuous progress which takes place in the interior of the thinking being." This interior progress leads to progress in science, but it should also lead to progress in other areas, including morality and even religion.¹⁶⁰ The amount of influence Brunschvicg had on Beauvoir is somewhat debatable. In her autobiography, Beauvoir says she generally accepted critical idealism at this point, although she always had some reservations.¹⁶¹ The idea that Beauvoir would be interested in Brunschvicg's neo-Kantian philosophy of science is not farfetched. Beauvoir earned a second *baccalauréat* in mathematics, studied mathematics at the Institut Catholique, and earned a *certificat* in mathematics.¹⁶² On the other hand, Beauvoir's mature philosophy is very different from Brunschvicg's. Brunschvicg emphasizes judgment and unity; the mature Beauvoir rejects both. Beauvoir sees Kant as a precursor to Hegel; Brunschvicg rejected Hegel's doctrine outright as mere Romantic irrationalism.¹⁶³ In her diary, Beauvoir says "Mr Brunschvicg is perhaps a man of worth, but for me = zero."¹⁶⁴

Beauvoir also mentions Jean Baruzi and Jean Laporte as teachers who influenced her while she was at the Sorbonne. Baruzi had studied under Bergson and Husserl, specialized in the philosophy of religion of Leibniz and James, and was best known for a phenomenological account of mystical experience.¹⁶⁵ Beauvoir dismisses his influence in her autobiography, but her diary shows that she was extremely eager to work with him: “Baruzi attracts me this year with his scrupulous and profound faith, the intellectual ardor of his brilliant eyes, and his manner of living his thoughts to his fingertips; he possesses an inner life.”¹⁶⁶ In her desire to study with Baruzi, we can see some lingering religious feeling, and perhaps an initial engagement with phenomenology. Laporte was an outright sceptic who liked Hume. In 1928 she took *certificats* in ethics and psychology, thus earning her *licence* in philosophy, and passed on a classics *licence* because it would have required a *certificat* in philology, which she hated. Instead she earned her teaching *diplôme* by writing a *dissertation* on “The Concept in Leibniz” for Brunschvicg, then did the required practical teaching at the lycée Janson de Sailly with Claude Levi-Strauss and Merleau-Ponty.¹⁶⁷ Beauvoir also wrote a second *dissertation* for Laporte on Hume and Kant. Apparently she read Hume as a sceptic, and preferred Kant to Hume, on the grounds that Hume didn’t solve any practical problems.¹⁶⁸ In other words, while at the Sorbonne, Beauvoir kept up her interest in Kant, though admittedly she seems more interested in the epistemological and metaphysical aspects of Kant’s thought than in his ethics at this point.¹⁶⁹

The *agrégation* itself consisted of two parts: a written component where candidates were assigned a single topic (the topic in 1929 happened to be freedom and contingency) and then an oral component that basically required candidates to make up a class lecture on the spot without preparation. Because this is virtually impossible to do, candidates have adopted the trick of using a standardized tripartite structure, in which one first presents two opposed and absurd

extreme positions, refutes both, and then presents one's own position as the answer.¹⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that Beauvoir adopts this same tripartite structure in some of her moral period essays. She might, in part, be trying to trade on her intellectual prestige as an *agrégée*. Beauvoir met Sartre in early 1929, between the written and oral parts of the *agrégation* exams. She placed a close second in the exams, behind Jean-Paul Sartre and ahead of Jean Hyppolite and Paul Nizan.¹⁷¹ The second place was somewhat controversial. The philosopher Maurice de Gandillac remembers that two of the three examiners considered giving the first place to Beauvoir. They felt that, although Sartre had more forcefulness of expression, Beauvoir was philosophy. There is also some suggestion that Sartre was given the first to because he was a male and a *normalien*.¹⁷² Regardless of the controversy, Beauvoir's success at the tertiary level is remarkable. In the space of four years, she took eight *certificats*, wrote two *dissertations*, and earned her *agrégation* in philosophy. The normal program, in contrast, required four *certificats*, a *dissertation*, and an *agrégation*, and generally took six years to complete. Sartre himself took seven years, having failed the *agrégation* on his first attempt.¹⁷³

Beauvoir and Sartre would maintain a close relationship for the rest of their lives. They generally lived in different rooms of the same apartment building, met daily to discuss philosophy or wrote letters when one or the other was away, and edited each other's works.¹⁷⁴ The "question of influence" is one of the most controversial areas of Beauvoir studies. On one side of the spectrum, as I have said, is the traditional view that Beauvoir was merely Sartre's disciple. On the other side of the spectrum, Kate and Edward Fullbrook, in *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre: The Remaking of a Twentieth-Century Legend*, attempted to completely reverse the picture, so that Sartre plagiarized all of Beauvoir's ideas. Scholars such as Hazel Barnes and Sonia Kruks have generally taken the middle position that the influence was

mutual.¹⁷⁵ Beauvoir herself perceived Sartre as the lead figure. Toril Moi has attributed this in part to the fact that Beauvoir, because she could not attend the ENS or the preparatory schools, inevitably had less educational capital than Sartre, and in part to the possibility that Beauvoir needed to view Sartre as her superior in order to justify her relationship with him. In her autobiography, Beauvoir's description of her ideal companion oscillates between two standards. Because men belong to a "privileged species" and have a "flying start" over women, a man would have to be better in an absolute sense to be equal in a relative sense. As Moi has noted, Beauvoir seems to have this double understanding of her relationship with Sartre.¹⁷⁶ If we look a little more closely, however, Beauvoir does not exactly say that Sartre was the better philosopher, but rather that they had different approaches to philosophy.

Sartre said that I understood philosophical doctrines, those of Husserl among others, more rapidly and more exactly than he did. Indeed, he tended to interpret them according to his own schemes. It was difficult for him to forget himself and to adopt unreservedly a foreign point of view. In my case I had no such resistance to break down. My thought modeled itself immediately around what I was trying to grasp. I didn't accept it passively: insofar as I adhered to it, I perceived in it lacunae and incoherence, just as I also envisioned possible developments for it. If a theory convinced me, it didn't remain external to me: it changed my relationship with the world, and colored my experience. In short, I had solid faculties of assimilation and a well-developed critical sense; and philosophy was for me a living reality. It gave me satisfactions that never paled for me.

Yet I did not regard myself as a philosopher: I was well aware that the ease with which I entered into a text came precisely from my lack of inventiveness. In this field, the real creative spirits are so rare that it is otiose to ask why I didn't try to take my place among them. What's necessary to explain, rather, is how certain individuals are capable of carrying out this concerted delirium that is a system and from where they get the stubbornness which lends to their personal perceptions the value of universal law. As I have said before, the feminine condition does not conduce to this species of obstinacy.¹⁷⁷

This seems like a relatively accurate description of Sartre's and Beauvoir's respective philosophical styles. Beauvoir is an asystematic philosopher, attentive to the details of lived experience, and solidly grounded in the history of philosophy.¹⁷⁸ It also seems like a relatively accurate description of each philosopher's works. Sartre's approach allowed him to write

massive works of philosophy such as *Being and Nothingness* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* are both short in comparison; Beauvoir's massive works such as *The Second Sex* and *The Coming of Age*, while they certainly have philosophical merit, are more interdisciplinary in nature. What is curious is that Beauvoir simultaneously recognizes the weaknesses of a systematic approach to philosophy – it is a form of delirium, of stubbornness, it leads to lacunae and incoherence and distorted readings – and yet privileges this approach as definitive of a “philosopher.” Beauvoir's statement is again open to a double interpretation. We can read her as saying that both partners had strengths and weaknesses as thinkers and were therefore equal, or we can read her as saying that Sartre engaged in the kind of philosophy that both recognized as definitive and was therefore her superior.

Three things happened in the 1930's and early 1940's that made the moral period possible. First, Beauvoir acquired most of the philosophical concepts that she would later use in her moral period works. Beauvoir had already studied Kant as a required part of her secondary and tertiary education. The *agrégation* results meant that Beauvoir was now qualified to teach secondary education, but for the next two years she lived on her own, supporting herself by offering private tutoring for the baccalauréat exam. She then spent the next twelve years teaching, with varying degrees of success and contentment, first in the provinces and later in Paris. Beauvoir taught advanced secondary education, which in practical terms meant that she prepared her students for the baccalauréat exam, and the exam didn't change much over time, so she could teach from the old knowledge she had acquired in her student days. Describing her first teaching job, in Marseille in the 1931-32 school year, Beauvoir writes: “I got much enjoyment out of the lessons I taught. They required no preparation, for my knowledge was still fresh.”¹⁷⁹ This old knowledge included Kant. The *Groundwork* and the introduction to the

Critique of Pure Reason were still on the exam.¹⁸⁰ The constant repetition of her old knowledge required by her teaching would have kept it fresh in her mind up to the beginning of the moral period.

The secondary school curriculum did not include phenomenologists such as Husserl or Heidegger, and it did not include much Hegel. Instead Beauvoir, like many of the generation of philosophers who had been students in the late 1920's, read these thinkers on her own in the 1930's and early 1940's. To a certain extent, as Sonia Kruks has noted, the generation of the 1930's turned toward German philosophy in order to distinguish themselves from their teachers, in much the same way that the next generation of philosophers would turn toward postmodernism in order to distinguish themselves from the then-dominant existentialists.¹⁸¹ The turn toward German philosophy was also, however, in part a response to the inability of the dominant philosophical movements in inter-war France to satisfactorily address the fact that the world was falling apart.¹⁸² Brunschvicg himself began to doubt his position in the 1930's as technological progress seemed to coincide with moral decay, the continuous progress in the interior of the thinking being notwithstanding. When Merleau-Ponty, in "The War Has Taken Place," criticizes his prewar philosophical education for convincing him that people were individual consciousnesses that just needed to become more spiritual, this is an implicit criticism of both Brunschvicg and Bergson.¹⁸³

Beauvoir seriously engaged with phenomenology in the 1930's, both on her own and in association with Sartre. Although she didn't publish under her own name, she discussed philosophy with Sartre, she proofread and commented on all of his works, including short phenomenological works like *Imagination* and *Transcendence of the Ego*, and she translated parts of *Being and Time* into French for Sartre.¹⁸⁴ In 1934 Beauvoir read Husserl's

Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness “without too much difficulty.” Beauvoir also wrote in her memoirs that at this time she “was infused with Heidegger’s philosophy.”¹⁸⁵ Phenomenology would have accorded well with Beauvoir’s rejection of Kant’s noumenal world and her attempt to build her life in the phenomenal world. From Husserl, Beauvoir took the idea of intentionality, that all consciousness is consciousness of something. Because consciousness is consciousness of something, the phenomenological description of our mental acts, far from isolating us in our own minds, actually reconnects us to the world of which we are conscious.¹⁸⁶ This is why Sartre was so excited when Raymond Aron told him that phenomenology could make philosophy out of an apricot cocktail: phenomenology allowed for an engagement with the world in a way that Brunschvicg’s idealism did not, without, however, devolving into an empiricist enumeration of the contents of the world.¹⁸⁷ Beauvoir also took from Husserl the idea that consciousness is situated. There is no view from nowhere; instead each person exists at a particular place and time and is conscious of the world from that perspective. To take a simple example, a solid cube presents itself to me as having three sides which, at present, I cannot see: the fact that I cannot see them in turn makes me aware of my own position in space relative to the cube. In the hands of French Existentialists such as Beauvoir, the concept of situation is expanded, so that we are not only situated at a specific point in space and time, but also embodied in a specific way, or located at a specific point within an oppressive class structure.¹⁸⁸

The influence of phenomenology on Beauvoir’s ethics is more complex. Husserl’s phenomenology is mostly an attempt to provide a grounding for the sciences: Husserl himself was not particularly concerned with ethics.¹⁸⁹ Heidegger’s work does have ethical import, in the general sense that he advocates a certain way of life, and Beauvoir does seem to have appropriated many of his ideas. Beauvoir’s concept of *dévoilement* seems related to Heidegger’s

concept of *Erschlossenheit*, although Beauvoir emphasizes the active element in disclosure more than Heidegger.¹⁹⁰ Beauvoir's description of humans as beings who project themselves toward a future that does not yet exist is an appropriation of Heidegger's description of man as a being of faraway places. Most importantly, Beauvoir draws from Heidegger the idea that we should pursue an authentic way of life which involves a fundamental good faith about our situation. On the other hand, Beauvoir explicitly rejects Heidegger's claim that man's authentic project is being toward death. For Beauvoir, the defining feature of human existence is the fact that we are free, not the fact that we will die. Therefore, when we adopt an authentic way of life, this involves the good faith assumption of our freedom, not the good faith assumption of our mortality. It is also the case that Heidegger's known political sympathies would have made any appropriation of his philosophy problematic for Beauvoir.¹⁹¹

Beauvoir did not read Hegel seriously until 1940, when she spent hours reading the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the Bibliothèque Nationale.¹⁹² Beauvoir says in her autobiography that she was deeply impressed by his amplitude of detail and the systematic unity of his thought, but she ultimately found Hegel unconvincing. Beauvoir seems to read Hegel as simply abolishing the part in the whole. The self merges with Universal Being, individual life is seen in the perspective of Historical Necessity, the present is but a brief instant viewed against the world's long history. Beauvoir could not accept this view: "the least flutter of my heart gave such speculations the lie...I turned back to Kierkegaard and began to read him with passionate interest."¹⁹³ Beauvoir thus rejects the glittering unity of the Hegelian System for her own particularity as an individual human being, just as she had previously rejected Kantian noumena in favor of the phenomenal world, and God in favor of the temporal world. She also, for the first time, identifies Kierkegaard as a philosopher who is able to address particulars as such. Whether

Beauvoir read Marx was a different issue. Beauvoir clearly knew about Marx prior to the moral period and criticizes Marxism in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Beauvoir does not, however, show any influence of Marxist ideas until her discussion of mystification in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* with its notion of mystification.¹⁹⁴ Beauvoir did not attend Kojève’s lectures, but she told Eva Lundgren-Gothlin that she was influenced by Kojève, and her decision to focus on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* rather than the *Logic* is definitely characteristic of the generation of the 1930’s.¹⁹⁵

Beauvoir also interacted with her contemporaries. *Being and Nothingness* was published in 1943. Beauvoir, of course, would have discussed the work with Sartre and edited a draft before publication. *Being and Nothingness* is clearly important to Beauvoir’s moral period works. The ontology Beauvoir uses in the moral period works is similar to the ontology in *Being and Nothingness*, and the moral period works share much of the same philosophical terminology. Nevertheless the moral period works are different from *Being and Nothingness*. In the first place, the moral period works focus on ethics, whereas *Being and Nothingness* is really a work about ontology and epistemology. The ontology of the moral period works also differs in subtle (and often unacknowledged) ways from the ontology of *Being and Nothingness*. Self-other relationships in *Being and Nothingness* (and also in *She Came to Stay*) are necessarily conflictual; in contrast self-other relationships in the moral period works can be reciprocal. Beauvoir also alters the account of freedom from *Being and Nothingness*. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre argued that freedom is absolute, because the world only appears to us as a situation when we freely decide to engage with the world.¹⁹⁶ In other words, I can always choose the stance I take toward the world, and if some part of my situation appears to me as an

obstacle, this is because I have freely chosen to view it as such. In her autobiography, Beauvoir recalls her uneasiness about this view.

I maintained that, from the point of view of freedom, as Sartre defined it – not as Stoical resignation but as an active transcendence of the given – not every situation is equal: what transcendence is possible for a woman locked up in a harem? Even such a cloistered existence could be lived in several different ways, Sartre said. I clung to my opinion for a long time and then made only a token submission. Basically, I was right. But to have been able to defend my position, I would have had to abandon the terrain of individualist, thus idealist, morality, where we stood.¹⁹⁷

In her moral period works, Beauvoir would alter the ontology of *Being and Nothingness* in order to incorporate this insight. She even reuses the example of a harem woman in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Beauvoir does not, in the works themselves, acknowledge that she is modifying the ontology, but she does say in her autobiography that she wrote *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* in part as an attempt to think through her objection to the account of freedom in *Being and Nothingness*.¹⁹⁸

The differences between Beauvoir and Sartre become particularly important when the focus shifts from epistemology and ontology to ethics. If freedom is absolute, then it seems impossible to explain how our actions could help or harm another person, and if interpersonal relations are necessarily conflictual then it seems impossible for me to establish ethical relations with others. Because of his ontology, Sartre was not particularly successful at formulating an ethics in the mid-1940's, and therefore could not have exerted much influence on Beauvoir. When commentators look for evidence of Sartre's ethics in the 1940's, they generally focus on the ethical questions at the end of *Being and Nothingness*, the lecture on existentialism and humanism, and the *Notebooks for an Ethics*. It is true that there are similarities between Sartre's works on ethics and the moral period works. Sartre's question in *Being and Nothingness* – can freedom take itself for a value as the source of all values – suggests the reflexive structure of Beauvoir's ethics, in which we freely choose to value freedom. Furthermore, the *Notebooks*

modify the ontology of *Being and Nothingness* in roughly the same way as Beauvoir. Sartre seems to admit the possibility that we could recognize others and will the freedom of others. None of these sources, however, provides the level of systematic development we get in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* or *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. *Being and Nothingness* really is what its subtitle announces it to be: a phenomenological essay on ontology. Therefore the ethical questions at the end really are intended as questions to be taken up in a planned future work. Sartre himself considered the lecture on existentialism to be a failure, and in actual fact he spoke extemporaneously, so that the essay which as come down to us as “Existentialism is a Humanism” is actually Beauvoir’s write-up of Sartre’s lecture notes. The *Notebooks* are more substantial, but they are notebooks made as preparation for a work on ethics, and not the work itself. Sartre did not think they amounted to a finished work, and this is why he withheld them from publication during his lifetime. Additionally, the *Notebooks* were written after *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, so the similarities between the two works could just as easily be taken to show Beauvoir’s influence on Sartre, and not Sartre’s influence on Beauvoir.¹⁹⁹

Beauvoir also continued her philosophical dialogue with Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty published *The Phenomenology of Perception* in 1945, after *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* but before *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, and Beauvoir wrote a review of the book for *Les temps modernes*. In her review, Beauvoir puts her finger on the essential difference between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. For Sartre, consciousness is a hole in being, for Merleau-Ponty, it is a fold, a hollow. In other words, Sartre is essentially a dualist. A Sartrean consciousness is always free to determine how it will view its situation and therefore is separate from and independent of situation. Merleau-Ponty, in contrast, emphasizes the role that the body plays in perception. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not an object in the world but rather my “anchorage” or “hold” on the world; it is the

manner in which I “frequent” the world and have a world. Merleau-Ponty uses this account of the body to overcome the dualism between subject and object. For Sartre, my primary relationship to the world is epistemological. I am a subject who assigns meanings to the objects of which I am conscious, and battles for dominance with other subjects who seek to view me as an object in their world. For Merleau-Ponty, in contrast, my primary relationship to the world is that of an acting embodied being. This means that perception is largely a matter of what is possible for me: for instance I see mountains as tall because they would be tiring for me to climb, I see silk as smooth because of the way it would feel if I touched it, and so on. The epistemological distinction between subject and object, knower and known, is merely an abstraction made from this more fundamental state of living in the world. In the same way, meaning, language, and signification are neither wholly internal nor wholly external. I insert myself into a world that is always already permeated with human meanings. I affect these meanings and they affect me.

Beauvoir herself does not press this point, but Sonia Kruks has pointed out that Merleau-Ponty’s account suggests that our freedom is never absolute and can be severely limited. If our embodiment in the world is primary, then other people can affect our freedom by acting on our bodies or on the world we encounter, and if meaning is a transactional relationship between inside and outside, there is obviously more critical mass on the outside. Beauvoir also emphasizes Merleau-Ponty’s claim that the body possesses some level of generality. Obviously, although we are all unique, we are also similar. We are all embodied in much the same way, and we all live in societies that are similar. My experiences as a 21st century American probably have a good deal in common with your experiences as a 21st century American. This generality, in turn, makes communication and intersubjective relations possible.²⁰⁰

The extent to which Merleau-Ponty influenced Beauvoir is again open for debate. Beauvoir, in her moral period works, is interested in ethics, and so she is primarily interested in people insofar as they act. Action is connected with embodiment. Our bodies simultaneously allow us to act and limit our range of possible actions. This means that Beauvoir's acting subject comes to look a lot like Merleau-Ponty's embodied subject. In her review, when describing the differences between Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, Beauvoir seems to maintain a neutral attitude. It is possible that Beauvoir, as a reviewer, did not feel the need to take sides. Still, as Kruks has pointed out, the fact that that Beauvoir does not actively try to defend Sartre is striking.²⁰¹

The second major occurrence that made the moral period possible is that Beauvoir finally found her technical competence as a writer. She had tried to write novels throughout the 1930's, with increasing degrees of success. She produced an unfinished novel, and then a finished collection of short stories which she submitted for publication but abandoned after they were rejected (they were eventually published in 1981 as *When Things of the Spirit Come First*). Challenged by Sartre to come up with something more personal, she produced *She Came to Stay*, a semiautobiographical novel about her triangular relationship with Sartre and Olga Kosakiewicz. The novel was nominated for the Goncourt prize, France's top literary honor, and established Beauvoir's reputation as a writer.²⁰² In Beauvoir's fictionalized version of events, Françoise Miquel and Pierre Labrousse are thirtysomething intellectuals, and Xavière Pages is a younger provincial who gradually insinuates herself into their lives. Françoise makes several attempts to establish some kind of stable relationship with Xavière, including ignoring her, threatening her, and devoting herself to her, but is finally forced to see Xavière as a completely alien consciousness. The experience shakes her to the core of her being. Pierre, realizing the effect Xavière is having on Françoise, tries to remonstrate with Xavière, but Xavière takes revenge on

Pierre by sleeping with his assistant Gerbert. Then Françoise sleeps with Gerbert, and when Xavière finds out, she accuses Françoise of betraying her. In order to eliminate this image of herself as she exists in Xavière's eyes, Françoise kills Xavière, and the novel ends.

She Came to Stay demonstrates Beauvoir's command of phenomenology and Hegel. At the beginning of the novel, Françoise appears as a Husserlian ego. The world exists for her; even though there are mind-independent objects they don't truly exist until they become part of her life. The biggest threat to her is the thought that other people are separate consciousnesses independent of her and at the center of their own lives, but at the beginning of the novel, she finds it fairly easy to avoid thinking of people in this way.²⁰³ When she finally is forced to confront Xavière as a completely alien consciousness, this begins a classic Hegelian life-and-death struggle, which is resolved in this case by the death of Xavière. Hazel Barnes has noted the similarity of the triangular relationship in *She Came to Stay* to the triangular relationship portrayed in *No Exit*; Barnes also was the first of many commentators to note that *She Came to Stay* reads like a literary version of *Being and Nothingness*.²⁰⁴ Some of the examples are even the same: there is a scene where Pierre looks through a keyhole at Xavière and Gerbert and feels shame, and another scene where a woman pretends not to notice as a man holds her hand.²⁰⁵ There is also a scene with a jacket which is clearly an example of nausea, and another scene where Pierre expounds what is clearly Sartre's account of temporality.²⁰⁶ Françoise's various attitudes toward Xavière seem to correspond to Sartrean existential attitudes such as love and an attempt to form a we-subject, while Pierre's sister Elisabeth is a clear example of bad faith and masochism.

Even the form of *She Came to Stay* reflects phenomenology. According to phenomenology, there is no single correct "view from nowhere" from which we see objects and

events as they really are, but instead every object is an object for a particular situated consciousness. Therefore, there is no omniscient narrator in *She Came to Stay*, but instead each event in the novel is told from the point of view of one of the characters. The opening line of the novel is “Françoise opened her eyes.” Because every object is an object for a consciousness, the novel cannot begin until Françoise – or some other consciousness – literally opens her eyes and begins to be conscious of the world around her. Most of the novel (14½ out of 18 chapters) is narrated from Françoise’s point of view, but there are also 2½ chapters narrated from Elisabeth’s point of view, and one chapter narrated from Gerbert’s point of view. The fact that there are multiple narrators expresses the fact that there are multiple consciousnesses battling for dominance. Each event is narrated from only one point of view, and no others, because Beauvoir still subscribes to the Sartrean view that multiple subjects are incompatible. Thus the fact that one character is the narrator excludes the possibility that other characters could narrate their own version of the event. These narratives are arranged in chronological order but they do not fit together into a seamless whole. Sometimes up to a month can pass between the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next, and the text makes clear that events continue to take place in the interim. From Beauvoir’s phenomenological perspective, temporal continuity is not given, it is produced by consciousness. Therefore, it is up to each of the characters to establish – or fail to establish – the continuity of the various events which take place in the novel.

She Came to Stay also contains ideas which may be attributed to Beauvoir alone, and which point toward her moral period. Beauvoir is very clear about the connection between apparently abstract metaphysical concepts and the world of everyday experience. In her autobiography, Beauvoir says that the philosophical theories she accepted altered her relationship with the world and colored her experience, and Beauvoir endows her fictional alter-ego

Françoise with this same personality trait. Françoise doesn't merely know on an intellectual level that Xavière is an alien consciousness but lives this realization. When she sees Xavière as a foreign absolute she is reduced to tears. In the discussion which follows, Pierre expresses surprise that Françoise "should be affected in such a concrete manner by a metaphysical problem," and says that she has a remarkable power "to live an idea, body and soul." Françoise replies that, "to me, an idea is not a question of theory. It can be tested or, if it remains theoretical, it has no value." Merleau-Ponty clearly recognizes the importance of this passage when he uses it as the header for "Metaphysics and the Novel," the review of *She Came to Stay* he wrote for *Les temps modernes*.²⁰⁷

She Came to Stay also sketches out the rudiments of Beauvoir's ethics. Everyone experiences his or her own consciousness as an absolute. The fact that every consciousness is an absolute seems to ground an inviolability that resembles Kantian respect. Even at the very end of the novel, as Françoise contemplates the murder of Xavière, she sees the idea of destroying a consciousness as unthinkable. This raises the problem of how multiple absolutes can be compatible. To kill Xavière is unthinkable, but if Françoise does not kill Xavière, then Xavière will reduce Françoise to the status of an object and thus "destroy" her insofar as she is a consciousness, which is also unthinkable.²⁰⁸ Of course, at this stage in her development, Beauvoir doesn't present any workable solution to this problem. Pierre does suggest a form of reciprocity, in which each consciousness renounces its preeminence, but this solution really isn't explored in any detail.²⁰⁹ Xavière's personality makes reciprocity between her and Françoise impossible, and even Françoise's relationship with Pierre is much more one-sided than she would like to admit.

The third major event which made Beauvoir's moral period possible was the war. The war was a traumatic and shameful experience for most French people. The French military was overrun by the Germans in the early months of the war. The Germans directly occupied the north and ruled the south through a puppet government at Vichy. Overall the occupation proceeded rather peacefully. Early in the occupation, when it looked like the Nazis would win the war, there was not much homegrown resistance. The French accepted the German victory as inevitable and went about their lives as best they could. The one exception was the Communist Party. When the occupation began, the Hitler-Stalin nonaggression pact was still in effect, so the French Communist Party was ordered to cooperate with the occupying Germans. When Germany invaded Russia, the policy suddenly changed, and the Communist Party suffered heavy losses.²¹⁰ Most homegrown resistance took place late in the occupation, as it became increasingly clear that the Allies were going to win the war.²¹¹ France also did a poor job of protecting Jews in the early stages of the occupation. The French generally raised few objections when the Nazis asked permission to "resettle" stateless Jews living in France, and only turned against the resettlement program when the Nazis made the mistake of asking to deport French Jews as well.²¹² After the liberation, the French attempted to purge their collaborators, largely without success. The punishments in the early stages of the purge were generally very harsh, and were administered in an inconsistent manner, leading many people to lose enthusiasm for the purge.²¹³ Camus, for instance, enthusiastically supported a harsh purge after the liberation, and upheld the necessity of death sentences in an exchange with François Mauriac in October 1944. By February 1945, however, he joined Mauriac in signing a petition to spare the life of collaborationist journalist Robert Brasillach, and by August 1945 he conceded that the Purge had been a complete failure.²¹⁴ Many of the "barberings" for which the purge became known were

really about reasserting traditional hierarchies rather than punishing collaborators.²¹⁵ Eventually, the loose confederation of resistance groups which had made up the resistance splintered apart, and the right-wing bourgeoisie reasserted itself.

All of these events impinged on Beauvoir in a way that nothing had before. Up until this point, Beauvoir had been sheltered from historical events by her relatively high social status. She could observe and judge events from the outside but they did not affect her personally. Now, as she says, “history took hold of me, and never let go thereafter.”²¹⁶ Sartre joined the army, was captured, and spent a year in a prisoner-of-war camp. Beauvoir herself lived in occupied Paris. Supplies were heavily rationed and Beauvoir, like everyone else, survived by buying on the black market. Beauvoir lost her job when she was fired for sleeping with one of her students. The firing was in part politically motivated; Beauvoir was offered reinstatement after the Liberation.²¹⁷ Beauvoir also personally knew people who were killed for being Jewish.²¹⁸ Beauvoir’s response to these events was somewhat problematic. She signed a statement that she was not a Jew or a freemason in order to be allowed to continue to teach.²¹⁹ After she was fired, she made money by producing a radio program on medieval history for German radio.²²⁰ She also published during the occupation, which meant that her works had to be approved by a censor. Beauvoir, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty did try to set up a resistance group called Socialism and Liberty, but their efforts were inefficacious. They gave up on the idea of violent resistance because none of them knew how to use weapons or make bombs. Instead they confined themselves to publishing a newsletter and conducting espionage. In one incident, they collected “intelligence” on the enemy and then realized they did not know who to pass it on to. In another incident, Sartre tried unsuccessfully to persuade his old friend Alfred Péron to join the resistance; Péron, unbeknownst to Sartre, was actually in a small group

undertaking active and effective resistance. Real resistance members avoided Socialism and Liberty because they believed, probably correctly, that they would do more harm than good. In the end, the members concluded that they ran enormous risks for little benefit and disbanded.²²¹ To a certain extent there are excuses for Beauvoir's war record. Most French people tried to get by as she did; in absolute terms her war record is probably better than average. She did run significant risks for the cause of freedom and nobody seriously doubted where she stood. It is also the case, however, that she did less than she could have done, and less than she advocates in her moral period works.²²²

From the point of view of the moral period, the war was important because it raised a whole host of moral issues. Of course the war raised questions about the nature and legitimacy of violence. These questions were complicated by the fact that World War Two was a total war: much of the violence was aimed at civilians and intended to bring about victory in an indirect manner. Every participant in the war had its own internal problems. Germany and Russia were totalitarian regimes, England and France held colonies, and America practiced institutionalized racism. So Beauvoir had to address totalitarianism and oppression individually, and she also needed to address the fact that all possible courses of action were suboptimal and would entail supporting some form of oppression. In these circumstances, as Merleau-Ponty said, merely living implied some level of collaboration,²²³ but resistance had its own difficulties. Resistance activity destabilized the situation in France, thus making life harder for the ordinary Frenchman, and it could lead to reprisal killings of hostages. This raised questions about the legitimacy of laws and governments, the justification of punishment in general and the death penalty in particular, and the need to make political compromises. Finally there was the unique fact of the Holocaust. The Nazis and the subsequent Nuremberg trials introduced the idea of crimes against

humanity. Beauvoir needed to provide a definition of a crime against humanity, and to do this she needed to describe the humanity which these crimes violated.

Beauvoir, and most of her intended audience as well, had to face these questions on a personal level. Therefore Beauvoir had to take up all the moral questions the war had raised and find answers. The ending of *She Came to Stay* was no longer acceptable in a world where the other consciousness was being killed on an industrial scale. Beauvoir responded to these circumstances by writing her moral period works. These works, as I have said, are all characterized by their focus on ethical issues, their universal outlook, and the influence of distinctly modern philosophy. Beauvoir's philosophical output during the moral period consists of two major works, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, three articles, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism" "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom" and "An Eye for an Eye," and a review of the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Beauvoir also wrote two novels, *The Blood of Others* and *All Men Are Mortal*, a bad stage play, *Les bouches inutiles*, and some minor journalistic pieces. These works were all written in response to very immediate circumstances and therefore make direct reference to the issues raised by the war and the purge. Both *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* arose out of philosophical discussions.²²⁴ The articles and review were all written for *Les temps modernes*, the journal Beauvoir co-edited with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and "An Eye for an Eye" in particular was written as a response to a trial Beauvoir had attended. The exact time at which Beauvoir wrote her moral period works is hard to determine because she gives conflicting accounts and because publication was sometimes delayed. *The Blood of Others* in particular had to be withheld from publication until after the liberation because it advocated violent resistance against the occupation. Generally speaking, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, *Les bouches inutiles*, and *The Blood of Others* were probably written some

time in 1942-1943.²²⁵ *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* was published in 1944, *The Blood of Others* was published in 1945, and *Les bouches inutiles* was produced in 1945. “Moral Idealism and Political Realism” and the review of the *Phenomenology of Perception* appeared in the November 1945 edition of *Les temps modernes*, “Existentialism and Popular Wisdom” in the December 1945 edition, and “An Eye for an Eye” in the February 1946 edition. None of them could have been written much before then. *All Men Are Mortal* was written in 1945 and published in 1946. *The Ethics of Ambiguity* was written in 1946 and published in 1947.²²⁶

Chapter 2. Beauvoir's Agreement with Kant and Hegel

In this chapter I will discuss Beauvoir's similarities to Kant and Hegel. My goal is to show that Beauvoir's ethics makes use of the same basic set of concepts – autonomy, freedom, dignity, respect, and recognition – as Kant's and Hegel's ethics. At a deeper level, my goal is to show that these similarities are systematic in nature. Beauvoir comes to similar conclusions as Kant and Hegel because she has, and knows herself to have, a similar project. Beauvoir's moral period works do not all cover the same philosophical ground, and each one is framed around a different question, so rather than look at them chronologically, I will group them together and look at them thematically. Within this chapter, I will start with Beauvoir's basic ethical position that we should value our freedom, and connect this to Kant and Hegel on freedom and autonomy. I will then move on to her discussion of relations with others and show how she reaches the Kantian and Hegelian concepts of dignity, respect, and recognition. I will conclude by discussing a piece in which Beauvoir develops a theory of retributive justice that very closely resembles Kant's views on punishment.

Freedom and Autonomy

Beauvoir holds that the world as it is in itself is just a collection of objects, and these objects, in and of themselves, do not have any connection to me. They may be below me or beside me or to the left of me, they may even be my property in the bourgeois sense of the word, but these are merely external relations which imply no true possession. There are other people in the world, and they may be my parents or children or second cousins, or they may belong to the same class or race or sex or nationality as I do, but these too are merely external relations. Other people are inherently neutral, neither with me nor against me but simply separate from me.

Beauvoir invokes Camus's stranger here, and though she finds him contemptible, he is not wrong to feel that the world is completely alien.²²⁷ Of course other people are conscious and can make judgments about me, but these judgments are inherently nothing more than facts in the world. If I don't care about another person, then I am not going to care what he thinks of me. Camus's stranger feels no connection to the prosecutor and so can listen with detached indifference as the prosecutor tells the court about his twisted soul.²²⁸ Beauvoir's claim in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* that others are inherently neutral represents a departure from the ontology of *Being and Nothingness* and *She Came to Stay*, in which each consciousness is necessarily hostile toward every other consciousness, and this change has important implications for Beauvoir's ethics. If the other is necessarily hostile, then it seems ethical relations with others are impossible, although we could still try to formulate an ethics of personal authenticity. If the other is inherently neutral, however, then it should be possible to formulate an interpersonal ethics, provided that we can overcome this initial neutrality.²²⁹

As I have no inherent connection to the world, so the world has no inherent connection to me. There is nothing I am called upon to do, so that if I did it, it would justify my existence. There is no God who promulgates a set of ethical rules for me to follow.²³⁰ Even if there were such a God, God is a perfect being, who lacks nothing and therefore cannot ask me for anything.²³¹ There are no objects that need to be made, and which will only be made if I make them. There is no human other whose needs and desires constitute for me an absolute end. There are not even any human situations which can be called objectively better or worse than any other.²³² The oppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie is only bad when considered from the point of view of the proletariat. From the point of view of the bourgeoisie it is a good thing;

from the point of view of an ascetic who rejects the world it doesn't matter one way or the other.²³³

Without any external standards of value, Beauvoir turns toward the self as a source of value. Like Kant and Hegel, Beauvoir views freedom as the defining feature of the self, though her definition of freedom is somewhat different from those of Kant and Hegel. Freedom is a slippery concept in Beauvoir and the secondary literature provides several different interpretations of what Beauvoir said. Sonia Kruks, in *Situation and Human Existence*, holds that Beauvoir attempted to use Descartes's distinction between freedom and power to reconcile Sartre's claim in *Being and Nothingness* that freedom is absolute with her own intuition that freedom could be limited by situation. Kruks claims that this distinction turns out to be untenable, and that limitations on our power will ultimately come to function as limitations on our ontological freedom, although Beauvoir herself never sought to develop an ontology of her own, and therefore never fully thought through the problems of her conception of freedom.²³⁴ Toril Moi holds that Beauvoir, in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, distinguishes between two types of freedom, freedom as transcendence and concrete freedom. Freedom as transcendence is part of our ontological condition and therefore the same for everyone; concrete freedom depends upon "the social, political, material conditions in which every human being finds herself, and which clearly vary immensely."²³⁵ Kristana Arp, in contrast, argues that Beauvoir introduces a level of moral freedom which is distinct from both ontological freedom and power.²³⁶ Karen Vintges, among others, shares this view, and Anne Morgan has further subdivided moral freedom into three levels corresponding to the three moments of existentialist conversion.²³⁷

I accept the view that Beauvoir distinguishes between moral and ontological freedom, both because it seems to be borne out by the text of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, and because it

solves some problems that Kruks identifies with Beauvoir's distinction between freedom and power. Nevertheless I also think that the disagreement between Kruks and Arp is more apparent than real. Kruks writes that ontological freedom can be reduced to "no more than a suppressed potentiality"; this is all Arp means when she says that we can never lose our ontological freedom.²³⁸ We should also note that Beauvoir never actually took the position that our ontological freedom can be limited; Kruks only argues that this is the position she would be forced into if she had fully thought through her account of freedom.²³⁹ Arp, for her part, recognizes that Beauvoir stresses the links between consciousness and the world more than Sartre.²⁴⁰ Probably much of the disagreement can be interpreted as a matter of emphasis. Kruks is a political philosopher, and her reading of Beauvoir is primarily intended to show that Beauvoir has a deeper understanding of situation than we get in *Being and Nothingness*. Arp, in contrast, is primarily interested in showing that *The Ethics of Ambiguity* can provide us with a workable version of existentialist ethics. Kruks needs to emphasize the limitations on freedom because this highlights Beauvoir's difference from Sartre; Arp need to emphasize the distinction between ontological and moral freedom because otherwise, as Kruks has correctly noted, Beauvoir's position would break down.²⁴¹

Beauvoir does seem to have a conception of freedom as transcendence or consciousness which is very like the conception of freedom in *Being and Nothingness*. Beauvoir's moral period works, however, are about ethics rather than epistemology or ontology, and so she is mostly concerned with freedom insofar as we use it to envisage projects, rather than freedom considered simply as consciousness of the world around us. The freedom to envisage projects preserves the intentional structure of consciousness in phenomenology: when we envisage a project, we orient ourselves outward, toward the end we have chosen to pursue. Every human is free in equal and

absolute measure. We as humans are always projecting ourselves toward ends at every moment whether we want to or not. This free projection simultaneously establishes values. There is nothing in the world which has any intrinsic value, but when we project ourselves toward some end, the achievement of that end becomes valuable to us. We make ends valuable by working towards them. There is no externally compelling reason why I should want to make a statue, but if I set about making one, I make it important that the statue be completed. Our projects not only create value but disclose being. The world as it is in itself is inherently meaningless, but once I engage in a project, things in the world acquire meaning through their relation to my project. Considered in themselves, the rocks and trees around me are merely insignificant objects. Once I decide to make a statue, however, these same rocks and trees suddenly become raw materials which might serve as the medium of my statue. I have no preexisting connections to things in the world, but as I create, I establish connections to particular things that are relevant to my project.²⁴² Beauvoir, in contrast to Sartre, does not seem to think that we have completely transparent access to our projects. We can engage in a project without realizing that we are doing so. There are projects that are lived but not thought. Beauvoir did not understand how important her Left Bank milieu was to her until the Occupation took it away.²⁴³ We can also fail to understand our projects even as we undertake them. The charitable lady gives to the poor and thus staves off the revolution.²⁴⁴

Beauvoir, following Descartes, distinguishes between our freedom and our power. In this particular quote, freedom means nothing more than the freedom to adopt a stance toward the world as it is, and Beauvoir accepts Sartre's claim that this is always absolute. Our power, in contrast, is our ability to bring about changes in the world as it is, and this is always limited.²⁴⁵ The limits on our power in turn affect the projects we can coherently undertake. I do not have

the power to run through a brick wall, and so it would be mere foolishness to make that my project, although technically I am free to do so.²⁴⁶ More to the point, we do not have the power to create all the time. In order to create, we must put in the effort to sustain our lives, and this limits our choices.²⁴⁷ Projects are creative activity. Merely to preserve our lives is not a project. Projects begin only when the basic needs of life have already been satisfied.²⁴⁸ Beauvoir, especially in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, is very aware of how seriously our power can be limited, and of the effects this can have on our projects. She writes that there are people who are oppressed to the point where they are reduced to the lowest level of animal life, to the point where we can only wish for death for them. This is one of the points at which Kruks thinks Beauvoir's distinction between freedom and power starts to break down. Beauvoir does, however, try to argue that freedom can still survive under oppression. Even in situations of the most severe oppression, according to Beauvoir, we can still see children who smile. Beauvoir is not being sentimental here, and she certainly does not mean to become an apologist for oppression, on the grounds that it cannot truly harm us. Her point is rather that people maintain their absolute freedom even in the worst of circumstances and the smile reminds us of this freedom. The child smiles because he projects himself toward a better future. The only reason Beauvoir uses a child rather than an adult in the example is that the child is less beaten down and therefore more likely to think about the future.²⁴⁹

Situations of severe oppression can also lead to a condition Beauvoir calls mystification. In mystification, oppression is so prevalent that it seems like a natural phenomenon, rather than a situation which was created by humans and can be resisted by humans. Beauvoir here gives the examples of slaves in the old South and women in a harem. These people are simply incapable of imagining that their situation could be other than it is. They have never seen examples of free

blacks or free women, and they cannot learn about such examples secondhand because they are denied education. The result is that the oppressed see their situation as an inevitable fact of life, rather like the weather, and would no sooner rebel against their situation than they would rebel against the weather. Beauvoir remarks that we cannot bring ourselves to hate a hailstorm or a plague; in the same way, the slave and the harem woman cannot see any reason to hate their respective masters. This is another point at which Kruks thinks the distinction between freedom and power starts to break down, but again, I think Beauvoir still has room to argue that existence of mystification, like the existence of powerlessness, does not contradict the claim that all people are always absolutely free. The slaves and the harem women really do have the freedom to challenge their situation, even though they don't yet realize this fact. Once this mystification is cleared away, they will be able to see their situation as changeable, and will be able to take a position on it.²⁵⁰

Beauvoir adds an ethical edge to her discussion of freedom by asking about the stance we take toward freedom itself. We can use our freedom to will other ends, but we can also use our freedom to turn towards ourselves and will ourselves free. We have already said that the things in the world are inherently neutral and absurd but that freedom gives them positive or negative value by choosing to pursue or shun them. Freedom itself – by which I mean simply the ontological fact that we take stances toward the world at every moment – can be regarded as a fact like any other. It too is inherently neutral and absurd: Beauvoir even describes freedom as a form of facticity at one point in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Just as we freely take a position on everything else, however, we will have to freely take a position on our own freedom. We can assign our freedom a value, either positive or negative. If we assign our freedom a positive value, then our freedom assigns a positive value to itself. It provides its own justification and

thus becomes autonomous.²⁵¹ The reflexive nature of Beauvoir's ethics corresponds, in general terms, to the kind of reflexivity suggested by Sartre at the end of *Being and Nothingness*, where he asks: "is it possible to take freedom for a value as the source of all values?" Sartre does not, however, develop this idea any further. The idea of a reflexive existentialist ethics is only developed in Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

The idea of willing ourselves free needs further explanation. It seems that there is no point in working toward freedom when we are all necessarily and absolutely free already. To put the problem in explicitly ethical terms: all ethics begins with an initial separation from the ethical desideratum. In order to say that I *ought* to strive for something, it is necessary to assume that I don't already have it, or at least that I could fail to attain it, but I couldn't fail to freely envisage projects and disclose being even if I tried. Therefore it seems Beauvoir cannot use freedom as her ethical desideratum. At a logical level, I cannot will myself not to be free, because then I would be using my freedom to say there was no point in freedom, and my negative judgment about the worth of freedom would undercut its own foundations. If I cannot meaningfully deny my freedom, however, then I cannot meaningfully assert my freedom either.²⁵²

Kristana Arp's response to these dilemmas is that Beauvoir must posit two levels of freedom: the ontological freedom we all have to an absolute degree and another level of freedom which Beauvoir calls "moral freedom."²⁵³ This separate category of moral freedom is missing from *Being and Nothingness* and even *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*. Moral freedom is "a certain way of living our lives." It is a "state or condition" in roughly the sense that Aristotle would describe virtues as states or conditions.²⁵⁴ In order to attain moral freedom, I must see myself as free, see my freedom as a good thing, and affirm my freedom by engaging in concrete actions. Beauvoir explains the idea of affirming my freedom as a variant of phenomenology. Just as we have the

Husserlian conversion we have an Existentialist conversion. The phenomenologist puts the question of the existence of an object in parentheses and focuses on how it is presented to me. In the same way, an authentic agent refuses to see his end as necessary, even as he pursues it. I act, but instead of viewing my act as necessary, I view it as an act that I undertake freely. I admit that I am free and that I pursue my goal because I have chosen to do so, yet I still pursue my goal.²⁵⁵ The separate category of moral freedom allows Arp say that Beauvoir can preserve an absolute moral freedom while still admitting limitations on our power. Limitations on power can limit moral freedom but not ontological freedom. For Kruks, without the category of moral freedom, limitations of power appear as limitations of ontological freedom.

If I openly acknowledge my freedom while pursuing my end, then I can affirm my freedom in an indirect manner. If I see myself as free while I pursue some concrete end, then I will see my freedom as valuable, because it allows me to pursue the end which I have freely chosen to pursue. My pursuit of my particular end thus simultaneously expresses my valuation of freedom generally. Beauvoir makes this point when she says: “It is through this end that it sets up that my spontaneity confirms itself by reflecting upon itself.” We have already said that projects carry their own justification within themselves: when I project myself toward an end I simultaneously make that end valuable. It now turns out that projects can also carry the justification of the freedom that makes them possible within themselves. To achieve moral freedom is to live in such a way that our freedom becomes an essential part of our way of life. As Beauvoir says, “it is up to man to make it important to be a man.” To put the matter in slightly different terms, Beauvoir equates morality with an “adhesion” to the self, and therefore to the freedom which defines the self. Freedom, however, is nothing in itself; it orients me outward toward the ends I project. Because I am a free being, I constantly envisage the

possibility of doing A or B or C. Therefore I can only adhere to my freedom by going out into the world and using my power to actually do A or B or C.²⁵⁶

This also explains how I can fail to affirm my freedom. I cannot will myself not to be free but I can fail to will myself free. My freedom is initially absurd and unjustified: I can choose to give it a justification or I can leave it at the level of a brute fact. I can live my life in such a way that my freedom is not important to me.²⁵⁷ There are several reasons why I might want to do this. Beauvoir seems to imply a fundamental human desire to merge with the natural world. Freedom, on the other hand, implies a separation from the world. In Husserlian intentionality theory, the consciousness which intends an object is distinct from the object intended. In order to disclose the world, I must put myself at a distance from the world which I disclose.²⁵⁸ Freedom also implies a separation from ourselves. Because I engage in projects, I'm oriented toward my future, not toward what I am now. This is what Heidegger means when he says man is a being of faraway places, and what Sartre means when he says that I am not what I am.²⁵⁹ Finally, freedom implies the anguish of choice. Because we can choose, we can choose wrongly, and do things that will turn out to harm ourselves or others. All of us were children, and so we all remember a time when our parents defined us as good little children or naughty little children, and we simply accepted these definitions, with no separation from ourselves, and no responsibility for our actions. The desire to rid ourselves of freedom, according to Beauvoir, can be due to nostalgia for our childhood, when we did not have to deal with the pain of separation from ourselves and our objects, and the anguish of choice.²⁶⁰

Beauvoir discusses several ways to fail to will my freedom in the second section of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. The sub-man refuses, as much as possible, to cast himself into the world by pursuing any coherent project. The serious man, in contrast, attributes absolute value to some

end, and conveniently forgets that he only thinks the end is valuable because he freely chose to make it valuable. Seriousness is thus very much like heteronomy in Kant. The serious man sees the value of the end he pursues as residing in the object and not in himself; a heteronomous actor is determined to act by something outside himself and not by the categorical imperative within himself. The nihilist, like the sub-man, sees everything as valueless, but unlike the sub-man he actively tries to reject both himself and the world. The sub-man, the serious man, and the nihilist thus all fail, in different ways, to will their freedom.

Of course the sub-man, the serious man, and the nihilist are still human, and so all of them still engage in projects and disclose being as a matter of ontological necessity, and in this respect they seem very like the morally free person. The difference is that the morally free person cares about being free, whereas the sub-man, the serious man, and the nihilist do not. The sub-man does not see his freedom as important because he does not see anything as important. There is no narrative thread that connects his experiences; even his actions are no more than accidents. His experiences and acts happen to him while he looks on with passive indifference. The serious man does not see his freedom as important, he sees his end as important, and the freedom which allows him to get there has merely instrumental value for him. The nihilist does not see freedom as important; in fact he tries to actively rid the world of freedom. To put the matter in more everyday terms, the morally free person, as we will see, engages in a consistent course of action which opens further possibilities for action. The sub-man, the serious man, and the nihilist do not. The sub-man acts in an incoherent and haphazard manner and therefore does not accomplish anything. The serious man would willingly trample on the freedom of others, or even on his own freedom, if this would help to bring about the end he takes seriously. The nihilist engages in openly destructive acts. He may try to destroy himself in suicide, he may try

to destroy other people, or he may engage in deliberately self-denying projects such as the Dadaist movement in art.²⁶¹

Because Beauvoir is trying to convince us to adopt a certain way of life, and not simply to hold a certain intellectual position, she is not interested in advancing logical arguments in favor of freedom. As both Linda Bell and Kristana Arp have pointed out, I cannot find logical arguments compelling unless I have first decided to accept logic as my standard for making decisions.²⁶² If I were to say that I had decided to value freedom because a logical argument had convinced me to do so, then I would deny my absolute freedom to decide upon values in bad faith, and my valuation for freedom would amount to a form of seriousness. Instead Beauvoir offers us practical incentives. Beauvoir shows us what our lives will be like if we value freedom, and what our lives will be like if we do not, in the hope that we will prefer the former. The choice of a way of life, however, is itself unjustifiable. Once I have decided to value freedom, then I will look at the sub-man, the serious man, and the nihilist from this standpoint and judge their ways of life deficient. In this sense, all choices, both the choice of an authentic way of life and the choice of an inauthentic way of life, establish values which retroactively justify the original choice. Because there are no objective values, however, there is no way to say in advance that the sub-man, the serious man, or the nihilist are objectively wrong.²⁶³

Beauvoir seems to provide two separate practical arguments in favor of freedom. First, Beauvoir thinks that all of us feel the need to justify our own existence, to feel our lives as useful in some way, and to do this we first of all need freedom, because freedom defines things as useful by pursuing them. If we declare freedom to be valueless, then we declare all the ends that we freely pursue to be valueless, and the fact that we pursue these ends cannot lend justification to our existence. The world as it is in itself is the world of Camus' stranger, and it only acquires

meaning because we freely value things and pursue projects. Take away freedom and we are back with the world of Camus' stranger, unable to see any reason to do anything.²⁶⁴

Second, whether we want to be free or not, we really are free, and we have access to this fact. If we choose to acknowledge our freedom, and act in ways that are consistent with our freedom, then we will live in a kind of harmony with ourselves that will make us happy. We want to be free, and we are free, so we have "won."²⁶⁵ At a very everyday level, if we admit to ourselves that we are free, we will be able to straightforwardly pursue the ends we set for ourselves, and therefore stand a good chance of achieving them. At a deeper level, Beauvoir writes of a joy in freely pursuing our projects. She seems to have an almost Nietzschean conception of this joy: we understand our situation, admit it to ourselves, and play it out for all it is worth. In contrast, if we try to deny our freedom, it will make us very unhappy. Even though we may not want to be free, we still have access to the fact that we are free, and so we will have to hide our freedom from ourselves. We will live in constant fear of being placed in situations which will force us to acknowledge our freedom. Instead of wholeheartedly pursuing our projects, which would refer us to our freedom, we will engage in self-contradictory projects, in which we undermine ourselves even as we pursue our goal. These abortive and unsuccessful projects will allow us to avoid realizing we are free; they also help us not to desire freedom by confirming our feeling of powerlessness to change the world around us.²⁶⁶

Beauvoir makes use of the dissatisfying character of failing to will freedom to make her case for willing ourselves free. In both *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she presents her own views as the end results of dialectical progressions. In the second section of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir presents the existential states she discusses in the form of a dialectic, so that the failure of the attitude of the sub-man leads us to adopt the attitude of the

serious man, and the failure of the serious man leads us to adopt the attitude of the nihilist, and so on. (Beauvoir's dialectic has three more states, which I will discuss in the next section of this chapter.) *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* may have a similar dialectical structure. In the first part, Beauvoir rejects Stoicism, universal benevolence, devotion to God, and devotion to humanity before presenting her own views about acting in situation, and in the second part, she rejects devotion to others before presenting her own view about communication and action with others. Beauvoir is able to use these dialectics because she expects that we will inevitably find the lower stages unsatisfactory, and that our dissatisfaction could eventually drive us to affirm our freedom. At a much simpler level, in "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom," Beauvoir makes use of the dissatisfying character of failing to will ourselves free in order to compare existentialism to psychotherapy. In Freudian psychology, we have drives, we try to repress them, and this causes neuroses. Psychotherapy makes us aware of our drives, helps us accept them, and thereby cures the neuroses. In the same way, we repress our awareness of our freedom, and this causes self-contradictory behavior. Existentialism makes us aware of our freedom, and in doing so, it makes us better.²⁶⁷

The subjective value for freedom that I feel in moral freedom will have practical consequences for my actions. Because I desire freedom, I will be inclined to engage in certain kinds of projects because they promote freedom, and inclined to avoid others because they hinder freedom. I will be inclined to create as an act of the free expansion of my freedom.²⁶⁸ At a very practical level, I will be inclined to increase my power, in order to increase my ability to create.²⁶⁹ At the same time, I will be inclined to fight against those who want to oppress me and decrease my power, because this limits my ability to engage in creative activity.²⁷⁰ In the limit case, if all avenues to any kind of freedom are cut off – if I am so badly oppressed that I do not

even have enough power to fight the oppression – Beauvoir advocates suicide. By rejecting the situation that prevents me from even hoping for freedom, I show that I value freedom.²⁷¹ It should go without saying that Beauvoir advocates this only in extreme circumstances.²⁷² Thus the stance of moral freedom, much like the categorical imperative, imposes certain limitations on my actions, and also recommends certain actions.

In one sense there is a hierarchy among actions. Creative activity is best, followed by fighting against oppression, followed by suicide. Because it is a purely negative act of resistance, rather than a positive creative action in its own right, there is no intrinsic justification for fighting against oppression. Fighting against oppression is only justified insofar as it creates a situation which allows us to subsequently engage in creative activity.²⁷³ Of course suicide does not even provide this indirect form of justification. This hierarchy represents a change from the ontology of *She Came to Stay* and *Being and Nothingness*, in which freedom is considered only in its absolute ontological aspect and therefore no hierarchy among actions is possible. Of course the hierarchy among actions implies a hierarchy of situations. Situations in which we are free to engage in creative activity are better than situations of oppression. In more general terms, situations where we have more power are better than situations where we have less power. This hierarchy among actions and situations does not, however, imply that there is a hierarchy among moral agents. Beauvoir judges the moral worth of agents by the stance they take toward their freedom. From the standpoint of the individual, the important thing is to do the best we can with the situation we face, whatever that situation may be. The best moral agents will desire freedom, and this desire can take the form of creative activity, resistance to oppression, or even suicide, depending on the situation they find themselves in.²⁷⁴ People living in a state of mystification cannot be judged. Beauvoir evaluates moral agents by looking at the stance they take toward

their freedom, and people living in a state of mystification cannot take any stance toward their freedom, because they don't yet know they have it.²⁷⁵

Beauvoir's distinction between the evaluation of actions and the evaluation of agents allows her to tread a very fine line. On the one hand, if Beauvoir were to privilege creative activity over resistance to oppression, then it would follow that those people who lived in oppressive situations that gave them less scope for creative activity were somehow morally inferior. On the other hand, if Beauvoir were to say that people maintain their freedom and their ability to act morally no matter what the situation, then we could not say that one situation was better than another, and there would be no need to refrain from oppression or to resist oppression. Beauvoir's distinction allows her a way out of this dilemma. To put it another way, Beauvoir here makes use of the distinction between ontological and moral freedom. All people maintain their complete ontological freedom no matter what the situation, and this ontological freedom forms the basis for human dignity, and claims for the rights necessary to human dignity. In contrast, our moral freedom, our ability to affirm our ontological freedom by engaging in concrete actions, depends on our power, and this can be limited. The problem with oppression (or any other form of failing to respect the other) is that it denies a being with ontological freedom the chance to achieve moral freedom.²⁷⁶

Dignity, Respect, and Recognition

Beauvoir has shown that I must desire freedom for myself, but she goes to great lengths to show, in both *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, that I will also desire freedom for others. My own freedom is so inextricably tied with the freedom of others that to desire one is to desire the other.²⁷⁷ Beauvoir's argument begins from the position that my freedom is not

sufficient to justify itself. My freedom allows me to engage in projects, but once a project is completed, the object I have created separates from me, and becomes part of the given world which I have to transcend toward new projects. Therefore I never get anywhere. Once I have completed a project, I am in exactly the same position as I was when I started.²⁷⁸ Because I already know that I will not get anywhere, there is no reason to start in the first place.²⁷⁹

Of course I could try to solve this problem by engaging in a series of projects in which one project serves as a starting-point for the next. In this way my future projects would retroactively justify my past projects as necessary precursors, and my present projects would imply the possibility of future projects. This solution, however, merely pushes the problem back a level. One project implies another, but there is no reason to engage in any of them. Because no one project in the series is justified in itself, the other projects in the series cannot be justified by their relationship to it. Viewed apart from other people, a series of projects seems to be an endless reshaping of the world for no valid reason.²⁸⁰ Furthermore, no matter how far I extend my projects, they are always finite in nature. If there are no other people in the world, then I can only judge my projects by comparing them to the world as a whole, which is infinite, and finitude against infinitude is ultimately nothing. Even if I build an edifice designed to last for thousands of years, it will eventually collapse, and if it collapses in the end there was no reason to build it in the first place. I take a long trip to see Lyon but I miss Nîmes: the number of places I can see is always insignificant next to the number of places I will miss. Because my projects will always come to nothing against the infinity of the world, there is no reason to start.²⁸¹

Fortunately for me, there are other people in the world. Every person is both subject and object, freedom and facticity, transcendence and immanence, but the way I experience this duality in myself is different from the way I experience it in others. I experience myself as a

subject. I experience myself as a being capable of envisioning and engaging in projects, as a being who establishes values. The corollary to this is that I do not appear to myself as an object. Even my body is not an object in the world; it is rather my way of engaging with the world. There is a sense in which I can experience others as subjects, because I can experience others as free beings who engage in projects, but the way I experience others as subjects is different from the way I experience myself as a subject. I have no control over the projects of others. They are not *my* projects. In a sense, other people appear to me as part of my situation, because they exist in the world which I must transcend, but they also appear as privileged parts of my situation, because they also freely shape my world and establish values of their own. I know *that* other people are free – that they are subjects for themselves – but I don't have access to this interior view they have of themselves. Other people are closed off to me in the same way that things are. Of course this situation is reciprocal. Other people experience themselves as subjects for themselves, and see me as a privileged object in their world.²⁸²

This in some sense gives other people a power I do not have. To experience oneself as free is to experience oneself as a being that always projects itself toward something else. It is to experience oneself as a being of faraway places, a being that it not what it is. Therefore, I can never fully believe in my own projects. I can never be fully absorbed in what I am doing. I can always reflect on what I am doing and project myself toward something else. I can always picture a future where I will transcend my project toward some future project. The other person, looking at himself through his own eyes, feels the same void as I do, but I never get to see through his eyes. To me the other appears as a freedom wholly engaged in some or other project. The other appears to me to have a solidity which I don't have. This is why we seek the approval of others. When a child makes a drawing, he can call it a drawing of a boat, but he can never

quite believe his judgment. When his parents call it a drawing of a boat, however, then that judgment acquires the same solidity that they have. Hermits like Thoreau write for exactly the same reason.²⁸³ I cannot take myself as an object, but other people can take me as an object, and in doing so, they give me a being which I cannot give to myself.

Beauvoir's discussion my relation to the other thus serves the same role as the master-slave dialectic in Hegel and the discussion of the Look in Sartre. As in Hegel and Sartre, the other gives me a being which I cannot give to myself; as in Hegel, the other turns out to be necessary to my own constitution of myself as a subject. The main difference is that the self-other relation takes on a much more benign character in Beauvoir than in Hegel or Sartre. For both Hegel and Sartre, the initial meeting between self and other necessarily leads to physical or at least epistemic violence, as each tries to reduce the other to an object. For Hegel, the initial meeting between self and other results in a life-or-death struggle in which each consciousness tries to kill the other. Sartre's battle of Looks reenacts the life-or-death struggle on an epistemic level, and this initial moment of struggle can never be overcome as it is in Hegel, so that the exchange of Looks continues *ad indefinitum*. For Beauvoir, in contrast, the initial meeting between self and other is potentially nonviolent: a child shows a drawing of a boat to an adult. In this interaction, the child recognizes the adult as a subject, and actively seeks out the adult in the hope that the adult will recognize the child as a subject as well. The child and adult have already reached the stage of mutual recognition, apparently without any need to go through all the initial stages of the Hegelian dialectic. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir again adopts a relatively benign view of self-other relations. She admits that there is an element of alienation inherent in self-other relations – I see myself as an object in the other's world – but she immediately gives this alienation a positive dimension: "If he is reasonable, the young man immediately

understands that by taking the world from me, others also give it to me, since a thing is given only by the movement which snatches it from me.”²⁸⁴ For Beauvoir, I “immediately” reach a standpoint in which I integrate the other’s view of me into my own view of myself, whereas I only reach this standpoint after a violent struggle in Hegel, and never reach it in Sartre.²⁸⁵

In order to establish a relationship with the other, I must be able to affect him in some way. Unfortunately for me, I cannot affect another person in his ontological freedom. Every person is completely free at all times. No matter what I may do to him, he always maintains an absolute freedom to respond to this situation as he will. Therefore there is no act that, in itself, is necessarily helpful or harmful to another person. The act is helpful or harmful only if the other person decides it is. Even death is not necessarily an evil. It is only an evil if it conflicts with my project, and I can have projects which extend beyond my death. The Athenians who sentenced Socrates to death did not harm him, because his project was to teach, and the death sentence provided him with a teachable moment. Similarly Crito did not help Socrates by bribing the guards to let him escape. Crito only offered Socrates the chance to live, and Socrates did not particularly care about living, if he had to live in a way that would compromise his role as a teacher. Beauvoir, following Kierkegaard, holds that each person must accomplish his own salvation. As freedoms we are radically separated. Our ultimate goal is to affirm ourselves as free beings by freely engaging in concrete projects. This is something that we can only do for ourselves.²⁸⁶ We can only “get credit” for the things we do ourselves. If a child struggles to climb a tree, and I help him up, he will be unhappy with me. He wanted to climb to the top; by helping him, I prevented the accomplishment from being his accomplishment.²⁸⁷ Of course this situation is reciprocal: the other cannot affect me in my ontological freedom either.

I can, however, affect the other's situation, and through this the success or failure of the other's projects. All of us need to use our freedom to engage in projects, all projects involve reshaping the world in some way, and the world is fundamentally a shared world. My projects reshape the same world as your projects. Because of this, even though we cannot affect each other in our ontological freedom, our projects can come into interaction. My projects will affect your situation, and therefore affect the success of your projects, or the range of projects that you can coherently undertake. I can create a situation which makes it easier for you to achieve your ends or I oppress you so that it becomes nearly impossible for you to act. I can open new possibilities to you or I can close off possibilities. If we have opposed projects, then the success of my project will be the failure of yours, and vice versa. In this sense my ability to help or harm the other is limited only by my power, and reciprocally, the other's ability to help or harm me is limited only by his power.²⁸⁸ It is important to note that the interaction of projects does not contradict Beauvoir's claim that we can never affect each other in our ontological freedom. Even if I thwart the other's projects, he is still free to decide how to view this. He might, for instance, choose to view his project as a failure, or he might choose to view me as an obstacle. Similarly, even if I assist the other, it is still up to him to complete his project, and he will earn the credit for this. Charles Lindbergh did not invent the airplane, but he still had to fly across the Atlantic, and he got credit for the flight.

The fact that I can affect the other's projects and he can affect mine allows for communication between us. The other encounters my actions, the results of my projects, and looks at them from the standpoint of his own projects. On this basis he may see me as an enemy, an ally, a neutral, a competitor, or a precursor. When he fixes me as an object, he will fix me as an object with a value, either positive or negative. The world is always already full of people

who are engaging in projects and thereby assigning values and significations to the objects in the world. To a sculptor, a stone is not simply a stone, it is the raw material for a sculpture. To an explorer, a river is not simply a body of water, it is the gateway to a new territory waiting to be discovered. My projects have meaning because they enter into a world that is already permeated with human meanings. Direct, freedom-to-freedom interaction is impossible for Beauvoir, but free beings act upon the same world, and so they can interact with each other through the medium of the world. The fact that other projects interact with mine creates the “rough ground” that allows my own projects to have meaning.²⁸⁹ Nancy Bauer has pointed out that this process is ongoing. When I act before the other, this creates a new situation for him, which he must respond to in some way, which then creates a new situation for me, and so on. The existence of others therefore spurs me to action. As long as there are other people in the world, I will recognize myself in the way they view my actions or even my inaction, and so I will always feel called upon to act before them.²⁹⁰

The fact that I can affect others through their situations also allows others to justify my existence. Say for instance that I invent a new kind of airplane motor which makes air travel safer and cheaper. Other people notice the improvement in air travel and make it their project to visit friends, relatives, business associates, etc. And in doing so they see me as necessary to their projects. They would not have decided to fly if I had not invented the new motor. Thus they retroactively give a justification to my project: my project was useful because it was useful to their projects.²⁹¹ They thereby give a justification to my project that I could not have given myself, for two reasons. In the first place, I cannot take myself as an object, as I have already said, but others can take me as an object, and their justification of me takes on the same solid character as they do. In the second place, if I am by myself, my project is limited by my power,

and one person all alone has very little power in the grand scheme of things. If, however, other people take up my project, as a point of departure for their own projects, then my project can extend itself through the projects built upon it, much in the way that a ripple travels through a pond. My projects can have long-term and far-reaching consequences when the power of others is added to them.²⁹²

Beauvoir has shown that our projects can only have meaning and confer justification to the extent that they intersect and agree with other people's projects.²⁹³ Of course a shared project – two or more people working together on the same thing – is the paradigm case of projects that intersect and agree. In reality, however, there is a continuum between shared projects and projects that merely intersect. Every project that has meaning intersects with others to a certain extent, and no two people can have exactly the same project. Beauvoir draws out the consequences of this view in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. People form “coherent ensembles” which allow us to “recognize the presence of intelligible sequences.” In other words, groups of people engage in projects that intersect and agree to a certain extent, creating webs of interconnected projects, and meaning exists within these webs. People engage in projects together and create meaning together. The justification of human existence can only take place within a group of people who recognize each other as free and care about the projects the others are undertaking.²⁹⁴

In order for other people to enter with me into these webs of connections, so that they can extend my project and justify my existence, both they and I need to meet certain conditions. First, other people can extend my project only if they have the power to do so. There is no point in making an airplane motor for a homeless man. All projects, my own and those of others, are what Marx would call creative activity. They begin after the needs of animal life have been satisfied. In order to extend my project, which is a creative activity, other people must have the

leisure to engage in projects themselves. Therefore I will want to expand the power of other people generally, to enable them to respond to my projects.

I will also, however, show a particular interest in bringing people to the same point on the path as I am, so that they can become my peers. There is no point in telling a freshman the details of my dissertation because he will not be able to understand it, and there is no point in telling an electrical engineering major about the details of my dissertation because he will not care about it. Every project is an appeal to other people to continue that project, but others cannot do so unless they have, in addition to leisure, the technical ability to understand my project and carry it forward. Put in other terms, every project is particular in nature, and so it is an appeal to some particular group of people. In order to expand my project, I will want to expand the group of people my project appeals to.²⁹⁵ Beauvoir does not pursue this point, but in a modern industrial economy, the amount of power we have is largely determined by formal and informal social institutions. Thus the claim that I rely upon the power of others could serve as an argument for a form of socialism, in which the State takes care of everyone's basic needs, allowing us to spend our free time in creative activity, and everyone has the same basic amount of social prestige.²⁹⁶ At the very least, if I need other people to have power, and power is distributed through institutions, then I need to pay attention to the way institutions work, and try to change them if they distribute power in a way that deprives some people of power.²⁹⁷ For Beauvoir, as for Kant and Hegel, genuine interchanges can only take place between equals. The difference is that, for Kant and Hegel, this equality exists at the formal level and as such it is guaranteed. For Beauvoir, this equality has to exist at both a formal level – which is guaranteed for her as well – and a concrete level. Peers are people who are our equals on both levels.

Second, and more importantly, others can only justify my existence if they genuinely appear to me as free beings. Others can justify my existence because their judgments have a solidity which I cannot convince myself of in my own case, and this solidity depends upon the fact that they appear as subjects. I can transcend any mere object in the world. I can always fit it within the context of one of my own projects. The object is originally separate from me, but I can always eliminate this separation, whether by eating it, destroying it, shaping it, etc. Therefore a mere object cannot justify me any more than I can justify myself. If an object could somehow make judgments about me, then I could always transcend these judgments, simply by transcending the object. In contrast, I cannot transcend another freedom. I cannot fit it neatly into my projects because it is constantly engaging in its own projects. The other freedom constantly escapes me. Whenever I try to grab hold of it, it is already gone, projecting itself toward some new end. The fact that I cannot transcend another freedom means that it appears as an absolute in my world, while all mere objects exist only by my leave. The fact that the other has an absolute character means that its judgments about me have an absolute character. I cannot transcend the other's judgment about me any more than I can transcend the other's freedom. When the other sees me as necessary to his own projects, he justifies my existence, in a way that I cannot transcend.²⁹⁸

This means that, in order to have any hope of justifying my own existence, I must see other people as free beings and not as objects. "Respect for the other's freedom is not an abstract rule. It is the first condition of my successful effort." I must leave the other free as I engage in projects. My projects must take the form of appeal to the other. I cannot and do not touch his freedom; instead I only affect his external situation, in the hope that he in turn will freely decide to respond to it in a way that extends my project.²⁹⁹ After discussing the sub-man, the serious

man, and the nihilist in the second chapter of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir suggests two more ways of failing to realize moral freedom. The adventurer admits that his freedom has no external justification and takes a gratuitous delight in free activity, while the man of maniacal passion admits that he makes his end valuable and yet still seeks to possess it. Although the adventurer and the maniac both affirm their freedom, they both fail to affirm the freedom of the other, and therefore fall short of a genuinely moral attitude. The adventurer only cares about his own freedom, not the freedom of others, and so he is willing to trample upon the freedom of others, or at least to acquiesce in regimes which do. The maniac, in his pursuit of his end, cuts himself off from the rest of the world. Because neither the adventurer nor the maniac respects the freedom of others, neither can justify his own existence. The genuinely moral attitude for Beauvoir is what she calls generous passion. In generous passion, we renounce the desire to possess the other, and instead project ourselves toward the other as someone who is free and therefore always radically separate from us.³⁰⁰

Beauvoir discusses several projects which fail to respect the other: contempt, violence, oppression, and paternalism. All of these projects short-circuit the interaction of freedoms which alone allows me to justify my existence. In contempt, I simply stop caring what the other thinks about me, and view him purely as an object. I may recognize that the other has thoughts of his own, but I will tell myself that these thoughts don't matter. There are any number of reasons for contempt and any number of ways of practicing it. Sometimes contempt can be nothing more than a form of self-definition. Beauvoir gives the example of Fernande Picasso, who used to wear outrageous hats in the hope it would scandalize the bourgeoisie.³⁰¹ But there are also more problematic reasons for contempt. I may act in bad faith: some women listen to the advice of their concierge because he represents the voice of the They. I may want not to think about the

oppression I practice: the Roman tells himself that his slave's thoughts don't matter because they are only the thoughts of a slave. Or I may use contempt to protect myself against failure: I may decide to value the judgment of only those critics who praise my work.

Beauvoir holds that all contempt is unsatisfactory. In the first place, contempt is never fully possible. Other people really are free, and so if we live in close proximity to them for long enough, we will eventually notice their freedom whether we want to or not. Even to speak to someone is to appeal to them as a free being. Sartre, in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, will make this same point with regard to slaves. Furthermore, even when we do manage to temporarily ignore the other's freedom, this robs us of the chance to justify our existence. Any project is an appeal to a group of people to take it up. If we feel contempt for people we cannot appeal to them. Camus's stranger feels universal contempt, so he has nobody to judge his projects, and therefore can't find any meaning in his life. The need to justify our existence also rules out the possibility that we can use contempt selectively, so that we only respect the opinions of those who approve of us, and feel contempt toward those who disapprove. When we truly set ourselves a goal, we define, in advance, the group of people we intend to appeal to, and though this group may change as our project develops, such changes will never be purely arbitrary. We cannot decide, after the fact, to feel contempt for the group of people our project was meant to appeal to without also abandoning our original project, and with it our hope for justification. To put the point in more general terms, if we know in advance that we cannot fail no matter what we do, then success becomes meaningless. The decision to use contempt in a selective manner eliminates the risk of failure and thus the possibility of success.³⁰²

Violence represents a more extreme failure of respect for the other. When I use violence against the other, I give up appealing to his freedom, and try to coerce him from outside. I want

the other to behave in a certain way, so I put pressure on him, to compel him to behave as I want. Violence is successful if the other acts as he is supposed to; what he thinks while he obeys me is irrelevant.³⁰³ The main problem with violence is that, by giving up the idea of the other as a free being, and interacting with him only insofar as he is a physical being, I also give up all hope of justifying my own existence. The other can only justify me if he is free. Of course the other still maintains his absolute freedom even if I use violence against him, but if I stop caring about his freedom, I cannot suddenly decide to care again when he does things that justify my existence. I cannot arrange things so that the other is actually not free, but I can constitute the other as not free for me, and in doing so, I constitute him as someone who cannot justify my existence.³⁰⁴ A secondary problem with violence is that, in order to act on the facticity of the other, I can only act on him by using my own facticity. In simple terms, I must shoot at him or overpower him, I must use my body to coerce his body. Therefore, by using violence, I not only reduce the other to the level of a thing, I also reduce myself to the level of a thing as well.³⁰⁵

Beauvoir takes a particularly hard line against violence. Freedom is an absolute good and the only good. Therefore violence, which denies freedom, is an absolute evil. Beauvoir's position here is almost Levinasian: freedom is absolute and therefore anumerical. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she conditionally agrees with the "Kantian rationalist who passionately maintained that it is as immoral to choose the death of a single man as to let ten thousand die."³⁰⁶ In "Moral Idealism and Political Realism" she goes even further: "If I were to kill only one man to save millions, an absolute outrage would break out in the world because of me, an outrage that could not be compensated for by any success and that could neither be overcome or remedied, nor integrated into the totality of action."³⁰⁷ Beauvoir does not, of course, think that it is generally a good idea to let millions die; she merely wants to make the point that the death of one person is

an absolute loss, and the fact that we might have a good reason to kill a single person cannot in any way justify or lessen that loss. Freedom is a formal and ontological condition of all human beings. We all have freedom to an equal and absolute degree. Violence denies the formal freedom of the victim, and because everybody else shares this freedom, my violent denial of the freedom of one person can be universalized, so that it denies the freedom of all. To use violence against one person is to use violence against all humanity: “even if I oppress only one man, all humanity appears in him as a pure thing to me. If a man is an ant that can be unscrupulously crushed, all men taken together are but an anthill.”³⁰⁸

Oppression seems to be either a more extreme form of violence or a sinister alternative to violence. Oppression divides the world into two groups, those who engage in creative activity, and those who are condemned to maintain life and therefore cannot engage in creative activity of their own. This kind of oppression is clearly tied up with social institutions: oppression is possible because groups of people are systematically denied access to the security, leisure, and education they would need to engage in creative activity. Oppression tends to lead to mystification, as in the examples of southern slaves and harem women, and in this way it can become self-perpetuating. From a metaphysical standpoint, oppression goes beyond mere violence. Violence is an attempt to prevail against the other consciousness in a Hegelian life and death struggle; oppression is the attempt to prevent the struggle from even starting. For all its many faults, violence does at least contain the implicit acknowledgement that the other has a point of view which I want to suppress, for otherwise I would not need to use violence to suppress it. In a situation of oppression, however, the oppressed does not even try to advance a point of view, because he has no resources with which to do so. Oppression obviously deprives me of the chance to expand my freedom through interaction with the oppressed. Because they

cannot engage in any creative enterprise at all, they obviously cannot engage in creative projects which will justify my projects. Oppression goes beyond mere violence, however, because it also deprives other people of the chance at justification. If I practice contempt or violence against someone, then he cannot be my peer, but he can still be somebody else's peer. If, however, I practice oppression against somebody, and keep him in a position where he cannot engage in any kind of creative activity, then he cannot become anyone else's peer either. In this sense, oppression hurts everybody, and so any act of oppression is everyone's problem.³⁰⁹

Beauvoir takes a more complex position on paternalism. Paternalism, like violence, involves forcing the other from outside to do something he does not want to do. The difference is that we use violence to secure our own ends, but we use paternalism for the good of the other, when he is unwilling or unable to act for his own good. Beauvoir is very aware that paternalism is often nothing more than a pretext to keep people in a state of permanent subjection, as with paternalism toward women, or colonial subjects, or the lower classes. This kind of paternalism ought to be rejected absolutely as a form of oppression.³¹⁰ There are, however, other situations in which Beauvoir does think paternalism is justifiable. In these cases, the paternalism is designed to open more possibilities for people who are, at the moment, incapable of creating these possibilities for themselves. So, for instance, a mother may exercise control over her child, but only so he can grow into an adult who can make decisions for himself. Or a caregiver may exercise control over a sick patient, forcing him to stay in bed and take his medicine when he would rather indulge himself, so that the patient will become well and be able to continue with his life. These cases are privileged because they tend toward the promotion of freedom.³¹¹ Beauvoir's position on paternalism, at least with respect to children, is exactly parallel to Kant's position. Beauvoir and Kant both demand that we respect the freedom of others. Therefore they

both reject paternalism in general as a failure of respect, and only permit paternalism toward children on the condition that it is directed toward producing free adults.³¹²

Even in these privileged cases, however, paternalism still involves forcing the other from outside, and therefore it is an absolute fault for which the paternalist must get himself pardoned. Once the paternalism is over, and the dependent is able to act on his own, the dependent can decide whether or not to forgive the absolute fault inherent in paternalism. The dependent can decide to use the possibilities that the paternalist has created by transcending them toward new ends, in which case he will retroactively justify the initial act of paternalism, which was necessary to produce the situation the dependent now transcends. The dependent can also, however, decide to reject the situation the paternalist has created for him and go back to his old ways, in which case the act of paternalism will remain an unjustified use of force against the dependent.³¹³ This is why, when using paternalism, we must distinguish the dependent's will from his whims. We must take account of the other's freedom and ask what he is likely to want to do with it. To put it in other terms, the paternalist acts in order to help the dependent achieve his will, when the dependent's will is overcome by his whims. We cannot force the dependent to do what we think is best for him; we can only help him to do what he thinks is best for himself. Using paternalism against a whim is likely to be retroactively justified because it will allow the person to pursue his serious projects later. So, for instance, a young girl is disappointed in love and takes an overdose of Phenobarbital. We save her and she eventually becomes the happy mother of a large family. In this case it is easy to see that her suicide attempt was nothing more than a temporary aberration, and that she did not really fully understand or intend the consequences. People in the grip of an illness, or children who are sheltered from the consequences of their actions by their parents, are likely to act on whims if we don't stop them.

If, however, a person has persistently chosen a course of action which we consider ruinous, then at some point we have to accept that this is what he has chosen to do with his life, and that he will only resent our interference if we try to help him. We cannot use paternalism in these cases, because paternalism is unjustified in itself, and we are not likely to receive any retroactive justification.³¹⁴

Beauvoir has shown that we must refrain from using contempt, violence, oppression, and (in most cases) paternalism against the other, but I also want something from the other. I want the other to recognize me as a free being who engages in projects. The other engages in projects that build upon the objects I have fashioned, but this will only justify my existence if the other sees these objects as the result of my projects. Someone who builds a house upon a rock does not confer any justification on the rock: he merely consumes the rock by integrating it into his own project. In the same way, if the other looks upon the objects I have fashioned as natural objects, and does not connect them back to my projects, he will confer no justification upon me. I need the other to see my creations as creations, as the products of an agent who actively gave shape to the world, in order for him to make the connection back to me and justify my existence. Just as we would not want to use contempt, violence oppression, or paternalism against the other, we will not want the other to use contempt, violence, oppression, or paternalism against us. Whether used by me against the other, or by the other against me, contempt, paternalism, oppression, and violence prevent the interaction between freedoms which alone allows me to justify my existence.³¹⁵

To a certain extent I can command respect from others simply because I am free, as Beauvoir has already shown. Though they may wish to ignore my freedom, other people will still need to interact with me, and in the course of these interactions they will inevitably come to

realize that I am free. This kind of respect, however, is not sufficient to justify my existence. It amounts to respect for my purely formal freedom, and it is purely negative in nature, entitling me to freedom from violence and paternalism. In order to justify my existence, I need to be recognized as the person who fashioned objects that are necessary to other people's projects. This recognition, unlike respect for our abstract freedom, is not automatic. We have to fight for it. At the simplest level, we have to fight for power, because power enables us to use our freedom to engage in the concrete projects for which we hope to be recognized. At a deeper level, we have to fight to make others recognize us. We have to create a situation where other people have to take account of us as beings who can impose our will on the world.³¹⁶

This fight for recognition, just like the fight for recognition in Hegel, is metaphysical in nature. We want recognition so much that we will risk merely phenomenal dangers to get it. Here Beauvoir gives the examples of workers who go on strike and the Parisians who (according to Beauvoir) liberated Paris. The workers could probably get better standards of living through charitable contributions, but then the workers would not appear as agents, they would appear as the dependents of the benevolent capitalists. The workers strike to gain material goods, but they want these goods insofar as they signify their ability to change their lot, not only insofar as they meet their material needs. The workers want to prove that they can get bread for themselves, they want to assert that they have a political existence, they want to get a sense of themselves as having the power to change their lot. The Parisians, from a practical standpoint, had nothing to gain by liberating Paris themselves. Even if the Parisians had not acted, Paris would have been liberated a few weeks later by the advancing Allied armies, with less risk to the Parisians. This would also, however, have been an admission of their inability to shape their own fate: the new postwar France would have to hide behind the military might of the British and Americans. The

Parisians acted because they did not only want Paris to be liberated, but also wanted to prove that they had the ability to liberate Paris for themselves.³¹⁷

Retributive Justice

Beauvoir makes her strongest statement about our need for recognition in “An Eye for an Eye.” “An Eye for an Eye” is a short essay published in *Les temps modernes* in 1946. The essay is technically a response to the trial and execution of Robert Brasillach. Brasillach was a moderately acclaimed writer with extreme right-wing anti-Semitic tendencies. During the occupation, he published a newspaper called *Je suis partout*, which urged collaboration with the conquering Germans. The newspaper also included a section titled *Partout et ailleurs*, which gave the real names and address of Jews in hiding, and hinted that it would be particularly nice if they were picked up and killed. After the Liberation, Brasillach was put on trial for treason, convicted, and sentenced to death. Because he had been a writer of some note, his lawyers decided to circulate a petition among the French intelligentsia, asking for clemency. Beauvoir explicitly refused to sign, but she felt involved enough in the case to attend his trial. The petition was ignored and Brasillach was executed. About a year later, needing a topic for an article for *Les temps modernes*, Beauvoir decided to comment on Brasillach’s crimes and his punishment. The explicit point of the article was to explain the reasons she had refused to sign the petition, and to assume responsibility for the small part her refusal had played in bringing about his execution, but it is actually much wider in scope. The Nuremberg trials were going on at the time, and Beauvoir uses Brasillach as a vehicle to reflect on the more general category of crimes against humanity, as well as everything from the nature of justice and forgiveness to the objection that the Allies too had engaged in the practice of total war. The essay itself mentions

not only Brasillach, but also a war-crimes trial that took place in Lunenburg, the site of Bergen-Belsen, a war-crimes trial of Russians who massacred Ukrainians, and the German massacre of an entire French town at Oradour, among other examples.³¹⁸

Beauvoir begins “An Eye for an Eye” by distinguishing between ordinary crimes and what she calls “abominations.” The distinguishing feature of an ordinary crime is that it aims only at the “exteriority” of the victim. To put it more simply, an ordinary crime is strategic in nature. In committing his crime, the common criminal aims at achieving some material result, and views other people insofar as they aid or inhibit his project of achieving that result. This material result can be anything from bare subsistence to revolution; therefore the crime can involve anything from stealing bread to political assassination. These crimes obviously differ in intensity, and Beauvoir does not minimize this difference, or foolishly hold that both crimes should be treated the same way. But she does hold that, on a “metaphysical” or “spiritual” level, they are equivalent in the sense that they share the same general structure of aiming only at the exteriority of the victim. As common crimes aim only at the exteriority of the victim, so their punishment aims only at the exteriority of the criminal. The punishment essentially involves inflicting negative utility values on the criminal for the strategic purpose of preventing future crimes. Jailer and criminal interact on a purely external level which parallels in reverse the purely external relations between the criminal and victim.³¹⁹

In contrast with common crimes, the defining feature of an abomination is that it aims specifically at the “interiority” of the victim. It treats him as a thing or as a means to an end; it denies his interior view of himself as subject.³²⁰ This view needs further explanation, because strategic crimes, which view the other relative to an end, also seem to treat him as a means to an end. Beauvoir replies that I can treat the other as an object for me without denying that he is a

subject for himself. Therefore we can distinguish between treating the other as an object for me and treating him as an object simpliciter. Beauvoir illustrates this point with the example of soldiers at war. If you and I are at war and I shoot at you, I grasp you by your exteriority, and my goal – to win the war – is a project of mine in which you appear as an obstacle to achieving my goal. I do not, however, deny that you are a subject for yourself. The fact that I want my side to win doesn't imply that you, in your interiority, want my side to win. I can shoot at you while still recognizing that you have ends of your own. In fact I implicitly acknowledge that you have your own ends because I have to shoot at you to prevent you from achieving them.³²¹

This metaphysical equality or symmetry depends on material power to the minimal extent that I can only act against you if you have enough power to prevent me from achieving my goal. If I were simply trying to achieve my goal and you were powerless to stop me, then obviously I wouldn't act against you, because I would have no reason to do so.³²² Metaphysical equality does not, however, imply equality in material power. The soldiers in the example have relatively equal chances of prevailing, but Beauvoir also gives examples of common WWII practices – such as killing civilian populations and prisoners already in custody – in which there was nothing close to an equality of material power between aggressor and victim. Beauvoir thinks these acts are still strategic, because even though the victim poses no threat to the aggressor, the aggressor still aims at some strategic end – winning the war – through the violence inflicted on the immediate victim. One can bomb innocent civilians and execute defenseless prisoners without denying that they have projects of their own.³²³ To take another example, Beauvoir concedes that torture may be merely strategic when it is used “as a police method” to extract information.³²⁴ Here the jailer meets the criminal on a level of material inequality, but he does not deny that the criminal has ends of his own, which the jailer seeks to thwart through the use of

torture. Not even defeat, the ultimate loss of my ability to concretely realize my ends, takes these ends from me. The defeat is still “my defeat” as long as I have concretely engaged in the battle.³²⁵ Of course it needs to be said that Beauvoir gives these examples merely to illustrate the distinction between common crimes and abominations. Saturation bombing, reprisal killings, and torture are still forms of violence, and as such they are still open to all the objections which can be raised against ordinary violence.³²⁶

Abominations, in contrast, make the victim feel that his pursuit of his own ends has not only been thwarted, but ignored entirely. Beauvoir gives the example of an inadvertent kick or shove in a crowd. Of course this jostling is merely accidental – no sane person goes into a crowd intending to kick or shove other people – but it often results from taking a solipsistic view of the world. Suppose for instance that I’m rushing through the crowd to get to work on time, and I’m so focused on beating the clock that I don’t pay attention to what is going on around me, and as a result I accidentally bump you out of my way. In the example I don’t have anything against you; I don’t even mean to bump you. I simply care about getting to work on time. The problem is that my focus on getting to work is so intense that it blots out the thought that other people want to get to work too. By bumping into you as I rush through the crowd of people, I posit a world in which only my getting to work matters, not just for me, but for you. This is why interiority is involved. I posit something about your values, not only about mine. I posit a world in which you exist only for my benefit, only to serve the end of my getting to work.³²⁷ In philosophical terms, I adopt the spirit of seriousness in my desire to get to work, and my getting to work takes on the character of an absolute end. I am so absorbed in getting to work that I forget that I make it important to get to work and begin to think of getting to work as objectively important.³²⁸ Beauvoir does not, I think, go so far as to say that bumping people in a crowd on your way to

work is an abomination, but she does think that it reveals the metaphysical structure of an abomination. The abominations Beauvoir talks about – she seem to use torture as the paradigm case – are not metaphysically distinct although they are doubtless far more egregious in intensity. They all amount to the denial that the victim can hold ends of his own even for himself. They posit the torturer – or some end the torturer holds – as an absolute end, and therefore as an absolute end for the victim. In doing so they treat the victim, not as an end, but as a means to the end which is posited as absolute.³²⁹

Abominations contradict the sense I have of myself as a subject, and as such they awaken my need to be recognized by others as a subject. More specifically, they awaken my need to have the torturer recognize me as a subject, because the torturer is the one who denied I was a subject. The only way to make the torturer recognize me as a subject is to turn the tables on him, and put him through exactly the same situation that he put me through. My hope is that, by doing so, I will compel him to see me as a subject. The torturer thought that he was the sole sovereign subject; now, in undergoing what I had to undergo, he sees himself in the position of an object, and sees me in the position of a subject.³³⁰ Beauvoir calls this desire to punish the other hatred, and although she uses it as a technical term, it is quite an ordinary emotion. It is the emotion “we” felt when listening to collaborationist radio broadcasts or reading Brasillach’s paper.³³¹

Thus vengeance is metaphysical in character. Vengeance is not directed toward any material end. It is always practiced on a victim who is already rendered helpless, as pure retribution for what he has done, and even if it does have a deterrent effect this is mere coincidence. As Beauvoir says, “they did not shoot Mussolini to deter future dictators.” The real motivation behind vengeance is our need to get our recognition back. This is why the

moment Mussolini says “no, no” before the firing squad is more satisfying than the moment he actually falls under the bullets. When he dies he merely dies; when he cries out he grants us recognition.³³² Beauvoir is quite clear about the fully metaphysical character of vengeance. The metaphysical need for punishment may even run counter to our practical interests. Many French bureaucrats who had collaborated too closely with the Vichy regime were not allowed to participate in the postwar government, even though their skills would have been very helpful in the rebuilding process. The need to punish was simply too great, and it overrode practical considerations, in the same way that the absolute worth found in acting from the categorical imperative can outweigh our pathological desires in Kant, or the desire for recognition can outweigh the desire to survive in Hegel. As Beauvoir says, “man does not live by bread alone. He also has spiritual appetites that are no less essential than any other appetites and the thirst for revenge is one of these. It answers to one of the metaphysical requirements of man.”³³³

The desire for vengeance also has a social dimension. My hatred can extend to abominations committed against others. “The respect that he demands for himself, each person claims for his loved ones and finally for all men. The affirmation of the reciprocity of interhuman relations is the metaphysical basis of the idea of justice.”³³⁴ The first part of this argument is straightforward: if I care about other people then obviously I will care about what happens to them. Beauvoir does not, however, think that we can care about all of humanity in this concrete way. Therefore, when she says that we will hate abominations committed against any of our fellow men, her argument must be that abominations deny the formal freedom we all share, and so an abomination against another is an abomination against me. I cannot assert my own dignity without simultaneously asserting the dignity of everyone else as well. This universal assertion of dignity can only be realized if everyone reciprocally respects and is

respected by everyone else. Beauvoir does not explicitly use the term here, but this reciprocal respect is the equivalent of Kant's kingdom of ends. The desire for vengeance is a desire to reassert the kingdom of ends which the abomination rejects.

The reciprocity of social relations is deeply integrated into Beauvoir's concept of abominations and vengeance. Abominations deny a preexisting state of reciprocity which vengeance seeks to "reestablish"³³⁵ This means that I can only demand respect from someone to whom I show respect. Beauvoir claims that we cannot demand respect from people – such as criminals and the oppressed – who are excluded from society. Their actions, even when they rise to the level of assassination, cannot inspire the hatred which characterizes our response to abominations. This claim works on both a metaphysical and a practical level. At a metaphysical level, we constitute these people as things by excluding them from society, and therefore we cannot be offended when they react on us. We would not feel anger toward a hailstorm or a plague; in the same way we cannot feel anger toward someone we have constituted as a thing. In order to see an act as an abomination, we need to see the perpetrator as a free being, who consciously chooses to become the author of an absolute evil. At a practical level, if we do not give people a realistic chance to make a living through peaceful means, then we can expect that they will resort to violence. Criminal acts by the downtrodden can be seen as mechanistic phenomena which follow the statistical laws of the social sciences. If a poor person kills from me or steals from me, then this is probably because he needs to survive, not because he wants to deny my subjectivity. These acts could still, of course, be seen as violations of the existing order, but here again Beauvoir appeals to the reciprocity of social relations. She says she would not make a complaint against a thief because she would not think she had any right to her possessions. The current set of rules does not give everyone a fair chance, so those who happen

to benefit have no reason to feel entitled to their advantages, and those who are excluded have no duty to obey a set of rules which place them at an unjust disadvantage.

Beauvoir concludes her essay by considering three possible ways of handling the desire to punish to gain recognition. The first, of course, is straightforward vengeance, carried out directly by the victim on his torturer. This kind of direct vengeance, however, runs into difficulties. First, vengeance may fail in its aims. If the vengeance leaves the torturer free to respond as he will, then the torturer might refuse to grant recognition to his victim. If, on the other hand, the vengeance overwhelms the torturer, then it will reduce him to the level of a thing, and only a subject can grant recognition. Second, the victim judges in his own case, and so he might overestimate the injuries done to him, or punish from the desire to feel himself a subject for himself. Thus what start out as an act of vengeance may turn into an abomination in its own right. Third, and most obviously, if people were allowed to take private vengeance for the wrongs done to them, it would lead to chaos.³³⁶

The second way of handling the desire to punish is a criminal trial. In a criminal trial, the abomination is reconceptualized as an offense against society, which judges the abomination according to a set of legal rules, and punishes it with a legal sanction. This sanction is still a purely metaphysical matter. The criminal is already rendered harmless and the sanction is imposed to symbolically express the society's disapproval for the criminal's action. Of course, the more severe the penalty, the more serious the disapproval expressed, up to the death penalty, which expresses an absolute rejection. Criminal trials solve the problems associated with direct vengeance. In a criminal trial, the society turns away from the desire to concretely reestablish the reciprocity between the torturer and victim, and instead aims to express a set of shared values, which it can accomplish simply through the imposition of sanctions. The crime is judged

and punished by impartial third parties, so there is no danger of the victim judging in his own case, and private vengeance is legally forbidden, so there is less danger of social disorder.

Criminal trials do, however, have their own problems. The original abomination and the hatred it engenders take place at the level of concrete interactions between individual human beings. Criminal sanctions, in contrast, operate at an abstract level, and can never get down to the level of particulars. Therefore a criminal trial can never explain why the crime was a crime in the first place. Considered in themselves, apart from their relation to the concrete suffering of individuals, the laws are nothing more than an arbitrary set of rules. The judge and jury, legally bound to impartially play carefully defined roles, seem to be actors rather than real people. The sentence appears as a kind of purification rite, in which the punishment itself is less important than the values which the punishment signifies, up to the point that it is possible to sentence Pétain to death with the avowed intention of sparing his life. Beauvoir was horrified by Brasillach's trial, not because of his crimes or his punishment, but because everyone except Brasillach seemed to adopt an attitude that amounted to seriousness.³³⁷

Faced with the failure of both vengeance and criminal trials, Beauvoir considers the possibility of forgiveness. For common crimes she seems to have no objection to this, but with abominations it is different. They are the "sole sin against man...an absolute evil that nothing can efface." As absolute crimes, they demand an absolute penalty, which in the case of a criminal trial means the death penalty. If we were to forgive an abomination, that would be tantamount to saying that the sense each person has of himself as a subject, the reciprocity between people, does not really matter that much after all. We create values through our actions. We constitute an abomination as an abomination by punishing it with an absolute penalty. Through our punishment of abominations, we affirm a vision of society in which every person is

an end for himself. If we fail to mete out an absolute penalty, we are in effect saying that an abomination is not an absolute crime, which is to say that the human dignity that was lost in the abomination does not have an absolute value. This is this reason that Brasillach must die.³³⁸

Summary

Beauvoir's position has several similarities to Kant and Hegel. Beauvoir, like Kant and Hegel, rejects the idea that there are any ethical standards existing "out there" which we are obliged to follow. There is no law written in the sky that commands us to obey the categorical imperative, or to pursue the progress of Spirit, or to value freedom. Instead Beauvoir's ethics, like the ethics of Kant and Hegel, is an ethics of autonomy. We follow laws which we give to ourselves. We make it important to obey the categorical imperative, or to pursue the progress of Spirit, or to value freedom. Lacking any external standards of value, we turn toward ourselves, and take ourselves as values. Beauvoir says that all ethics of autonomy, from Kant's to her own, define ethics by some kind of agreement with oneself or adhesion to the self.³³⁹ The self is both the agent which engages in ethical action and the end toward which ethical action is directed. In Kantian ethics, for instance, the second formulation of the categorical imperative is to treat humanity as an end.³⁴⁰ Beauvoir places herself within this tradition: "existentialism merely carries on the tradition of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, who, in the words of Hegel himself, 'have taken for their point of departure the principle according to which the essence of right and duty and the essence of the thinking and willing subject are absolutely identical.'"³⁴¹

Another way to say this is that any ethics of autonomy defines ethics in terms of contradiction and non-contradiction. Kant's categorical imperative asks whether our maxims would be consistent or self-contradictory if made into universal laws. Even Hegel defines wrong

in terms of self-contradiction and right in terms of self-agreement, and the higher stages of his ethics are reached dialectically through the need to overcome contradictions at the lower stages. Beauvoir's notion of authenticity is not so formalized but it is still based in consistency. For Beauvoir, man "can not positively will not to be free because such a willing would be self-destructive."³⁴² Authentic action is internally consistent, action in bad faith contains an internal contradiction. Thus ethics is derived from ontology. We follow the rules we give ourselves because it is the only way we can live in harmony with ourselves rather than in contradiction with ourselves. In Kant, we find ourselves to be rational beings, and we follow the categorical imperative because this allows us to think of ourselves as rational beings. In Hegel, we need the rational state because it is the only place we can realize our natures as both rational and empirical beings. In Beauvoir, we find ourselves to be free, and value freedom because it is the only consistent response to freedom.

Beauvoir follows Kant and Hegel in defining the self fundamentally in terms of its freedom. This was not her only option. Beauvoir could have defined people as beings who pursue happiness, like the Utilitarians, or she could have defined people as social beings existing within the context of a political community, like Aristotle. By focusing on the nature of the self as a free subject, therefore, Beauvoir places herself within the tradition of Kant and Hegel. Beauvoir's decision to use freedom as the definition of the self leads to further similarities with Kant and Hegel. Freedom is a formal feature of human beings, and this means that Beauvoir's ethics, like the ethics of Kant and Hegel, is universal in scope. "It is rather well known that the fact of being a subject is a universal fact and that the Cartesian cogito expresses both the most individual experience and the most objective truth."³⁴³ Even the particularity of our projects is a universal fact: it is a general feature of all projects that they are directed toward some specific

concrete end. Therefore Beauvoir's ethics, like the ethics of Kant and Hegel, applies universally to all people: "it appears to us that by turning toward this freedom we are going to discover a principle of action whose range will be universal."³⁴⁴ Everyone is free, and the only consistent response to freedom is to value freedom, so everyone must value freedom.

Freedom is also an absolute and metaphysical attribute of human beings, and this leads Beauvoir to a strong conception of human dignity that resembles the conceptions of human dignity in Kant and Hegel. Kant in particular stresses that all people have an absolute worth, which elevates them qualitatively above merely pathological concerns.³⁴⁵ Beauvoir would agree. In both *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and "An Eye for an Eye" she asserts her solidarity with society insofar as it seeks to affirm the "dignity" of man.³⁴⁶ Beauvoir holds in numerous places that the free self has an absolute value, and the fact that she says we will often risk material well-being merely to assert our freedom shows that she thinks freedom is qualitatively elevated above merely pathological concerns. We can see how seriously Beauvoir takes human dignity by her reaction to situations where dignity is denied. Beauvoir uses almost religious language when discussing abominations. They are "absolute evil," the "sole sin against man," and the need to punish them is a "spiritual appetite." Even the term "abomination" has religious connotations, and of course the title of the essay is taken from Leviticus.³⁴⁷ It is as though the self has taken the place normally reserved for God. This dignity leads, just as in Kant and Hegel, to a need for respect and recognition. We demand respect and recognition from others because of our perception of our own dignity. "An object for others, each man is a subject for himself, and he insistently demands to be recognized as such... The respect that he demands for himself, each person claims for his loved ones and finally for all men."³⁴⁸ We also need to recognize others, because their freedom is necessary to our own freedom, and even if we treat only one person as a

means, all humanity appears to us as a pure thing in him. Thus the ideal society, for Beauvoir, turns out to be like the Kantian kingdom of ends or the Hegelian community of mutual recognition, in which every single person is respected and recognized.

Beauvoir's general agreement with Kant and Hegel leads to more particular points of agreement. Beauvoir's position on paternalism, for instance, exactly parallels Kant's. Both hold that paternalism in general is unjustifiable, but that paternalism toward children is justified, so long as it tends toward the production of a free being capable of making decisions on his own. The reason for this similarity can be traced back to their views on freedom. Both take freedom as an absolute value, and paternalism represents a denial of freedom, so both reject it.³⁴⁹ Beauvoir's position on punishment also parallels the positions of Kant and Hegel. All three develop purely retributive theories of punishment which include the death penalty. The purely metaphysical, as opposed to rehabilitative or deterrent, nature of the punishment parallels the metaphysical nature of freedom. All three support the death penalty because they see freedom as an absolute value; therefore all three see the denial of freedom as an absolute crime, which demands an absolute punishment.

Chapter 3. Beauvoir's Disagreement with Kant and Hegel

Beauvoir has a complex relationship to Kant and Hegel. In the last chapter, we looked at Beauvoir's agreement with Kant and Hegel. Beauvoir shares the same normative ideals as Kant and Hegel, and at a deeper level, all three ethical systems are structured in the same way. Beauvoir also, however, criticizes Kant and Hegel. Her criticisms can be traced back to the metaphysics which Kant and Hegel use to ground their ethics. Kant's metaphysics is based on a distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds, while Hegel's metaphysics is built around the System. Beauvoir, in contrast, grounds her ethics in her version of phenomenology. These metaphysical assumptions have consequences for the way we apply ethical norms. Beauvoir, Kant, and Hegel all share the same normative ideals, but because they make different metaphysical assumptions, they differ on how to realize these ideals. Kant claims that we should always act as though we are noumenal beings regardless of what is going on in the phenomenal world, while Hegel claims that we should view actions in light of the way they figure into the completion of the system. Beauvoir, from her phenomenological perspective, claims that we should try, as much as possible, to bring about these ideals in the real world as it currently exists, and this means we have to take account of the real world in all its particularity and complexity. From Beauvoir's point of view, both Kant and Hegel present us with an ethics that is too abstract. Every human being is a combination of universal and particular features. It is a universal fact that we are free, but we are free to respond to our situation, and everybody is in a different situation. It is a universal fact that we use our freedom to engage in projects, but all projects are particular in nature. Kant and Hegel manage to preserve only the universal features: the noumenal form we all share for Kant and the contributions we make to the universal for Hegel. Beauvoir, in contrast, tries to preserve both the universal and the particular elements.

Beauvoir phrases her objections in more abstract terms in two works published in *Les Temps Modernes* in November 1945. In her review of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Beauvoir contrasts the views of idealists, empiricists, and phenomenologists on the problem of mind and matter. Idealists try to reduce matter to mind; empiricists try to reduce mind to matter. Phenomenologists, in contrast, preserve both mind and matter and put them into relation with each other. Mind is conscious of matter and matter is matter for a mind. The two poles, mind and matter, are distinct from each other yet inextricably linked. Beauvoir then suggests that these metaphysical positions have practical ethical implications. “Only in taking it [phenomenology] as a basis will one succeed in building an ethics to which man can totally and sincerely adhere.”³⁵⁰ If a correct metaphysics is, as Beauvoir claims, a necessary condition for building a convincing ethics, then an incorrect metaphysics (such as idealism or empiricism) must lead to an unconvincing ethics. Beauvoir plays out the ethical implications of idealism, empiricism, and phenomenology in “Moral Idealism and Political Realism.” Here she contrasts and rejects two approaches to action, moral idealism and political realism, before presenting her own view, which she calls moral realism. The similarity in the tripartite structure suggests that moral idealism is the ethical correspondent to metaphysical idealism, political realism corresponds to empiricism, and moral realism corresponds to phenomenology. In the essay, moral idealism is “a more or less adulterated legacy of Kantian ethics,” and Hegel and Marx turn out to be the most advanced version of political realism.³⁵¹ Beauvoir uses an almost identical framing device at the beginning of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, except that now she calls her position “existentialism” rather than “moral realism,” and explicitly identifies Kierkegaard and Sartre as representative existentialists.³⁵²

The need to build an ethics based on phenomenology is at once metaphysical and mundane. It is an ontological fact about all human beings that we are ambiguous, at once both subjects and objects, infinitely vulnerable yet possessed of an absolute worth. In this sense the need for an ethics suitable for ambiguous beings has existed as long as humans have. Most people, however, have only recently come to feel the need for such an ethics. Like the problem of other consciousnesses in *She Came to Stay*, ambiguity must be lived and not merely thought, and this can only happen under certain circumstances. Beauvoir's examples bear this out. Because she is concerned about a problem which is part of the ontological condition of all human beings, Beauvoir is able to give examples from the distant past, such as Antigone and Charles V.³⁵³ Beauvoir also, however, reminds us that in those days only a select few could expect their decisions to have a significant impact on the world around them. Antigone and Charles V faced complex ethical dilemmas because they were nobles. Commoners, in contrast, were largely confined to fulfilling a preordained role within a preexisting social order. They still had to choose how to respond to this situation, but their responses were mostly personal decisions, with few implications for the larger world. It is significant that Beauvoir leads off her essays "Moral Idealism and Political Realism" and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* by talking about the developments which have made ethics relevant for everyone, such as the extension of political influence to the masses, the development of the atomic bomb, and the horrors of WWII.³⁵⁴ Ambiguity is a pressing philosophical problem because the ordinary person now lives his ambiguity in his everyday life.³⁵⁵ In the rest of this chapter, I will look at Beauvoir's critiques of Kant and Hegel before presenting her own views. In all cases, I will try to show how differences at the level of metaphysics lead to differences at the level of practical action. I will then look at some of the

difficulties inherent in Beauvoir's attempt to bring about the ideals of dignity, respect, and recognition in the world as it is, and the way Beauvoir responds to these difficulties.

Kant

Kant's metaphysics is based on the distinction between noumena and phenomena. Kant uses this metaphysical distinction as the basis for his ethics. Both moral laws and moral agents have moral worth, according to Kant, insofar as they are located in the noumenal world. The categorical imperative is the law guiding members of the world of understanding, and the being which obeys the categorical imperative thinks itself as a member of the world of understanding.³⁵⁶ From a practical point of view, this means that Kant defines both moral laws and moral agents in a way that makes them independent from the complexities of the phenomenal world.

Kant produces the categorical imperative by starting with a law of nature and abstracting from all empirical content until he is left with nothing but the form of a law as such. This form of a law as such is precisely the universality and timelessness that characterizes the laws of Newtonian physics: laws of nature hold everywhere in the universe and at all times. In order to test whether a certain course of action is morally acceptable, I ask whether the maxim which determines my will could fit into the form of a universal law. In practical terms, we are left with a set of general rules, which we then apply to particular cases through the use of judgment. Kant's position here answers to his demand for moral rules which are independent of the phenomenal world. The fact that we first figure out the rules at an abstract level, and only afterwards bring these moral rules to bear on the phenomenal world, means that the particular circumstances which hold in the phenomenal world won't have any influence on the moral rules

we must follow. Beauvoir calls the categorical imperative a timeless and universal law and in a sense she is right. It is the same for all people in all times and all situations. This is because the particularities of any given situation do not enter into the calculation of what we should do. The real world enters into the equation only at a later stage where we use our judgment. At the same time, the procedure of universalizing our maxim means that we look at situations from the standpoint of a generalized third-person observer with no distinguishing features, as opposed to the first-person standpoint of a phenomenal subject acting out of a particular situation.³⁵⁷

The fact that the categorical imperative is universal means that it is negative. In a sense the categorical imperative is simply a test to see whether we can fit a maxim – a particular content – into the form of a universal law. If it fits it's permissible; if it doesn't fit it's impermissible. It rules out courses of action without suggesting new ones. If we look at Kant's examples from the *Groundwork*, he always begins with a person who wants to take some course of action, but then finds it ruled out by the categorical imperative. This is true for positive as well as negative duties. A person feels no inclination to further the happiness of others but finds he cannot will that other people not further his. A person feels no inclination to develop his talents but finds he cannot will that all people should live like South Sea Islanders. The categorical imperative always says no and never says yes. It can tell us the conditions that a truly just world must meet, but it can never give us a "map" of what this world actually looks like in concrete terms. The agent who acts by the moral law will simply reject certain courses of action as inconsistent with the moral law. In order to act at all, our passions must first propose a course of action to us, and the categorical imperative then functions as a rational constraint on our passions.³⁵⁸

Beauvoir also objects that the categorical imperative issues commands which are so general it is impossible to know how to apply them. Kant directs us to treat all people always as ends, but in the real world this is simply impossible. “The respect of the human person in general cannot suffice to guide us because we are dealing with separate and opposed individuals. The human person is complete in both the victim and the executioner; should we let the victim perish or kill the executioner?”³⁵⁹ Beauvoir’s point is not, of course, that this is a serious moral dilemma. Beauvoir says, without much regret, that we should kill the executioner, and in his own way Kant does too.³⁶⁰ Her point is rather that the respect for all people which Kant writes about is only possible if we look at people in abstract terms. If we take the particular features of people into account, as well as their formal features, we will find that they all make different judgments, and that some of these judgments will always come into conflict with others. We can only side with one person at the expense of another.³⁶¹ The only reason Kant can tell us to treat all people as ends is because he views people in abstract terms. At the most, Kant can describe the system of rules governing a society in which everyone is treated as an end, but conflicts can arise even within this framework, and Kant gives us no guidance how to act in these circumstances.³⁶²

The same process of abstraction takes place in Kant’s discussion of moral agents. Kant holds that, when we behave morally, we are motivated to act only by our reason, without any input from our passions.³⁶³ This is Kant’s way of creating a moral agent which is independent from the phenomenal world. Reason regulates the faculties with which we perceive and understand the phenomenal world; it is not itself dependent on them. Therefore, as long as we identify with our reason, we attain this same independence.³⁶⁴ Nor does our reason individuate us as particular human beings. All human beings have a rational nature to an equal and absolute

degree. It doesn't always determine our will, but fundamentally we all have reason, and it always speaks to us even if we choose not to listen to it. Our reason is a purely formal aspect of ourselves. Our passions, in contrast, belong to us insofar as we are phenomenal beings. They connect us to the phenomenal world. A passion is always directed toward a phenomenal good. Of course, insofar as our passions connect us to different phenomenal goods, they also individuate us. By saying that our moral action is motivated solely by reason, therefore, Kant puts the phenomenal world out of the picture, and makes the moral agent into an abstract and formal being.

Kant holds that morality resides in the maxim of our will and not in our action. The good will is an unconditioned good and the only unconditioned good. If we will to do the right thing, this act of willing shines like a diamond, even if we are wholly unable to put it into effect, or even if our actions produce unintended consequences.³⁶⁵ This means that the moral agent, willing only from his reason, can justify himself without reference to the phenomenal world. The move from action to the maxim of action again answers Kant's demand for moral agents free from the taint of the phenomenal world. Action takes place in the phenomenal world and therefore connects us to the phenomenal world. By focusing on the maxim of our will, and allowing for the moral agent to be fully good in himself without reference to action, Kant again takes the phenomenal world out of play. In Beauvoir's terminology, Kant separates the subject from the object, and then hopes to make the subject self-sufficient in its own right.³⁶⁶

Beauvoir draws out the practical consequences of this view. "Any individual who acts in pursuit of earthly ends thus situates himself forthwith outside of ethics. He can either avoid transgressing the supreme laws or else actively oppose them. If he opts for the former, his action will not be called good; it will remain neutral in value; while in the latter case it will be

condemned as reprehensible.”³⁶⁷ Actions done from the desire for happiness have no moral worth for Kant even if they coincide with the dictates of the categorical imperative. They are done in accordance with duty but not from duty. This is true even of actions done out of apparently praiseworthy pathological impulses such as sympathy for others.³⁶⁸ Acting in the real world thus seems like a losing bet. If you pursue a phenomenal end, the best you can do is break even, and you run the risk of doing positive wrong. Therefore the safe alternative is not to act at all. Not acting is a valid option for Kant because I am not liable for the consequences of my actions, and therefore not liable for the consequences of my non-actions. For Beauvoir, if I do not fight against oppression, I thereby consent to it, because I allow the oppression to continue.³⁶⁹ For Kant, if I do not fight against oppression, the maxim of my will was to avoid doing violence against a fellow rational being (the oppressor) and this in itself is praiseworthy. Of course the oppression continues, but the moral fault for continuing the oppression falls on the oppressor, not on me. The unintended consequences of refraining from action are not my responsibility.

Another more complex way of not acting is to make what Beauvoir calls a gesture. The defining feature of a gesture is that it does not aim at achieving any concrete result. Instead the purpose of the gesture is to signify allegiance to some principle. For instance, when Antigone defies Creon and buries her brother, this shows her allegiance to the cult of the dead, but she doesn't mean to achieve any practical good in the phenomenal world. She knows quite well that the consequences will be death for herself, and continued warfare and suffering for those who remain. Antigone buries her brother anyway because she simply doesn't care what happens in the phenomenal world. Antigone, like a good Kantian, does the right thing because it is right, without regard to the consequences. If the consequences turn out to be death or suffering for the

gesturer, then this is all to the better, because it highlights the fact that the gesturer's value system stands apart from and above the phenomenal world in which she suffers, and thereby increases the signifying power of the gesture.³⁷⁰

All actions done from the categorical imperative share in this basic structure of the gesture. In acting from the categorical imperative, the actor does not aim at any concrete result, but merely at the coincidence of his will with the categorical imperative. The duty to develop our talents is a positive duty, but in acting from this duty we are not motivated by the desire to develop our talents, we are motivated by the desire to obey the categorical imperative, which commands us to develop our talents. The morality of the action resides in the desire to obey the categorical imperative and not in the action which the categorical imperative commands. Kant tries to make this distinction clearer by focusing on situations where the categorical imperative is opposed to inclination, and even goes so far as to manufacture these situations when they do not naturally arise. We are generally inclined to preserve our lives and develop our talents. When Kant talks about these as duties, however, he invents people who have the opposite inclinations. This allows Kant, like the gesturer who chooses martyrdom, to highlight the fact that duty is separate from and higher than inclination.³⁷¹

The obvious problem with Kantian ethics is that, if you act without regard to consequences, these will often turn out to be bad. The Kantian moralist holds that it is as wrong to kill one man as to let ten thousand die. This is valid enough when viewed simply as a theoretical assertion of the absolute worth of human beings, but the problem is that, when the time comes to actually make a decision, a thoroughly committed Kantian will refuse to kill one man and ten thousand will die as a result. Put in more general terms, Beauvoir's objection to Kantian ethics is that it is counterproductive. A Kantian will be so concerned about not

personally treating people as means that he will allow others to treat people as means. Therefore he will often do more damage than good.³⁷²

The most infamous example of this comes in Kant's short essay "On a supposed right to lie from philanthropy." In this essay, Kant considers a hypothetical scenario proposed by Benjamin Constant as a counterexample to Kant's claim that it is always contrary to duty to lie. In this example, A comes running to our house, says that B is trying to kill him, and asks us to hide him. Some time later, B comes to our door and asks if A is hiding in our house. The obvious solution is to refuse to answer, but for whatever reason this will not work. We now have two options: we can lie and say that A escaped out the back, or we can tell the truth and admit that A is in the house. If we tell the truth, it is very likely that B will kill A, but lying will violate the categorical imperative. So what should we do? Kant answers that we should tell the truth. He even says that, if we lie and say that A escaped out the back, while unbeknownst to us, A has in fact escaped out the back, we should be held responsible as an accomplice to the ensuing murder.³⁷³

Kant's position is intuitively absurd but it is a consistent application of his ethics. The categorical imperative is truly categorical: it applies in all situations. If people routinely lied to protect others, then the murderer would know not to trust our answer, and would never bother to ask in the first place. It is up to us to act as if we were members of a kingdom of ends and follow the categorical imperative in all circumstances. If the would-be murderer chooses to act in a different manner, then the entirety of the blame rests on him, not on us. Furthermore, if the intended victim should die as a result, this is an accident of fate which does not affect him in his essential moral worth as a rational being, any more than death or misfortune affect the essential freedom of the Stoic. The intuitive force of the counterexample arises from the fact that, instead

of lying from a selfish desire to enrich ourselves, we lie from the apparently praiseworthy desire to protect someone else. But from Kant's point of view, however, the relevant question is whether we act from duty or from pathological desires. Sympathy may be more socially useful than selfishness but it is still a pathological desire. The desire to help the intended victim out of sympathy therefore appears as a temptation to disobey the categorical imperative, on par with the more selfish passions that cause us to lie or steal. As for the scenario in which the victim escapes out the back, Kant's argument here is simple. If we tell the truth, we stake our bets on the inner moral worth of our maxim – telling the truth from a sense of duty, whatever pathological inclinations we might have to aid the victim – and so our action should be judged on the inner moral worth of our maxim. If, however, we lie and attempt to help the victim, we stake our bets on the consequences we think our action will have, and so we should be judged on those consequences, whatever they turn out to be.³⁷⁴

Hegel

Hegel's system is designed to reconcile subject and object, particular and universal. Hegel tries to reconcile the universal and particular through his concept of overcoming. Each project for Hegel is overcome in the next. So, for instance, cubism contradicts impressionism. This contradiction, however, is not a mere negation. Cubism responds to impressionism. Cubism overcomes impressionism by integrating it and moving beyond it. Cubism is the way it is only in order to overcome impressionism. In this way we have a ceaseless progress in which each step in the process leaves its mark on the next. The prior steps are integrated into the final result – the universal – because the universal was shaped by all these steps. It is impossible to separate the final result from the movement that brings it about. At the level of the individual,

this means that I merely have to be myself, and I will do my part in leaving my mark on the universal. Another way of saying this is that our project would be realized if we only extended it far enough. We see our projects as failures only because we take a short-term view. If we were to take a long-term view, however, we would see that our project is in fact fulfilled, only not in quite the way we had originally imagined. For instance, Demosthenes wanted the spread of Greek culture, lost to Philip of Macedonia, and thus paved the way for the spread of Greek culture under Alexander the Great.³⁷⁵

At the beginning of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir indicates her approval of Hegel's project to reconcile the universal and particular, but not of the way he goes about it. Beauvoir's basic criticism of Hegel's system is that it only works by ignoring the individual. From an individual point of view, I engage in some particular project, and I want that project to succeed. I want my project to be taken up by others and used as the starting-point for their own projects. I want the future to take the shape suggested by my project. It would be a bitter failure to me if my project were to become of use to my enemy. This is precisely what happens in Hegel's system. Each step in the process does not start a chain of events in itself. Instead each step is integrated into a new event which is different from and opposed to it. Every action has both interiority and exteriority. It consists of both the living choice to engage in the action and the accomplished result of the action. The living choice to undertake a project is what makes it important to me that my own project be completed. The accomplished result of my action is preserved by being overcome in the universal, but Hegel severs this result of my action from the living choice to engage in action. The truth of each act, for Hegel, lies outside that act, in the impact it has on the universal, and not in the choice to act. Thus the individual turns out to be the substance of the completed system and not the subject. The universal is made from the

results of our projects, but as particular beings who engaged in particular projects, we do not get to enjoy it. The accomplishment of the universal was not our project.³⁷⁶

Another way of saying this is that Hegel strips the subject of its particularity. The essential moment in the Hegelian system, for Beauvoir, comes in the master-slave dialectic where each consciousness encounters the other as identical to itself. Beauvoir's point is that, in Hegel, each consciousness recognizes in the other "the pure abstract form of the self."³⁷⁷ This is why the consciousnesses recognize one another as identical: at the abstract level they really are identical. They have the same general form; they are both subjects. This is also why the Hegelian dialectic can advance beyond the master-slave stage. The reconciliation of consciousnesses is possible because Hegel sees consciousnesses as identical. It doesn't matter to Hegel which person is the master and which is the slave. The important point is that the dialectic progresses and some person is the master and some person is the slave. The people are inessential insofar as they choose one position in the system. In this respect Hegel is exactly like Kant, who looks at people in formal terms, and on that ground directs us to seek the support of all humanity. If you were to take the particular projects of people into consideration, then these projects would come into conflict. It may not matter from the point of view of the completion of the system who becomes the master and who becomes the slave, but it certainly matters to the individuals who occupy those roles, and so if you looked at things from the standpoint of the individuals the system would never be able to progress. Hegel's solution is to do away with the standpoint of the individual. The real is the rational. The aspect of people that matters is the aspect that can be integrated into the system. Anything that resists integration – our first-person standpoint and the particularity of our projects – is excluded from the real. As the individual is stripped of its content so is the world with which it interacts. The present is insignificant

compared to the progress of history. Therefore the concrete thickness of the world we inhabit on a daily basis is really inessential. In Fascist ideology, the soldier dies joyfully because he dies for a cause which is essential, and the person who insists on preserving his particularity does so only because he is a coward and is afraid of death.³⁷⁸

The practical result of this is that the political realist, the person who acts on the basis of Hegelian metaphysics, will tend to overestimate the importance of the end he is trying to reach, and to underestimate the importance of the means he uses to get there. He will see the sacrifices he has to make to reach an end as insignificant compared to the value of the end. The political realist, to put it very simply, adopts the spirit of seriousness, and makes his end into an absolute. He is willing to use violence to achieve his ends.³⁷⁹ In this he is exactly the opposite of the moral idealist, who is so concerned with the means he uses that he forgets about the end. The problem with this approach is that it will often lead the political realist to engage in action that contradicts his fundamental project. For instance, Charles V wanted to restore the Holy Roman Empire, and in order to do so, he made an alliance with Protestant nobles against the Pope.³⁸⁰ This problem is particularly acute for realists on the left, because their end is humanity itself, and all violence contradicts this end.³⁸¹ Beauvoir believes that the Communist Party stands for the liberation of humanity, but when Stalin pursues this end through purges and show trials, it rather defeats the purpose.³⁸²

The political realist will try to justify the sacrifices he makes by showing that they are necessary for reaching some desirable goal. This goal, if we follow the argument to its logical conclusion, must be some future end-state, in which all people live together in perfect harmony for all time thereafter. If the future is merely a better version of the present, then we can coherently ask why we should sacrifice present individuals to the future, but if the future is

millennial, qualitatively different from the present, then this question is no longer relevant. The suffering of a finite number of people now is nothing compared to the infinite number of people who will live in the future; the present moment is nothing compared to a future which will perpetuate itself for all time.³⁸³ Beauvoir has three objections to this view. The first and simplest is that Hegel himself does not actually posit such an end state. The completion of history, for Hegel, is not a utopian state of peace but a state of endless struggle. If this is the case, however, then there is no reason to engage in a struggle now, just so we can struggle in the future. If each generation is sacrificed to the next, but no generation ever reaches the final goal, then there does not seem to be any point in the sacrifice. If the future is just a state of endless war, then the people of the future are no different than the people of today, and cannot be considered more important.³⁸⁴

Second, even if Hegel did try to posit such an end-state, reaching it would be impossible because it would always be disrupted by the individual. The end-state for Hegel, if he did posit one, would be an end-state of peace. It would be an end-state in which consciousnesses are reconciled to each other. This is possible for Hegel and Kant because they look at people in abstract terms, but it is not possible on Beauvoir's ontology. In Beauvoir's ontology, multiple people transcend themselves toward the same world. Because all people are free, there is always the possibility that two people will choose projects that contradict one another other, and because both these projects have to be realized in the same world, this will lead to conflicts in which one person succeeds and another fails. This success or failure is significant to Beauvoir. We want to be recognized for our particular accomplishments. We want to be recognized as the person who has accomplished this or that. And if we fail to realize our project then we lose that opportunity for justifying our existence concretely. Therefore the success or failure of our projects is always

worth fighting over. Conflict is not an accidental condition of mankind; it is implied by our ontology. The world has always been at war and always will be. We might want to question Beauvoir's ontology at this point, but she claims it doesn't make any difference. Even if we think some future reconciliation of consciousnesses is somehow possible, the point remains that it has not happened now, and seems unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future. As agents we must respond to the situation that we find ourselves in. And our situation is one of conflict. Trying to justify our present actions on the basis of what might possibly happen in some distant unforeseeable future is pointless because anything might happen in the future.³⁸⁵

Third, even if we could somehow reach a millennial end-state, this would be meaningless, because all divisions would immediately disappear in the universal.³⁸⁶ All perception and all action implies limitation. To perceive is to single out the perceived object against the background of other objects which we do not attend to. To act is to engage in some particular act rather than another. Therefore there is really no difference between acting on everything and acting on nothing.³⁸⁷ The person who loves all humanity loves no human in particular.³⁸⁸ At a very practical level, if we lived in a perfect world, there would be nothing left to do and we would get desperately bored. Human existence is a ceaseless projecting of ourselves outward toward new possibilities. This would not be possible in a millennial end-state.³⁸⁹ Hegel is aware of this danger. He knows that a universal which was pure positivity would instantly disappear into nothingness. This is why he posits a concrete universal which includes the negations that are overcome in it. Beauvoir, however, believes that Hegel does not really manage to save these negative moments as moments. They do not matter in their own right but only insofar as they affect the universal.

Moral Realism

Beauvoir wants to argue that both Kantian and Hegelian ethics fail when put into practice because Kant and Hegel use an incorrect metaphysics. They both separate the subject from the object and then manage to retain only one of these two poles. Kant retains the subject alone, and this means that a Kantian will never engage in any action, while Hegel never really accepts the subject in its own right, and this means that a Hegelian will engage in self-contradictory action. Put in other terms, Kant pays attention to the means, and forgets about the end; Hegel pays attention to the end, and ignores the means. Beauvoir, in contrast, starts with a model of metaphysics that puts the subject and object into relation. The subject always intends an object and the object is an object for a subject. Moral realism involves acting in a way that acknowledges both the subject and the object. The moral realist does not shut himself up in his subjectivity and refrain from action as in Kant, nor does he take his object seriously and forget about individual subjects, as in Hegel. The moral realist pays attention to both ends and means in his action. He strives for a unity of means and ends; he does not see means and ends as distinct. The final result cannot be separated from the movement which produced it; therefore we must pursue an end by means consistent with that end. The meaning of our projects is contained in the project itself. We establish the standards for the success or failure of our project in the very act of engaging in that project. Unlike Kant, for whom the good will is justified in itself apart from the world, and Hegel, for whom the truth of an action is found outside that act itself, Beauvoir thinks that meaning is found in the project, which is an act of a subject reaching out to an object.³⁹⁰

Every project involves a subject reaching out toward an object. In other words, freedom as Beauvoir defines it, the freedom to engage in projects, is the freedom to establish connections

between the subject and object. Beauvoir has shown that authenticity is the only appropriate response to freedom; therefore moral realism, which establishes connections between subject and object, is the same as the authentic action I described in the last chapter.³⁹¹ The moral realist will try to affirm his freedom by engaging in creative activity, and he will try to promote the freedom of others so that they can transcend the results of his projects and justify his existence. The moral realist would ideally like for all men to be free, both because this will give the greatest reach to his projects, and because he sees any failure of respect for the freedom of others as an absolute loss. Unlike Kant and Hegel, however, who frame respect for others in abstract terms, the moral realist sees respect in concrete terms. We do not only want to be recognized for our freedom; we want to be recognized for our accomplishments. The requirement to treat others as ends, for a moral realist, means that we should try to respect their projects as well as their abstract freedom. Moral realism is the attempt to treat everyone as an end in the phenomenal world.³⁹²

Moral realism solves the problems associated with Kant. The problem with Kant is that he tries to take the phenomenal world out of play. Moral realism directs us to act in the phenomenal world and therefore puts the phenomenal world back into play. Our projects all aim at the creation of something in the phenomenal world. This means we have to take account of the phenomenal world as it already exists, because it is the material we will be working with. Our projects are all particular in nature, and this means we have to take account of the particular potentialities and resistances of the phenomenal world, because these will affect the success of our project. We have to take account of the concrete “thickness” and complexity of the world. If I aim to create a statue, I need to consider whether to make it out of stone or wood or clay, and I will make this decision on the basis of which material best suits the shape of the statue I

envision. I also need to take account of my own potentialities. If I have no aptitude for music and no musical training, I probably shouldn't try to write a symphony. And I need to take account of other people. Because my ultimate aim is to appear to other people in a certain way, I need to consider how other people are likely to view my actions.

Beauvoir also brings the phenomenal subject into play. Unlike Kant, who directs us to assume the standpoint of a universal third-person observer, Beauvoir directs us to look at the world through our own eyes. I act because I personally desire some end. I want to be known as the creator of a sculpture or a painting or a philosophy paper. In contrast to Kant's negative rules, which merely tell us what not to do, Beauvoir's rules are always positive, in the sense that they direct us to go out and do something. They are also comprehensive, giving us a positive picture of what we want to accomplish and how to accomplish this. When we aim to create some particular change – such as inventing an airplane or painting a painting – we always have in mind a map of what the future world will look like. It will be a world where people commute with ease across continents or an artworld that values abstraction over realism. Beauvoir brings the consequences back into play. Because our projects aim at actually achieving some result, we obviously need to think about what the likely results of our action will be. Beauvoir would never say that we should tell the truth and let the intended victim die.

Moral realism also solves the problems that Hegel faces. Where Hegel only takes account of people insofar as they share the same abstract form, which makes possible some future reconciliation, Beauvoir looks at people as particulars. People to Beauvoir are people as you meet them in your everyday experience in the real world. As such they have both general and particular features that need to be taken into account. At an ontological level, all people act in situation, before other people, and all want to justify their own existence. All people engage

in projects, shaping the world around them, and are seen by others on the basis of these projects. Now these are all general facts about people, but it is also true that all people are in a particular situation, and engage in particular projects, and want to be recognized for their own particular accomplishments. What is general about us is precisely our particularity, and this ontic level needs to be saved too.³⁹³ Because of this, Beauvoir would not allow individuals to be blithely sacrificed to some proposed future good. For Beauvoir, the present sacrifices we make to reach a better future are real and absolute sacrifices, and should be weighed as such when we make decisions.³⁹⁴ Another way to say this is that the future is not different from the present for Beauvoir. The future is not absolute. The future, like the present, consists of free human beings, who engage in projects and try to justify their existences. Therefore it makes no sense to assign the future a greater weight than the present.³⁹⁵ If anything, it makes sense to assign less weight to the future, because the gains and losses that may happen in the future are more indefinite than the gains and losses we bring about in the present.

Consequences of Moral Realism

Beauvoir's move to moral realism forces us to accept some unfortunate consequences. Moral realism forces us to accept the risk that our projects may fail. This is not a danger in the philosophies of Kant and Hegel. For Kant, moral worth resides in willing the right course of action, so it is always possible for us to become perfectly moral beings simply by willing rightly, which is always completely within our power. Of course, it is possible that we may not achieve what we will, but this consideration is irrelevant to the evaluation of our moral worth. For Hegel, the achievement of our ends does matter, but he thinks it would be possible to successfully achieve our moral ends within the context of a rationally ordered State. For

Beauvoir, in contrast, moral action means engaging in projects, and our projects aim at achieving some end in the world as it presently exists, so we can fail if our project fails, which depends on external circumstances as well as our own efforts.

Moral realism also forces us to accept the possibility that we may engage in the wrong course of action. This too is a danger that we do not face in the philosophies of Kant and Hegel. For Kant, because we don't need to take account of the consequences of our actions, we can always figure out the right course of action with perfect certainty. All we need to do is ask what we can will as a universal law, and once we have performed the action, we can rest comfortable in the knowledge that we did the right thing, regardless of what results from it. For Hegel, the consequences of our actions matter, but our actions will be taken up into the dialectic and overcome in future syntheses, so a positive outcome will eventually result from our actions even if we personally "get it wrong." For Beauvoir, in contrast, the consequences of our actions matter, and we can never be quite sure what those consequences will be. The world is inherently chancy, we have a limited understanding, and all actions have consequences that go on to infinity through a kind of butterfly effect. Therefore it is in principle impossible know the right course of action with absolute certainty. Of course it is still possible to make an educated guess at the likely consequences of our actions, and we should certainly do everything we can in this regard, but we can never have the kind of metaphysical assurance we get in Kant and Hegel. No matter how careful we are, it seems inevitable that somewhere down the road our actions will result in unintended consequences which are positively opposed to what we originally wanted.³⁹⁶

The risk of error is made more serious by the fact that our actions aim not only to shape the world but also to communicate with others. Our projects are appeals to other people to respond to us in certain ways. Therefore our projects depend for their success on the response of

the other, and the other is free, so it is in principle impossible to know with absolute certainty how he will respond. Because my project is no more than an appeal to the other, which he is free to respond to as he will, there is always the chance he will reject my appeal, or ignore me entirely, or use my project as the starting point for a project which radically contradicts mine.³⁹⁷ On a practical level, it is mostly possible to predict the reactions of other people, though the way other people react to our actions is still harder to predict than the material consequences of our actions. Other people are free, but they are engaged in projects, and in this sense they have already freely declared their positions. If it were not possible to make educated guesses at how others would respond to my projects, then the meaning of our actions would be completely random, and there would be no reason to act at all.³⁹⁸ These educated guesses, however, can never fully eliminate the possibility of error. People really are free, and so there is always the possibility that they will change projects, even in everyday life. Beauvoir converted almost overnight from pacifism to support for the war, and from an ethics of personal authenticity to an ethics of political commitment.³⁹⁹ Furthermore, even if people do not radically change their project, all projects are characterized by change as well as continuity. When I first made it my project to write a dissertation on Beauvoir, I did not also decide to write precisely these words at this time. The specific content of this dissertation took shape gradually as my project continued. Because my project grows and changes over time, my response to your appeals will also change over time, and you will have to constantly re-evaluate my likely reactions if you want me to justify your existence. Therefore, even from a practical standpoint, there is an risk of error in all action.⁴⁰⁰

An even more troubling consequence of moral realism is that it implies all our actions must inevitably fail to a certain extent, even if we do manage to achieve our goal, and even if we

do manage to judge the consequences and the reactions of others correctly. This is a problem Kant and Hegel do not face. There are no moral dilemmas in Kant and Hegel. Both think that there is some right course of action which will be completely satisfactory. Kant may ask casuistical questions, but he doesn't doubt they have an answer, and of course Hegel has a completely satisfactory resolution waiting for us in the distant future. For Beauvoir, in contrast, there are genuine moral dilemmas. Situations can arise in which we can only reach just ends by employing unjust means, but confining ourselves to just means will lead to an unjust result. In such situations, no matter what we do, we can only promote freedom in one area by curtailing freedom in another.⁴⁰¹

These kinds of moral dilemmas can arise in several ways. At the simplest level, moral dilemmas arise because Hegel's slave is correct and physical survival, while not valuable in itself like freedom, is nevertheless the necessary condition for freedom. This same point can be made in less stark terms as well. Material well-being is the precondition for the free positive expansion of freedom. We cannot create, we cannot make great works of art and literature and philosophy, until we have food, clothing, shelter, and leisure time. There are situations where freedom seems to come into conflict with material well-being. For instance, after the liberation, the French had to decide whether to let collaborationist civil servants back into the postwar government. These civil servants had the capacity to make a positive contribution to postwar rebuilding of France, but allowing them back into the government would fail to hold them responsible for their actions.⁴⁰² At one level these situations seem easy to resolve: freedom is a lexically higher value than material well-being. At a deeper level, however, we could use that material well-being to do things we could not otherwise do. Our desire for freedom directs us to increase our power. This means that situations in which freedom stands opposed to material

well-being can be viewed as situations in which freedom stands opposed to freedom. Kant and Hegel would not face this dilemma. Kant would not face it because he doesn't need to worry about our material well-being. Hegel would not face it because the master-slave dialectic is only a preliminary stage in the progress of spirit: the apparent dilemma will be resolved at a later stage. For Beauvoir, in contrast, the loss of material well-being counts as a genuine loss of freedom, and this loss will not be redeemed by any future synthesis.

For the most part, though, moral dilemmas arise because of plurality. There are multiple people in the world, and they are heterogeneous, so they come into conflict with each other. This is a problem that Kant and Hegel do not face. Kant and Hegel both look at people at a formal level at which they are identical. Kant looks at people insofar as they have a noumenal aspect, and even Hegel is concerned with people insofar as they share an abstract form of the self. Because all people are basically the same anyway, there is no reason why they would come into conflict, and so it is easy enough for multiple people to be reconciled with each other. Kant has the kingdom of ends, and Hegel has a future in which all particular differences are dialectically overcome. Beauvoir, in contrast, sees our particular projects as crucially important, and these particular projects can come into conflict. Of course life is not a zero-sum game and most conflicts have multiple solutions. We should try to find compromise solutions which benefit both parties as much as possible. It is not, however, always possible to find a compromise, and in any case Beauvoir's real point is metaphysical, not practical. The fact that conflicts exist means that some people will fail to achieve some of their ends, and they will experience this as a genuine loss to themselves. In Beauvoir, it is crucially important to achieve our ends, and our failure to do so will not be redeemed by any future synthesis.⁴⁰³

These conflicts can arise in several ways. Conflicts can exist between people whose projects come into opposition. Schopenhauer and Hegel had very different ideas of how philosophy should look after Kant. We cannot take up philosophy without being a partisan of one or the other.⁴⁰⁴ Or this conflict can exist within individuals. What a person wants in the present is never quite what he will want in the future.⁴⁰⁵ The same point can be made about classes or societies as well as individuals. Or this conflict can exist between self and others. We may be free while others are oppressed. We should promote freedom, of course, but should we promote it by engaging in creative activity, thus leaving others to suffer in oppression, or should we promote freedom by freeing the oppressed, thus sacrificing the expansion of freedom that would come from our creative acts?⁴⁰⁶ Finally, conflicts can exist between the needs of multiple others. There are seven billion people in the world, and most of us suffer from some or other unjust limitation on our power, and every time we stand aside and allow this situation to continue, this amounts to tacit acceptance. All oppressed people have the right to make demands on us in the name of freedom, but very few of us have the resources to help more than a few other people each. Therefore, we will have to limit ourselves to helping some people, and leave other equally deserving people to their fate.⁴⁰⁷ In this sense, Beauvoir comes to look a little like Levinas. There are multiple others, and each of them makes an absolute ethical demand upon me, thus forcing me to make political decisions about which of these competing ethical demands to fulfill.

All the cases thus far have involved binary divisions. In the real world, however, the divisions are never simply binary. Everyone is connected to everyone else in myriad ways, and this leads to another level of hard choices. The French, the British, the Americans, and the Russians fought against Nazi oppression, but also practiced oppression at home. The French

oppressed the Algerians. The English oppressed India. Stalin killed more people than Hitler. The Americans oppressed their own minority population. The Nazis, meanwhile, worked to free the Arabs from French and British colonialism; the two groups had bonded over their desire to oppress the Jews. Therefore, any action against oppression is also action for oppression. Supporting independence for India, for Algeria, for blacks and for serfs would simultaneously weaken the powers fighting the Nazis.⁴⁰⁸ The same point can be made about denouncing Russian show trials. The Communists were the party that did the most in the Resistance, the party that wanted to free the workers in France and in the rest of the world. To denounce the show trials would weaken the Communists and thus harm the cause of freedom; but to allow Stalin's purges to continue would also sacrifice freedom.⁴⁰⁹ The problem is that, although we can see arguments for both sides, in most cases we can only act for one side. As Sonia Kruks has pointed out, action is less ambiguous than deliberation. When Beauvoir writes about the need to make political decisions, she gives very nuanced analyses of her position toward Communism. When, however, Beauvoir writes in order to intervene in politics, she seems to wholeheartedly support Communism. This is not because Beauvoir has suddenly forgotten her nuanced analyses; rather, this is because Beauvoir recognizes that, in the polarized climate of the Cold War, the choice between Capitalism and Communism has regrettably turned into an either/or scenario, and she feels that Communism, despite its flaws, is preferable to Capitalism.⁴¹⁰

An additional complication arises when we remember that the world is full not just of division but of violence. It would seem that violence is not strictly speaking necessary. It is theoretically possible that all conflicts and all divisions could be resolved peacefully, but violence is always available as an option, and it will always be a temptation. As a statistical matter it is certain that there will be violence somewhere, and even if universal peace were

somehow possible, we still have to act in the real world, and in the real world it is not going to be achieved any time soon.⁴¹¹ Thus violence is always around us, and Beauvoir is not naïve enough to think that there are always nonviolent solutions to violence. Sometimes violence has to be answered with violence.⁴¹² Beauvoir even seems to think that any act of leadership or of social organization implies violence.⁴¹³ “No one governs innocently.”⁴¹⁴ “Through violence the child will be made into a man and the horde into society.”⁴¹⁵ The problem with all this violence is that it reduces both the aggressor and the victim to the level of things, but at the same time it may be necessary to uphold freedom.⁴¹⁶ Therefore another set of moral dilemmas arise, in which we have to decide whether to use violence, and thus sacrifice freedom through the very act of violence, or refrain from violence, and sacrifice legitimate ends such as fighting oppression and building a society.

The inevitable failure involved in moral realism leads to an obvious objection to Beauvoir’s entire philosophical project. Beauvoir’s goal was to reconcile the competing demands of ideal ethics and real human beings, but if moral realism involves failure then it seems that Beauvoir has not achieved her goal. Beauvoir’s moral realism leaves us faced with irresolvable moral dilemmas in which we are forced, no matter what we do or do not do, to engage in actions which partially contradict our own reasons for acting. The contradictions inherent in moral realism also call into question Beauvoir’s privileging of authenticity over inauthenticity. Beauvoir tries to advocate for authenticity by showing that we are better off if we choose authenticity rather than inauthenticity. She talks about the self-agreement and joy we can find when we choose to live authentically and the fear and failure we will experience when we choose to live inauthentically. This is why Beauvoir, in her philosophical works, frequently leads up to discussions of authenticity with dialectical progressions through various forms of

inauthenticity. The failure inherent in the various stages of inauthenticity drives us to seek authenticity. Now, however, it turns out that authenticity itself also involves failure.

Furthermore, Beauvoir says, following Kierkegaard, that the genuinely moral man lives in constant fear that he has not done the right thing after all.⁴¹⁷ Thus authenticity, although it can bring us joy, also requires us to accept a new kind of fear and a new kind of failure. To the extent that authenticity, like inauthenticity, involves us in failure and fear, this calls into question Beauvoir's privileging of authenticity over inauthenticity. The fear and failure inherent in authenticity could easily drive us back into inauthenticity, and Beauvoir's dialectical progression from inauthenticity to authenticity will turn out to be unstable.⁴¹⁸

Beauvoir's response to these objections would be that her conception of her philosophical project does not necessarily require her to provide a fully consistent account of ethical behavior. Beauvoir's philosophical work was asystematic in principle. When describing her own strengths and weaknesses as a thinker, Beauvoir said that she lacked the stubbornness to assert her own ideas in the face of all obstacles. One of the consequences of this tendency was negative: Beauvoir never developed a philosophical system like Sartre or Merleau-Ponty, and this is what she meant when she said she was not a philosopher. It also, however, had positive effects, as Nancy Bauer has emphasized. Because she did not feel the need to develop a comprehensive system, Beauvoir was free to become a careful reader who tried to understand other philosophers on their own terms, and to give phenomenological descriptions with a novelist's eye for verisimilitude. Sartre, by contrast, was more concerned with developing a comprehensive and internally consistent philosophical system, so he tended to view other thinkers mostly in relation to his own ideas, and therefore had more trouble understanding philosophical systems other than his own.⁴¹⁹ In her review of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Beauvoir announces that her

goal is to formulate an ethics to which people can sincerely adhere. Beauvoir says that one of the main merits of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is that it is convincing.⁴²⁰ Beauvoir wants her ethics, too, to be convincing. As such her main need is to start with people as they are and experience as it is. Her ethics should still, of course, be as rigorously consistent as she can make it, but this goal is secondary to providing a convincing account of our experience.

Beauvoir, following Sartre and Kierkegaard, holds that people are not internally self-consistent.⁴²¹ We constantly experience ourselves both as subjects and objects, as free beings and as beings constrained by our situation. Furthermore our freedom itself is necessarily tied up with failure as well as success. Because we are free, and project ourselves toward the future, we can never coincide with what we are at any given moment. Because freedom implies separation, we cannot merge with the objects before which we are free. Ambiguity and failure are part of our internal make-up, and so our experience shares in this ambiguity and failure. As free and ambiguous beings we find ourselves faced with intractable moral dilemmas. This is not merely a philosophical point: these moral dilemmas occur in our everyday experience. We frequently encounter situations in our everyday experience where “common sense” seems to conflict with “the principle of the thing.” Therefore, in order to be convincing, Beauvoir needs an ethics that acknowledges these dilemmas. Moral realism involves failure because people are unable to coincide fully with themselves. The failure inherent in moral realism corresponds to the failure inherent in ourselves. In one sense the incompleteness of Beauvoir’s solution can be seen as a strength rather than a weakness. Rather than try to conceal the fact of our internal inconsistency, Beauvoir, as a good phenomenologist, straightforwardly sets it out. Her philosophy is asystematic because our experience is asystematic.

This provides a response to the potential objections to Beauvoir. From Beauvoir's point of view, Kant and Hegel only manage to escape the unfortunate consequences that moral realism forces us to accept because they do not take the ambiguous nature of people seriously enough. The result, according to Beauvoir, is that Kant and Hegel produce ethical systems which are consistent enough when presented as theories in an ethics textbook, but to which nobody seriously adheres in practice. The bourgeoisie, according to Beauvoir, pay lip service to Kantian morality when it suits their purposes, but revert to a naïve form of moral realism in their everyday lives. Revolutionary Marxists, in contrast, pay lip service to the idea of an inevitable overarching historical dialectic, but form small-scale plans and make moral judgments like anyone else.⁴²² Moral realism is superior to inauthentic ways of being not because it makes us happier or more successful (though it does) but because it better addresses our situation. The problem with inauthentic ways of being is that they oversimplify our experience in order to take out the ambiguities. The sub-man and nihilist ignore everything, the serious man ignores our freedom, the adventurer ignores our need for others, and the maniac ignores the freedom of the other. Moral realism succeeds, not in the sense that it solves problems which have no solution, but in the sense that it faces these problems head-on rather than avoiding them. This is why the failure in moral realism must be assumed whereas we can simply move on from the failure of all the inauthentic ways of being. Kristana Arp has suggested that Existentialism values honesty and courage above all else; but these are not only values, they are also motivations. If we are honest enough that we cannot be satisfied with lying to ourselves, and courageous enough to move forward, then we will be driven through all the stages in Beauvoir's dialectical progressions, and wind up with the position of moral realism.⁴²³

The Calculus of Freedom

Beauvoir now turns to the question of how we should go about making the tough decisions we have to face when we decide to live authentically. Beauvoir rejects any kind of hard-and-fast calculation procedure, such as the greatest freedom principle or freedom as fairness, and instead focuses on the internal state-of-mind of the agent. The world only acquires meaning because I engage in projects. In order to make a decision, I must first take a definite standpoint on the world, and this means that my state-of-mind will determine the decision I make. Any calculation procedure, according to Beauvoir, involves looking at the world from the standpoint of a neutral third-person observer, and nothing can be seen from such a standpoint. The impartial spectator stands aloof from the world and thus fails to find meaning in anything. Another way to say this is that appealing to a calculation procedure to justify my decision is really a form of bad faith. When I make a decision, I assign relative values to the various freedoms I decide between, and so I must assume responsibility for the choice. If I appeal to a calculation procedure to justify my decision, I shunt this responsibility onto the calculation procedure. The person who uses a calculation procedure in effect claims that the relative values of various freedoms exist as objective facts in the world, and all one has to do is add up these objective values to determine the right course of action. This is also the reason Beauvoir does not establish a hierarchy among various ways of failing to respect freedom, so that, for instance, oppression is worse than violence, or committing an act of violence is worse than allowing an act of violence to occur, or benefiting directly from oppression is worse than benefiting at a second or third remove. Such a hierarchy, in Beauvoir's view, would be too close to a calculation procedure. Instead, we have an absolute obligation to respect every other, and the decision of which obligations to honor and which to ignore is entirely our own responsibility.

Beauvoir's only demand for the internal state-of-mind of the agent is that he must assume his freedom, value freedom and work for freedom.⁴²⁴ In some cases, this value for freedom will be enough to lead us to the right course of action. So, for instance, if we see a situation of oppression, the obvious solution is to take the side of the oppressed against the oppressor. It is true that the oppressor is also a free being pursuing ends, and in fighting against him we will thwart the expansion of his freedom, but a freedom engaged in the denial of freedom is so outrageous that this loss barely registers. There is no concrete loss of freedom if we thwart a freedom engaged in fighting freedom. The loss only takes place at a formal level, and Beauvoir is more concerned with the concrete level.⁴²⁵ To take another example, if a couple decide to live in squalor, this is a loss of freedom, but we probably shouldn't interfere, because that would be a case of paternalism. If the couple were to have a child, however, then we would have to step in, and prevent the parents from ruining the child. Because we value freedom, we will take the side of the future against the present, we will take the side of the child's possibilities against the parents' stagnation.⁴²⁶ The desire for freedom also seems to rule out certain courses of action absolutely. It is hard to see how someone could value freedom and decide to become a Nazi.⁴²⁷ At a more general level, it is hard to see how someone who values freedom could ever decide to engage in oppression, or abominations, or certain forms of contempt which deny that the other could ever have anything to say. Violence is always on the table as an option, because even though this involves an immediate loss of freedom, we may feel this is necessary to prevent what we see as an even greater loss of freedom, but oppression, or abominations, or the more serious forms of contempt, which simply take freedom from people, could never be justified in this way.⁴²⁸

In more complex cases, the person who truly values and works for freedom will carry out a process of constantly challenging the ends with the means and the means with the ends. This makes sense, because for him freedom is the end of his action, and it is at stake in the means, so he will not feel comfortable abandoning either the means or the ends, but he will want to hold fast to each at the expense of the other. Beauvoir, following Kierkegaard, asserts that the genuinely moral man constantly asks himself whether he is doing the right thing, but does not allow this to stop him from acting.⁴²⁹ This is what authentic action looks like from an internal standpoint. From an external standpoint, the process of constantly running the means and ends against each other will lead us to pursue a course of action that finds a mean between the extremes. Beauvoir does not think that we should sacrifice any number of people to an indefinite future good, nor will she think we should stick to our guns and do what is right no matter what the cost. The determining factor will be the weights on each side and the particular circumstances involved.

Some examples are in order. At one point, Beauvoir contrasts a scenario from Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* with another scenario from Dos Passos's *The Adventures of a Young Man*. In Steinbeck's novel, the hero chooses to launch a strike. He realizes that the strike itself is unlikely to succeed, but also that the strike will give rise to a sense of solidarity among the workers, make them conscious of their oppression, and give them the will to resist. In Dos Passos's novel, several American miners have been condemned to death after a strike. The hero can appeal through legal means, in which case the miners will probably win, or he can work through the Communist Party, in which case the Party will gain publicity, but the miners will probably be condemned. The hero chooses the former option and the miners are saved. At a formal level, both cases are the same. In each case, the hero must choose between the immediate

needs of the striking workers and their long-term interests, but Beauvoir takes different positions on the two cases. She holds that Steinbeck's hero was right to start the strike, thus favoring the long-term over the short-term, but she also holds that Dos Passos's hero was right to appeal through legal means, thus favoring the short-term over the long-term. The particular circumstances in each case are enough to tip the balance one way or another. In Steinbeck's novel, the long-term benefit is enough to justify the short-term risk. In Dos Passos's novel, the short-term consequences are very severe, the long-term development of the Communist Party in America will only be helped slightly by sacrificing the workers, and in any case the interests of the Communist Party have only a very peripheral relation to the cause of American workers.⁴³⁰

To take another example, if you are in a resistance group and find an informer in your midst, you take care of him. This is relatively unproblematic. Now, however, suppose that you merely suspect an informer. Here the situation becomes more complicated. Beauvoir admits that a certain amount of ruthlessness might be in order. If a suspect individual holds other's lives in his hands then you have to take action, and kill one man to avoid letting ten innocent men die. This ruthlessness, however, has its limits. Beauvoir seems to disapprove of the rural peasants who massacred a family suspected of signaling to the enemy in WWI. Again, considered at an abstract level, the situations are the same – should we kill a suspect individual or risk putting others in danger – but in one case Beauvoir takes the side of the suspect, and in the other she takes the side of the potential victim. Again it is local circumstances which decide. The suspected informer poses an immediate danger to people who are actively engaged in fighting for freedom. In the case of the WWI peasants, on the other hand, the evidence was vague, the danger to the peasants was not very great, and this is not much weight to put against the deaths of an entire family. Beauvoir also points out that there was another way to prevent the family from

signaling the enemy: simply lock the family up until the danger passed. The fact that the peasants resorted to murder, when there was a less objectionable but equally efficacious form of action open to them, indicates that there was some kind of mass hysteria or local animosity at work.⁴³¹

Beauvoir's mean has two important features. First, the mean will be heavily influenced by context. How extreme our decision should be will depend on how extreme the situation is. We always act in situation, and so we are always forced to choose among the limited number of possible actions that our situation presents to us. An extreme situation – such as war – eliminates the middle-of-the-road options, forcing us to choose between a small number of alternatives, all of which are extreme in nature and involve a substantial loss of freedom. Many of Beauvoir's apparently extreme judgments make sense when looked at within the context of the war. The situation of France during the Second World War was worse than anything we as Americans have ever faced. The military had been overrun, the government had collapsed, and the country was being ruled by a group of mass murderers. That justifies some very serious actions that wouldn't be acceptable in more normal circumstances. So, for instance, Beauvoir says it is acceptable to kill a sixteen-year-old Nazi, even though he only thinks the way he does because his leaders have brainwashed him. It would be best to educate him, because his views really aren't his fault, and there is still the possibility that he will fight for freedom once he understands things better. In a situation of war, however, there isn't time for education, so you have to kill him.⁴³² To take another example, despite her general distrust of direct vengeance, Beauvoir writes approvingly about the Resistance fighter who took vengeance on a Nazi guilty of torturing a Frenchwoman. Here we have to remember that there was no legitimate government capable of holding a criminal trial. The Resistance fighter either had to take vengeance or let the criminal

go, and abominations are unforgivable, so he chose to take vengeance.⁴³³ Finally, Beauvoir's insistence on using the death penalty may seem less extreme when we remember that there were countries which had outlawed the death penalty and temporarily brought it back to deal with collaborators.⁴³⁴ There are also less extreme situations, however, and they demand less extreme responses. Beauvoir writes approvingly, for instance, of the attempts after the war to make sure that all the collaborators got fair trials. Her point here is that the Nazis have been defeated, the collaborators are no longer a danger, and so we can afford to be circumspect and careful about punishing. The real need now is to rebuild, to establish the value of freedom, and this is emphasized by being very careful about protecting the rights of the accused.⁴³⁵

Second, Beauvoir thinks that our level of personal involvement matters when deciding whether or not to intervene in a situation. The more we feel personally involved in a situation, the more right we have to intervene, and the less personally involved we feel, the less right we have to intervene. This position places Beauvoir directly at odds with Kant, for whom action can only be moral if it is done from disinterested motives. There are both theoretical and practical arguments in favor of Beauvoir's position. At a theoretical level, Beauvoir's point is that, if I do not feel any connection to the people involved, then I cannot feel any difference between the alternatives. The world only acquires meaning for me because I engage in particular projects which forge connections to particular others. Apart from these projects, other people appear as indifferent, and so what happens to them appears as indifferent. Therefore, no matter what course of action I choose, the results will appear as indifferent, and in this sense all courses of action are really the same. My love of freedom in general cannot help me here, because we are dealing with moral dilemmas in which we must decide between different ways of promoting freedom. People who act out of a disinterested benevolence toward humanity forget that there is

no such thing as humanity; there are only individual humans.⁴³⁶ Of course I can still make a decision, say by consulting a general principle found in an ethics textbook, but all such decisions will be arbitrary. At a practical level, people who have little connection to their intended beneficiaries can often engage in confused or counterproductive courses of action.⁴³⁷ Because they feel little connection to the people whom their action will affect, they will tend to act on the basis of what they think is right, without considering what their beneficiaries really want or how their actions will affect them. The charitable lady who accidentally staves off the revolution, and the Kantian who lets the intended victim die rather than tell a lie, are perfect examples of what can happen when we act without any personal interest.

Another way to phrase this argument is in terms of paternalism. There is something inherently problematic about accepting help from the outside. All of us want to be recognized for our accomplishments, and paternalism robs us of our accomplishments. If somebody simply does my project for me, out of the goodness of his heart, then the project is no longer mine. This is why the child cries when the adult helps him up the tree. If, on the other hand, multiple people engage in a shared project, then all of them can accomplish a goal together and can be recognized collectively for this accomplishment. This is what happens, to take a very trivial example, every time a sports team wins a title, and the entire team gets to meet the President. Beauvoir's point is that, insofar as we are personally connected with the others whom we help, this help takes the form of engaging in a shared project, rather than paternalistic help from outside. Therefore, insofar as we act for ourselves as much as the people we assist, we escape the problems of paternalism. This is why it is easier to accept help from a friend or family member than from a social worker or a total stranger. The friend or family member seems

concerned on their own behalf; the stranger and the social worker seem to intervene arbitrarily.⁴³⁸

This means that I have more authorization to make a decision the closer I am to somebody. Obviously I have the complete right to make decisions for myself, but I also have more right to make decisions for those close to me, if they need my help. If I am in a position to exercise paternalism on a dependent this is because I take my responsibility for them seriously. We are most justified in acting for our friends and family because we are naturally most inclined to be generous toward our friends and family. At a larger level, we are all members of particular groups. We are all men or women, proletarians or bourgeoisie, Jews or Gentiles, blacks or whites. Beauvoir thinks it is appropriate for us to fight for the groups of which we are members, because any action for the group is simultaneously action for ourselves. Our action is more justifiable because we fight for ourselves as much as for others. In contrast, if I have little connection to someone, I have little right to act for them.⁴³⁹ Beauvoir knows that Marxists distrust the bourgeois who support their cause because it is not coming from an internal movement, and she seems to approve of this distrust.⁴⁴⁰

Beauvoir's calculus is loose enough that people will not always make the same judgments. Two different people may have different views about where the balance lies. So, for instance, Beauvoir herself, as a Frenchwoman, did not want the English colonial subjects to rebel in the middle of the Second World War, but she also thinks that they were right to take advantage of the opportunity to gain their freedom, just as she thinks that Richard Wright was correct to refuse a request that American blacks put aside their own struggles to help America fight the war.⁴⁴¹ Beauvoir is not overly troubled by all this looseness. She doesn't think there is any one right answer and doesn't think there needs to be. The world is an inherently messy

place, and so the task of figuring out the right thing to do will be messy as well. Her ethics demands that all people must ultimately want to eliminate all forms of oppression, and the question is simply which form of oppression to eliminate first. The problem is political before being moral.⁴⁴² On a practical level, even though people will never come to exact agreement, in most cases they will come to relatively similar conclusions. Kristana Arp has pointed out that, although it is often hard to figure out what we should do, Beauvoir does not think there are irresolvable moral dilemmas, and in her examples she tells us the right course of action.⁴⁴³

Toward the end of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir tries to use her calculus of freedom to determine how to respond to the purges in the Soviet Union. On the one hand, Beauvoir accepted that the Soviet Union did fight for freedom, but on the other hand, she conceded that it did so through unjust means. At a larger level, there was a short-lived hope, immediately after the Liberation, that France (and western Europe generally) could stake out a middle position between America and the Soviet Union in the emerging cold war, and Beauvoir wanted to articulate what this middle position might look like.⁴⁴⁴ Beauvoir begins by relying on her tripartite division between moral idealism, political realism, and moral realism. She first rejects the views of the moral idealist, who says that the oppression practiced by the Soviet Union can never be justified even if they ultimately lead to greater freedom, and the views of the political realist, who says that the means used by the Soviet Union are always justified even though they oppress currently existing human beings. In contrast to both, the moral realist will view violence as a problematic last resort. The moral realist will not reject violence out of hand, because sometimes the loss of freedom inherent in violence is necessary to produce more freedom in the long run, but he will carefully look for alternatives before resorting to violence. Because this is an internal state-of-mind, it will lead to a variety of external behaviors, depending on the unique

circumstances in which the moral realist finds himself. Sometimes the moral realist will behave like a political realist. We may have all the good will in the world but we will still shoot the sixteen-year-old Nazi in a situation of war. Other times the moral realist will behave like a moral idealist. Beauvoir thinks we should try to distinguish who in a group is guilty and innocent rather than throw the whole group in jail simply to be sure of getting the guilty ones.

Beauvoir then cautions that what goes by the name of necessity is often nothing more than the laziness and brutality of the police. It is not necessary to lock everyone up, it is just more convenient. If the police say that convenience outweighs freedom, this is not because the situation really is urgent, but rather because the police don't take freedom very seriously in the first place. Political organizations that value freedom may resort to violence to gain a foothold, but because violence contradicts their respect for freedom, they will abandon violence once they see an opportunity to gain their ends through nonviolent means. In our own times, the African National Congress and Sinn Fein have both made the transition from terrorist organizations to legitimate political parties. Applied to the Soviet Union, Beauvoir's point seems to be that the Communists do not take individual freedom seriously enough, and that many of the actions which they claim are justified by necessity are nothing of the sort. Such actions might have been necessary earlier in the Revolution, but now that Stalin is secure, he can afford to be more careful about protecting freedom in the means used, and doing this will ultimately make the Soviet Union better.⁴⁴⁵

Given that she is critical of the means used by the Soviet Union, Beauvoir next needs to consider whether, as a public intellectual, she should express her criticisms. The problem is that Beauvoir still supports the spread of communism, and expressing her reservations about the Soviet Union would tend to weaken the Communists. Beauvoir responds that it is possible to

engage in a more limited form of criticism. This limited form of criticism “accepts the objective goal but criticizes the subjective movement that aims at it.” Beauvoir’s position here calls to mind John Stuart Mill’s argument that a true position loses its value when it becomes accepted as a dogma, and that a truth which has to face challenges will be more efficacious. Both Mill and Beauvoir think that we need to take account of that the manner in which we hold a belief as well as the content of that belief, and both rely on the idea that a limited and sympathetic opposition can actually strengthen a movement rather than weaken it. The key here is to strike the right balance. On the one hand, the point of the criticism is to keep the end alive as an end which we subjectively aim for, rather than let it harden into an absolute end for a political realist. On the other hand the criticism cannot be so severe that it leads us to reject the end itself. This is the balance Beauvoir thinks we should strike with respect to the Soviet Union.⁴⁴⁶

Chapter 4. Beauvoir's Literary Works

Thus far we have looked at Beauvoir's philosophical work from the moral period. But she also did substantial literary work in the moral period. She wrote two novels, *The Blood of Others* and *All Men Are Mortal*, and a stage play, *Useless Mouths*.⁴⁴⁷ Beauvoir saw her literary and philosophical works as closely interrelated. Both literature and philosophy, according to Beauvoir, are attempts to address our lived experience of the world, but they do so in different ways. Philosophy provides an "intellectual reconstruction" of our experience, whereas literature attempts to imaginatively recreate our experience in all its concrete thickness. Philosophy and literature thus both have valid purposes to serve. Philosophy, which explains our experience on a systematized and somewhat abstract level, can never fully do justice to the concrete thickness of our experience; literature can recreate the thickness of our experience but cannot provide us with a systematic account of our experience.⁴⁴⁸ Existentialism, as an intellectual movement, emphasizes subjectivity and lived experience. It therefore has to exist at the boundary of philosophy and literature. There is even some philosophical work that can only be done in literature. Beauvoir resorts to examples from Steinbeck, Dos Passos, Claudel, Ibsen, and others in the final section of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* because the question of how to balance the competing demands of multiple and heterogeneous free beings can only be resolved in practice.⁴⁴⁹

This has implications for the way we read Beauvoir's literary works. Literature is not the servant of philosophy and Beauvoir did not write her literary works simply to communicate her philosophical ideas. Books which are written to make a philosophical point are all, according to Beauvoir, stale and lifeless. The author and reader must both allow a certain freedom which nothing can replace. This is one of the reasons Beauvoir never wrote a literary work which was

narrated from a single point of view: the absence of a single definitive narrative voice leaves the reader free to draw her own conclusions. In her autobiography, Beauvoir is extremely sensitive to Blanchot's criticism of the *roman à thèse*. She judges *She Came to Stay* as successful because, with Blanchot, she sees the ending as open; she judges *The Blood of Others* as a partial failure because, again with Blanchot, she sees it as propounding a definite philosophical position.⁴⁵⁰ The literary works can, however, still serve to *illustrate* points Beauvoir made in her philosophical works. Because philosophy and literature are both attempts to address the same world, if the philosophy is well-done and the literature is well-done, the literature should imaginatively recreate the same dynamics which philosophy discusses at an abstract level.⁴⁵¹ In her philosophy Beauvoir writes about the importance of dignity and respect and recognition; in her literature we see characters who act simply to gain recognition. In her philosophy we see a rejection of paternalism; in her literature we see characters destroyed through subjection to paternalism. In her philosophy, Beauvoir objects that Kant and Hegel cannot provide us with an ethics we can apply in the real world; in her literature, we see characters who try and fail to live according to Kantian and Hegelian standards.

Useless Mouths

Beauvoir probably wrote both *Useless Mouths* and *The Blood of Others* around the same time, in 1942-43, though the exact dates are uncertain.⁴⁵² The works are in different genres, one a play and the other a novel, but share similar themes. Both works feature a protagonist who moves from a position of moral idealism to a position of moral realism. In fact it has been suggested that Jean Blomart, the protagonist of *The Blood of Others*, is a more fully realized version of Jean-Pierre Gauthier, the protagonist of *Useless Mouths*.⁴⁵³ At a more general level,

both works show the absolute value Beauvoir places on freedom, and both seem to play out in practical terms the criticisms Beauvoir had made of Kant and Hegel when put into practice.

Useless Mouths is set in the fictional town of Vaucelles, in Flanders, in the 14th century. The citizens of Vaucelles have rebelled against the Duke of Burgundy in order to rule themselves as free men and women. Besieged by the Duke, they send a messenger to the King of France, asking him to relieve the siege. He agrees to do so, but only after an interval of three months, and the town does not have enough food to hold out that long. A hard decision will have to be made.⁴⁵⁴ The main drama of the play revolves around the effects of this decision on one family. Louis d'Avesnes is one of the three elected aldermen of the town. His wife Catherine, though she holds no formal political position, is an imposing person in her own right. They have two children, Clarice and Georges, and have also raised two orphans, Jean-Pierre and Jeanne Gauthier, as their own. Clarice, who is a bit of a narcissist, is promised to Jacques Van der Welde, the second alderman, a boring weaver, but is in fact in love with Jean-Pierre. Jeanne, a fearful and weak-willed character, is similarly promised to Georges, an aspiring tyrant who secretly lusts after Clarice and eventually conspires with the third alderman, Rosbourg, to take control of the town.

As the play opens, Jean-Pierre has returned from his mission to the King of France, and brought back his unfortunate answer. Jean-Pierre is shocked to find there is no food in the town; he feels guilty about having eaten well while the townsmen were starving. As dangerous as his mission was, the point remains that he chose to leave the town, and thereby temporarily escaped from his situation as one of the townsmen.⁴⁵⁵ After completing his mission, Jean-Pierre is offered the post of Food Controller, which he turns down. He knows a hard decision will have to be made and he doesn't want to be the person who takes food out of somebody's mouth.⁴⁵⁶ Jean-

Pierre acts in a similar way on a personal level. He loves Clarice, but refuses to admit his love or accept hers. The reason for this is that he does not want to impinge on her freedom in any way. If she loved him, she would suffer when he was gone, and he doesn't want to cause her suffering. Jean-Pierre believes Clarice is totally self-sufficient. Clarice appears to need nothing from him, and this is just what he wants, because it means he cannot hurt her.⁴⁵⁷ Jean-Pierre's actions at this point are all consistent with Beauvoir's description of moral idealism. Jean-Pierre seeks to separate himself from his situation in the phenomenal world as much as possible. He steadfastly refuses to trample on anyone's freedom in any way, and he doesn't bother to think about the consequences of his failure to act, so long as he personally refrains from doing the wrong thing.

The results of Jean-Pierre's abstention are potentially disastrous. Without his moral guidance, the aldermen meet and decide to round up the "useless mouths" – the women, the children, the aged, and the sick – and throw them into the moat outside the town. The men of fighting age will then have enough food to survive until the King sends reinforcements to lift the siege, at which point they will remarry and start rebuilding the town.⁴⁵⁸ It is important to note, because this decision is clearly monstrous, that Louis and Jacques are not motivated by fear of death or even desire for power. Louis himself describes the decision as a crime, and states that it would be easier for him to die than to sacrifice Catherine, and his interactions with Catherine show that this is the case. Jacques also seems to feel the inherent immorality of the decision. Even the men of the town would probably rather die fighting alongside their wives than live without them. Jacques and Louis make this decision because they take the side of Hegel's slave. Physical survival, while not itself freedom, is nevertheless necessary to freedom, and so the townsmen must survive. Louis and Jacques essentially take the position of the political realist. The town must survive, and the ideal of freedom represented by the town must survive, and so

they choose the means most likely to guarantee that. The survival of the town becomes an absolute end.⁴⁵⁹

Catherine and Clarice are not amused. They do not, however, seem to mind dying, and they certainly do not beg for their lives. They are angry rather than scared. Catherine and Clarice are upset, not because they are about to die, but because the decision of the aldermen has denied them recognition. They are not seen as people anymore, they are seen simply as useless mouths, biological organisms that the town can no longer afford to feed. Food is valuable to them, not as a means to survival, but because it signifies to them that they have a right to survive, that they are subjects and so worthy of the same sustenance everyone else gets.⁴⁶⁰ The townsmen, like the torturer from “An Eye for an Eye,” have divided the town into two groups: those who are subjects and those who are only objects.⁴⁶¹ Being reduced to things, Catherine and Clarice cannot engage in projects as subjects can. Now that the townsmen have declared she was an object the whole time, Catherine’s participation in the political life of Vaucelles, and her love for Louis, appear to her only as lies, fantasies that Louis and the townsmen allowed her to have. When Louis asks her to give her assent to the plan, she refuses to do so, not on the ground that she disagrees with the plan, but on the ground that she cannot meaningfully give her assent.⁴⁶² She will be thrown into the ditch whether she agrees to be or not, so it doesn’t really matter what she says.⁴⁶³ Catherine’s refusal to give her assent is a way of expressing her sense of her loss of subjectivity. She is not recognized as a subject, and only subjects can give or withhold consent. By depriving her of her subjectivity, the aldermen have deprived her of the right to speak.⁴⁶⁴ Catherine does not, however, have any objection to the ditch *per se*. At the end of the play, when the decision to expel the useless mouths has been reversed and Catherine is treated like a subject again, she wonders aloud whether it might not have been a better idea to go into the ditch

after all.⁴⁶⁵ Louis does not, of course, take her up on the offer, but it does serve to highlight the fact that Catherine has always been more concerned with recognition than with preserving her life. When Catherine was sentenced to die in the ditch, it deprived her of her subjectivity. If, however, she were to freely decide to sacrifice herself in order to give the remaining townspeople a better chance of preserving their freedom, then this would still be the act of a subject.

Having been denied recognition by the decision of the townsmen, Catherine and Clarice do what they can to assert themselves as subjects. Catherine dares Louis to look her in the eyes. When Jeanne begs for her life, Catherine tells her to stop. Clarice behaves in a similar way. When Jacques offers to hide her in his house so she will survive the expulsion, Clarice refuses his offer. These are all attempts at asserting some level of subjectivity. Catherine wants Louis to look her in the eyes because she wants Louis to see that she *has* eyes: that she can look at him and make judgments about him. At a deeper level, by meeting Catherine's eyes, Louis will acknowledge that she can look at him. Looking someone in the eyes can be a sign of respect in much the same way that talking to someone is a sign of respect. Catherine tells Jeanne to stop begging for her life for exactly the same reason that Kant tells us not to cry out in pain. By yielding to her pathological desire for life, Jeanne reduces herself to the level of phenomenal existence, which she shares with all the animals. Through their willingness to lose their lives, Catherine and Clarice prove that recognition is more important to them, and thus that they are subjects. This is also why Clarice does not accept Jacques's offer to hide her. She does not want to survive, she wants to be recognized as a subject, and hiding will not get her recognition, it will only prove her own weakness.⁴⁶⁶ Both Catherine and Clarice, having been sentenced to certain death, try to kill themselves as a means of asserting some limited sense of subjectivity. They

cannot control whether they die, so they will assert control over how they die, dying through an act of will rather than having their death inflicted on them from without. Catherine tries to kill Louis along with herself, because she is still committed to the projects they shared together, and so she wants to die together with him. Clarice, meanwhile, tries to kill herself at Louis's door to express her rejection of his decision.⁴⁶⁷

Rosbourg and Georges, meanwhile, take the decision to expel the useless mouths to its logical conclusions. Rosbourg concludes that, if the standards of usefulness and necessity can justify killing half the town, then they can justify everything else as well. There is one scene in which Rosbourg argues that the townspeople should stop building a belfry and focus instead on useful buildings such as markets, shops, and warehouses. When Louis and Jacques try to remonstrate that the townspeople chose to build the belfry in order to ring out their newly won freedom from the Duke, Rosbourg responds that the people are not the best judges of their own good, and that it is up to the aldermen to lead them in the right direction.⁴⁶⁸ Later Rosbourg tries to have Jean-Pierre arrested on the grounds that he might incite opposition. When Jacques objects that Jean-Pierre hasn't broken any laws, Rosbourg responds that sending the useless mouths to their deaths is also unlawful, but the aldermen chose to do it because it was necessary.⁴⁶⁹ Georges, less sophisticated than Rosbourg, concludes that the laws no longer apply and it is acceptable to resort to raw power. If the social institutions that guarantee people their lives and their dignity can be ignored in one case then they can be ignored in others. In one scene Georges tries to shoot arrows into an unruly crowd.⁴⁷⁰ Later Georges tries to rape Clarice. Georges tells Clarice quite openly that he is not concerned what she might think about him because he knows she is about to die anyway. Because Clarice is no longer constituted as a subject, and does not have the ability to project herself toward an open future like a subject, she

can no longer fix other people as objects in the way a normal subject can. When Louis catches Georges in the act and disowns him, Georges replies that Louis is about to send Clarice to her death, so he cannot consistently care about anything else that happens to her.⁴⁷¹ Eventually Rosbourg and Georges conspire to kill Jacques and Louis and take over leadership of the town. Georges justifies the conspiracy to Rosbourg by arguing that Jacques and Louis are useless. Their continuing scruples show they are too weak to exercise power. Therefore, just as Jacques and Louis expelled the citizens who were too weak to serve as soldiers, Georges and Rosbourg should kill the aldermen who are too weak to serve as rulers.⁴⁷²

Rosbourg is a classic political realist. His ultimate goal is to create a perfect world in which nobody will want for anything. In this world, no actions will be wasted, but instead the entire universe will function as a single unit.⁴⁷³ This goal comes to serve for him as an absolute end. He is willing to use any means to achieve it, including murder, political pressure, and arbitrary arrest. He does not care much about freedom. He sees the belfry, which is intended as a symbol of freedom, as useless. He does not think that the free decision of the townspeople to build the belfry ought to be taken seriously. He has no place for freedom in his perfect world, because free people might choose to act in ways that do not fit into a harmonious whole. Georges, on the other hand, is simply in love with power. His main interest in assuming leadership of the town is that he would not have to answer to anybody. If he could create a world without any other subjects in it, then he would not need to fear that somebody might judge his actions, and he could do anything he wanted.⁴⁷⁴ The fact that Rosbourg is such an unsavory character, and the fact that he gets involved with the even more unsavory Georges, functions as Beauvoir's implicit critique of the moral realist position which underlies the decision to sacrifice the useless mouths. At a deeper level, the fact that Rosbourg and Georges can justify their

actions by drawing analogies to the decision to expel the useless mouths shows that the original decision was wrong. One of the arguments Beauvoir made against violence and abominations is that they establish principles which can be universalized to apply to all humans. The justifications provided by Rosbourg and Georges play out this concern in practical terms.

The decision to expel the useless mouths shocks Jean-Pierre. When he protests that he does not want to survive on such terms, Catherine responds that he is responsible for the decision, because he chose not to involve himself. By refusing to guide the decision himself, Jean-Pierre tacitly consented to whatever the aldermen decided.⁴⁷⁵ At this point Jean-Pierre realizes that he cannot keep his hands clean. His only hope is to shift to a position of moral realism and engage in a shared struggle for the freedom of all.⁴⁷⁶ He declares his love for Clarice, exposes Georges and Rosbourg, and persuades the townspeople to arm themselves and attack the Burgundians. The play ends as they open the gates to set out on the attack. They know they are going to their probable, though not certain, deaths, but it does not matter. They have proved they value freedom by fighting for the freedom of all, they all recognize one another as free, and they share projects again. The husbands and wives who were separated by the decision to expel the useless mouths now fight side by side for each other.⁴⁷⁷

The Blood of Others

The Blood of Others covers the same themes as *Useless Mouths* but in a more fully developed way. As in *She Came to Stay*, Beauvoir plays with the form of the novel. The novel opens as Jean Blomart, the primary protagonist, sits at the bedside of his dying lover H el ene . Jean is the leader of a resistance cell fighting the Nazis. In the course of his resistance activities, he sent H el ene on a mission, in which she has been mortally wounded. Jean must now decide

whether to authorize another action. He knows that this action will require other members of his cell to risk their lives, and that the Germans will respond by executing hostages in reprisal. As he makes his decision, he reflects on the events that have brought him to this point, beginning with his childhood and proceeding chronologically toward the present. Jean's reflections do not take the form of simple narrative. His reflection on the past is dictated by his need to make a decision in the present. He frequently interjects commentary on his earlier self, and identifies his present self with that earlier self to greater or lesser degrees. Beauvoir's decision to tell the story of Jean's life in flashback form emphasizes the relation between action and temporality. When we act in the present, we project ourselves toward the future, on the basis of what we have done in the past. Authentic action establishes a continuity between past, present, and future. As we make decisions about the future, we also decide on the meaning of the past. If we choose to continue our past projects, we will see the past as a necessary precursor; if we choose to change directions, we will see our past as a history of mistakes to learn from. Jean reflects on his past because he is about to decide what it means.

Beauvoir alternates between Jean's reflections and scenes from Hélène's life. These scenes are ordered chronologically and begin a bit before Hélène meets Jean. This alternating structure reflects Beauvoir's ontology from *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, which was written at about the same time. There are multiple consciousnesses, and each appears to the other as part of the other's situation, to which the other must respond in turn. Because Hélène's life was intertwined with Jean's to a certain extent, Jean appears as a character in the scenes told from Hélène's point of view, just as Hélène appears as a character in the reflections told from Jean's point of view. The alternating structure enables us to see each character both from the inside and the outside, as consciousness and as situation. The alternating structure also emphasizes the absolute loss which

takes place when H  l  ne dies. The chapters told from H  l  ne's point of view enable us to see H  l  ne as unique. H  l  ne has experiences which Jean is not involved in, she faces problems which do not affect Jean, and as she solves these problems, she establishes a narrative in which she is the principal character. When H  l  ne dies, this unique perspective on the world is lost forever. The fact that we can see H  l  ne's death as an absolute loss allows us to see the weight of Jean's decision. Jean knows that the resistance fighters he is about to send on a mission, and the hostages who will be executed in reprisal, are unique and irreplaceable just as H  l  ne was.⁴⁷⁸

Jean is consumed by feelings of guilt. In part this guilt is based on Jean's situation. Jean's father is a respectable bourgeois and the owner of a print shop, and Jean knows that his education and his well-fed health have been paid for with the alienated labor of his father's workers.⁴⁷⁹ For the most part, however, Jean's guilt is ontological, grounded in the relations that necessarily exist between all human beings. The epigraph of *The Blood of Others* is a quote from Dostoevsky: each person is guilty for everything, before everyone. In *Pyrrhus and Cin  as*, Beauvoir explains this quote. Whatever I do, I exist for the other as the facticity of his situation, to which he must respond. All of our actions, and also all of our non-actions, have consequences for others.⁴⁸⁰ Merely by existing, Jean affects other people, so that their lives are different from what they otherwise would be. Furthermore, Jean is a subject who gives meaning to the world of which he is conscious. Therefore, every time he fails to care about something that has happened to somebody, for instance by eating his soup after his former nurse's baby has died, he constitutes this occurrence as unimportant.⁴⁸¹ Jean really wants not to exist; he wants not to need to make decisions. Jean sees guilt as universal. There are times when he feels guilty for things that are clearly not his fault – for instance when H  l  ne gets pregnant to spite him – or for failing to live up to expectations that are clearly unreasonable – for instance when H  l  ne demands that

he serve as a God-surrogate. From a moral standpoint, Jean can hardly have anything to feel guilty about in these situations: H  l  ne is a free being who freely chooses to create problems for herself. From an ontological standpoint, however, H  l  ne can still look at Jean as the person who has failed her, and her judgments about Jean become Jean's being-for-others whether they are fair or not.

The initial stage of Jean's development begins when he travels through the poorer sections of Paris and finds out how the proletarians live. Jean is horrified and speaks about revolt to his parents. Jean's reaction is due in part to simple human sympathy for the material suffering of others. At a deeper level, however, Jean also objects to the lack of agency on the part of the proletarians. Their lives are infinitely constrained between "endless blank walls." Their activity in the factories is not clearly directed toward any goal; from morning until night they repeat the same gesture over and over without really knowing why they do it. The proletarians themselves have been reduced to the level of things. The men place their hands palms down, the women's eyes are lifeless. They don't reach out to the world and change it; they are just physical objects. Because of this, their lives appear to Jean as absurd and without justification. Like the train that passes by images and then descends into a black tunnel, the proletarians seem to live and die for no reason. The situation of the proletarians corresponds to Beauvoir's account of oppression: the proletarians are denied the chance to justify their lives through creative action and forced to engage in repetitive activity to maintain the bourgeoisie. At an even deeper level, Jean reacts not only to the proletarians' lack of freedom, but to their acceptance of their lack of freedom. "They're used to it.' If they really were used to it, that only made it worse." Jean does not seem to blame the proletarians for abdicating their freedom; rather, he seems to think that this is just a consequence of the constrained situation in which they

find themselves.⁴⁸² In Beauvoir's terms, the oppression of the proletarians has caused them to become mystified, so that they no longer bother to question their oppressed situation.

Jean responds to this situation on both a personal and a political level. On a personal level, Jean renounces his privileges as the son of a respectable bourgeois and joins the proletariat. His decision has much in common with the moral idealist from "Moral Idealism and Political Realism." Jean serves as a martyr for his ideal. He pays for his beliefs, in the form of a life that is considerably less comfortable than it would have been if he had stayed home and agreed to inherit his father's business. Jean does not, however, think that renouncing his privileges will actually bring about any concrete improvements for the proletariat; his goal is simply to express his disapproval of those privileges. Jean's gesture is negative: he changes from bourgeois to proletarian to reject the privileges of the bourgeoisie. Jean has no intent to affirm the value of the proletariat by joining them; indeed he finds their situation inherently objectionable. His goal in leaving the bourgeoisie is to avoid action: Jean doesn't want to be complicit with a system he finds oppressive.⁴⁸³ Jean wants to be self-sufficient, to live only on what he earns through his own efforts, without relying on his privileges as a bourgeois.⁴⁸⁴ He strips away all that sets him apart from other people and reduces himself to the pure form of a man. His room is the pure form of a habitation: "the six surfaces necessary to make a cube, a hole for light to enter, another to allow me to enter it myself."⁴⁸⁵ His food, with its uniform taste of dubious cooking fat, is simply nourishment in general as opposed to any particular kind of food.⁴⁸⁶ Jean tries to become a man in general: he wants to shed his background as the son of a bourgeois and become just like the rest of the workers. Jean has no particular projects: he even says that he is not trying particularly to serve a purpose.⁴⁸⁷ Of course Jean can't totally shed his privileged upbringing, but when his friend Marcel points this out, Jean responds that "I shall, at

least, have done everything I could.”⁴⁸⁸ Jean here takes the Kantian position that the consequences of an action aren’t really important; what matters is simply the intent.

On a political level, Jean joins the Communist Party as an ordinary member. The official party platform is one of moral realism: the success of the coming revolution serves as an absolute end. This moral realism can best be seen in Jean’s friend and comrade Paul Perrier. Paul sees all people, including himself, as ordinary. He thinks that his membership in the party is a natural consequence of his proletarian background; he even thinks of his love for his girlfriend H el ene as the natural consequence of physical attraction.⁴⁸⁹ H el ene remarks to Blomart that Paul sees people as ants in an ant-heap.⁴⁹⁰ Paul only loses his sense of proportion when he talks about the Party: then he can go on for hours.⁴⁹¹ The result of this attitude is that Paul is too willing to resort to violence. People are all alike, spilling the blood of one is the same as spilling the blood of another, and the price in lives will never be too high when compared to the goals of the Party. People are simply means to an end.⁴⁹²

Jean’s own membership in the party is always somewhat problematic. He seems to be attracted to the party primarily because it promises to end the social and economic injustices for which he feels responsible. The party is a political, as opposed to personal, method of keeping his hands clean. Thus Jean views the party platform in much the same way that a moral realist views his Kantian maxims. Jean conceives of the goals of the party as though they were idols in an intelligible heaven. He wants justice, and moreover he wants perfect justice: it is impossible to carve out a just fate in an unjust world.⁴⁹³ This just world, like the noumenal world of idols inscribed in an intelligible heaven, is a “purified world.” Jean conceives of this purified world in strictly negative terms: “No more war, no more unemployment, no more servile work, no more poverty.” He never says what will be in this future world, which suggests that he hasn’t

considered the question. Jean also seems to conceive of this purified world as static in nature. Jean may chorus, “Tomorrow, the *Internationale* will be the human race,” but he seems to have no clear idea of what people will do once that happens. Apparently, the *Internationale* will simply be the human race forevermore and that will be enough. Jean’s ideal world is a world where there is no need for action; his desire to bring it about comes from his desire to avoid acting. Jean separates this ideal world from his own existence as a particular being in the phenomenal world. Jean admits that, as a bourgeois, he personally has no stake in the triumph of communism, but he rejects this consideration as irrelevant: the important thing is to realize the goals of the party.⁴⁹⁴

The result of separating the ideal from the world in this way is that Jean fails to think in terms of the situation he is in and the likely consequences of his actions. Jean has evident speaking and organizational skills, and Marcel’s brother Jacques, as an intellectual who reads Hegel, is ideally suited to serve as a theorist. The Party, however, needs lungs and fists, so Jean and Jacques, who are effete bourgeois unused to brawling, get into fights at political meetings.⁴⁹⁵ The result is that Jacques, who has no business carrying a gun, gets shot and killed in a brawl.⁴⁹⁶ Jacques, who joined the Communist Party to imitate Jean, winds up serving as the ultimate martyr for an ideal.⁴⁹⁷ Jean’s comrades tell him that Jacques died for the Party and so on, but Jean sees Jacques as an individual whose loss is irreplaceable and irredeemable: he was Marcel’s only brother, and nothing will ever bring him back.⁴⁹⁸

Jean’s eventual response to Jacques’ death is trade-unionism. Jean’s goal in his trade-union stage is still to alleviate the lack of freedom he first saw while riding the Paris subway. In fact there is a scene where Jean revisits those same streets and sees them animated by the freedom of his colleagues.⁴⁹⁹ Jean now realizes, however, that he cannot pursue freedom

through means that deny freedom. This leads Jean to reject both politics and violence, because both relate to people from the outside, as things rather than freedoms. In the political demonstration from Chapter Three, we see people “caught up in a crowd,” existing as a mass rather than as a collection of individuals.⁵⁰⁰ Jean, following Kant and Beauvoir, sees each person in the crowd as unique. The masses are made up of people who exist as individuals; it isn’t a matter of numbers.⁵⁰¹ When even one of these people dies, it is an absolute loss, which no future victory can compensate. Jean wants a society where people “organize themselves from within.”⁵⁰² He wants freedom for all, but he wants to reach freedom for all only through the free action of all.

Jean comes closest to realizing this ideal in the trade-union strike early in Chapter Three. In the strike, we see each of the workers engaged in their own activities – some play cards, some smoke, Portal heats food, Laurent writes. In other words we see them as individuals. Each of these individuals follows his own will, but these wills nevertheless harmonize in collective action.⁵⁰³ From small strikes like this in individual factories, the movement will spread to the whole of France, and then the whole world.⁵⁰⁴ Jean now has an alternative model of political action, which builds up from small-scale action to large-scale movement, rather than starting with an ideal and then fitting people into that ideal. The fact that Jean’s model of political action builds up from small-scale action highlights the fact that it is ultimately grounded in the free choices of individuals. Jean’s trade-union activities still, however, preserve many of the tendencies of moral idealism. Jean still has a martyr complex. He is annoyed when H el ene is allowed to visit him, because he does not want to take advantage of an exception to the rules, which would put him above his fellow strikers.⁵⁰⁵ Jean feels the need to disown his role in shaping the views of his fellow workers: he is simply the mouthpiece through which they express

their own desires.⁵⁰⁶ If Jean saw himself as playing an active role in convincing his fellow-workers to unionize, then he would see himself as acting on them from the outside, and therefore limiting their freedom. He would also, on a more practical level, see himself as responsible for the risks and hardships that a strike entails. Jean still has a predilection for self-sufficiency, except that now, instead of his own self-sufficiency, Jean emphasizes the self-sufficiency of the strikers.⁵⁰⁷ The strike itself is, in some sense, a negative action. Jean objects to the present capitalist system, and the workers, through their strike, show that they have the ability to refrain from participating in that system. The speech Jean gives at the rally, full of fine phrases, shows that he still views his ideals as idols. Jean believes that a wave of goodwill will sweep throughout the entire world, leading to a glorious and negatively-defined future without war, violence, dictatorship, or political divisions.⁵⁰⁸

Jean's trade-union activity seems to work in Chapter Three because he takes a very local perspective. His own trade union, and the other trade unions he meets at the rally in Chapter Three, all share his ideals and his methods. He has already rejected Paul's Communism, he doesn't take Marcel's cynicism seriously, and the bourgeoisie are oppressors and so don't count. Once Jean takes a wider view, however, he runs into trouble. The basic problem is that it is impossible to treat everyone as an end in a world full of violence. The Nazis are overrunning central Europe and Jean, as the leader of an effective union movement, must decide what position to take on that issue. If Jean throws the weight of his union behind war, then he will save the Austrians, but his own union members will have to fight. If Jean throws the weight of his union behind peace, then his own union members will be spared from fighting, but Austria will be overrun. Either way Jean treats somebody as a means. If the union members become soldiers, then they will be reduced to the level of things, risking their bodies to resist the bodies

of the enemy, but if Austria is overrun, the Austrians will lose their freedom living in a totalitarian regime. Jean chooses peace, but he sees this decision as unsatisfactory, because he knows what is happening in Austria.⁵⁰⁹

Jean faces similar problems in his personal life. Jean's main goal in his personal life is to avoid infringing on the freedom of others. To this end, Jean has very carefully set up his social life so he is surrounded by people who make no demands upon him. His lover Madeline never does anything and places no value on herself, so she never asks Jean for anything, and cannot lose anything as a result of her association with Jean.⁵¹⁰ His friend Marcel pursues his own projects with an insane intensity, but Jean is always pretty sure that Marcel never does anything but what he wants, so there is no real need to be concerned about him.⁵¹¹ Marcel's wife Denise only makes demands on Marcel. Then Jean meets Paul's girlfriend H el ene. H el ene does make demands on Jean: she demands to be necessary to his existence.⁵¹² H el ene wants to find a substitute for the absolute justification she felt as a child when she devoted herself to God. Paul makes a poor substitute, but Jean, because of his heroic efforts to rid himself of the advantages that set him above his fellow men, ironically appears to H el ene as a special individual.⁵¹³ Because H el ene makes demands on Jean, Jean is put in a position where he has to respond to that demand. This, in Jean's eyes, amounts to constraining her freedom. No matter what he does, Jean creates for H el ene a situation which she did not choose, but which she must respond to.⁵¹⁴ Of course, Jean also creates the situation for Madeline, Marcel, and Denise, but our projects define which parts of our situation are important to us, and Jean doesn't figure into the projects pursued by Madeline, Marcel, and Denise in any significant way. Their possible range of actions will remain pretty much unchanged no matter what Jean does. In contrast, Jean's actions are central to H el ene's project.

Jean's first response is to push H  l  ne away. He hopes that she will forget about him, making his actions irrelevant to her as they are irrelevant to Madeline, Marcel, and Denise.⁵¹⁵ Jean also tries to refrain from action by pushing H  l  ne away. His hope is that, by not acting, he will not create any situation for H  l  ne.⁵¹⁶ For Beauvoir, however, there is no such thing as inaction: refusing to do something also creates a situation. H  l  ne responds to Jean's rejection by sleeping with P  trus, which leads to pregnancy and an illegal abortion.⁵¹⁷

Jean's next response is to become H  l  ne's accomplice. Jean simply goes along with H  l  ne's wishes. Jean now knows that he cannot avoid creating a situation for H  l  ne, but he still hopes that, if the situation he creates for her is the exact situation she would choose for herself, then at least this situation won't appear as a constraint to her. The best example of this is the first time Jean and H  l  ne make love. H  l  ne makes it clear that this is what she wants, so Jean feels no guilt.⁵¹⁸ There are, however, several problems with Jean's program of becoming H  l  ne's accomplice. First, H  l  ne wants to be necessary to Jean's life, and this is simply impossible. Devotion is doomed to failure.⁵¹⁹ Second, all action creates a situation, so Jean constrains H  l  ne's freedom even when he goes along with her wishes. So, for instance, Jean makes H  l  ne promise that she will never turn down a promotion because of him. He doesn't want to weigh on H  l  ne's life as an obstacle to her advancement. When H  l  ne does get a promotion to a job in America, however, she has already been with Jean for two years, and so she turns it down to stay with him. Of course, H  l  ne wanted the relationship with Jean, but by following her wishes, he allowed her to forge ties with him, which eventually outweighed her desire for promotion.⁵²⁰ Third and most importantly, there are multiple people in the world, with opposed projects, so Jean cannot become the accomplice of all of them. When Jean's relationship with H  l  ne becomes more serious, Paul thinks Jean meant to steal H  l  ne from him

all along, and Madeline goes back to using drugs.⁵²¹ During the war, when H el ene gets Jean moved away from the front into a safe job as a proof-reader, Jean's fellow soldiers look on him as an impostor. The only way Jean can get out of that situation is by breaking with H el ene.⁵²² No matter what he does, Jean is going to weigh on somebody's life in a way that person finds unwelcome.

Jean finally comes to a third solution, in the form of his resistance cell. In this third phase of his career, Jean is still motivated by the desire for freedom. He resists the occupation because a world ruled by the Nazis is a world without freedom. There are no men; there are only animals.⁵²³ Jean's goal in forming the resistance cell is to contest this vision of the world and prove that people are still free.⁵²⁴ Jean now realizes, however, that he must pursue freedom by getting his hands dirty. Before, Jean's goal has always been to purify himself, to be self-sufficient, to avoid weighing down on other people. Now, Jean is interested in weighing down on the earth in a definite way. Jean takes action to bring about the freedom he values. He forms a group which goes out into the world and blows things up. This action is ultimately positive action. Jean is clear that the ultimate goal of his resistance group is to influence the way France is rebuilt after the war. The negative acts of resistance they take in the present are simply the first step in this process. Jean and the resistance cell are fighting today so that they will be strong tomorrow.⁵²⁵

Because he is interested in weighing down on the world in a definite way, Jean pays attention to his situation in a way he never has before. Jean argues that the group must commit violent acts because this is what the situation demands. The Germans rule through violence and so can only be resisted through violence.⁵²⁶ Jean also demands that these attacks should be carried out on highly visible targets because his real aim is to communicate with others. He

wants the French to think of the Germans as enemies, and in order to bring this about, the French have to see the acts of sabotage and the reprisals that follow.⁵²⁷ Jean also seriously considers the material he has to work with. A notable fact about the resistance cell, especially in the light of Jacques' death, is that everybody does the job to which they are ideally suited. Jean has excellent motivational and organizational skills; he serves as leader. Hélène has always loved riding bicycles; she serves as the driver. Jean's father is a capitalist; he provides the means of production, in this case his printing press. Marcel's main talent is to be obtrusively present; his job is to sit on a safe house for the group.⁵²⁸ Another way to say this is that people are spared from performing jobs they would be bad at. Marcel, who would turn bombs into art projects if given the chance, is not given any job within the group. Jean, whose leadership skills make him the most irreplaceable member of the group, has never risked his life after going out on the first and safest mission.⁵²⁹ Rather than trying to get rid of his bourgeois past and pretend he is just another proletarian, Jean assumes his bourgeois past and tries to put it to use.

Jean acts in situation, and the result is success. This is true in the most concrete terms, because in the one mission we see, Jean does significant damage to the Germans with no damage to his own organization.⁵³⁰ Since then, Jean's organization has suffered losses but also inflicted damages, and Jean obviously thinks his organization is still on the positive side of the ledger, or else he would have stopped his activities. Jean manages to weigh on the world in the way that he wants. Paul tells him that news of the attacks reaches prisoners in the camps and cheers them up immensely.⁵³¹ The severity of the reprisals also shows Jean's success in achieving communication. In the group's first action, all Jean does is throw a homemade bomb into a café full of Germans, but the Germans obviously take this as a very clear message they are still at war, because they call it an "outrage" and publicly announce their intent to kill twenty-four

hostages.⁵³² At a deeper level, Jean has realized his dream of a community in which everybody acts together, but each person acts for their own reasons. Jean acts to prove he is not a coward. Hélène acts to prove that she won't stand by and let other people die to save her own skin. M. Blomart acts out of his bourgeois version of French nationalism. Marcel acts because he has realized that an artist needs an audience that is free to respond to him. Denise acts to be alongside Marcel.⁵³³ In other words, the various members of Jean's resistance cell all have personal, as opposed to impersonal, stakes in what is going on.

Jean's decision to act in situation also, however, carries several negative consequences. First, Jean has to abandon the idea of a millennial end-state where everything will magically work out. Jean now works for a temporally bounded goal, the end of fascism, and he realizes that once that goal has been reached, his trade-union allies will fight it out with the communists and the bourgeoisie for the future of France.⁵³⁴ Jean still works for freedom, but he no longer thinks he'll ever get there. Second, Jean loses the certainty of success. When his main goal is to make a speech or to do everything he can to rid himself of his bourgeois background, Jean can be assured of success simply by making the gesture. His goal now, however, is to stop fascism, and this project will fail if the Germans win the war. This failure, in turn, will affect the meaning of Jean's projects. If the Allies win the war, then the actions of Jean's group will appear as heroic resistance, which contributed to the victory. If the Germans win the war, however, then the actions of Jean's group will appear as useless crimes, which merely made life more dangerous for no valid reason.⁵³⁵ Third, Jean loses the possibility of perfect success. Jean fights for freedom, but he uses violent methods, and violence also entails a loss of freedom. Every resistance action requires the members of Jean's group to put their own lives at risk. In the most recent action described in the novel, Denise and Hélène drive a truck to rescue Paul, and Hélène

is mortally wounded in the attempt. Even more problematically, Jean's form of violent resistance invites reprisal killings of hostages, and Jean intends this as one of the consequences of his acts. Jean considers the deaths of the hostages to be justifiable, because they ultimately serve the cause of freedom, but the fact remains that the hostages die and they did not consent to their deaths.⁵³⁶

All Men Are Mortal

Beauvoir wrote *All Men Are Mortal* in late 1945. It is very different in both tone and theme from "Useless Mouths" and *The Blood of Others*. The novel begins with Régine, an extremely narcissistic character, who essentially feels that she needs other people to look at her in order to exist. This feeling has determined her choice to become an actress: she wants to exist in the eyes of her audience. Then Régine meets an immortal man named Raymond Fosca. She realizes that, if she can make Fosca love her, she will exist forever in his eyes. She gives up her stage career in order to pursue Fosca. Fosca tries to avoid her, but she chases him down, and Fosca finally agrees to tell her the story of his life. The bulk of the novel consists of Fosca's narration of his life to Régine, with short interjections by Régine to mark the end of each chapter.⁵³⁷

Fosca's narrative reveals that immortality, which might seem like a blessing, is actually a curse. Because of his immortality, Fosca actually realizes the standpoint of the absolute. Ordinary mortals face a limited situation. We are confined to our own time and place and social milieu. Fosca, on the other hand, has no limitations. He already knows that he will be alive at all future times. He knows that he will see an infinite variety of places and meet an infinite number of people in the infinite amount of time that stretches before him. Fosca truly views the

world *sub specie aeternatis*. At every moment of his life, all people and places and things are equally present to him, because he knows that he will be around to experience them all. Because this is true of every single moment of his life, one moment is no different from any other, so there is nothing to mark the passage of time for him. In Hegelian terms, there is no negation. With no way to set limits to his projects, Fosca has no way to make some parts of his world stand out as more important than others, and so he is completely unable to find any meaning in anything. Fosca's disastrous life since his decision to become immortal thus serves as Beauvoir's critique of Hegel's absolute. As Fosca gradually reveals how he came to see his immortality as a curse, Régine gradually comes to see herself as implicated in this curse: by abandoning her finite goals, and choosing to involve herself with an immortal man, she has condemned herself to exist forever as an insignificant speck in Fosca's infinite universe. Fosca's narrative is, however, also open to a more positive interpretation. Because we are mortal, we are free to reject Fosca's unlimited perspective, and engage in limited actions which give meaning to our own lives by reaching out toward others.⁵³⁸

Fosca was born in 1279 to a noble family in the fictional Italian town of Carmona. Fosca eventually assumes the role of ruler, and seeks to turn Carmona into a great city, but he realizes that, as a mortal being, he can only make a very limited contribution. Fosca therefore sets his scientists to work on finding the "cure" for mortality. Eventually an old beggar, who has been sentenced to death, offers Fosca the cure in exchange for his life. Fosca attempts to use his newfound immortality to carry out his program for Carmona, but this enterprise runs into problems. First, it is not really clear what is good for Carmona. Fosca first tries to turn Carmona into a military power. In order to finance his wars he is forced to deprive his subjects.⁵³⁹ At one point Fosca even expels the women and children in order to save food during a siege.⁵⁴⁰ Then

Fosca comes to realize that there is no point in military glory if it makes his subjects unhappy. He changes tactics and tries to encourage trade.⁵⁴¹ Carmona becomes prosperous but vegetates in the shadow of its more militant neighbors.⁵⁴² Second, Fosca comes to realize that the fate of Carmona is tied to events in the larger world. Italy consists of a number of city-states – Carmona, Genoa, Florence – vying for control of the region. Because these city-states fight amongst each other, they weaken Italy as a whole in its struggle with France and the Hapsburgs.⁵⁴³ Fosca values both Carmona and Italy, but fighting for Carmona means fighting against Italy and vice-versa. Third, no matter what Fosca does, he does not make any essential difference in the lives of his subjects. In the two hundred years Fosca rules Carmona, he makes the city more populous and more prosperous, but not happier. If anything, the more his subjects have, the more inclined they become to engage in petty squabbles amongst themselves.⁵⁴⁴

Fosca faces similar problems in his personal life. His first son Tancredo tries to assassinate him in order to take over leadership of Carmona.⁵⁴⁵ A few centuries later, he has a son named Antonio, and adopts a young girl named Beatrice as his ward. Fosca tries to make them happy but finds that they are only interested in things which they do for themselves. He lets them live in his palace, but they sneak out at night to roam the palace grounds. He tries to protect Antonio, but Antonio tries to swim a lake and nearly drowns. He offers Beatrice precious jewels, but she prefers to improve herself by reading.⁵⁴⁶ Eventually Antonio demands to be allowed to rule Carmona in his own right, and Fosca, remembering Tancredo, abdicates in his favor. Antonio leads Carmona into war, wins a great victory but is mortally wounded in the process, and dies happy in the knowledge that he has accomplished his goal. Soon the fruits of Antonio's victory are lost in diplomatic wrangling. Fosca is determined not to make the same

mistake again. He marries Beatrice and tries to force her to be happy. The eventual result is that Beatrice spends all her time painting miniatures to stop herself from thinking.⁵⁴⁷

After two centuries of rule, Fosca no longer sees the point in merely leading Carmona. There are plenty of cities in the world: why should Carmona matter more than any other?⁵⁴⁸ Fosca becomes the tutor to Charles V and tries to unite the entire world under the Holy Roman Empire and the Catholic Church. This is the only goal that is really suitable for him. He is an infinite being and so must set himself an infinite project.⁵⁴⁹ Rome and Catholicism, with their pretensions to universality, suit this project very well. Fosca is a benevolent despot. He desires a world that is, like himself, without negations, and so he seeks to unite the world into a single prosperous whole where everyone lives in harmony with everyone else.⁵⁵⁰ This project ends in failure. In order to unite the world, Fosca must first remove all the negations. He must bribe electors and crush rebellions. Fosca responds by adopting the standpoint of the political realist. He takes his end seriously. The roads, cities, and canals of the Holy Roman Empire will remain on the earth forever, whereas the people he has to sacrifice to finance his building projects will die in a few years anyway.⁵⁵¹ Because he takes his end seriously, Fosca is willing to use means that totally negate the original meaning of his project, as when he advises Charles V to make an alliance with Protestants against Catholics in order to promote the growth of the Holy Roman Empire.⁵⁵²

Through the course of his political work, Fosca finally comes to realize that his goal of uniting the world is misguided. He offers people a perfect world, but people do not really want a perfect world, they want to feel alive. People want to project themselves toward limited futures.⁵⁵³ In one incident, Fosca besieges a town, but the inhabitants sneak out at night and leave Fosca to conquer empty walls. When Fosca asks the one remaining inhabitant, an old lady

who was unable to flee, why the town would resist him when all the other towns he has conquered are prospering, the old lady says her town is different.⁵⁵⁴ In another incident, Fosca meets Luther, and comes to realize that his persuasive power comes, not from any personal magnetism or theological brilliance, but from his underlying message that people should judge for themselves.⁵⁵⁵ Later, he meets the Anabaptist Enoch, who looks at Fosca's perfect world and decides that humans must destroy it simply to have something to do. When Fosca tries to remonstrate with a Lutheran monk that Luther's message has created fanatics such as Enoch, the monk responds that the only good is to judge according to one's conscience.⁵⁵⁶ The fact that people are free means that they will always be divided against each other. As long as each person judges according to his own conscience, they will come up with different answers. This means that, from Fosca's point of view, there will be no progress, because this ontological condition will never change. We can only see progress and decay, we can only judge one situation to be better or worse than another, if we focus on the particular and changeable features of our situation, as opposed to the unchanging ontological features. This limited viewpoint is always available to mortals because we are limited beings, but Fosca, as an immortal being, does not have access to this point of view.

Unable to create a perfect world for humans, Fosca instead tries to accompany humans on their own projects. While wandering around the New World, Fosca encounters the explorer Carlier, looking for the Northwest Passage. Carlier eventually succeeds in finding the Mississippi River, aided in part by Fosca's ability to bear deprivations that would kill a mortal man. His encounter with Fosca, however, causes Carlier to see things from Fosca's perspective, and he loses interest in his discovery. Fosca cannot see any project as meaningful. He always looks at things from the standpoint of the distant future, where every limited project will

eventually simply end. If every project will eventually end, however, then there seems to be no good reason to begin.⁵⁵⁷ Fosca also poses more specific problems for Carlier. Carlier's project depends crucially on time – he wants to be the first person to discover the Northwest Passage – but time is meaningless to Fosca. To Fosca, the river was always there, and somebody would have found it eventually.⁵⁵⁸ Carlier's project also depends on risk: finding the Northwest Passage matters because it is hard and dangerous to do. Fosca, however, does not need to risk death or hardship to find the river, so there was no great merit in finding it, and insofar as Carlier found the river with Fosca's help, it cheapens Carlier's accomplishment as well.⁵⁵⁹ Finally, Carlier's project depends on other people. The reason explorers wanted to find the Northwest Passage was that it would open up new trade routes and thus open new possibilities to people. Fosca, however, already knows it is impossible to benefit people in any essential way. Eventually Carlier refuses to accept Fosca's help even to save his own life.⁵⁶⁰

A century or so after unintentionally destroying Carlier, Fosca falls in love with an energetic young reformer named Marianne. Fosca hides his immortality and tries to live a mortal life alongside her. His love for Marianne briefly reconnects him to the temporality and the limitations of ordinary humans. It is important for him to make scientific discoveries and spur political progress while Marianne is still around to see it.⁵⁶¹ Eventually, however, Marianne discovers his secret and it destroys her in the same way it has destroyed everyone else in his life. Fosca cannot truly establish a reciprocal relationship with Marianne. Marianne devotes her whole life to Fosca; Fosca can give no more than an infinitesimal fragment of his life to Marianne. Marianne continues to love Fosca even after she knows his secret, however, and so Fosca's worldview continues to matter to Marianne. She is condemned to see herself as an infinitesimal and ultimately insignificant particle in Fosca's infinite universe.⁵⁶² Fosca's

perspective also makes Marianne's projects irrelevant. She does not see it as important to make scientific discoveries because somebody will make them someday.⁵⁶³ Fosca also knows that Marianne's belief in the infinite power of Enlightenment reason is mistaken. Reason can no more unite the world than Catholic dogma.⁵⁶⁴

Before she dies, Marianne tells Fosca that his only hope is to live as a man among men.⁵⁶⁵ Fosca tries. He falls in with a group of revolutionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, and makes significant contributions to their cause, but ultimately realizes that he has nothing in common with them and leaves. Through his abortive attempts to forge connections with other people, Fosca comes to realize that, in order to want something for other people, you have to want it with them.⁵⁶⁶ As mortal beings, we live within an already existing world saturated with human meanings, and our own projects have meaning because they enter into this world. Our actions enter into the human world because we ourselves are part of the human world. Because we are part of the human world, we have the same needs, wants, hopes, and fears as any other member of the world. Communication is only possible with people whom we see as peers, and because peers are similar to us, when we want something for them, we want it for ourselves as well. This kind of relationship, however, is impossible for Fosca because of his immortality. Fosca cannot truly interact with the human world. Beatrice tells Fosca that, although he is generous with his wealth, he has so much that it doesn't matter. Fosca can never truly give a gift because he can never truly give something up. He will have an infinite amount of wealth in his infinitely long life.⁵⁶⁷ The point does not come up, but nobody can do anything for Fosca either, because he has no needs. Fosca cannot interact with the human world because he is not *of* the human world. Fosca sees the limits of all mortal projects and so cannot share in them. He can use human language but he knows that words do not have the same meanings for him as for other

people.⁵⁶⁸ For instance, when Marianne promises to love him forever, she means something very different than Fosca would mean.⁵⁶⁹ Even Fosca's body is different from a mortal human body. Fosca has a normal human form, but normal human bodies are vulnerable and changeable, whereas Fosca's is not.⁵⁷⁰

The result is that Fosca spends most of his time in a sleeplike state because he cannot bring himself to care about anything. Fosca spends four years aimlessly wandering the prairie before meeting Carlier, and after Carlier's death, he spends several generations living quietly with the Native Americans. In the nineteenth century Fosca serves ten years in prison. As an immortal being, he could easily have escaped, but he didn't see any reason to bother escaping. In the early twentieth century, he spends thirty years in a mental hospital. When we first meet Fosca in the present, he spends all his days sitting in a café staring blankly into space.⁵⁷¹ He rarely breaks out of this slumber. When Laure offers to love him in the nineteenth century, in the full knowledge that he will never be able to give her anything and will forget all about her in a few thousand years, he rejects her love because he cannot bring himself to care about a being who will die.⁵⁷² He has a brief fling with an actress in the mid twentieth-century present but quickly loses interest in her. She is just one face among the countless multitudes he will meet in his life; there is nothing special about her.⁵⁷³ Fosca's almost total inertia represents Beauvoir's criticism of the perfect end-state. In a world without limitations, we would stop caring about anything at all.

Fosca can't change, but Armand, the mortal great-grandchild of Fosca and Marianne, can. Armand starts out as a moral idealist. When we first meet him, the revolution of 1832 has been co-opted by the bourgeoisie, and Armand decides to shoot the Duke of Orleans out of desperation to prove that he can do something. Fosca stops him on the grounds that this would

be a useless gesture.⁵⁷⁴ Armand emerges as an exemplar of moral realism. He values freedom. “I like to see the sun shining. I like rivers and the sea. How can anyone sit back and allow those magnificent forces that are in man to be choked off?”⁵⁷⁵ Armand also recognizes that action also has to be efficacious. His goal is to increase his grasp upon the future as much as he can. At one point Armand criticizes one of his fellow revolutionaries who chooses to die at the barricades in an unsuccessful rebellion rather than live to fight another day. This decision was wrong, according to Armand, because it did not project itself toward any future.⁵⁷⁶ Armand, in contrast, sees each failed attempt to incite a revolution as a chance to learn what to do differently the next time.⁵⁷⁷ He forms long-term plans, carefully laying the groundwork so that, when the next uprising does happen, his faction will be in a better position to turn it to their advantage.⁵⁷⁸ This attitude protects him in his interactions with Fosca. In contrast to everyone else who has met Fosca, Armand simply uses Fosca for his own ends, without being troubled by his jaded perspective on things.⁵⁷⁹ Because Fosca cannot really lose anything, Armand feels no compunction in asking Fosca to run risks and accept deprivations which would be too great to ask of a mortal man.⁵⁸⁰ Finally, Armand works with other people. At one point he chooses to stay in prison in order to forge connections with other revolutionary groups.⁵⁸¹ When Fosca asks Armand why he fights for others, Armand explains to Fosca that he fights together with others, toward the common goal of freedom for all.⁵⁸²

Armand is able to succeed because he affirms the limitations of his project. His goal is simply to make other people free. He realizes that, after they have been given their freedom, the people of the future will use their freedom in ways he cannot anticipate, but he affirms that the accomplishment of his project is enough for him. As Armand says to Fosca: “If I knew that in fifty years it would be against the law to employ children in factories, against the law for men to

work more than ten hours a day, if I knew that the people were free to choose their own representatives, that the press would be free, I would be completely satisfied.”⁵⁸³ Armand knows, along with Fosca, that any such victory will be temporary, and that eventually all of his work will be undone, but he refuses to regard this as a reason not to act. Whatever happens in the distant future, Armand can make life better for the people of today, and that benefit will matter to them. Armand celebrates when the revolution of 1848 succeeds. He knows that the victory is nothing more than a temporary success, and that the revolutionaries will have to fight again tomorrow, but this doesn’t keep the victory from being a genuine victory.⁵⁸⁴

Chapter 5. Critical Assessment

The preceding chapters discussed Beauvoir's moral period works. Beauvoir herself would later harshly criticize these works, and much of the secondary literature on Beauvoir has shared her unfavorable assessment. Commentators have found the moral period works to be deficient in themselves, and deficient in comparison to Beauvoir's later works such as *The Second Sex* and *The Coming of Age*. In this last chapter I will seek to defend the moral period works against some of the more common criticisms that have been made against them. There are two ways to respond to these criticisms. On a strictly philosophical level, Beauvoir's moral period philosophy is more flexible than Beauvoir or her critics give it credit for. On a historical level, if we put Beauvoir's moral period philosophy into its historical context, then we can see how the apparently objectionable features of the works actually make sense. In this chapter, I will start by laying out the criticisms of Beauvoir's moral period philosophy, then respond to these criticisms on a purely philosophical level, and then conclude by placing the moral period philosophy in its historical context.

Criticisms of the Moral Period

There are three major criticisms that seem to be made of Beauvoir's moral period philosophy. The first is that Beauvoir's moral period philosophy is overly abstract. The substance of this objection is that Beauvoir's goal in her moral period works, as Nancy Bauer points out, is to produce a universal ethics rather than to solve particular ethical problems. She wants to find rules that are valid for all human beings. Therefore Beauvoir is primarily concerned with the general ontological features all people share. These general features will serve as a basis for universal ethical principles.⁵⁸⁵ Differences in situation, although present,

figure only as different backgrounds against which a free self must make decisions.⁵⁸⁶ Because there are an infinite variety of possible situations, Beauvoir's rules have to take the form of general guidelines, as opposed to specific suggestions for what to do in specific circumstances. In the third section of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir merely gives us a "guiding thread" to follow when deciding how to act, a few examples by way of illustration, and then leaves it up to us to figure out how to respond to the situations we encounter in our own lives. Given that she wants her rules to be universal, this is all Beauvoir can be expected to do, but we can still ask why Beauvoir assumes that ethics has to consist of universal rules in the first place.

The abstract character of the moral period works has consequences for the form of the works as well as the content. In her moral period works, Beauvoir looks at people on an abstract level, at which all people are basically the same. This means Beauvoir herself is basically the same as her readers, so she can speak directly to her readers, without needing to worry about her subject position. Beauvoir sees herself as part of the universal and this allows her to speak in the universal voice of philosophy. Thus the moral period works are relatively straightforward in form: there is one universal truth and Beauvoir tells us what it is. In later works such as *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir looks at people on a more concrete level, at which (among other things) it is perfectly obvious that they are divided into men and women, and because of this she realizes that it will take a lot of work even to establish a position from which she can speak. Bauer and Moi have done a good deal of work to analyze the complex form of *The Second Sex*. Both have shown how Beauvoir adapts Descartes's method for her own purposes; Moi also shows how Beauvoir uses irony to establish a position from which to speak. This difference in form has a moral dimension. Bauer and Moi both see the form of *The Second Sex* as an expression of

humility, which implies that the very different form of the moral period works is an expression of arrogance, a point which Bauer makes explicit.

The abstract character of the moral period works causes Beauvoir to ignore problems which exist primarily at the societal level. The important point, for the moral period Beauvoir, is the ontological fact that each of us lives in a situation which we must transcend toward our future possibilities. On this view, the fact that we are members of a certain sex, or class, or race, or age group is simply part of our situation, just as the fact that each of us has certain intellectual and physical abilities is part of our situation. Of course each of us faces a different situation, but this fact exists at a lower level of abstraction, which Beauvoir is not interested in. Because she is not interested in the particularities of our situation, Beauvoir does not need to give an analysis of the way people are divided into different groups, or to propose specific responses to the limitations imposed on specific groups. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, for instance, Beauvoir simply claims that most Western women abdicate their freedom, and seems to suggest that they ought to show more courage. The fact of being a woman appears as part of an individual situation which must be dealt with on an individual basis. In the later works, in contrast, Beauvoir looks at people at a lower level of abstraction, at which it becomes apparent that people are divided up into groups, and that members of different groups face very different situations. Because she can now see these systematic differences between people, she thinks it worthwhile to look at these differences in detail, and to suggest specific changes which function at the level of the group. *The Second Sex* gives an account of the specific situation which women face, a detailed account of the way in which women abdicate their freedom and the reasons which lead them to do so, and makes concrete suggestions for systemic change.

The second major criticism of Beauvoir's moral period philosophy is that it is overly idealistic. Beauvoir herself makes this criticism in her autobiography. She criticizes *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* for "a streak of idealism that deprived my speculations of all, or nearly all, their significance."⁵⁸⁷ She is even more critical of her articles for *Les temps modernes*: "Why did I write concrete liberty instead of bread, and subordinate the will to live to a search for the meaning of life? I never brought matters down to saying: People must eat because they are hungry."⁵⁸⁸ The substance of this criticism is that the moral period works accord too much weight to spiritual values and not enough weight to our material needs. The early Beauvoir says that man does not live on bread alone, and in practical terms this means that she often thinks we should choose to go without bread. The citizens of Vaucelles risk their lives for freedom, Hélène risks her life for freedom, Fosca makes Carmona prosper and thinks he has accomplished nothing. At a deeper level, the point is not only that Beauvoir accords too little weight to our material needs, but that she conceptualizes our material needs in a way which makes them subordinate to our spiritual needs. In the moral period works, the main value is freedom. Material deprivations only matter because they deprive us of the ability to expand our freedom; they do not matter as deprivations in their own right. For instance, the early Beauvoir sees hunger as a problem because it is a form of oppression, which prevents the hungry person from engaging in projects, and thus costs both him and me the ability to expand our freedom. This means that our material needs must compete on equal footing with our spiritual needs, and can easily be outweighed. In Beauvoir's later works, in contrast, material needs carry moral weight in their own right. The later Beauvoir says that the most important ethical problem is hunger. The important point is not only that Beauvoir identifies hunger as an ethical problem, but that she identifies hunger as an ethical problem in its own right, and not merely as an ethical problem

because it limits our freedom. The result is that the later Beauvoir shows more concern with strictly material problems.

The third major criticism of Beauvoir's moral period works is that they are overly individualistic. Beauvoir seems to think of people as isolated individuals who subsequently enter into connection with each other. In particular, Beauvoir seems to think that we make decisions on an individual basis. The external world figures into our decisions, but only as a situation we have to respond to, not as an influence on our choices.⁵⁸⁹ As Beauvoir says, "in my essay [*Pyrrhus and Cinéas*], co-existence appears as a sort of accident that each individual should somehow surmount; he should begin by hammering out his project in solitary state, and only then ask the mass of mankind to endorse its validity." Furthermore, Beauvoir, in her moral period works, seems to think that the most important decision we must make is whether or not to assume our freedom, and this is a decision each individual must make for himself. Once we do decide to assume our freedom, then we have to assume ourselves before others, which requires us to make further decisions. These decisions, however, are comparatively unimportant, to the extent that Beauvoir can respect individuals who engage in projects that positively contradict her own, so long as they fight for freedom.⁵⁹⁰ In her later works, by contrast, Beauvoir sees people as always already integrated into society. As Beauvoir says: "In truth society has been all about me from the day of my birth; it is in the bosom of that society, and in my own close relationship with it, that all my personal decisions must be formed." Because of this, she thinks it necessary to give an account of society when describing the way people make decisions.⁵⁹¹

Another way to say this is that Beauvoir provides a very thin account of the pre-existing connections between individuals. There are any number of mechanisms that might lead people to agree with each other's judgments. Beauvoir might, for instance, say that all people share a

rational nature or a *sensus communis*, or she might appeal to the operation of sympathy or the standpoint of the impartial spectator. Failing this, Beauvoir could at least provide an account of how fundamentally heterogeneous people can resolve their differences and coordinate their actions. She could, for instance, appeal to speech and persuasion, or to politics, or to laws, or she might suggest that people can coordinate their actions through participation in institutions.

Beauvoir does not adopt any of these strategies. Beauvoir does not believe that reason can play a decisive role in helping us to make decisions. She thinks we have reason, and that we should try to make decisions as rationally as possible, but ultimately there is an element in all our decisions which exceeds rational calculation. We certainly cannot count on reason to produce the kind of agreement we get in Kant's categorical imperative or Hegel's rationally ordered state. The *sensus communis* would escape some of these difficulties, but Beauvoir thinks that this informal source of general agreement simply doesn't exist. Beauvoir completely rejects the idea of an impartial spectator. We can only disclose the world because we look at it from the point-of-view of our own interests. The fact that we are interested in some aspects of the world causes them to stand out against the background of other aspects which are less important to us. If we were to step back from our own first-person perspective, and look at the world from the third-person standpoint of an impartial spectator, then there would be no way to distinguish background and foreground, and the world would appear as an undifferentiated mass. This also serves as a criticism of sympathy. Insofar as it leads us to step outside of our own point-of-view, sympathetic identification with others causes the same loss of differentiation as the standpoint of the impartial spectator.

Beauvoir also seems to have a very thin account of speech and persuasion. In contrast to ordinary language philosophers such as Stanley Cavell, Beauvoir does not seem to think that

speech itself can be a form of action, although she admits that persuasive speech can lead to action. Furthermore, Beauvoir does not seem to think that speech is particularly effective at causing people to change the way they act. In general her attitude is summed up in the example of the sixteen-year-old Nazi: it would be better to persuade him, but there isn't time, so we have to shoot him instead.⁵⁹² This is why Beauvoir's protagonists – Jean-Pierre Gauthier, Jean Blomart, and Armand – use persuasion in the service of violent action. Jean-Pierre persuades the townsmen of Vaucelles to attack the Burgundians, Jean Blomart persuades the members of his resistance cell to undertake sabotage, and Armand persuades his groups to unite and take to the streets.

Beauvoir, in her moral period works, does not have a robust account of politics. She does not, like Arendt, have any conception of politics as a distinct sphere of existence. Instead she collapses the distinction between ethics and politics. Every individual assumes himself through action in the world and before other individuals. The affirmation of oneself – ethics – and the affirmation of one's connection to others – politics – take place simultaneously and are inextricably connected. Thus every authentic action is at once ethical and political: “ethics and politics seem one and the same to us.”⁵⁹³ This means that politics, for Beauvoir, takes place at the level of concrete connections to particular other people which are affirmed through individual actions. There are no uniquely political concepts or entities for Beauvoir. There are no such things as “France” or “America” unless we decide in bad faith to take these concepts seriously; there are only the connections between individual Frenchmen or individual Americans. Beauvoir would not bother to analyze the political distinctions made in various countries, as Arendt does in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, because she would consider these distinctions irrelevant.

Because Beauvoir does not distinguish ethics and politics, she obviously cannot privilege ethics over politics, but there is a sense in which she still privileges the individual over the group. Every individual makes decisions on his own and for his own reasons. When individuals happen to agree this creates the basis for collective political action. Thus the individual is prior to the group. Politics is individual action writ large.⁵⁹⁴ We can see this, for example, in Jean Blomart's resistance cell. The members of the cell all work for the same goal and even manage to divide up the labor in the way that gives them the best chance of realizing that goal, but ultimately each member participates in the resistance cell for very personal reasons. The collective activity of the resistance cell is only possible because every member of the cell has already made the prior decision to fight the Nazis in some way. All Jean does is find like-minded individuals and help them organize. If things went the other way – if membership in the group shaped the individuals who made it up – then this would amount to a constraint on their freedom on Beauvoir's view. Jean Blomart renounces politics because it views people as a mass rather than distinct individuals.

Beauvoir also does not have any robust conception of law. She seems to think that a law has value only insofar as it is a manifestation of the shared values of a community. For instance, when the French wanted to reassert the dignity of all people after the war, they paid careful attention to the rights of the accused, and they executed Brasillach because he had transgressed against human dignity, and when the citizens of Vaucelles wanted to assert the freedom of all their citizens, they revolted and decided to attack the Burgundians. These shared values have to be forged at the level of individual interactions. The law itself is just an epiphenomenal manifestation of this shared will. Beauvoir does not seem to think that the law can help to create shared values as well as express them. Insofar as the law becomes separated from the concrete

interactions among particular human beings it loses its authority. The law is inherently nothing more than a rule backed by the force of the police. As such it is merely part of our situation. It is up to us to make an existential choice whether to obey the law or break it. If we were to obey the law because it is the law then this would amount to a form of seriousness. Thus, for instance, Beauvoir was horrified by the formality of Brasillach's trial. To take another example, when the townsmen of Vaucelles want to change their decision but decide that they can't because the council has decided otherwise, Jean-Pierre tells them they are behaving like slaves. Free people would not be bound by laws as though from outside; they would make laws. Beauvoir would have loved Eichmann's trial. She would not, like Arendt, regret that the forms had not been observed, or that the man and his actions had become confounded. Instead she would have approved of the prosecution's effort to make the horror of the Holocaust present again for the court.

Finally, Beauvoir has almost no analysis of institutions. Beauvoir, in her moral period works, seems to think of institutions mostly as tools which oppressors use to legitimate their power. On this view, institutions affect us through mystification, and the way to change institutions is to resist them with physical force. In other words, Beauvoir conceives of institutions mostly as constraints on freedom, and she views them at a high level of abstraction. One of the striking features of Beauvoir's moral period philosophy, especially in contrast to later works such as *The Second Sex* and *The Coming of Age*, is that Beauvoir does not step outside of philosophy and into the human sciences. She takes only a few concepts from Marx and psychology, and none from sociology, economics, or anthropology. When she does talk about history she uses it mainly as a repository of examples to illustrate her philosophical points. She

does not, as she does in *The Second Sex*, seriously consider the possibility that our historical situation might shape the way we make decisions.⁵⁹⁵

The individualism of Beauvoir's moral period philosophy has consequences at the level of concrete action. First, genuine action is relatively rare for Beauvoir. Her account of action requires people to assume their freedom and ambiguity in generous passion. Beauvoir herself admits this is hard to do. All of us will always be faced with the temptation to fall into some or other form of bad faith, and Beauvoir seems to suggest that most of the people live in bad faith for most of the time.⁵⁹⁶ Put in other terms, Beauvoir seems to be concerned only with the relatively few people who autonomously cause themselves to act. She is not concerned with the factors that cause the great majority of people to act, such as discussion, or participation in institutions, or even sheer habit.

Second, when people do act, Beauvoir's reliance on emotion and personal connections makes it likely that they will act in extreme ways. Emotion is more capricious than judgment. It tends to be intense and short-lived. The Purge is a wonderful example of this. The Purge started out very intense and burned itself out very quickly. The people who were tried in the early stages were punished very harshly, while those who were only prosecuted after it burned itself out got minor sentences.⁵⁹⁷ Most of the people who were not executed in the early stages of the purge had their sentences commuted in a couple of years.⁵⁹⁸ To take a more recent example, the same holds true of public opinion in America after the attacks of September 11. What is the proper balance between civil liberties and national security? What are the conditions of a just war? When, if ever, is it acceptable to use torture? The arguments that could be made for each side have not changed, and yet public opinion on these questions changed dramatically after the attacks, and has gradually begun to change again as the memory of the attacks has faded.

Reason, judgment, laws, or even discussion can serve as a check on emotion, producing action that is more moderate and more consistent. This is why Beauvoir, in “An Eye for an Eye,” appeals to legal sanctions as an alternative to the excesses of private vengeance.⁵⁹⁹ But how do we decide whether or not to rely on emotion? It seems that we must make this decision on our own on the basis of emotion.

Many of Beauvoir’s positions are too extreme, even granting the straitened circumstances of the war. For instance, there were many people who thought, even at the time, that Brasillach did not deserve to die. After all, it was argued, he had merely written words. He tried to help the Nazis kill Jews, but he did not personally kill anybody, and it seems impossible to trace any specific death back to him.⁶⁰⁰ Writers such as Mauriac and Camus, who had actively participated in the resistance, signed the petition asking DeGaulle to commute his sentence.⁶⁰¹ Brasillach did get a much tougher deal than most of the people who were not killed before the purge had burned itself out.⁶⁰² Finally, it seems likely that Brasillach was worth more dead than alive. Alive, he was an Ecole Normale dropout who wrote sentimental novels.⁶⁰³ His trial and execution elevated him into a martyr for the extreme right wing.⁶⁰⁴ The position on resistance violence in *The Blood of Others* is also on the far side of extreme. Most resistance activity did not take the form of deliberate public violence. In fact there were many resistance groups that refused to undertake violent resistance because they knew it would bring about reprisals, and there was no resistance group that made reprisal killings part of their goal.⁶⁰⁵ Blomart’s public resistance activity retains some of the characteristics of a gesture. Blomart does not aim at helping the French war effort so much as publicly signifying that Germany and France are still at war.⁶⁰⁶

Third, Beauvoir's individualism makes it unlikely that the actions of individuals can coalesce into a coherent political movement. On Beauvoir's account, political organizations form when several individuals all decide, on their own, to pursue the same course of action. Such organizations will be inherently short-lived and unstable. For instance, Jean Blomart's resistance cell in *The Blood of Others* seems to be a relatively small organization in which everyone knows everyone else by name. Jean freely admits that the group, made up of trade-unionists like himself, Communists like Paul, and French Nationalists like M. Blomart, will fall apart once the war has been won.⁶⁰⁷ They are united only by their shared rejection of Nazism. In one sense the character of the group owes its coherence to the Nazis. The Nazis are a monolithic regime, the resistance cell defines itself negatively as resistance to the Nazis, and so the monolithic character of the Nazis rubs off on them. If, however, they tried to define themselves positively, then they would splinter apart. Any group that depends on individuals spontaneously deciding the same thing cannot engage in any large-scale or long-term action. Or, to take another example, there is a scene in *Useless Mouths* where Jean-Pierre convinces the town council to change the laws of Vaucelles. Under the circumstances, Jean-Pierre was doubtless right, but the point remains that he does so without any observance of forms. He simply barges into a meeting, makes some accusations about Georges and Rosbourg which happen to be true, and when the Representatives protest that his interruption is illegal, Jacques shouts "we are the makers of the laws."⁶⁰⁸ Laws are nothing more than expressions of the shared values of a community. They can be changed entirely at will. Laws of this kind can work in a relatively small community like Vaucelles where everyone can meet and express their general will by a unanimous show of hands, but they cannot bind together a larger community.⁶⁰⁹

Philosophical Replies

There are two ways of responding to the criticisms of Beauvoir's moral period philosophy. The first response, which is strictly philosophical in nature, is that the criticisms underestimate the flexibility and resources of Beauvoir's moral period philosophy.⁶¹⁰ Beauvoir's later philosophy can be viewed as a continuation and development of tendencies in her moral period rather than a radical break. All the ideas of Beauvoir's later philosophy are present in Beauvoir's moral period works, although they are often present in more attenuated form, or present *in potentia* rather than *in actualis*. The underlying position remains basically the same; the difference is in the emphasis or weight that Beauvoir accords to various aspects of her underlying position. Beauvoir herself seems to have recognized this. Even when she criticizes her earlier self, she never says she was positively wrong. She still holds by the basic arguments of *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Instead she criticizes herself for presenting these arguments in a way which is too abstract, too spiritual, and which accords too little weight to situation.⁶¹¹ It is easy to look back, from the standpoint of the philosophical developments which have taken place since the 1940's, and criticize Beauvoir's moral period works as a continuation of the worst excesses of Enlightenment humanism. In order to truly understand the moral period works, however, we need to look at them in the context of the works they respond to, and then it becomes apparent that the moral period works are genuinely original.⁶¹²

Beauvoir's moral period works are not motivated solely by abstract philosophical concerns. They are all, more or less, occasional pieces, which Beauvoir was motivated to write by events in her personal life. She tells us in her autobiography that conversations led to both *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, and "An Eye for an Eye" is a response to Beauvoir's involvement in Brasillach's trial and execution.⁶¹³ The works themselves, though

they quickly become philosophical, begin by stating very practical problems that we face in our everyday lives. “Moral Idealism and Political Realism” begins with the statement that all of us feel ourselves to be both ethical and political beings. “An Eye for an Eye” begins with the statement that we have all felt hatred toward the Nazis and people who collaborated with them. *The Ethics of Ambiguity* begins with the statement that recent events – Stalingrad, Buchenwald, Hiroshima – have forced us to confront our ambiguity.⁶¹⁴ Thus the moral period works, like *The Second Sex*, begin with the realization that there is something awry in our everyday experience, and that resolving this confusion will require an excursion into philosophy. It is true that the moral period works begin with the problems “we” face, whereas *The Second Sex* begins with a problem Beauvoir herself faces, but this “we” is not the royal we of philosophy, it is the we of anyone who has a political existence, or who lived under the occupation, or who lives in the atomic age.

Beauvoir’s moral period works are not systematic philosophical treatises in which she lays out the truth as she sees it. Beauvoir she was motivated in part by practical concerns, Beauvoir could consider a piece successful if it satisfactorily addressed the problem which motivated her to write it, and felt no need to write treatises in which she presented an entire philosophical system. Beauvoir does not aspire to provide us with a set of rules, such as the categorical imperative or the greatest happiness principle, that can satisfactorily address every moral question we could conceivably face. Instead she provides us with the general injunction to value freedom, admits that much of the time it is impossible to do this in a fully successful way, and leaves a great deal of responsibility for navigating moral dilemmas in the hands of individuals. Within the moral period works themselves, Beauvoir does not simply state her positions as the truth, but frequently resorts to some form of dialectical reasoning. In the first

part of *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, Beauvoir discusses Stoicism, universal benevolence, love of God, and love of humanity before presenting her own view of action in situation. In “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” Beauvoir discusses moral idealism and political realism before discussing moral realism. Finally, in the second part of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir discusses the sub-man, the serious man, the nihilist, the adventurer, and the maniac before presenting her own account of generous passion.⁶¹⁵

Beauvoir does not view people merely in abstract terms in her moral period works. One of my main goals in this dissertation has been to argue that one of the strengths of Beauvoir’s philosophy is that she does take the particularity of people and situations seriously. As Sonia Kruks has noted, the existentialist notion of an embodied subject is already a significant departure from the disembodied “Enlightenment” subject criticized by postmodernism.⁶¹⁶ As a practical matter, the Beauvoir of the moral period knows that people face different situations, and also that these situations can be discussed at the level of groups as well as individuals. Kruks, for instance, finds this insight present in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*.⁶¹⁷ Her main example of mystification in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, as Nancy Bauer has pointed out, involves the oppression of women, and *Useless Mouths*, in which the men use their political power to expel the women, has an obviously feminist message.⁶¹⁸ Many of her other examples involve slaves, proletarians, American blacks, and French colonial subjects. Beauvoir’s moral period philosophy looks abstract because, at this stage in her career, she is content to make the ontological point that every person faces a particular situation, and is not very interested in looking at these situations on an ontic level. This does not mean, however, that Beauvoir does not know that the ontic level is present. There is nothing to stop Beauvoir from looking at a person, or better yet at a group of people, and giving a detailed account of the situation in which

they find themselves and the attitudes they take toward it. In fact, if we follow Beauvoir's thought through, every one of us must respond to the situation we personally face, and so it behooves each of us to study that situation in detail. In this sense, we could see *The Second Sex* as a continuation of the ethics of ambiguity, rather than a radical break. Beauvoir starts with a largely situation-independent consciousness in *She Came to Stay*, recognizes the importance of situation generally in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, and then looks at her particular situation in *The Second Sex*.

Beauvoir's moral period philosophy is individualistic, in the sense that she thinks every person is originally separate from others, but she does not, like Sartre, carry her individualism to the point that we are necessarily isolated from each other. Instead her philosophy allows for originally separate individuals to forge connections with each other. The ability to forge connections is not only possible but essential for Beauvoir. She goes to great lengths to show that an isolated individual is not sufficient to himself, and that we must forge connections to others in order to give meaning to our own lives. This means that speech and persuasion actually occupy a privileged role in Beauvoir's moral period philosophy. Our ultimate goal, as Beauvoir shows in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, is for others to freely extend our projects. In order to get them to do so, we have to use persuasion, because speech allows both parties to recognize each other as subjects. Therefore the use of speech in persuasion allows us to secure the agreement of others while still respecting their freedom. If, in contrast, we were to use violence to force others to act the way they want, then this would be a failure, because then we would not constitute other people as free beings, and therefore they could not justify our existence.

Beauvoir does think that political engagement is important. She implicitly or explicitly criticizes people – such as Jean-Pierre Gauthier and Jean Blomart in their moral idealist phases –

who try to avoid politics altogether. Instead, Beauvoir reserves her criticism mostly for a specific *kind* of politics: large-scale party-driven politics. Given that this description fits both Nazi Party and the Communist Party, it is easy enough to understand her concern. Furthermore, even her objections to large-scale politics would have to be qualified. Large-scale politics is problematic, but so is any action which engages the world. The question of whether or not to engage in large-scale politics is a moral decision we must all make for ourselves. Beauvoir does not think that Saint-Just should have refused to rule because he recognized that no one governs innocently; she does not think that a people should remain a horde because only violence can make them into a society.⁶¹⁹ Her objection is not so much to large-scale politics in itself, but to people, such as Paul Perrier, who forget that large-scale politics ignores the individual and turn the goals of their party into an absolute end.

The same is true of Beauvoir's views about the law. Beauvoir thinks most existing laws are oppressive and unjust, and she thinks the court system takes the law seriously (in the technical sense) rather than view it as something that is freely made by a like-minded community.⁶²⁰ She does not, however, seem to object to the idea of laws as such. In fact she seems to approve of the attempt to set up a more just and vital system of legal protections after the war.⁶²¹ I do not see that Beauvoir would have any objection to Edward Levi's conception of the law as "a system of known rules [which] provides for the participation of the community in resolving the ambiguity that must always characterize the gap between constant or slowly evolving but abstract laws and the messy reality of everyday conflict."⁶²² She would, however, add the proviso that every person is free to remain inside the community or leave it, and she would probably be less optimistic than Levi about the practical potential of this conception of the law.

Finally, Beauvoir is aware, from a very early point in her development, of the role that institutions can play in oppression. *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* includes a discussion of the taboos set up to keep French colonists from encountering their colonial subjects as people. Beauvoir is also aware, as I have said before, that these institutions operate on people as members of groups, and not only as individuals. Beauvoir admits that this institutional oppression can affect people to a significant degree. Mystification involves oppression so severe that free people do not even realize they are free, and therefore cannot act freely.

Historical Context

The other way to respond to the criticisms of Beauvoir's moral period works is to place them in their historical context. All the moral period works were written either during the war itself or in the fluid situation that followed the Liberation. The war broke down all the large-scale ties that had bound people together before the war.⁶²³ The Third Republic was on its last legs even before the Germans invaded and wiped it out for good.⁶²⁴ Once the Germans had conquered France, they ruled half the country (including Paris, where Beauvoir lived) through open physical force rather than legal institutions, and the institutions they set up in Vichy were declared illegitimate once France had been liberated.⁶²⁵ On a less formal level, the relatively peaceful nature of the occupation showed the hollowness of existing value systems such as bourgeois conservatism. The breakdown of the old social order led to a fair amount of social fluidity. The only connections that mattered were the ones that people chose to actively forge amongst themselves. Beauvoir presents a fictionalized version of this phenomenon when Hélène Bertrand, who was a mere *petit bourgeois* in her prewar life, is presented with an opportunity for rapid advancement if she joins a German business venture. In these circumstances, the French really were reduced to something like human beings in the abstract. One's particular situation

did not affect one's chances in life as much as the individual existential choice about one's attitude toward the occupying Germans.⁶²⁶ In other words, it seems possible that the picture of humanity Beauvoir presents – isolated individuals faced with life-and-death decisions with nothing fixed to guide them – is not a product of Beauvoir's commitment to an outdated conception of philosophy or her lingering allegiance to Sartre, but simply an accurate phenomenological description of what it was like to live in occupied France.⁶²⁷

Beauvoir's moral period works are well-suited to respond to the specific set of problems posed by the war. Beauvoir emphasizes individual decision-making and extreme courses of action. This may seem problematic to us, but when viewed in the context of the war, it makes sense. The basic question facing all French people during the war was whether to collaborate or resist. The decision to resist was inherently risky. In order to decide to resist, an individual had to see the world in very stark terms, and had to be moved to take an extreme course of action. This decision had to be made on an individual basis, both because moving someone from outside to risk his life would treat him as a means, and because there was very little mainstream encouragement of resistance. The majority of French people neither actively resisted nor actively collaborated. Instead they tried to get on with their lives as well as they could. In order to resist, an individual had to separate himself from the mainstream.⁶²⁸ Once one did decide to resist, this resistance had to be violent and oriented toward rapid change rather than peaceful and oriented toward gradual change. It was an extreme situation and so action could only be extreme. The possibility of pursuing more moderate courses of action had been foreclosed by the use of violence.

Conversely, many of the weaknesses of Beauvoir's moral philosophy would not have mattered during the war. Beauvoir's extreme individualism would probably lead to social

disorder if put into practice on a large scale, but during the occupation, disorder was preferable to peaceable collaboration.⁶²⁹ This is not a trivial point. Hannah Arendt, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, goes to a great deal of length to show how the Nazis depended on both the existing Jewish leadership and the existing government apparatus in occupied countries in order to carry out their campaign of systematic mass murder.⁶³⁰ Arendt also shows how quickly the “ruthless toughness” of the Nazis collapsed when they were met with principled opposition.⁶³¹ Disorder in France would, at minimum, have tied down German resources, and it might also have changed some minds as well. Beauvoir sometimes goes too far in her advocacy of violent resistance, but under the circumstances, it was probably better to go too far than not far enough.⁶³² The fact that Beauvoir’s moral period philosophy could not serve as the basis for large-scale positive political movement would not have mattered either. During the war there was no need for positive political action. The only need was to negatively resist the Nazis, and Beauvoir’s moral period philosophy does allow for political organization in the face of a monolithic enemy. Even the somewhat impractical character of Jean Blomart’s resistance cell can make sense in the context of the war. The Allies won the war for reasons that had nothing to do with the Resistance. The problem for France was national humiliation. The French put up almost no resistance of any kind to the Germans. The military crumbled in about a month, and for the next four years the French served as unwilling but generally cooperative hosts. In these circumstances, the impracticality of Jean’s resistance cell wouldn’t matter, but the public nature of Jean’s activities would have gone a long way toward restoring national pride.

The war can also account for the thinness of Beauvoir’s account of deliberation. Deliberation only makes sense within the context of a stable and functioning social order. Aristotle, for instance, holds that practical wisdom can only be cultivated within the *polis*.

Practical wisdom is essentially the wisdom to navigate an already orderly world, and we cultivate practical wisdom by making wise actions habitual. In a situation such as the occupation, where the *polis* was dysfunctional and unstable, there was no point either in rational deliberation or in cultivating habits that might soon become outdated. Instead, individuals were thrown back on their own resources, and had to make decisions on the basis of what felt right to them.⁶³³

In a similar way, the war can explain the thinness of Beauvoir's account of speech and persuasion. There was not much point in speaking to the Germans during the occupation. The Germans essentially foreclosed the possibility of dialogue by choosing to rule through violence. Speech is a subject-to-subject interaction; in contrast violence constitutes both the doer and the sufferer as objects. Therefore my use of violence amounts to a declaration that I am not interested in speaking with my victim. Conversely, if I speak to someone who uses violence against me, then I enter into a non-reciprocal relationship with him, in which I constitute him as a subject, while he constitutes me as an object. This is why Beauvoir frequently seems to imply that speech amounts to a form of collaboration. There was not much point in speaking to the French either. Most of the French people were already persuaded that the Occupation was a bad thing. The problem was getting people to make the leap from opinion to action. Making this leap did not require more belief in the rightness of resistance; it required more personal courage. The collaborators in *The Blood of Others* know quite well that what they are doing is wrong, but they do it anyway because it provides them with benefits, and because the alternative is dangerous. H el ene could have run a business; instead she gets shot while driving a truck. To put the point at a more general level, speech can change people's beliefs, but there comes a time when beliefs have to be cashed out as actions. If the society is just and stable, then the gap

between belief and action is small, and persuasion can be useful at spurring action. If, however, the society is violent and oppressive, then the gap between belief and action is large, and persuasion is relatively useless.

After the war the situation changed. The main issue now was to build a new France that was more just than the old Third Republic. This presented Beauvoir with a new set of challenges. The French population was heterogeneous. It was divided into men and women, blacks and whites, proletarians and bourgeoisie, citizens and colonial subjects, communists and socialists and conservatives. Building a new France required holding all these disparate groups together. This task actually became harder after the Liberation because there was no longer any need to band together in the face of a common enemy. The resistance had been a fundamentally negative movement. Beauvoir, in basic agreement with Camus, holds that there is a certain purity in negative movements. One can assert one's position fully by rejecting its opposite. There are a small number of options and the distinctions between them are clear. In contrast, positive movements are always messy. After the Liberation, the situations and choices became increasingly complex, and because the stakes were lower, it was harder to clearly distinguish between different options.⁶³⁴ The main need was not for heroic authenticity but for pragmatic compromise. Building a more just France required taking care of the groups – such as women, blacks, and proletarians – which had been marginalized in the old Third Republic. This required Beauvoir to come up with concrete suggestions for helping marginalized groups; at a deeper level, it required Beauvoir to figure out how to conceptualize a marginalized group in the first place. The issue of Algerian independence posed particular problems for Beauvoir because, as a Frenchwoman, she found herself quite unwillingly on the side of the oppressors. Beauvoir

therefore had to come up with a way of speaking and acting that would work in this rather unique situation.

At the same time, the Liberation presented Beauvoir with a new set of opportunities. Now that France was comparatively stable, the large-scale ties that held people together before the war – habit, speech, politics, law, and other institutions – began to function again. By looking at these ties and figuring out how they worked, Beauvoir could hope to create large scale positive political action, and to improve the world through gradual instead of cataclysmic change. It is no surprise that Beauvoir began to do sociological work on women and blacks at around the same time she visited America. America had been comparatively stable, even during the war, and therefore had institutions to analyze. On a more personal level, Beauvoir was now an established public intellectual, whereas she had been nothing more than an unknown schoolteacher at the beginning of the war. She knew that her actions could reach and influence a wide range of people.

Beauvoir responded to these new problems and new opportunities by changing her philosophy to work with the new situation. In works such as *The Second Sex*, *America Day by Day*, and *The Coming of Age*, Beauvoir looks at particular groups of people and discusses their situations in detail, using resources from a wide variety of disciplines. Along with this, Beauvoir gives an analysis of the way situation interacts with individual freedom that is vastly more sophisticated than her earlier discussion of mystification. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir assumes that our situation presents us with a limited range of options from which we decide. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir describes the way women buy into their “destiny” as an interaction between freedom and situation in which neither predominates.⁶³⁵ Beauvoir’s analyses lead to concrete suggestions for change, which are not couched as calls for violence, but as calls for

institutional changes: paid work and reproductive control for women, and paid part-time work for the aged. Beauvoir's later political work, in contrast to her earlier attempts at political action such as *Socialism and Liberty*, is notable for its pragmatic character. For instance, Beauvoir supported Mitterrand because she thought he would be closer to socialism than his opponent, although she knew that he would not conduct a genuine socialist revolution. Beauvoir also understood that she personally was sheltered from repercussions because of her fame. Therefore she could afford to take risks on behalf of those who had more to lose. Some of her public acts, such as her signing of the Manifesto of 343, involved little more than contributing her name; nevertheless, she knew that her name carried significant weight.⁶³⁶ The result of this change in approach is that Beauvoir was successful. *The Second Sex* sold well and positively influenced women's movements in several countries, and Beauvoir's overt public acts like her articles on Djamila Bouchapa or her signing of the Manifesto of 343 probably helped to influence public opinion.⁶³⁷

Notes

¹ Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 659.

² Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 659, “Existentialism and Popular Wisdom,” 203.

³ Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 271. “It was not so much that I espoused his beliefs as it was that I admired the form of his expression. [...] He [Sartre] rejected my Kantian standards, fearing they would become notions within my writing and thus harmful to my expression. It irritated him to discuss this, so we did not talk much about this aspect of my thinking. Gradually, I found Kant less appealing, and so my jottings ceased to be an irritant to Sartre.” Beauvoir says she had just started her second novel at this time, which amounts to the time immediately before the moral period, rather than the moral period itself.

⁴ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 17-8.

⁵ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 33.

⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 23.

⁷ Wilson, “Simone de Beauvoir and Human Dignity,” 91-2.

⁸ Beauvoir, “Review of *Phenomenology of Perception*,” 159-60.

⁹ Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, Ch. 3.

¹⁰ Quoted in Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 14.

¹¹ Kruks, “Beauvoir’s Time/Our Time” 288-90 (quotes from 290). See also Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 11-8.

¹² Kruks, “Beauvoir’s Time/Our Time,” 296.

¹³ The genesis of this idea is Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 86, 162n37. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*, 39. Anderson, *Foundation and Structure of Sartrean Ethics*, 4-5. Detmer, *Freedom as a Value*, 180. Barnes, *Humanistic Existentialism*, 122. Barnes, *Story I Tell Myself*, 188. Anderson, to his credit, later acknowledged that Beauvoir had provided the clearest published formulation of existentialist ethics. See Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 162n37.

¹⁴ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, Chapter 3.

¹⁵ The mistranslations extend beyond the moral period. The most egregious mistranslation is probably the use of the English word “conscience” for the French word “conscience” in *She Came to Stay*, as in “Each conscience seeks the death of the other.”

¹⁶ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 10-2, reflects on being a Norwegian who worked in Norway, England, and America.

¹⁷ See Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 138.

¹⁸ See Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 64-5.

¹⁹ See Kruks, “Beauvoir’s Time/Our Time,” 292-3.

²⁰ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 77.

²¹ Moi, *What Is a Woman?*, 228n115.

²² Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 76-7.

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- ²³ LeDoeuff, “Simone de Beauvoir,” 64.
- ²⁴ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 140. See also *Ibid*, 157-8, 170-1.
- ²⁵ Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 128-9; Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, 6-11.
- ²⁶ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 151. Barnes, *Existentialist Ethics*, 95-7.
- ²⁷ Barnes, *An Existentialist Ethic*, 95. Barnes has two qualifications. First, there are obvious differences between Kant and Existentialism: Barnes seems most interested in the difference between Kantian and Sartrean epistemology. Second, Kant was so influential that almost any work written after Kant would inevitably have some trace of Kantian philosophy; in this sense Barnes thinks existentialism may not be unique.
- ²⁸ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 151.
- ²⁹ Quote from Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 2.
- ³⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 305-7. Discussion of God on A631/B659-A462/B670.
- ³¹ See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A444/B472-A451/B479; *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:452.
- ³² Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:414-6. Discussion of heteronomy on Ak. 4:433.
- ³³ See for instance Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:82, 5:23.
- ³⁴ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:410-1.
- ³⁵ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:438.
- ³⁶ *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:452.
- ³⁷ *Groundwork*, Ak 4:446-7.
- ³⁸ See for instance Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:457, Ak. 4:454-5, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:87.
- ³⁹ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:432-3. The relevant point of a free action is that it was motivated by reason as opposed to some phenomenal cause. A free action does not need to positively break the phenomenal change of causality.
- ⁴⁰ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:433-6.
- ⁴¹ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason, especially Ak. 5:73.
- ⁴² Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 434-6.
- ⁴³ See Allen Wood’s “general introduction” to Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, xvii-xviii.
- ⁴⁴ See Allen Wood’s “general introduction” to Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, xvii-xviii.
- ⁴⁵ See for instance Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:439-40.
- ⁴⁶ Wilson, “Beauvoir and Human Dignity,” 95-6.
- ⁴⁷ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 6:435-7.

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- ⁴⁸ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 6:462-8.
- ⁴⁹ Wilson, “Simone de Beauvoir and Human Dignity,” 94-9.
- ⁵⁰ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:437.
- ⁵¹ See Allen Wood’s “Introduction” to Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, xvii-xviii.
- ⁵² Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:433-434.
- ⁵³ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:429-9.
- ⁵⁴ Economic inequality: Kant, *On the Common Saying*, Ak. 8:291-2. Help to poor: Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:423. See also Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 6:325-6.
- ⁵⁵ Kant, *On the Common Saying*, Ak. 8:290-1.
- ⁵⁶ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:281-2. Kant says that paternalism toward women is acceptable because they are incurably incapable of acting for themselves, but obviously nobody takes this argument seriously anymore. See Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:279.
- ⁵⁷ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 6:332-3.
- ⁵⁸ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4: 453-4.
- ⁵⁹ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:36-7 among other places.
- ⁶⁰ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:125-6.
- ⁶¹ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:417-8.
- ⁶² Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:438.
- ⁶³ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:394.
- ⁶⁴ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:435.
- ⁶⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §73.
- ⁶⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§90-165, Kojeve, *Introduction*, 3-5, 36-9.
- ⁶⁷ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 105, 118-25.
- ⁶⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§166-77.
- ⁶⁹ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 107-12.
- ⁷⁰ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 102-3.
- ⁷¹ This covers the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§178-196, Kojeve, *Introduction*, 5-9, 39-41. Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 87-96.
- ⁷² Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §187, Kojeve, *Introduction*, 5-8, 39-41.
- ⁷³ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §§36-8.

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- ⁷⁴ Kojeve, *Introduction*, 7-9.
- ⁷⁵ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 117-8.
- ⁷⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §§188-196, Kojeve, *Introduction*, 7-9, 13-23, 41-50.
- ⁷⁷ Kojeve, *Introduction*, 53-6. According to Kojeve, this internalized slavery has its corollary in the temporal world in the mutual slavery of bourgeois and proletarians to Capital.
- ⁷⁸ Kojeve, *Introduction*, 65-7.
- ⁷⁹ Kojeve, *Introduction*, 40.
- ⁸⁰ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 91-3, 102-3.
- ⁸¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §4. Whether Kant said the same thing is open for debate. Kant certainly thinks he did, and Beauvoir seems to suggest that she agrees when she says Kant defines ethics by an adhesion to the self. But Hegel thinks Kant didn't. The basic reason is that Hegel views Kant's noumenal self as an abstraction. From Hegel's point of view, Kant's imperatives, which aim at the noumenal self, have no content.
- ⁸² Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §15, §35.
- ⁸³ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §16. This is not, of course, what Kant thinks he is doing, but Hegel doesn't believe in noumena and has a much richer notion of freedom, so this is what Kant looks like to Hegel.
- ⁸⁴ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:429; Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §36. Kant identifies humanity with rational nature and rational nature with personhood. See Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:428.
- ⁸⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §38.
- ⁸⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §29.
- ⁸⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §100.
- ⁸⁸ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:37; Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §§99-102.
- ⁸⁹ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:71-76; Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §126.
- ⁹⁰ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §135.
- ⁹¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §135, §124.
- ⁹² Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §4.
- ⁹³ Wood, "Hegel's Ethics" in *Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, 216-19.
- ⁹⁴ See for instance Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §30; Kenneth Westphal, "Context and Structure of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," 254-5, 258.
- ⁹⁵ Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 21-9. Bair gives a general depiction of Beauvoir family class snobbery on 21-2, then discusses her father Georges on 22-7, and her mother Françoise on 27-29.
- ⁹⁶ Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, discusses the financial mistakes of Beauvoir's maternal grandfather on 34-5, and her father on 50-1.

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- ⁹⁷ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. Beauvoir discusses family patriotism on p. 65 and cultural chauvinism on p. 172.
- ⁹⁸ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 128-31.
- ⁹⁹ All information from Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. Family patriotism 65; classism 128-31; cultural chauvinism 172; sexism of father 104; sexism of mother 106.
- ¹⁰⁰ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 41.
- ¹⁰¹ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 41.
- ¹⁰² Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 190-1; *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 55; *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 135.
- ¹⁰³ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 55.
- ¹⁰⁴ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 133.
- ¹⁰⁵ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 75.
- ¹⁰⁶ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 17, 23-5, 79-82.
- ¹⁰⁷ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 136-7. Beauvoir also discusses her view of the relation of God and the world in *Ibid*, 41, 75.
- ¹⁰⁸ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 136-7. Beauvoir also discusses her view of the relation of God and the world in *Ibid*, 41, 75.
- ¹⁰⁹ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 102-3.
- ¹¹⁰ See for instance Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 279, 284, 291.
- ¹¹¹ See for instance Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 135.
- ¹¹² Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*, 35.
- ¹¹³ Whitmarsh, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 10-1.
- ¹¹⁴ Mahon, *Existentialism, Feminism, and Simone de Beauvoir*, 93. Winegarten is not, in general, the most reliable of commentators: see Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 82-4. Mahon, however, is not open to the same criticism. Sonia Kruks downplayed the significance of religious language in “An Eye for an Eye” when I asked her about this after her presentation at Penn State.
- ¹¹⁵ Offen, “The Second Sex and the Baccalauréat,” 258-62.
- ¹¹⁶ Offen, “The Second Sex and the Baccalauréat,” 265.
- ¹¹⁷ Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 42-4, Farrington, *French Secondary Schools*, 191-201.
- ¹¹⁸ See Offen, “The Second Sex and the Baccalauréat,” 277, 281.
- ¹¹⁹ Farrington, *French Secondary Schools*, ch. 7.
- ¹²⁰ Simons and Peters, “Introduction to ‘Analysis of Bernard.’” In Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, 21n7.

¹²¹ Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 88-90.

¹²² Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 150. The paper was an analysis of Claude Bernard's *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*. See Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, 15-30.

¹²³ Simons and Peters, in Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, p. 21, note 7.

¹²⁴ Beauvoir's description is on *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 157.

¹²⁵ See Farrington's assessment in *French Secondary Schools*, 142, 145.

¹²⁶ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 160.

¹²⁷ The original textbook was written by Charles Lahr in two volumes. After his death, it was edited down into one volume "d'omettre certaines questions, superflues peut-être au point de la simple préparation de l'examen." This one-volume textbook went through three editions, in 1924, 1926, and 1931. Beauvoir would have read from the 1924 edition, which is not available in an American library. I worked from the 1931 edition, held by Loyola University in Chicago. Charles Lahr, *Manuel de Philosophie: Résumé du cours de philosophie*. 3rd ed. Paris, Gabriel Beauchesne, 1931. The summary of the *Critique of Pure* reason is on pp. 174-8, Kant's ethics on pp. 590-2, Pantheism on 788-92.

¹²⁸ I wish I knew this for sure. Farrington, *French Secondary Schools*, has the list from 1910, which includes the *Groundwork* and the *Prolegomena*. Lahr, which is from 1931, lists the *Groundwork* and the introduction to the first *Critique*. Either way the basic point is the same: students had to have a basic understanding of Kant's ethics and metaphysics.

¹²⁹ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 157-8.

¹³⁰ Most of this information is from Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 64-6. Moi discusses the financial argument on *Ibid*, 48, and the *certificat* and *diplôme* requirements on *Ibid*, 71-4.

¹³¹ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 48-66

¹³² Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 222-3.

¹³³ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 207.

¹³⁴ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 223.

¹³⁵ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 234.

¹³⁶ See Simons's introduction to *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 12; Altman, "Beauvoir, Hegel War," 71-3.

¹³⁷ Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 26, 29.

¹³⁸ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 52.

¹³⁹ Merleau-Ponty is first mentioned on June 29, 1927 (p. 274). Apparently he was offended at being beaten by Beauvoir in the exams. On July 16, 1927 (p. 281) Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty had a conversation at the Luxembourg Gardens. Merleau-Ponty appears consistently through the rest of the diary.

¹⁴⁰ Imbert, "Simone de Beauvoir," 7; Whitmarsh, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 26.

¹⁴¹ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 50. Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 279. Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 223-4.

¹⁴² Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 173.

¹⁴³ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 180.

¹⁴⁴ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 224-5.

¹⁴⁵ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 286.

¹⁴⁶ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 262.

¹⁴⁷ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 286.

¹⁴⁸ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 267-8.

¹⁴⁹ This is a debate between Margaret Simons and Toril Moi. Simons takes Beauvoir's early diary very seriously; Moi, more sensibly, regards it as historically interesting but not philosophically significant. Simons, Introduction to *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 43; Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 10.

¹⁵⁰ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 262.

¹⁵¹ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 263.

¹⁵² Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 261.

¹⁵³ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 276.

¹⁵⁴ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 263.

¹⁵⁵ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 279.

¹⁵⁶ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 266.

¹⁵⁷ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 279.

¹⁵⁸ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 279.

¹⁵⁹ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 279.

¹⁶⁰ Worms, "Between Critique and Metaphysics." The quote is from page 50.

¹⁶¹ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 234.

¹⁶² See Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 46-9. Brunschvicg was also a supporter of women's education, and his wife was a physicist and served on various organizations promoting the education of women. Imbert, "Simone de Beauvoir in her Generation," 4; Offen, "The Second Sex and the Baccalauréat in Republican France," 266; Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 654n-655n.

¹⁶³ Baugh, "Limiting Reason's Empire," 267-9.

¹⁶⁴ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 231.

¹⁶⁵ The best discussion is by Simons, in the introduction to *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 39-40.

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- ¹⁶⁶ Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, 230-1.
- ¹⁶⁷ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 266. The thesis is now lost. Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 628n27. Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 52-3.
- ¹⁶⁸ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 304-5.
- ¹⁶⁹ Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 140. Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 314. Beauvoir writes: "I was reading books on Kant."
- ¹⁷⁰ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 53-4.
- ¹⁷¹ Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 26-7.
- ¹⁷² The French is *la philosophie, c'était elle*. Moi comments that the examiners may have thought the point was not to *be* but to *master* philosophy. Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 31. The *agrégation* results are also discussed in Fullbrook and Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*, 61. The Fullbrooks in turn cite Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 145-6, Gerassi, *Jean-Paul Sartre*, 91, and Francis and Gontier, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 92.
- ¹⁷³ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 37, 63; Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 26-7.
- ¹⁷⁴ Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 28-9.
- ¹⁷⁵ Barnes, *Story I Tell Myself*, 186-8; Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence*, 84. Margaret Simons, in "From Murder to Morality: The Development of Beauvoir's Ethics," has argued in opposition to the Fullbrooks that the ethics of *She Came to Stay* do not in fact mirror the ethics of *Being and Nothingness* but are actually closer to Carol Gilligan. The idea that Beauvoir would have much in common with Carol Gilligan is silly, but it does raise an interesting point. From a (contemporary) feminist perspective, one would not take crediting *Being and Nothingness* is not a compliment. Simons, "From Murder to Morality," 1-2.
- ¹⁷⁶ Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 145; Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 22-3, 28-9.
- ¹⁷⁷ Translation from Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 63-4. The original passage is in Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 265, but is clearly mistranslated.
- ¹⁷⁸ See Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 78 for a discussion of how Beauvoir interpreted her relation to the philosophical tradition.
- ¹⁷⁹ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 111.
- ¹⁸⁰ Farrington, *French Secondary Schools*, 292, which is from 1910, lists the *Groundwork* and the *Prolegomena*. Lahr, *Manuel de Philosophie*, x, which is from 1931, lists the *Groundwork* and the introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I don't know when the transition occurred.
- ¹⁸¹ Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 10.
- ¹⁸² Imbert, "Simone de Beauvoir in her Generation," 5-6, 10-11.
- ¹⁸³ Worms, "Between Critique and Metaphysics," 52-3.
- ¹⁸⁴ See Fullbrook and Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 89. Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 174.
- ¹⁸⁵ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 11.

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- ¹⁸⁶ See Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*, 11-3.
- ¹⁸⁷ Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 162.
- ¹⁸⁸ See Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 9-12.
- ¹⁸⁹ Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 130.
- ¹⁹⁰ Discussion in Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 65-6.
- ¹⁹¹ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 97-98, 114.
- ¹⁹² Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 549-51.
- ¹⁹³ Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 564-5.
- ¹⁹⁴ See Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 26, 31, 42-4.
- ¹⁹⁵ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 87; Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 273n16; Baugh, "Limiting Reason's Empire," 261-2.
- ¹⁹⁶ See Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence*, 68.
- ¹⁹⁷ Quoted in Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence*, 83.
- ¹⁹⁸ Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 661.
- ¹⁹⁹ See Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 78-85.
- ²⁰⁰ Beauvoir, "Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*," 160-3; Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 32-6. Merleau-Ponty's account seems to have parallels to, for instance, Dewey's account of transactional relationships, or Wittgenstein's talking lion, or Quine's claim that languages can only be translated as wholes. Wittgenstein's lion is embodied in a way very different from us, and therefore there is no generality shared between our bodies, and therefore we cannot understand him. Communication and intersubjectivity are possible because of the generality of cultures. I can talk to you because we share the same understanding as 21st century Americans. We use words in the same way. If we came from very different cultures we would not immediately share this generality. In order to truly understand your words, I need to understand your entire language, I need to understand your culture, I need to understand the way you interact with the world and live in the world as an embodied being and the way words help you to do this.
- ²⁰¹ Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 33.
- ²⁰² Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 107-8, 206, 209, 228, 231, 282-6.
- ²⁰³ Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, 15-7.
- ²⁰⁴ Barnes, *Literature of Possibility: Humanistic Existentialism*, 122.
- ²⁰⁵ Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, 306-8, 59-61. Compare Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 347-350, 96-97.
- ²⁰⁶ Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, 120, 58-9.
- ²⁰⁷ Merleau-Ponty, "Metaphysics and the Novel," *Sense and Non-Sense*, 26.
- ²⁰⁸ The working title of *She Came to Stay* was *Self-Defense* [Légitime Défense]. See Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 624-5.

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- ²⁰⁹ Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, 301-2.
- ²¹⁰ Novick, *Resistance versus Vichy*, 16-8.
- ²¹¹ Vinen, *Unfree French*, 338.
- ²¹² Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 162-5.
- ²¹³ Novick, *Resistance versus Vichy*, 158-68.
- ²¹⁴ Covered in David Carrol's "Foreword" to *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944-1947*, xi-xvi.
- ²¹⁵ Vinen, *Unfree French*, 179-81, 346-56, especially 352.
- ²¹⁶ Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, 433. See also *Ibid*, 445-6.
- ²¹⁷ Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*. Sartre joins 216-17, Sartre captured 239, rationing and black market 240, Sartre released 244, Beauvoir fired 278. Beauvoir discusses the firing in *Prime of Life*, 650.
- ²¹⁸ Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, 20-1.
- ²¹⁹ Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 242-3.
- ²²⁰ Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 279-80.
- ²²¹ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 14-5, Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 252-5. Beauvoir describes "Socialism and Liberty" in *Prime of Life*, 580-2, 601-3.
- ²²² This seems to be the consensus view. See Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 15-7; Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 259-60, 295-6. Bair also quotes Sartre's biographer John Gerassi, who comes to a similar conclusion. See Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 260. Susan Rubin Sulieman takes up the issue of Beauvoir's war record in "Life-Story, History, Fiction: Simone de Beauvoir's Wartime Writings." Her main interest, however, is in the theoretical issues raised by the relation of Beauvoir's life and work; insofar as she allows herself to judge Beauvoir's war record she also comes to the conclusion that Beauvoir did no worse than most French people and better than many. See Sulieman, "Life-Story, History, Fiction: Simone de Beauvoir's Wartime Writings," 3-4.
- ²²³ Merleau-Ponty, "The War Has Taken Place," *Sense and Non-Sense*, 146-7.
- ²²⁴ Beginnings of *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* in Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 270. Beginnings of *Ethics of Ambiguity* in Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 45.
- ²²⁵ See Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 22.
- ²²⁶ See Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 40, 44.
- ²²⁷ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 92.
- ²²⁸ Camus, *The Stranger*, 83-4.
- ²²⁹ See, for instance, Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence*, 84-7; Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 156.
- ²³⁰ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 14-6
- ²³¹ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 102-3.

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- ²³² Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 18.
- ²³³ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 18-9.
- ²³⁴ Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence*, 84-5, 90-1.
- ²³⁵ Moi, *What Is a Woman?*, 229.
- ²³⁶ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 6-7.
- ²³⁷ Vintges, *Philosophy as Passion*, 56; Morgan, "Simone de Beauvoir's Ethics of Freedom and Absolute Evil," 76.
- ²³⁸ See Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence*, 98; Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 141-2.
- ²³⁹ Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence*, 84-5.
- ²⁴⁰ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 52.
- ²⁴¹ See Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 1-2; Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence*, 1-2, 16-7.
- ²⁴² Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 11-15; *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 93-4.
- ²⁴³ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 94. Beauvoir doesn't explicitly say so but I assume she is talking about herself.
- ²⁴⁴ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 95.
- ²⁴⁵ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 28; *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 124.
- ²⁴⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 28.
- ²⁴⁷ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 137.
- ²⁴⁸ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 183.
- ²⁴⁹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 101-2.
- ²⁵⁰ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 38. Mystification, for Beauvoir, is not as prevalent as we might think. The modern woman of 1946, for instance, may seem to share many of the same traits as the genuinely mystified harem concubine. Both maintain a kind of carefree happiness because they can live within a world that does not impose demands on them. But the difference is that the harem concubine is genuinely mystified, whereas the modern woman pretends to take the world seriously, as a means to escape her freedom. The proof of this is that, if you suggested to the harem concubine that she free herself, the response would be confusion. You do not resist the weather. If, on the other hand, you suggested to a modern woman that she free herself, she would snap viciously to the defense of the serious male world. Considering that the modern woman Beauvoir is talking about is the modern woman of 1946 France, who had just won the right to vote because the French were embarrassed in front of their American and British counterparts, Beauvoir's standards for mystification are pretty high.
- ²⁵¹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 23-5; Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 627; Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 55, 79. Beauvoir describes freedom as a form of facticity on *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 25.
- ²⁵² Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 24. This position is consistent with the thought of both Kant and Hegel. Kant comments that we cannot speak about a duty for God; Hegel tells us that moral consciousness can only exist to the extent that there is a disagreement between nature and morality. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:81-2; Beauvoir quotes Hegel, from *The Philosophy of Right*, in *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 10. There is some debate about

whether Beauvoir intends this to be a logical contradiction or a performative contradiction, but either way the point remains the same.

²⁵³ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 55; Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 25. The French term is *liberté morale*. Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, 35.

²⁵⁴ Both quotes from Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 91.

²⁵⁵ The general summary is on *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 24-6. Beauvoir uses the category of Existentialist conversion and compares it to Husserlian conversion on *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 13-4.

²⁵⁶ The basic argument is from Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 24-6. Quotes from *Ibid*, 16, 25, 33.

²⁵⁷ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 25-6.

²⁵⁸ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 12.

²⁵⁹ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 97-8.

²⁶⁰ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 35-40.

²⁶¹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*. Beauvoir discusses the sub-man on 42-5, the serious man on 45-52, and the nihilist on 52-8.

²⁶² Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity*, 16-7; Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 92.

²⁶³ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 92-5.

²⁶⁴ See for instance Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 72.

²⁶⁵ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 23.

²⁶⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 41-5. Beauvoir makes an exception for people living in mystification. Someone who is genuinely mystified does not need to hide her freedom from herself; she genuinely doesn't realize she has any. For this reason someone who suffers from mystification can be genuinely happy, and she may also acknowledge her freedom within the range that she is aware of. There is no moral failing on the part of the mystified person, because she has not taken a position yet. Beauvoir makes moral judgments on people for what they do within the range in which they are aware of their freedom. Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 38.

²⁶⁷ Beauvoir, "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom," 214-5.

²⁶⁸ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 29.

²⁶⁹ For instance, on *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 94, Beauvoir writes approvingly about the way technology increases our possibilities for action.

²⁷⁰ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 136-7

²⁷¹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 32.

²⁷² I can think of two examples from Beauvoir's moral period works in which she seems to think suicide is an acceptable response. In *Useless Mouths*, Clarice, having been condemned to a certain death which will rob her of her dignity, attempt to kill herself as a form of protest. (46-7) In *All Men Are Mortal*, the explorer Carlier shoots himself after he encounters the immortal Fosca and adopts his viewpoint on the world. Of course, we are not likely to be caught in a medieval siege, or to meet an immortal man. As a contrast, there is another scene in *All Men Are*

Mortal where Garnier chooses to die at the barricades, and Armand objects that this was pointless, because he still had a chance to enlarge his hold on the future. (328). Suicide is not acceptable unless we have no chance at all to give our lives any other justification.

²⁷³ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 32, 81-5.

²⁷⁴ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 137.

²⁷⁵ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 38.

²⁷⁶ Analysis from Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 117-20.

²⁷⁷ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 71-3.

²⁷⁸ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 115.

²⁷⁹ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 90.

²⁸⁰ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 90.

²⁸¹ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*. Beauvoir discusses trip on 113, building on 115, pointlessness on 95 and 115.

²⁸² Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 116. Beauvoir hints at reciprocity on *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 128, but does not make an outright assertion of the reciprocity of intersubjective relations until “Eye for Eye,” 249.

²⁸³ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 115-6.

²⁸⁴ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 71. Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 146-56 discusses the relationship of Beauvoir’s view in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* to Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, and to Sartre’s appropriation of the master-slave dialectic in *Being and Nothingness*.

²⁸⁵ The differences between Beauvoir, on the one hand, and Hegel and Sartre, on the other hand, probably trace back to a disagreement about the way we relate to natural objects. For Hegel and Sartre, my initial impulse is to dominate the natural world. For Hegel, I seek to take objects which are not-me and make them into me, for instance by eating them, in Kojève’s example. For Sartre, I epistemically dominate objects in the world by viewing them according to how they relate to my projects. When I encounter another consciousness, therefore, I immediately adopt the same attitude, and seek to dominate the other in the same way as I would dominate a natural object. For Beauvoir, in contrast, my initial impulse is to seek to merge with the natural world of which I am conscious. Therefore, when I encounter another consciousness, I immediately adopt the same nonaggressive attitude.

²⁸⁶ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 124-5. Beauvoir repeats this point in *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 71.

²⁸⁷ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 119.

²⁸⁸ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 125-6, 133.

²⁸⁹ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*. Beauvoir discusses acting before others on 125-6, precursors on 128-9, and conflicting projects 133-4. The idea that the world is saturated with human meanings is from *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 74.

²⁹⁰ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 147-8.

²⁹¹ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 129, 135.

²⁹² Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 109; *Ethics of Ambiguity* 71. Of course others can never provide my projects with full justification, for four reasons. First, I am not unified but scattered. Every person always engages in many projects simultaneously. Therefore anyone who takes up one of my projects will only partially justify my existence. In order to be fully justified, I would need someone to take up all of my projects, but this will never happen. See *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 129-30. Second, people are divided among themselves. One person is French and another German, one is proletarian and another bourgeois, and so on. Ideally I would like the whole world to take up my project, but this will never happen, because a project for one person is a project against another. See *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 107-8, 135. Third, I can always transcend a transcendence. Other people can appear to me to have a solidity I lack, but I can also look at them as objects in my world, and then the justification ceases. See *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 139-41. And fourth, the other will never fully take up my project. He will take it up, but in ways that expand upon it. Hegel would have been impossible without Kant, but this does not mean Kant would have been happy with this dependence. I do not control the way that my projects will be taken up by others. See *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 109-13, 128. Despite all these qualifications, however, the relevant point is that the justification others give to me, limited as it is, is still far more than the justification I can give to myself.

²⁹³ To take this a bit further, our projects only justify our existence to the extent that they intersect and agree with other projects. If Fernande Picasso wears a funny hat, and it scandalizes a respectable bourgeois, then her act is certainly meaningful, but it does not confer any positive justification on her.

²⁹⁴ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 122-3. Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 71-3.

²⁹⁵ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 136-7.

²⁹⁶ Beauvoir does not work out her ideal of a just society in any detail, but if she did, it would probably look something like a Rawlsian state, in which everyone is guaranteed certain political rights, and also everyone is guaranteed a certain minimal amount of power, which can be distributed either in the context of a socialist state or a capitalist welfare state. The granting of basic political rights would ensure respect for our formal dignity as free beings, while the granting of a minimum amount of power would take care of our material needs so that we could engage in creative activity. The fact that Beauvoir would resemble Rawls should not be surprising, given that both attempt to realize Kant's basic intuition that people should be treated as ends as well as means. Beauvoir would, however, object to the quasi-mathematical formalism of Rawls's theory, to his use of social contract theory, and to the fact that Rawls tries to design an ideal society rather than starting with the one we have and figuring out how to make it better.

²⁹⁷ Discussions in Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 121-3; Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 151-3; Wilson "Simone de Beauvoir and Human Dignity," 94-5.

²⁹⁸ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 131.

²⁹⁹ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 136.

³⁰⁰ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*. Beauvoir discusses the adventurer on 58-63, maniacal passion on 63-6, and generous passion on 66-7. Beauvoir describes generous passion as affirming the freedom and therefore the radical otherness of the person desired. One destines oneself toward other free beings by pursuing a particular project. This is precisely what Beauvoir had said earlier about moral freedom. Generous passion simply is moral freedom, and Beauvoir has now shown that the freedom of others is essential to my own moral freedom.

³⁰¹ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 133. Of course, Beauvoir still thinks it is problematic to define oneself negatively through one's opposition to someone else's project, rather than positively through one's own project. Ideally I want all others to agree with my project. Therefore this kind of contempt is still a failure, in the sense that it fails to win approval from the bourgeois other.

³⁰² Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 132-3. Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 126.

³⁰³ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 124.

³⁰⁴ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 138.

³⁰⁵ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 99.

³⁰⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 113-4.

³⁰⁷ Beauvoir, “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” 190.

³⁰⁸ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 138.

³⁰⁹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 81-3; Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence*, 96-8.

³¹⁰ Beauvoir, “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” 182; *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 85-6.

³¹¹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 141; *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 119.

³¹² Of course Kant does not seem to agree with Beauvoir when it comes to paternalism toward women and blacks, but this is only because he was racist and sexist, and didn't think these people could think for themselves. If Kant had believed that women and blacks could think for themselves, his position on the family and on colonialism would have been the same as Beauvoir's.

³¹³ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 136-7.

³¹⁴ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 142-3; *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 119. In *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 138, Beauvoir says that violence is less objectionable when used against the sick or children, because they are unlikely to make use of their freedom anyway. These are the same groups Beauvoir says we may potentially be justified in using paternalism against. Her point is that one against whom we use paternalism is not my peer, and cannot justify my existence, and this is a loss, but as they were not likely to justify my existence anyway it is no great loss.

³¹⁵ This is why, as Beauvoir says, it hurts when someone gives us a gift back in exchange for a gift. We feel that, through the economic exchange, we are being reduced to the level of a mechanical force. If the other thinks I give gifts because I expect something back, he no longer sees the gift as my way of freely projecting myself into the world, toward the other. *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 123-4.

³¹⁶ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 136-7. See also “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” 183-4.

³¹⁷ Beauvoir, “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” 182-4.

³¹⁸ Arp discusses the circumstances surrounding the publication of the essay in *Bonds of Freedom*, 38, and in her introduction to “An Eye for an Eye,” pp. 239-40. Lunenburg, 254-5; Kharkov, 254; Oradour, 246. Beauvoir herself discusses the essay in *Force of Circumstance*, 20-2, 68. Kaplan, *Collaborator*, 32, provides some gems from *partout et ailleurs*. Sartre was in New York at the time and too busy to be bothered. Kaplan, *Collaborator*, 195. Camus signed out of his blanket opposition to the death penalty, and then sent a letter explaining that his signature should not be misconstrued as suggesting he had the slightest personal interest in Brasillach. See Kaplan, *Collaborator*, 198, which also includes Camus's statement.

³¹⁹ Beauvoir does the main philosophical work of defining common crimes on “An Eye for an Eye,” 247. She discusses petty crimes such as theft on *Ibid*, 245-6. The best example of Beauvoir's admission of differences in degree among crimes that are on the same metaphysical level is actually on *Ibid*, 252, where she admits differences in the intensity of the sanctions imposed for crimes. But what applies to sanction should apply to common crimes as well.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 249. Beauvoir herself never uses the term “interiority.”

³²¹ *Ibid*, 248.

³²² This is why Beauvoir explicitly says (*Ibid*, 247) that we cannot subject the criminal to punishment in her strict sense of the term until he is within our power and no longer a threat to us. Punishment, because it addresses an abomination committed on the metaphysical level of interiority, will appear as a luxury from the standpoint of exteriority.

³²³ *Ibid*, 247.

³²⁴ This discussion of torture is important, because Beauvoir, in the rest of the essay, seems to use torture as the paradigm case for all abominations.

³²⁵ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 94.

³²⁶ Beauvoir's remarks on torture are extremely problematic in the light both of the behavior of the French during the Algerian war and our own more recent behavior. However there are several reasons why we should not use torture. In the first place there is the problem of motives. We may say that we are using torture strategically but how do we know this really the case? We may actually be using torture out of hatred or the desire to dominate others. This problem is particularly compelling for Beauvoir because she does not believe in any universal standpoint in which all judgments are reconciled. It is possible that I may see the torture one way, my victim may see it another way, and various third parties in still different ways. Without any "view from nowhere" from which to make a definitive judgment, each of these different perspectives could be held to be valid. Second, torture is still a form of violence. All strategic action reduces the opponent to the level of a thing and therefore cuts off our possibilities for freedom. The ideal course of action would be to persuade the prisoner to renounce his own cause, convert to the jailer's cause, and freely reveal his information. Of course in most cases this won't happen, but it would still be better if it did. Third, just because torture used as a police method is strategic, it does not mean that it is used in the pursuit of a valid end. Torture used strategically in the pursuit of oppression might not be an abomination, but it is still a form of oppression. Fourth, torture used strategically has to actually work. It has to produce accurate information, and this information needs to produce more benefit than cost by Beauvoir's nonspecific calculus of freedom. The gain of freedom and human dignity produced by the information has to outweigh the loss to human dignity inherent in the original act of torture. This means that we need to consider the context in which torture is used. Someone who has other means at his disposal, or is not facing much danger, would probably have less justification for using torture. The practical upshot of this is that Beauvoir would not automatically rule out the strategic use of torture as wrong in all circumstances, but the situations in which she would consider it acceptable are probably very limited. In the hypothetical "ticking time bomb" example that was thrown around in the recent election – we have captured a terrorist who knows of an impending attack and refuses to talk about it – Beauvoir would probably admit that it is better to torture one religious fanatic than let hundreds of innocent people die. But the one incidence of torture that Beauvoir directly addressed – the Djamila Bouchapa affair – Beauvoir came out on the side of the victim, and if she were around to see Abu Gharib or Guantanamo, she would probably strongly object to these as well.

³²⁷ The example is from Beauvoir, "An Eye for an Eye," 249. The part about rushing to get to work is my addition. Beauvoir says *that* we can experience a kick or shove in the crowd as the denial of our interiority but not *why* we do.

³²⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 796-7; Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 45-6. Beauvoir observes in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 46 that "*Being and Nothingness* is in large part a description of the serious man and his universe." Beauvoir is in position to say this because she changed the ontology. All intersubjective relations in *Being and Nothingness* operate on the model of the Look.

³²⁹ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 248-9.

³³⁰ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 247-9.

³³¹ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 246.

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- ³³² Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 250.
- ³³³ The French is "l'homme ne vit pas seulement de pain." Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 247.
- ³³⁴ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 249.
- ³³⁵ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 249.
- ³³⁶ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 249-51.
- ³³⁷ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 251-4. Pétain from 252.
- ³³⁸ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 254-8. Remarks about absolute evil and sole sin on *Ibid*, 257.
- ³³⁹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 33.
- ³⁴⁰ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:429.
- ³⁴¹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 17.
- ³⁴² Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 24.
- ³⁴³ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 17.
- ³⁴⁴ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 23.
- ³⁴⁵ See for instance *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:161-2.
- ³⁴⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 107; "Eye for Eye," 246.
- ³⁴⁷ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye." Absolute evil and sole sin on 257, spiritual appetite on 247, discussion of the word *scandale* on 259n.
- ³⁴⁸ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 249.
- ³⁴⁹ Kant, *On the Common Saying*, Ak. 8:290-1; Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 136-7.
- ³⁵⁰ Beauvoir, "Review of The Phenomenology of Perception," 160.
- ³⁵¹ Beauvoir, "Moral Realism and Political Realism," 177, 184.
- ³⁵² Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 9-10. Beauvoir does say that Hegel tries to put both sides together, but she thinks he failed to do so, so his philosophy winds up as a form of political realism.
- ³⁵³ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 175, 179.
- ³⁵⁴ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 175-7, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 7-9.
- ³⁵⁵ This analysis was influenced by Stacy Keltner, "Beauvoir's Idea of Ambiguity."
- ³⁵⁶ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:453-5.
- ³⁵⁷ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 177-8. Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:420-4.

³⁵⁸ See for instance Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:421-424; Beauvoir, “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” 178. This picture of Kant’s ethics is not universally shared, but it is clearly Beauvoir’s view, and it is relatively common in Anglo-American interpretations of Kant as well.

³⁵⁹ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 127.

³⁶⁰ If we speak for Kant and point out that he does, after all, have a definite recommendation for what to do about the victim and the executioner, this only makes it worse. If we apply Kantian ethics, the appropriate thing to do is wait for the executioner to kill the victim and then kill the executioner in reprisal. This will not conflict with our absolute duty to preserve rational nature because the executioner, according to Kant, has now forfeited his status as a rational being through his action. When we finally do punish the executioner it is a response rather than an action in its own right. We are commanded to kill him; it is now incumbent on us not to let a world exist in which a murder goes unavenged.

³⁶¹ Beauvoir, “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” 133.

³⁶² Beauvoir’s argument here relies on the hidden premise that to oppose someone else’s pursuit of their phenomenal ends (or to stand back and let them be impeded by others) represents a loss. How persuasive or significant this argument is depends on which example we use. I am, I suppose, relying on two premises which for writing purposes I chose to defend later. Beauvoir is relying on the hidden premise that to oppose somebody’s ends is to treat them as a means, which I suppose is not valid, and even Beauvoir doesn’t think this, although she does think this is a loss, which Kant does not. But, at a deeper level, she is relying on the idea that unintended consequences don’t matter. Kant would get out of the question of whether to let the victim die or kill the executioner by giving the intuitively absurd claim that to let the victim die is not, after all, treating him as a means.

³⁶³ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:410-1.

³⁶⁴ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:446-7.

³⁶⁵ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:394.

³⁶⁶ This is analogous to the categorical imperative. Just as a categorical imperative commands apart from the world, the moral agent is good apart from the world.

³⁶⁷ Beauvoir, “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” 177.

³⁶⁸ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4: 397-8.

³⁶⁹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 86.

³⁷⁰ Beauvoir, “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” 175-7.

³⁷¹ Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak 4:397-400.

³⁷² Beauvoir’s discussion is on “Moral Idealism and Political Realism” 189. The Kantian rationalist is from *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 113-4.

³⁷³ The essay is Kant, “On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy,” Ak. 8:425-430.

³⁷⁴ Kant, “On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy,” Ak. 8:425-430. This is important from a reading standpoint. The reading I have given of Kant is certainly not very charitable. But for Kant to have reached a conclusion like this he must have something somewhere in his ethics which does not deserve to be read charitably. Kant was too smart to make invalid arguments. Therefore, in order for Kant to reach an absurd conclusion, he must have used an absurd premise. Beauvoir’s claim is that the absurd premise is Kant’s desire to formulate moral rules which do not take the consequences into account.

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- ³⁷⁵ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 110-2.
- ³⁷⁶ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 111. The discussion of an enemy who makes use of my project is from *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 133.
- ³⁷⁷ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 104. The quote is from *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 129.
- ³⁷⁸ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 103-4.
- ³⁷⁹ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 179, 184-5.
- ³⁸⁰ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 185.
- ³⁸¹ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 189-90. Also see Beauvoir's discussion on 184.
- ³⁸² Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 144-8.
- ³⁸³ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 186-7; *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 103-6, 116-7.
- ³⁸⁴ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 104-6.
- ³⁸⁵ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 115-20.
- ³⁸⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 120-1.
- ³⁸⁷ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 121.
- ³⁸⁸ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 101.
- ³⁸⁹ Discussion of boredom on *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 95-6. Discussion of Marx on *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 118.
- ³⁹⁰ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 188-9.
- ³⁹¹ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 189.
- ³⁹² Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 189-91. See also *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 138.
- ³⁹³ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 29.
- ³⁹⁴ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 107.
- ³⁹⁵ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 186.
- ³⁹⁶ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 109.
- ³⁹⁷ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 133-6. Comment in Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 150-1.
- ³⁹⁸ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 122. Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence*, 93-4.
- ³⁹⁹ Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 445-6, Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 13-4. At least this is the way she presents herself. This is only intended as an example.
- ⁴⁰⁰ Beauvoir discusses the temporal continuity of projects on *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 26-7. A project is not a mechanical activity in which we produce according to a preexisting standard. Instead it is a genuinely creative

activity in which the standard for judging the project develops along with the project itself. Therefore there is a certain amount of openness in any project. The project develops over time. Beauvoir describes the process of writing a novel in these terms in *Metaphysics and the Novel*, 271-2. The same is true of any other creative act. When an artist makes a drawing, he first roughs in what he wants to draw, then gradually fills in the details. When I began this dissertation, I had a general idea of what I wanted to say, but I had to do a great deal of work to fill in that outline.

⁴⁰¹ Beauvoir makes versions of this argument in three places – twice in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and once in “Moral Idealism and Political Realism” – and each time she explicitly attacks Kant. In *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 127, Beauvoir writes: “The error of Kantian ethics is to have claimed to make an abstraction of our presence in the world. Therefore, it leads only to abstract formulas. The respect for the human person in general cannot suffice to guide us because we are dealing with separate and opposed individuals. The human person is complete in both the victim and the executioner; should we let the victim perish or kill the executioner?” In *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 138, Beauvoir writes: “If the universal ethics of Kant and Hegel end in optimism, it is because in denying individuality, they also deny failure. But the individual is; failure is. We are condemned to failure because we are condemned to violence. We are condemned to violence because man is divided and in conflict with himself, because men are separate and in conflict among themselves.” In “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” 189, Beauvoir writes: “If man is the supreme end of every action, then reciprocally, man should always be considered as an end, as Kantian ethics requires. But the part-whole, present-future antinomy demands sacrifices because, if we must not destroy the goal while reaching for it, neither should we give up the idea of reaching it for fear of destroying it. It is not possible to act for man without treating certain men, at certain times, as means.”

⁴⁰² Beauvoir, “Eye for Eye,” 247.

⁴⁰³ See for instance Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 127, 135, 138; *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 27.

⁴⁰⁴ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity* 118-9; *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 129, 133.

⁴⁰⁵ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 120.

⁴⁰⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 88.

⁴⁰⁷ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 152 makes this point.

⁴⁰⁸ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 89, 98-9.

⁴⁰⁹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 145-8.

⁴¹⁰ See Sonia Kruks, “Simone de Beauvoir: Legacies for Political Thought.”

⁴¹¹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 119-20. Beauvoir’s treatment of abominations also bears this out. The distinction between abominations and common crimes is very strange. There are only a very few things which count as abominations; in contrast the horrors of total war and political assassination coexist with insurance fraud on the “common crimes” side of the ledger. Beauvoir is able to treat these violent crimes so lightly because she thinks violence is inevitable anyway. Beauvoir, “Eye for Eye,” 245-8.

⁴¹² Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 83; *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 138.

⁴¹³ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 113.

⁴¹⁴ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 108.

⁴¹⁵ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 138.

⁴¹⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 99; see also *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 138

⁴¹⁷ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 133-5.

⁴¹⁸ Argument suggested by Deutscher, *Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, 51-5.

⁴¹⁹ Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 46, 265-6, Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 63-6.

⁴²⁰ Beauvoir, "Review of *The Phenomenology of Perception*," 160, 164.

⁴²¹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 9-10.

⁴²² See for instance: *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 138, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 178, 189, "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom," 204, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 18-23.

⁴²³ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 9; Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 149.

⁴²⁴ Beauvoir says there are no hard and fast rules on *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 134 and discusses freedom on 142, but in reality the whole of this section on "ambiguity" is her discussion.

⁴²⁵ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 97.

⁴²⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 143-4.

⁴²⁷ And thus we dispense with the "sincere Nazi" counterexample. For Beauvoir there is no such thing. In order to hold that belief, one would either need to be brainwashed, in which case the belief would count as a form of mystification rather than a genuine choice, or one would have to deny one's freedom in bad faith.

⁴²⁸ I do keep thinking of the distinction between public and private spheres made by Hannah Arendt among others. The general idea is that oppression in the private sphere provides the material basis for freedom in the public sphere. In the first place, I do not think Arendt meant to argue that oppression was positively a good thing, she meant to point out a fact about the way society was structured, and did not care very much about the problems associated with this structure. Second, Beauvoir obviously does not accept this argument, and she seems to suggest anyone who does is acting in bad faith, as opposed to tragically mistaken about the weights assigned to the value of freedom.

⁴²⁹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 133-4.

⁴³⁰ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 150-2.

⁴³¹ They turned out to be innocent. Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 149-150. See also "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 185.

⁴³² Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 98; "Eye for Eye," 256.

⁴³³ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 248.

⁴³⁴ Novick, *Resistance versus Vichy*, 186.

⁴³⁵ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 106-7. This is revisionist history on Beauvoir's part but the philosophical point remains. As for the contrast with "An Eye for an Eye," the need for fair trials does not conflict with the need for harsh sentences. That also was a way of reaffirming the value of freedom. And a lot of countries that had banned

⁴³⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 112.

⁴³⁷ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 144. The idea of people as zeroes is from *Ibid*, 100.

⁴³⁸ It would be a mistake to take this argument too far. Beauvoir does not want to say that we should not intervene in cases of oppression. All of us want to justify our existence, and all of us need to be surrounded by other free beings in order to do so, and so any resistance to oppression is automatically action for ourselves as well as for the other. And of course, if somebody clears away oppression for us, this does not amount to paternalism. The mere fact that we are free gives us the right to at least try to engage in projects. We do not have to thank anyone for clearing away a situation we should never have been in to start with. And clearing away oppression does not accomplish our projects for us; it merely creates a situation where we can begin to engage in projects.

⁴³⁹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 137.

⁴⁴⁰ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 19.

⁴⁴¹ Beauvoir's discussion of British subjects is from *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 98-9. Her discussion of Richard Wright is from *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 89.

⁴⁴² Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 89.

⁴⁴³ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 105-6.

⁴⁴⁴ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 145-8; Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*, 35-50.

⁴⁴⁵ Beauvoir's general discussion is on *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 145-8, 154. Her discussion of the sincere Nazi is from "An Eye for an Eye," 256.

⁴⁴⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 154-5. This is very close to the position John Stuart Mill takes in *On Liberty*, that it is necessary to have truths challenged even to keep them alive. This could be mere coincidence, because Beauvoir hated Utilitarianism, but I think not. Mill, like Beauvoir, places a great deal of value on the individual, and on the subjective movement that leads to a result rather than the result itself.

⁴⁴⁷ The original French title is *Les Bouches Inutiles*. The translators chose to use the more descriptive English title *Who Shall Die?*

⁴⁴⁸ Beauvoir, "Literature and Metaphysics," 269-71.

⁴⁴⁹ Beauvoir, "Literature and Metaphysics," 274.

⁴⁵⁰ Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 655-6.

⁴⁵¹ Beauvoir, "Literature and Metaphysics," 271-2.

⁴⁵² Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 22.

⁴⁵³ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 28.

⁴⁵⁴ The play is based on real events. This moral dilemma seems to have appealed to Beauvoir. In addition to *Useless Mouths*, she discusses it in "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 185, and creates a similar situation in *All Men Are Mortal* where Carmona is besieged. Fosca actually does expel the useless mouths, and shelters his own wife into the bargain. *All Men Are Mortal*, 76-7.

⁴⁵⁵ Beauvoir, *Who Shall Die*, 15-6.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 21-2.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 16-7. In reality, Clarice has cried herself to sleep every night while Jean-Pierre was away, and is pregnant with his child, but Clarice is too proud to admit her attachment to Jean-Pierre if he will not admit his reciprocal attachment to her.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 35, 61-2.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 38-9, 41, 61.

⁴⁶⁰ See for instance *Ibid*, 39.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid*, 45.

⁴⁶² *Ibid*, 53.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid*, 38.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 53, 38.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 64.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 38-40.

⁴⁶⁷ Clarice: *Ibid*, 46. Catherine, *Ibid*, 52-5.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 37.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 44-5.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 29.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid*, 40-1. It might be argued that, if Clarice really cannot command respect for her formal dignity as a subject from Georges because of her material circumstances, then this suggests that ontological freedom is not absolute after all and some level of material power is necessary to ontological freedom. The reply is that Georges only fails to see Clarice as a subject because he projects ahead to the moment when she will be dead. This projection is mistaken: in actual fact Clarice survives longer than Georges does.

⁴⁷² Beauvoir, *Who Shall Die?*, 49.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid*, 49.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 50.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 44.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 48.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 63-4. See also *Ibid*, 61, where Louis says the men want to risk their lives for their wives and children.

⁴⁷⁸ Analysis based on Fallaize, *Novels of Simone de Beauvoir*, 44-7, Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 28-32.

⁴⁷⁹ Beauvoir, *Blood of Others*, 24.

⁴⁸⁰ Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 126.

⁴⁸¹ Beauvoir, *Blood of Others*, 11.

⁴⁸² All quotes from Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*, 14-15.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid*, 24.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 27.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 31.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 28.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 29.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 27. The character of Marcel seems to be based on Giacometti, whom Beauvoir had met in their shared Left Bank milieu. In her autobiography, Beauvoir describes how Giacometti made sculptures that could fit in a matchbox, and once got dissatisfied and throws his works into the Seine; Marcel repeats both scenes in *The Blood of Others*. See Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 585-9, 653-4.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 39-40.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 69.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid*, 41.

⁴⁹² *Ibid*, 131.

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- ⁴⁹³ *Ibid*, 29.
- ⁴⁹⁴ All quotes and ideas from *Ibid*, 16-7.
- ⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 30.
- ⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 34.
- ⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 29.
- ⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 59, 120.
- ⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 66.
- ⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 68-9.
- ⁵⁰¹ *Ibid*, 69.
- ⁵⁰² *Ibid*, 61.
- ⁵⁰³ *Ibid*, 56.
- ⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 65.
- ⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 56.
- ⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 60.
- ⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 57.
- ⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 65-6.
- ⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 117-21. Jean's dissatisfaction with pacifism can be seen as a self-critique on Beauvoir's part.
- ⁵¹⁰ *Ibid*, 64, 67-8.
- ⁵¹¹ *Ibid*, 220.
- ⁵¹² See for instance *Ibid*, 158, 182.
- ⁵¹³ *Ibid*, 41, 49.
- ⁵¹⁴ *Ibid*, 107.
- ⁵¹⁵ *Ibid*, 102.
- ⁵¹⁶ *Ibid*, 74-5.
- ⁵¹⁷ *Ibid*, 96-7.
- ⁵¹⁸ *Ibid*, 106.
- ⁵¹⁹ *Ibid*, 181-2, and *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 122.
- ⁵²⁰ Beauvoir, *Blood of Others*, 105, 128-9.
- ⁵²¹ *Ibid*, 103, 111-2.
- ⁵²² *Ibid*, 178-81.
- ⁵²³ *Ibid*, 185.
- ⁵²⁴ *Ibid*, 185, 188.
- ⁵²⁵ *Ibid*, 189-90.
- ⁵²⁶ *Ibid*, 188.
- ⁵²⁷ *Ibid*, 188-9.
- ⁵²⁸ Jean, 190; Hélène, 233; M. Blomart, 215; Marcel, 217.
- ⁵²⁹ Marcel, 217; Jean, 221-2.
- ⁵³⁰ *Ibid*, 222.
- ⁵³¹ *Ibid*, 161.
- ⁵³² *Ibid*, 222-3.
- ⁵³³ Jean, 187; Hélène 230-2; Marcel, 220; M. Blomart, 220; Denise, 218.
- ⁵³⁴ *Ibid*, 161.
- ⁵³⁵ *Ibid*, 189-90.
- ⁵³⁶ *Ibid*, 224.
- ⁵³⁷ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 40-4.
- ⁵³⁸ Some of this analysis is based on Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 40-4.
- ⁵³⁹ Beauvoir, *All Men Are Mortal*, 91.
- ⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 76-9.
- ⁵⁴¹ *Ibid*, 114.
- ⁵⁴² *Ibid*, 125-6.
- ⁵⁴³ *Ibid*, 127.
- ⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 125.

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- ⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 100.
- ⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 118-25.
- ⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 126-138.
- ⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 141-2.
- ⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 147.
- ⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 151.
- ⁵⁵¹ *Ibid*, 159.
- ⁵⁵² Told in Beauvoir, *All Men Are Mortal*, Books 1 & 2. Charles V makes his alliance on 173-4.
- ⁵⁵³ *Ibid*, 202.
- ⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 112-113.
- ⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 161-4.
- ⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 177-81.
- ⁵⁵⁷ See Beauvoir, *All Men Are Mortal*, Book 3, especially 224-5.
- ⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 215.
- ⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 219.
- ⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 227-31.
- ⁵⁶¹ *Ibid*, 267.
- ⁵⁶² *Ibid*, 277-81.
- ⁵⁶³ *Ibid*, 280.
- ⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 238.
- ⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 281.
- ⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 333. Marianne is the main topic of Book 4.
- ⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 134.
- ⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 331.
- ⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 264.
- ⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 135. I keep thinking of Wittgenstein's comment: "If a lion could talk, we would not understand him." Wittgenstein's point, of course, is that language is a tool, and therefore it responds to the tasks that need to be done. The way a hypothetical articulate lion would live is so different from the way a human lives that their languages would not even be intelligible to each other. Communication is embodied and it depends on similarity. Fosca is embodied so differently that he cannot use normal language.
- ⁵⁷¹ Prairie 210, natives 236, prison 320-1, mental institution 18, Fosca catatonic 11-13.
- ⁵⁷² *Ibid*, 333.
- ⁵⁷³ This fling is the topic of the preface. Fosca minimizes the actress on page 55.
- ⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 289-90.
- ⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 319.
- ⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 328.
- ⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 315.
- ⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 322.
- ⁵⁷⁹ See for instance *Ibid*, 294.
- ⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 298.
- ⁵⁸¹ *Ibid*, 316.
- ⁵⁸² *Ibid*, 327.
- ⁵⁸³ *Ibid*, 328.
- ⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 338.
- ⁵⁸⁵ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 163. See *Ibid*, 133 for a similar analysis of *Being and Nothingness*.
- ⁵⁸⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 144.
- ⁵⁸⁷ Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 662.
- ⁵⁸⁸ Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, 68.

⁵⁸⁹ Kruks, "Introduction to 'Moral Idealism and Political Realism,'" 172; Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 149.

⁵⁹⁰ Francis Jeanson makes a similar point with regard to Sartre's work: "the moral choice of oneself is authentic only if singular. Men can choose to fight for their fellow men and with them, but such a choice is valid only if it is made in solitude, as the invention of a strictly personal mode of rapport with other persons. It is by starting with the world that man undertakes to understand his own existence, but it is only by starting with himself that he can attempt to endow his acts with value." Jeanson, *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, 17.

⁵⁹¹ Both quotes from Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 662.

⁵⁹² See Grosholz, "Simone de Beauvoir and Practical Deliberation."

⁵⁹³ Quote from "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 189.

⁵⁹⁴ From a written communication with Mitchell Aboulafia.

⁵⁹⁵ Kruks, for instance, makes this criticism in her "Introduction" to "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 172.

⁵⁹⁶ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 35, 39-40, 46-7.

⁵⁹⁷ The major political figures and the writers were tried early because their role was visible. The political figures had obviously participated and the writers had their words on the page for everyone to see. The financiers were prosecuted later because their role was harder to prove. Novick, *Resistance versus Vichy*, 161-4.

⁵⁹⁸ Vinen, *Unfree French*, 343.

⁵⁹⁹ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 251.

⁶⁰⁰ Kaplan, *Collaborator*, 227.

⁶⁰¹ These were based on positions that Beauvoir rejected but that doesn't matter in this context. Mauriac wanted him commuted on the basis of Christian charity; Camus wanted him commuted because of blanket opposition to the death penalty. Kaplan, *Collaborator*, 191-3, 198.

⁶⁰² Kaplan, *Collaborator*, 227-9.

⁶⁰³ Kaplan, *Collaborator*, 10, 18-20.

⁶⁰⁴ Kaplan, *Collaborator*, 227-9, 234.

⁶⁰⁵ Fallaize, *Novels of Simone de Beauvoir*, 53-4.

⁶⁰⁶ Beauvoir, *Blood of Others*, 187-90.

⁶⁰⁷ Beauvoir, *Blood of Others*, 161.

⁶⁰⁸ Beauvoir, *Who Shall Die?* Act II Scene 4. Quote from p. 59.

⁶⁰⁹ The reference to Rousseau is deliberate. Rousseau says that the general will can only be fully realized in relatively small states. Beauvoir faces the same difficulty.

⁶¹⁰ Beauvoir's own criticisms should not be taken too seriously. Beauvoir gave different assessments of her work at different times in order to suit her purposes as a writer. In her autobiography, Beauvoir is writing from the more materialist perspective of her later works, and also trying to adopt a pessimistic tone in order to disconcert the bourgeoisie. See Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 18.

⁶¹¹ Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 661, *Force of Circumstance*, 67.

⁶¹² The other way to say this is that we should not overestimate the extent to which the later Beauvoir differs from the moral period Beauvoir. Just as the moral period Beauvoir never fully ignores our situation or our particularity, the later Beauvoir never fully gives up on freedom or even on universal discourse.

⁶¹³ Beauvoir discusses *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* in *Prime of Life*, 659-60, and *Ethics of Ambiguity* in *Force of Circumstance*, 66.

⁶¹⁴ Beauvoir, "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," 175-7, "Eye for Eye," 245-6, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 7-9.

⁶¹⁵ Bauer comments on this in *Simone de Beauvoir*, 163-6, with explicit reference to Hegel. Beauvoir herself makes the connection to Hegel explicit in *Force of Circumstance*, 67.

⁶¹⁶ Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 8-9.

⁶¹⁷ Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 45.

⁶¹⁸ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 168-9; Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 28.

⁶¹⁹ See *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 138, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 108

⁶²⁰ Beauvoir, "Eye for Eye," 245-6, 251-4. See also Beauvoir, *Prime of Life*, 155-8 for Beauvoir's earlier attitude toward the law.

⁶²¹ Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 106-7.

⁶²² From Grosholz, "Simone de Beauvoir and Practical Deliberation."

⁶²³ Vinen, *Unfree French*, 16.

⁶²⁴ Novick, *Resistance versus Vichy*, 5-6.

⁶²⁵ Novick, *Resistance versus Vichy*, 141-2.

⁶²⁶ "Resistance was an individual phenomenon, based more often on temperamental rather than ideological considerations." Novick, *Resistance versus Vichy*, 15. See also Vinen, *Unfree French*, 327.

⁶²⁷ Vinen, *Unfree French*, 16.

⁶²⁸ This is the assessment, for instance, of Novick, *Resistance versus Vichy*, 13-5.

⁶²⁹ See for instance *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, 180-1, 188, and *Blood of Others*, 156, 186-7.

⁶³⁰ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 116-25.

⁶³¹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 171-5.

⁶³² I am relying on Aristotle's notion of the mean here. Aristotle says that, of the two extremes, there is one which is further from the mean and which is more tempting to us. Therefore, in order to find the mean, we need to push toward the opposite extreme. In the context of the war, this would mean that the error made by Beauvoir is closer to the mean than the error made by the collaborator.

⁶³³ See Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 149.

⁶³⁴ Arp, *Bonds of Freedom*, 132.

⁶³⁵ Kruks, *Retrieving Experience*, 47-8, 59-70.

⁶³⁶ Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 546-8.

⁶³⁷ Abortion: Grosholz, "Beauvoir and Practical Deliberation." Bouchapa: Shelby, "Beauvoir and Ethical Responsibility," 101-7.

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Areas of Specialization

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Major Award

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