SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S THEORIES OF FREEDOM

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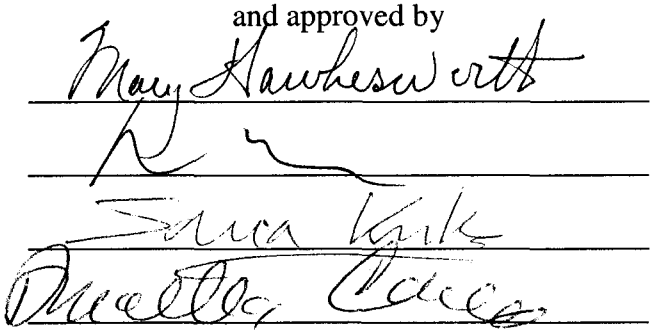

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Simone de Beauvoir's Theories of Freedom

by KAREN LEE SHELBY

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The development of Simone de Beauvoir's thought about freedom owes much to the renewed interest in the work of G.W. F. Hegel in France beginning in the 1930s. Beauvoir's understanding of Hegel's master/slave dialectic presented problems of intersubjectivity and human freedom that she struggled with in varied ways through her writings. Her initial work attempts to comprehend a notion of freedom as individualist sovereignty, and the confrontation of the self with the other as a battle for assertion of the self through the death or domination of the other. Ultimately, this solution is unsatisfactory, although it prefigures the problem of violence that is the underside of human freedom's imbrication with intersubjectivity. As Beauvoir's thought unfolds, two further understandings of freedom emerge that work in tandem. Beauvoir presents a notion of freedom as conditioned by the lived experience of the self, and sees that freedom as realized through the projects that self undertakes. In order to comprehend one's place in the world, one must be able to judge one's situation and the opportunities that arise or are foreclosed out of that situation.

Ultimately, living one's freedom, for Beauvoir, is an ethical project, and active, one that she insists "takes a bite out of the world." However, this engagement is shaped by the situation of the ethical actor, her understanding of the world and her place in it, and the political possibilities of the projects undertaken. The alternatives that confronted Beauvoir during the Algerian War, and with which she sought to confront her fellow *citoyen(ne)s*, reflect both the difficulties and the possibilities that inhere in Beauvoir's understandings of freedom. In this context, as in many contexts, the choices were complicated and difficult, open to contestation and re-interpretation. Beauvoir privileges human freedom as the ultimate value that informs those choices. This leads her to the human capacity to make judgments about freedom's content, and to undertake the proper actions necessary to accomplish the aims in question. However, it is precisely the situations of choice that Beauvoir sees as highly constrained that push her to question freedom's possibilities in humans' lived experience.

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"To put it positively, the precept will be to treat the other... as a freedom so that his end may be freedom; in using this conducting-wire one will have to incur the risk, in each case, of inventing an original solution." (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* 142)

"The possibility that the factual world is the outcome of a systematically disordered whole produces still another difference between the epic political theorist and the scientific theorist. Although each attempts to change men's views of the world, only the former attempts to change the world itself." (Sheldon Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," 1080)

"An ethical theory is a theoretical account of what ethical thought and practice are, which account either implies a general test for the correctness of basic ethical beliefs and principles or else implies that there cannot be such a test." (Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 72)

Finding Freedom

The development of Simone de Beauvoir's thought about freedom owes much to the renewed interest in the work of G.W. F. Hegel in France beginning in the 1930s (Le Doeuff 1995; Roth 1988). As argued in this dissertation, Beauvoir's understanding of Hegel's master/slave dialectic presented problems of intersubjectivity and human freedom that Beauvoir struggled with in varied ways through her writings. Her initial work attempts to comprehend a notion of freedom as individualist sovereignty, and the confrontation of the self with the other as a battle for assertion of the self through the death or domination of the other. Ultimately, this solution is unsatisfactory, although it prefigures the problem of violence that is the underside of human freedom's imbrication with intersubjectivity. As Beauvoir's thought unfolds, two further understandings of freedom emerge that work in tandem. Beauvoir presents a notion of freedom as conditioned by the lived experience of the self, and sees that freedom as realized through the projects that self takes on. In order to comprehend one's place in the world, one must be able to judge one's situation and the opportunities that arise or are foreclosed out of that situation. Finally, living one's freedom, for Beauvoir, is an

ethical project, and active, one that she insists "takes a bite out of the world" (1945a, 252), or engages strongly. However, this engagement is shaped by the situation of the ethical actor, her understanding of the world and her place in it, and the political possibilities that shape the projects she undertakes.

Freedom is, for Beauvoir, "a mode of relating thought to life," (to borrow Rosi Braidotti's description of feminist theory) (1989, 94). It is a method that involves a recognition that, "...freedom realizes itself only by engaging itself in the world: ...man's project toward freedom is embodied for him in definite acts"[1] (1948b, 78). Distinguishing between the three modes of Beauvoir's freedom pushes us to understand the value of exercising one's freedom through active critical engagement with the world and helps us understand what is at stake in the way we view the world and our mode of comprehending it. Exploring Beauvoir's rejection of a notion of freedom as sovereignty foregrounds the importance of others to the realization of each person's freedom. Acknowledging that one's freedom is conditioned necessitates the critical faculty of judgment in order to assess one's situation and the responsibilities to others that it entails. Finally, a notion of freedom as active engagement with the world pushes humans to confront the possibilities for action with an understanding that "the past weighs on the present, shaping alternatives and pressing with a force of its own" (Wolin 1969, 1077). The alternatives that confronted Beauvoir during the Algerian War, and with which she sought to confront her fellow *citoyen(ne)s*, reflect both the difficulties and the possibilities that inhere in Beauvoir's understandings of freedom.

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[1] Beauvoir used the traditional, although potentially exclusionary, term "man" for her general discussions of humanity. In this thesis, I have abided by the English translations of Beauvoir's work, and generally followed this standard practice in my own translations of Beauvoir's work, in order to leave open questions of how inclusive or exclusive Beauvoir's work may be.

They represent one difficult set of situations that entailed choices and reckonings that seemed at some points to privilege individual freedom, and at others to privilege the freedom of a group over an individual's. In this context, as in many contexts, the choices were complicated and difficult, open to contestation and re-interpretation. In making choices, however, Beauvoir privileges human freedom as the ultimate value that informs those choices. The problem occurs when competing versions of immediate freedom, or competing visions of the achievement of future freedom are at stake. This leads Beauvoir to privilege the human capacity to make judgments about freedom's content, and to undertake the proper actions necessary to accomplish the aims in question. This works both at the level of the individual as an actor making choices of how to act (and why) in a given situation, as well as at the level of the social and political context within which that actor's choices are framed and realized. Neither the choice, nor its constraint is infinite. However, it is precisely the situations of choice that Beauvoir sees as highly constrained that push her to question freedom's possibilities and humans' lived experience.

Much of Beauvoir's work came from her personal understanding of her own freedom as both enabled and limited by economic, political and social conditions. Beauvoir was, after all, the daughter of a bourgeois family, which, if not for financial difficulties suffered by her father, would have meant a bourgeois marriage for her at the appropriate time. As it was, the economic reversals meant she would need to seek out a career, and at that time teaching was one of a few options open to a respectable young woman of Beauvoir's background. The first woman had achieved the *Aggrégation* in Philosophy in 1905, three years before Beauvoir's birth, and twenty-

four years before Beauvoir herself would place second in the *Aggrégation* in Philosophy behind Jean-Paul Sartre, Beauvoir's lifelong intellectual interlocutor and personal companion. Subsequent to this, Beauvoir held a series of teaching positions, but these were stepping-stones to her ultimately achieved desire of becoming a full-time writer.

Beauvoir's most often cited work, *The Second Sex* (1989b), has been widely translated, and generations of women have found in it a reflection of their own lives through the complexities of the economic, political, social and philosophical arrangements that have shaped their life experiences.[2] In this text, Beauvoir argued that gender as a defining attribute of human existence constrained the freedom of women. Many of the themes that it addresses are ones that recur in her work, although Beauvoir developed those themes in a variety of ways: writing fiction in the tradition of the French philosophical novel; writing straightforwardly philosophical essays; writing autobiographical works that simultaneously recount political and social events and criticize her own and others' actions; and writing critical commentary on contemporary events, situating them in terms that challenged her readers to develop their own critical judgment of events, and to act in response.[3]

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[2] At the same time, however, Beauvoir has been criticized for her focus on white women of the French bourgeoisie in *The Second Sex*. See, for example, Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Simone de Beauvoir and Women: Just Who Does She Think 'We' Is?" (1988)

[3] See, for example, Beauvoir's "In France Today, One Can Kill With Impunity" and "Syria and Its Prisoners" and Karen L. Shelby, Introductions to these texts, forthcoming in a multi-volume collection of translations of Beauvoir's philosophical and political works edited by Margaret Simons.

Djamila Boupacha's Situation

The Algerian War for independence from France was fought from 1954 to 1962 (Ruedy 1992, 156-94). During the time of the Algerian War, Simone de Beauvoir was disgusted at the apathy of French citizens in the face of both the injustice of France's attempt to maintain Algeria as a French colony and the atrocious conduct of the war. She all but withdrew from public life, except for those demonstrations and meetings that would benefit the causes she supported. Why was she loath to maintain the ordinary contact with fellow French citizens that had been a regular feature of her life? The weight of their complicity in the maintenance of an unjust war, and her frustration at her own (and others') failure to motivate them to take action against the war, and for an independent Algeria, are two answers to the question. What is provocative, however, is that Beauvoir, whose *Ethics* is premised on the ability of each person to choose her own projects and the particular concrete content that those projects will take, should argue so strongly for particular actions, have expectations that people should act, and be so profoundly disappointed when many did not act. Were Beauvoir's expectations a case of wanting to maintain the individual subjectivity as the basic element of her philosophical theory at the same time that she premises the freedom of that subjectivity on an intersubjective relationship, and relatedly to maintain the premise that one's freedom means that one can choose not to act, then expect people to act in a certain manner to secure others' freedom? Not necessarily. Beauvoir's call for individual responsibility for one's actions and inactions is grounded in a relational ethic, one that leads her to expect certain political actions in order to attempt to achieve conditions leading to the

freedom of all humans. Reading her philosophical writings with and against her engagement with the Algerian War highlights both the possibilities and the limitations of her understandings of human freedom.

In her study of the Algerian conflict, *Torture: The Role of Ideology in the French-Algerian War* (1989), Rita Maran's central thesis is that it was France's ideology of the *mission civilisatrice* that justified much of the systematic torture that was used as a tool by the military in the war. By analyzing the discourse of the military, the government, and intellectuals from this period, she shows that the perception of the "civilizing mission" informed the logic of those who agreed with torture's use (as a necessary evil, of course), those who opposed it but supported France's waging of the war, and those who opposed the war altogether. Of intellectuals, Maran says that they, "...have long acted as a moral prod to governmental policy-makers as well as to the French public. Intellectuals served as interpreters, critics, and stimulators of ideas between sectors of French society. In their discourse the influence of the civilizing mission ideology on propagation of torture became visible" (1989, 22). Because they participated in the propagation of the ideological frame that helped justify the torture, even when they were decidedly against it, Maran indicates that they were in some way responsible for its practice. Her claim is that in citing the spread of universal principles of 'human' rights as a part of France's own revolutionary legacy, often through deliberate appeals to French nationalism, intellectuals in fact contributed to a justification of unconscionable acts.

This conflict was one about which Simone Beauvoir felt very deeply. She was outspoken in her opposition to the continuing efforts of France to retain this North

African colony. Maran describes Beauvoir as someone "actively engaged in opposing domination–of women, of colonized peoples, of others whose human rights were breached" (1989, 166). Beauvoir also took on the cause of Djamila Boupacha, an Algerian woman tortured by French soldiers. In publicizing the Boupacha case, and urging French citizens to act on their knowledge of the conduct of the Algerian war, Beauvoir invoked a notion of collective responsibility for actions with which many were not directly connected. And yet, Beauvoir saw the burden of French citizenship as necessitating some kind of response to the Algerian War and especially the means adopted by the French military in fighting it. Maran notes that Beauvoir was addressing, "fair-minded French people and their sense of national pride. The appeal was based on the prevailing collective understanding of France as a country of justice for all and the rights of each one." Maran then goes on to cite expediency as the reason for Beauvoir's making such an appeal, "one that required no explanation.... She called up benevolent aspects of France's civilizing mission as expressed in national pride..."[4] (1989, 167). However expedient this may have been, it certainly accords with Beauvoir's understanding of human existence as rooted in the particular situations in which individuals find themselves. As a French citizen in a particular historical time and place, Beauvoir believed there were certain responsibilities that that situation entailed for her and for her fellow citizens. At the same time, the theoretical foundation of her understanding of those responsibilities is her notion of the ambiguity of human existence, with its correlative necessity of intersubjective relations. The

[4] Provocatively, the quote continues, "...feelings prevalent not only among 'French French' (on the mainland) but among 'Algerian French' (in Algeria) as well" (Maran 1989, 167). It is clear from what follows that Maran is including not just so-called *pied noirs*, whose ancestors came from the French mainland, but, in Maran's terms, "Muslim Algerians" as well.

combination of these two elements – a situation of blatant denial of human freedom alongside the responsibilities of human freedom – led her to certain expectations in the context of the Algerian War.

While opposed to the violent maintenance of "Algérie Française" from the beginning of the War, Beauvoir eventually took on a particular project that involved two goals. One was to remind the French people of the atrocities that were being committed in their name and to which many turned a blind eye, acts for which Beauvoir believed they were ultimately responsible as French citizens. The other was to bring about the release and vindication of twenty-two year old Djamila Boupacha.

In February of 1960, Djamila Boupacha was imprisoned as a suspect in the planting of a bomb, later defused, in the café of the University of Algiers. She admitted involvement with the Algerian resistance forces, including having harbored agents in her house, but initially denied any involvement with the bomb at the café. Eventually, a confession was extracted from her under torture, which included beatings, submersion in water, electric shock, burning and rape with a bottle (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962a, 28-29). The systematic torture of Algerians taken into custody was one of the central means of waging the "counter-terrorist" war of the French military forces (Sorum 1977, 113-29; Maran 1989). There was little accountability for these actions. They were allowed as a sort of necessary evil by the French colonizers, and encouraged as a means of gathering intelligence by the military command. Officials in France, who by this point wanted the conflict, which had spread across the Mediterranean into France, to be over, and France victorious, ignored this. Boupacha's case would have been like many others, a quick trial followed by a guilty verdict

based upon a confession that was the only evidence available, if not for her own courage, the intervention of Gisèle Halimi, a young French attorney known for her activism, and Simone de Beauvoir.

In Boupacha's first interview with a magistrate, after more than a month of imprisonment, she had the temerity to make the request, "Note that I have been tortured"[5] (Montreynaud 1992, 466), and to demand that she be examined by a doctor. Her accusations were greeted mainly with indifference by the magistrate, but Boupacha stood by her allegations of torture and declarations of innocence despite threats of both further torture to herself and harm to her family. At the same time, her brother wrote from Algeria to Halimi, and asked her to take the case. She agreed.

Part of the challenge for Halimi was the official resistance she knew she would encounter in both Algeria and France. This included restriction of her first trip to Algiers to forty-eight hours, a severe limitation given that Halimi would arrive on the 17th of May, Boupacha's hearing would take place on the 18th, and the dossier for her case would not be available for her lawyer to see on the day before the hearing. Halimi tried to have the visa extended, although it was not surprising to her that she could not, as "the frequency with which those lawyers who regularly pleaded in Algeria were interned, expelled, or arrested while going about the normal business of their calling pointed to a deliberate policy of ensuring that the farcical travesty which passed for justice there should continue unmolested" (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962a, 25). The harassment engendered by the attempt to maintain the colonial system was an impediment to Halimi's (and other attorneys') freedom as well, despite ability to more

[5] "Notez que j'ai été torturée."

or less continue in the exercise of the legal profession. Halimi worked through the courts initially to have the trial postponed to give adequate time to prepare a defense for the proceedings in Algeria, and eventually to have the trial moved to France, where an impartial judge might be found. The likelihood was also greater that the allegations of torture might be investigated by a French judge more removed from the immediacy of the conflict.

One of the first things that Halimi did upon returning to Paris from her visit to Algeria was to notify officials, all the way up to Charles de Gaulle, of the circumstances of Boupacha's case, including her allegations of torture. This she did in order to "destroy a myth and block a handy official loophole. Whenever such abuses are brought to the notice of those ultimately responsible for them, we hear the same old song: 'It's an Algerian affair; Paris knew nothing about it'" (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962a, 63). Halimi also contacted persons who had made known their opposition to France's conduct of the war, including Simone de Beauvoir. It was decided that they must arouse public sympathy, a not-insignificant task, as they must, "overcome the most scandalous aspect of this whole scandalous affair – the fact that people *had got used to it.*" They concluded that "The French had to be shocked out of their comfortable indifference to the Algerian problem" (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962a, 65) before they would act on behalf of Boupacha, or indeed on behalf of their own freedom.

With this in mind, Beauvoir mobilized her social and intellectual capital and wrote a stirring letter intended to galvanize public opinion, which she had published in the newspaper *Le Monde* on June 3rd under the title, "In Defense of Djamila

Boupacha." Beauvoir sought to confront the French people both with the horrific facts of Boupacha's torture, and with their own complicity in the perpetuation of such practices in Algeria. Although Beauvoir was forced to substitute the word "belly" for the word "vagina" in the sentence that was to read, "They forced a bottle into her vagina," the severity of such a description of violation and torture was intended to provoke a reaction, and it made what was an incident like many others in Algeria a *cause célèbre* in France.

Beauvoir wrote of the ease with which the "heart-breaking cries of agony and grief that have so long been going up from Algerian soil - and indeed, in France as well - have failed to reach your ears, or if they have, have been so faint that it took only a little dishonesty on your part to ignore them" (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962a, 10-11). Against this attitude, Beauvoir discusses the "struggle against oppression," claiming that, "...every man is affected by this struggle in so essential a way that he can not fulfill himself morally without taking part in it" (Beauvoir 1948b 88-89), offering a moral imperative and a motive both self-interested and intersubjective for ethical action. In the context of the Algerian War and Djamila Boupacha's situation, knowledge that practices such as torture were standard procedure for French troops acting in the name of France and therefore for all French citizens, should have been enough of a motivation to outrage for persons who considered themselves ethical human beings, but was not. It was left to Beauvoir, and writers, activists and artists like her, to function as educators, eye-openers, to French women and men, to educate them about, to use Hannah Arendt's term, the "collective responsibility" for those acts that membership in the community of French citizens had entailed to them (Arendt

1987a; 1994 [1945]). The fog of apathy that perhaps made their lives more comfortable also rendered them incapable of realizing their own freedom, as well as the freedom of the Algerians fighting for independence. The justice of the claims of the Algerians who had lived for more than a century under France's colonial rule, and were fighting to throw it off was a question French citizens trusted to the same French officials who duplicitously affirmed that torture was not an accepted practice anymore in Algeria, then ignored evidence to the contrary, or condoned such conduct by the military. Beauvoir expected that her fellow citizens would examine for themselves what was happening in Algeria, and come to some decision as to the rightness or wrongness of what they found, and act.

The particular action possible is dependent on the situation of the individual and upon politics, according to Beauvoir. She says that "[H]ere the question is political before being moral: we must end by abolishing all suppression; each one must carry on in his struggle in connection with that of the other and by integrating it into the general pattern. What order should be followed? What tactics should be adopted? It is a matter of opportunity and efficiency. For each one it also depends on his individual situation" (1948b, 89). It is clear that in the context of Djamila Boupacha's case, there was for Beauvoir a certain expectation that French women and men should engage ethically by acting in some way in light of the burden of collective responsibility that their complicity had brought them. In comparison to the revelations about the Holocaust and the genocidal intentions of the system of concentration camps which led Hannah Arendt to invoke an absolute judgment about the wrongness of those acts, and the culpability that humans in the conditions of modernity must bear

for them, Beauvoir's appeal is not as strong. Why, in the face of government assurances that the war was necessary, and an understanding of the civilizing mission that the French were ostensibly engaged in (Maran 1989), should French citizens contest those claims? One reason that Beauvoir would give, of course, is that the goal of the war, i.e. maintenance of a colonized country as such, was unjust and impeded Algerians' ability to claim their freedom. Another would be that the conduct of the war, i.e. the systematic use of torture, was wrong as well. For Beauvoir, the failure to create conditions enabling the freedom of Algerians also diminished the freedom of the French.

And yet for Beauvoir, there is a contradiction in her philosophical understanding that in a particular historical situation, the content of the action is not determined, alongside her insistence that in this instance the opportunity to act was offered, and that she wanted French citizens to act with a certain anti-war agenda. She believed that the freedom that was offered was not just their own, the safe, comfortable, ersatz freedom of the French citizen at home, sympathetic to those French citizens in Algeria, but oppressors more or less direct of the Algerian people. The freedom offered through collective action was the antidote to their collective responsibility for the plight of the Algerian people under French colonization, and the conduct of the war being fought to maintain it.

Recognizing that "Oppression tries to defend itself by its utility...[but that] nothing is useful if it is not useful to man; nothing is useful to man if he is not in a position to define his own ends and values, if he is not free" (1948b, 95), Beauvoir was anticipating some of the objections to an independent Algeria, and some of its

justifications as well. This would suggest that political assessment is the constant companion of ethical action, and that citizens needed to let those politicians who continued to defend France's colony and its means of retaining it know that they would no longer accept this behavior or rationale. They could, and some did, do this through protests, petitions, and direct confrontation. They sought thereby to inspire "general revulsion" for the treatment of Djamila Boupacha and others similarly treated. But Beauvoir insists that this feeling is not enough, as "[A]ny such revulsion will lack concrete reality unless it takes the form of political action" (1948b, 20).

Attempting to build on the revulsion her article had engendered, and push those in the government to do something, Beauvoir also organized a Djamila Boupacha committee to put pressure on French officials. Her goals as stated in *Le Monde* were: to obtain further postponement of Boupacha's trial, in order to have time enough to investigate Boupacha's allegations; to ensure that neither Boupacha's family, nor witnesses favorable to her would be harassed, intimidated, or worse; and to see the torturers of the El Biar and Hussein Dey prisons, where Boupacha had been held, brought to justice (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962a, 65). While some public sympathy may have been aroused by the publicity given this case, official intransigence remained firmly in place. In her introduction to *Djamila Boupacha*, Beauvoir recounts the reaction of one official, the President of the Committee of Public Safety:

> After all - as was delicately hinted by M. Patin...- Djamila Boupacha is still alive, so her ordeal cannot have been all that frightful. M. Patin was alluding to the use of the bottle on Djamila when he declared: 'I feared at first that she might have been violated *per anum*... such treatment results in perforation of the intestines, and is fatal. But this was something quite different,' he added,

> smiling: clearly nothing of the sort could ever happen to *him*" (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962a, 9).

It was this attitude of bland indifference that Beauvoir found impossible to accept. M. Patin was comfortable in the protection both from reflection and from responsibility that he believed his role in the bureaucracy provided. In the face of this, Beauvoir insists that as both a French citizen, and an official of the French government, he bore a responsibility that he refused to acknowledge. Relief that Djamila Boupacha was not dead rang false, when there were plenty of other allegations of torture that had resulted in death. Additionally, ignoring that Boupacha had suffered grievous harm was a way of evading the impetus to think and act.

The French were "used to" the conflict and allegations of torture. And if confronted about their complicity in the conflict, most would probably have responded 'What have I done?' In the wake of a book published just a few years ago by a reportedly unrepentant French General Paul Aussaresses, who admits to having ordered the torture and peremptory execution of Algerians captured during the Battle of Algiers, a statement of Lionel Jospin was published in Le Monde on May 17, 2001, in which the French Prime Minister condemned those who were torturers, and saluted those who served honorably during the Algerian War. Simone de Beauvoir calls this distinction into question in her desire to condemn French citizens who not only acted in support of the war, but who failed to work against the French government's attempt to retain this North African colony.

In asking regarding Djamila Boupacha, "Can we still be moved by the sufferings of one girl?" (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962a, 9), Beauvoir issued not just an

imperative for empathy or thought, but a call to action. She insists that it is the fundamental tie between the self and the other that pushes us into ethical action as the concrete expression of our freedom. This relational ethic entails collective responsibility for harms wrought in the name of collective political entities to which one belongs, such as nations, but also makes possible a notion of action in concert with others and the achievement of freedom through ethically informed political action.

Djamila Boupacha's situation is one that shows the intricacies of freedom's demands and possibilities, as Boupacha used the promise of political freedoms offered to French citizens, even Algerian ones, to seek legal representation and have her case moved. At the same time, she was involved in a cause that contested the notion of her freedom as manifest in her status as a French subject, presenting herself openly as an Algerian in conflict with the French nation over Algerian nationhood. Beauvoir's appeal to French citizens was not just one to free Algerians from the oppressive social conditions that colonization had resulted in, but to free themselves as well from their own situation of active or passive contribution to an oppressive system of colonial domination.

Reading Beauvoir

Simone de Beauvoir blended her activism, her avowed vocation as a writer, and her own lived experience in her selection of what to write and how to write it. She wrote essays, novels, plays, short stories, and autobiographies. She offered her own life as an example in semi-autobiographical novels and in works of autobiography that

critically examined her relation to historical events, and thereby invited her readers to do the same. Beauvoir saw the writer as a figure who could potentially call on her readers to confront their own decisions, choices and actions, someone who could in this way ask her readers to examine their lives and claim their freedom. Beauvoir's life and work have been read in a number of ways by scholars. Some have written biographical works about Beauvoir and Sartre, others biographical work focused primarily on Beauvoir. Other work has concentrated on Beauvoir's literary contribution, and there has been a (relatively) recent move to situate Beauvoir as a philosopher in her own right, not simply derivative of other existentialists, although engaged with similar themes. Other work on Beauvoir has examined her writings for their political implications, often in relation to questions of gender as they informed both her philosophical and political understandings of the world, and continue to elucidate contemporary problems of feminist theory and politics. These writings taken together offer a range of responses to and interpretations of Beauvoir's own political commitments, and of her importance for contemporary gender studies, philosophy and politics. What is most often at the heart of these writings is a question of freedom, either that of Beauvoir herself, whose life has served as a model for an independent, engaged, intellectual woman's existence, or a philosophical and political question of freedom's meanings and realization as a foundation of Beauvoir's writings.

Sonia Kruks' groundbreaking writings on Beauvoir and freedom have called into question the assumption of many scholars (and Beauvoir's own avowals) that she simply appropriated Sartrian existentialism's understanding of human freedom. In "Simone de Beauvoir: Teaching Sartre About Freedom" (1995) Kruks argues for a

reading of Beauvoir (in some ways against Beauvoir) as aligned with Merleau-Ponty, rather than with Sartre, when it comes to a contextual understanding of human freedom and constraint. In her most recent book, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics* (2001), Kruks reasserts Beauvoir's place in the trajectory of political philosophy, tracing out of Beauvoir's work on subjectivity and intersubjectivity (and its links to the work of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Fanon and Foucault), a path to political action grounded in women's lived experience.

Toril Moi has written several compelling studies of the imbrication of literature, philosophy and politics in the work of Simone de Beauvoir (1985; 1987; 1990; 1994a; 1994b). In "Politics and the Intellectual Woman: Clichés and Commonplaces in the Reception of Simone de Beauvoir," Moi discusses the critical response to Beauvoir's work as gendered, insofar as it revealed "how difficult it is for a woman to be taken seriously as an intellectual, even in the late twentieth century" (1994a, 74). Beauvoir, herself, noted in her "Introduction" to *The Second Sex* that, "man represents the positive and the neutral... whereas woman represents only the negative," having earlier avowed that "the terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form" (1989b, xxi).

Another form of asymmetry is evident in the treatment of Beauvoir and her wrtiting. Beauvoir has been absent from much of the general literature about existentialism and existentialists, or her work is subsumed as derivative of Sartre's. For example, Walter Kaufmann's *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956) does not address Beauvoir's contribution to Existentialist philosophy at all, and Paul Clay Sorum's *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France* (1977) mentions her only

briefly, while treating Sartre at length. Not until recently could a *New York Times* article proclaim, "Beauvoir Emerges from Sartre's Shadow," although the header on the second page of the article, "Simone de Beauvoir Is Emerging From Sartre's Shadow" is more accurate in some respects (Cohen 1998). The subtitle to this *Times* article, "Some Even Dare to Call Her [Beauvoir] a... Philosopher" is reflective of several dimensions of writing on Beauvoir. Beauvoir's avowal that she was a writer not a philosopher has been contested by authors engaged in projects that have revealed the philosophical importance of her writing. This work that contests Beauvoir's public self-presentation emerged as feminist scholars and philosophers realized how Beauvoir's work constituted a difference from her existential brethren and not simply in respect to its incorporation of questions of gender.

Much of what has been written about Beauvoir, especially in book-length works, has been biographical. And the focus has been on situating Beauvoir in terms of Sartre. Books titled *Simone de Beauvoir: A Life...A Love Story* (Francis and Gontier 1987), *Hearts and Minds: The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (Madsen 1977), and *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre: The Remaking of a Twentieth-Century Legend* (Fullbrook and Fullbrook 1994) are all evidence of the enduring interest in the lifelong relationship between these two writers who challenged conventions in their way of living and in their writings.

Deirdre Bair's *Simone de Beauvoir: a biography* (1990)shifts the biographical focus to Beauvoir, and examines Beauvoir's life and literature together in great depth. Bair presents the social and political milieu in which Beauvoir lived, the actions of Beauvoir and her close associates, and then examines Beauvoir's writings in this

context. Bair argues that Beauvoir's political involvement, until the time that she takes up the feminist cause late in her life, is driven by Sartre's political involvements. Bair presents her reader with a profoundly apolitical Beauvoir, involved so that she can both monitor Sartre's time and continue to be his first reader and philosophical interlocutor. So although the focus of the biography is Beauvoir, it seems that Beauvoir's primary focus up to a certain point is Sartre, and Beauvoir's own political investments are contested. This raises the question posed later in this project of what informs one's actions, and when someone else's project and one's own come together. For Beauvoir, writing was a vocation, and whatever the impulse behind her philosophical and political understandings, Beauvoir brought her commitments forth in her writings.

In *Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits of Commitment*, Anne Whitmarsh insists on the ties between Beauvoir's philosophical and fictional works as a means of communicating her ideas and seeing what they might become "in action" (1981, 32). Whitmarsh describes Beauvoir's version of existentialism as, "a stern ethical system. She sees clearly that man needs to believe in something, and this something is the possibility of transcendence through using his freedom for action, and of the efficacy of this action" (1981, 50). At the same time, Whitmarsh, like Bair, describes a Beauvoir not much taken to political action, even in the context of the Algerian War: "...Simone de Beauvoir always rejected that degree of public political activity that was the logical corollary of her strong moral disapproval of existing society and her inward sense of the possibility of a radical alternative. Why? ...she could never take the plunge into political involvement with power, into the market place of power in

action" (1981, 130). However, when Whitmarsh is critical of Beauvoir's (in)action during the Algerian War, she is guilty of taking Beauvoir at her word that she was "not a woman of action" (Beauvoir 1992b, 183), instead of relating Beauvoir's action to Beauvoir's situation, and taking those actions in context. Judith Okely contests, to some extent, the reading of Beauvoir as apolitical. Okely grants Beauvoir's dislike for politics as traditionally understood: "...bureaucratic agenda, hierarchies and legalistic procedures... male defined and male dominated" (1986, 151). Okely invokes Beauvoir's political opposition to the Algerian War and that she "use[d] to effect her position as celebrity intellectual and as a woman" (1986, 153) as a "political tactic" that was carried over into her later involvement with the women's movement in France (1986, 155).

Whitmarsh notes, as part of her critique of Beauvoir's political involvement, that, "Her protests against the wars in Algeria and Vietnam arose from her disgust at the inhuman treatment inflicted on the indigenous population of these countries by their oppressors: .... No longer was the freedom and independence of these peoples of paramount importance as it had appeared to be when she wrote *Pour une moral de l'ambiguité*. By the late fifties she had gone beyond the idealism and the theory to the reality of human suffering" (1981, 135). Whitmarsh misses the point that the "inhuman treatment" that Beauvoir had seemingly suddenly discovered was an element of the system of concretely realized freedom and independence that Beauvoir was developing from the beginning. In Beauvoir's claim that human freedom cannot be realized unless the material situation is taken into account, however, Whitmarsh levels a criticism that is not so easily dismissed, when she asserts that the political and

the social become so intertwined for Beauvoir, that "political action" can be almost anything other than an apathetic attitude (1981, 170). As for writing in particular, Whitmarsh presents Beauvoir's attitude as:

> ...writing is political. ...the most important area of her *engagement*. Her view of literary activity as a testimony and a communication from writer to reader could be seen as self-indulgence: a private act of fulfillment which might, *en passant*, influence people's thinking and attitudes. Yet for her writing is valid as action (in spite of her present wish to complement it with certain public activities) and therefore has fulfilled the task to which she has devoted herself (1981, 170).

I do not believe that Beauvoir saw writing as necessarily a form of political action. I also do not think Beauvoir was simply allowing herself to step out of the implications for action of her ethical theory.

In this project I argue that writing can help facilitate political action by fostering a critical confrontation between the self and a hypothetical other or others. Writing alone, however, does not determine whether one lives up to the challenge that Beauvoir's notion of freedom in action entails. Toril Moi's *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (1994b) begins with biographical information that contextualizes Beauvoir's career as writer and philosopher, then moves to an insightful investigation of the intellectual work of Beauvoir and its importance for literary studies, philosophy and politics. The biographical element of this text gives greater depth to the reader's understanding of the challenges that faced Beauvoir in choosing her career, as well as to the political themes that Beauvoir chose to address. In so doing, it offers an implicit critique of Whitmarsh's assertion that Beauvoir's writing was not somehow a political form of engagement.

Judith Butler's "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig and Foucault" picks up on those political themes, and highlights the sense of 'becoming' and agency that are to be read out of *The Second Sex*, as, "Not only are we culturally constructed, but in some sense we construct ourselves. For Beauvoir, to *become* a woman is a purposive and appropriative set of acts" (1987, 128). Butler reads Beauvoir's statement about being born versus becoming a woman as an opportunity to examine gender's materiality and the political elements of 'the body politic.' Frederika Scarth's recent dissertation also confronts Beauvoir's understanding of embodiment and its related notion of freedom. Scarth reads "implie[d] political tasks and responsibilities" out of *The Second Sex* and its description of the possible relations between women and men alongside the imperative from Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity* that "freedom is interdependent, and thus to will oneself free is to will others free: freedom is unthinkable outside community" (Scarth 2003, 21). Scarth reclaims the Beauvoirian body and the maternal subject from feminist readings of Beauvoir that rejected her work (or were scathingly critical of it) because of the difficulties of philosophy's, political theory's and feminism's confrontation with 'the body,' especially as presented by Beauvoir.

Other feminist scholars of philosophy have engaged Beauvoir's best-known text, *The Second Sex*, at length, and continue to do so. For example, in *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities* (1997), Debra Bergoffen's reading of an ethics of erotic generosity presents a compelling way to interpret intersubjectivity as productive of positive human interactions, albeit shadowed by the potential for submission and violence. Karen Vintges, in "*The*

Second Sex and Philosophy," claims that "The general consensus is that *The Second Sex* applies Sartrean theory; I see it, however, as containing a transformation rather than an application of that theory" (1992, 49). This is a more productive way of thinking about the relation between Beauvoir's and Sartre's existentialisms, one also taken by Nancy Bauer. Bauer examines what is at stake philosophically in the ways that Beauvoir interprets Hegel and presents her own form of existential philosophy in *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy and Feminism* (2001). The question of how Beauvoir's addition of gender to existentialism is *transformative of*, rather than merely additive to, existentialist philosophy, is at the heart of these works and those of Kruks and Scarth mentioned above. The difference it makes when Beauvoir asks, "What sort of transcendence could a woman shut up in a harem achieve?" (1962, 346) or when she asks "what is a woman?" (1989b, xix) and describes the place as Other that the feminine has meant, is a difference that both questions and builds on the fundamental premises of her own philosophical frameworks, and makes a political issue of freedom's possibility.

A collection of articles derived from a roundtable addressing the issue of Simone de Beauvoir's status in relation to contemporary feminist theory was published in *Women and Politics* in 1991. Each of the articles affirmed the relevance of Simone de Beauvoir's work to the political analysis offered by feminist theories today. Sonia Kruks framed the question addressed by each of the authors as to whether or not "Beauvoir's work still enters actively into feminist theory today" (1991, 57). Each of them responded affirming the challenges that Beauvoir's work continues to offer. Hester Eisenstein framed her answer autobiographically, then highlighted

Beauvoir's theoretical contributions. For Eisenstein, Beauvoir presented a role model of an "intellectual woman" (1991, 63), one who was actively engaged in politics with women of the feminist generation that came after her (1991, 62). In her work, she "foreshadowed" feminism's "redefinition of the 'political'"; focused on women's agency as central to feminism; and argued the need to see oneself as situated, "as a prerequisite for effective feminist political alliances" (1991, 62). Sondra Farganis saw Beauvoir as providing a method to analyze and judge how to act in confrontation with contemporary political situations. Beauvoir's turn to the social elements of women's existence led to an investigation of the 'ought' of how to live as a feminist, as well as an understanding that, "Freedom entails challenging these social roles and politics involves formulating alternative patterns of social and, hence, sexual behavior" (1991, 79). Linda Zerilli takes seriously Beauvoir's assertion, "I am a Woman" as an interrogation of what women's lived experience might mean as a political assertion that offers neither, "emotional solace in the promise of a unified self nor social alternatives in the form of female language communities" (1991, 95). According to Zerilli, Beauvoir's work offers, "a theory of gender that works with conflict and ambiguity in its search for a political because collective position from which women can speak critically about femininity" (1991, 95). In this way, answering the unanswerable question, 'What is a woman?' becomes a feminist political project of creating a non-fixed, non-unitary speaking subject, one constituted in feminist community. Mary Caputi focuses on Beauvoir's humanist philosophical legacy as underpinning postmodern theories in the work of French feminist theorists such as

Monique Wittig, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, through their concern for sexual identity and a focus on freedom and choice.

Work that has focused on the writings of Simone de Beauvoir has often examined them in context with Sartre's writings, seeking to define Beauvoir as separate philosophically in important respects. Michèle Le Doeuff, in "Falling into (Ambiguous) Line," also poses the question, "Or, inversely, must one consider that she [Beauvoir] concedes (and just halfheartedly) to whom it may concern that freedom is the very modality of existence, but that her own thought commences when she asserts that, 'on the other hand,' there is a concrete inequality in the possibilities that people can propose to themselves?" (1995, 63). This passage invokes the difference between Beauvoir and Sartre, and LeDoeuff argues that Beauvoir's separation begins with her engagement with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to LeDoeuff, this leads Beauvoir to side with Hegel against Sartre in the choice between, "The idea of a struggle between consciousnesses to transcend a reciprocal exteriority seen as a given or a theory centered on one consciousness and one alone" (1995, 64). My project seeks to expand that notion of struggle between consciousnesses to encompass one of struggle through action with other consciousnesses, in the sense of projects chosen that bring them together, as Beauvoir's means of building from and contesting Hegel's understanding of the confrontation of the self with the other. The goal of this form of intersubjective action is not to dominate the other(s), but to work together for the freedom of all persons. Beauvoir's involvement with the Algerian War shows that indeed this kind of struggle with others in service of human freedom was expected as a concrete realization of her ethical theory, at the same time that freedom's content will

not look the same to all persons. It is a challenge to live one's freedom, according to Beauvoir, and not only in times of political and social upheaval.

Julien Murphy argues in "Beauvoir and the Algerian War: Toward a Postcolonial Ethics" that there is a "radical notion of freedom implicit in Beauvoir's Algerian writings" (1995, 264-5). Her article draws primarily on *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *Djamila Boupacha* to make her central points: that the war in Algeria inspired Beauvoir's first action against colonialism; that the theme of decolonization is not addressed in Beauvoir scholarship, and that her *Ethics* combined with her actions "suggest a postcolonial ethics" (1995, 264). Murphy argues that the notion of collective responsibility that Beauvoir develops through her experience of the Algerian War is not present in her earlier *Ethics* (1995, 280). I disagree. Murphy presents the Algerian War as a period of philosophical awakening for Beauvoir, and while I agree that Beauvoir's response to the war furthers our understanding of her ethics and freedom, the ideas were present, even if only nascent, in her early writings. Murphy is correct in arguing that Beauvoir's radical notion of freedom implies a postcolonial ethics. However, it is neither begun nor limited to the context of French colonialism. Instead, I argue, Beauvoir offers in the varying accounts of freedom that occur throughout her writings, an ethics that is brought into focus through the lens of the Algerian War, but that is in development from the beginning of her career as a writer. Murphy notes that, "The deconstruction of cultural identities by war not only disrupts our subjectivity but presents us with moral and political challenges. Beauvoir's ethics, in particular, her responses to the Algerian war, indicate possibilities for reconstruction through recognizing our bonds to others" (1995, 292).

Either Murphy is asserting that Beauvoir's personal ethics is exemplary of intersubjective possibilities, or she reads a living ethics of intersubjectivity out of the document that Beauvoir often made of her own life, or possibly both. Nonetheless, Beauvoir's "deconstruction of cultural identities" and focus on the ethical possibilities of one's bonds to others are present in her earliest published writings.

My project seeks to extend our understanding of Beauvoir's concept of freedom, beyond the ground of *The Second Sex*, through an engagement particularly with early writings that contend with and question Hegel's notion of subject formation and intersubjective freedom. Beauvoir's understanding of freedom insists on its creation, politically, through action. Her novels, essays and other writings taken together reveal an author struggling to define those concepts against the limits of her chosen philosophical interlocutors, through her own experiences and through the experiences of the fictional characters she created. Freedom is at the foundation of Beauvoir's work. This dissertation project is an exploration of the possibilities, as well as the limits, of Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of freedom, and its ethical and political resonances, in relation to situations occurring during the Algerian War of Independence. The drive behind this project is to uncover what Beauvoir has to say to political theory about the imbrication of ethics and politics through her conception of freedom. It draws on both straightforwardly philosophical texts as well as those generally considered more literary in order to examine Beauvoir's understandings of freedom.

Chapters

The following chapter of the dissertation, "Mastering the World," examines the concepts of intersubjectivity and freedom as they are initially developed by Beauvoir. The impetus of this chapter is an understanding of 'the self' and 'the other' and the possible relations between them. Beauvoir relies on Hegel's master/slave dialectic in a way that initially reads freedom as sovereignty, then is mired in the necessary dynamic of dominance and subordination that is the outcome of this confrontation with the other. A reading of Beauvoir's first novel, *She Came To Stay*, highlights the limitations of this understanding of freedom. It privileges the 'freedom' of one particular subject over another, through a competitive understanding of the confrontation of the self and the other as entailing the domination of one and the death or submission of the other. For Hegel, this eventually results in a reversal of the dynamic and the realization of freedom through Reason. Beauvoir is not content with this resolution of the problem, and seeks alternate means of the intersubjective realization of freedom. Because Beauvoir is asking questions about relations among humans that are not answered by her initial conception of freedom, she is pushed toward understandings that recognize the lived experience of human existence and the possibility of mutual recognition that positive action undertaken with others may engender.

The third chapter, "Unveiling the World," shows Beauvoir's understanding of freedom as situational. Because she cannot resolve the epistemological problem of uncertainty, Beauvoir's ethical system requires a process of judging as a means to better understand freedom's intersubjective content. I use Hannah Arendt's insights

into judging, from her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (1982), in order to elucidate this crucial step in freedom's realization for Beauvoir. It follows from the previous chapter insofar as one must see the situational limitations with which one is complicitous and for which one is responsible, and judge what one sees, before one can act to change the conditions that inhibit the achievement of freedom for all, including one's own freedom. Judging is a solitary activity involving one particular subject, but it allows for reflection on one's place in the world, and a mental exercise in acknowledging others in the world. This imaginary confrontation with the other in an effort to judge a given situation can be difficult, given the ambiguities of existence and one's complicity in denying the freedom of others, yet it is a necessary part of judging, and therefore of realizing one's own freedom and making others' freedom possible. For Beauvoir, the writer is someone whose work can foster the process of judging for her readers, insofar as it brings an other or others into the presence of the judging subject, and allows for the imagination of possibilities of action through the narratives that the writer leads her reader to experience and that the reader imagines for herself.

The fourth chapter, "Mapping the Future World" examines acting as the means of achieving freedom. It becomes clear that for Beauvoir, it is through a set of individual choices that one decides how to act, but that those choices always take place in a particular historical and social setting, itself changing, which affords the opportunity to act with others in projects that are mutually desirable. At the same time, this setting presents difficulties which one must confront in acting ethically. It is the through the projects that one takes on, i.e. one's actions or lack thereof, that one can

reach for freedom. This is not merely a relativist principle of acting; it is informed by certain ethical absolutes. It is also political. Just as one must be conscious of history and of the future as one reflects upon a situation when judging, so must one be aware of the past, present and future when acting. This chapter returns to the notion of an intersubjectivity premised not on domination or submission, but on the mutuality and positive recognition that was first positively affirmed in chapter two. Its possibility is an open question, as the specter of violence remains, as a possible necessity in confrontation with an other or others who mistakenly claim their own freedom at the cost of those whom they see as absolute others.

The fifth chapter addresses the lingering question of violence and its place in Beauvoir's understandings of freedom. Violence against those who are oppressors is necessary, as a last resort, in confronting a situation of oppression. However, violence itself does not extend freedom. It can only open up possibilities for the kind of intersubjectively affirmed mutuality of freedom that Beauvoir reads as a possibility out of Hegel's *Phenomenology* (1931, 1994). In the end, the struggle continues, both in the resolution of Djamila Boupacha's situation and the questions about freedom's content that it poses, and in Beauvoir's drive to posit freedom as achieved in ethical action. Feminist debates about what comprises freedom and how best to achieve it recall Beauvoir's invitation to ethical living and proposed basis for ethical action: "Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our life that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting" (1948b, 9). Examining Beauvoir's engagement with the Algerian War, while turning

to the development of her understanding of intersubjective freedom exposes the possibilities as well as the difficulties of living one's freedom.

Chapter 2: Mastering the World

"How can one be free if one is alone?" (Michael Roth, *Knowing and History*, 310)

"We have to respect freedom only when it is intended for freedom, not when it strays, flees itself, and resigns itself. A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied." (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 91)

"If men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce." (Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?" *Between Past and Future*, 165)

Beauvoir's Freedom

Simone de Beauvoir continually confronts in her writing a problem that came strikingly to the fore during the Algerian War. For her, the assertion of the fundamental freedom of each individual accompanied a desire that individuals act ethically. Given that she recognized that there are many ways to evade living one's freedom through ethical action, known in her existential terms as living in 'bad faith,' what mechanisms does she propose will lead individuals to live ethically? Because freedom is shaped by one's encounters with others, her solution needs to account for intersubjectivity as an element. Initially, however, drawing on one understanding of Hegel's master/slave dialectic, she cannot overcome a problem of individuality and ethical intersubjectivity, and her novel *She Came to Stay* is emblematic of this failure. It shows a character who cannot imagine herself as she desires to in the presence of a certain other, and takes extreme measures in her confrontation with this other. The failure to comprehend a positively intersubjective ethic presented a challenge, and Beauvoir continued to address the question of freedom's relation to ethics throughout her life, as the concrete situations she encountered led her to further explore the concrete meaning of lived experience. However, the fundamental elements of the means she ultimately proposes for navigating between her assumption of freedom's

individualist aspects and ethics' intersubjective imperatives are present in her early writings.

In *Beauvoir and The Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism*,[1] Margaret Simons' work on Beauvoir's diary of the year 1927 reveals "Beauvoir's statement of her interest in the philosophical theme, 'the opposition of self and other'" (1999, 186). For Simons, this is an indication that Beauvoir did not simply appropriate Sartrian philosophy in her own writings, and indeed, that Beauvoir had a profound effect on the development of Sartre's writings (as well as Merleau-Ponty's). Simons reads a variety of philosophical influences in Beauvoir's writing, as would be expected given Beauvoir's philosophical studies both in her *lycée* as well as at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* and *Sorbonne*. In this chapter, however, I will narrow the focus to the influence of Hegel's master/slave dialectic and its related problematics of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in Beauvoir's writing on this confrontation of self and other and its importance for her understanding of freedom.

In Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*, the central argument is reflected in the statement that:

> There is an ethics only if there is a problem to solve. And it can be said, by inverting the preceding line of argument, that the ethics which have given solutions by effacing the fact of separation of men are not valid precisely because there *is* this separation. An ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny *a priori* that separate existants can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws for all. (1948b, 18)

Freedom is the most basic element of humanity for Simone de Beauvoir, and its most basic problem. For her, a human being *is*, by definition, a 'freedom.' One is a freedom both in the sense that each person *is born with the capacity to be free*; and in the sense

[1] Hereafter denoted as *BTSS*.

that one either *does or does not exercise one's freedom*, the content of which is dependent on one's situations and the resulting choices one makes in one's lived existence. In working with the tension between these two moments of freedom, Beauvoir initially presents an account of freedom that follows a familiar path. It owes debts to G.W.F. Hegel, and seems much akin to the existentialism of her lifelong philosophical companion, Jean-Paul Sartre. Over the course of her work, however, the difficult questions that Beauvoir asks of both Hegelian dialectics and Sartrian existentialism, and the answers she poses to the ethical problems she confronts, move her to develop an account of freedom that takes a different perspective. In this chapter, however, I will examine her initial understanding of freedom, in order to comprehend her point of departure, and where and why she eventually moves away from both Hegelian and Sartrian accounts of human freedom.

For Beauvoir, it is out of the ground of one's freedom that one becomes who one is, insofar as an individual also gives meaning to her own existence through the exercise of her freedom. Seen from one perspective, freedom is understood by Beauvoir to be something that each human possesses simply by virtue of existence. Freedom is here presented first of all as a property of each subject, something each human simply has, with a fixity that is premised merely on the necessity that one be alive to enjoy it.

At the same time, Beauvoir's system is highly relational, and because of this, freedom takes on a sense of fluidity and motion, based on the impact that the many humans, living and dead, have on each other's lives, either individually or collectively. In this way, the freedom of each person is related to and premised on the freedom of

all other persons. Here again, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* Beauvoir claims that, "To wish for the disclosure of the world and to assert oneself as freedom are one and the same movement. Freedom is the source from which all significations and all values spring. It is the original condition of all justification of existence" (1948b, 24). In this passage, she presents a notion of freedom that is full of desire, motion and action, and which leads to meaning and value for those who seek to understand their place in the world. Freedom therefore involves looking outward from the self toward the world. For Beauvoir, the world is the condition of freedom. To rest in the solipsistic moment of understanding only one's own freedom, or understanding one's own freedom only in opposition to others' freedom, would be to undercut the potential that inheres in the understanding of each subject as having the capacity for freedom. Therefore, the world is the background condition or the ground of ethical action insofar as freedom's exercise is foundational for the creation of meaning and human value.

In addition to this, considering freedom as justification of existence means for Beauvoir that humans have free will, and that they do not only act instinctively in whatever situations they encounter. Rather, they are thinking beings who exercise their individual will as freedom through the choices they make. Each individual is always situated within a plurality of other 'freedoms,' and while each is separate, all are bound to each other. Because of this, meaning and value, while shaped by individuals, are collectively at stake, and the context within which freedom is exercised, i.e. within which ethical action happens or fails to happen, becomes extremely important. For if one's situational constraints are such that the opportunities to act, to create meaning and value for oneself and for the community in which one is located, are denied, then

the terrain of ethical action is constrained, and the possibility of manifesting one's freedom is at risk.

Out of this relation to others, as a freedom in the midst of many other and related freedoms, comes what Beauvoir considers the fundamental ambiguity of the human condition. This ambiguity involves, for each person, the realization of "being a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects... In turn an object for others, he[2] is nothing more than an individual in the collectivity on which he depends" (1948b, 7). This sets up an opposition between the individual's perception of herself or himself as a subject, and of others as objects, and her/his perception that for those others s/he is an object. Likewise, each of those others considers herself/himself to be a subject, and others as objects. This divide between perception of one's own subjectivity and a failure to comprehend the subjectivity of another, the other's reciprocal failure in the same regard, and the consequences that follow from this, present the fundamental epistemological and ontological problem that must be confronted in life, according to Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*.

This notion of an ethics of *ambiguity* also highlights the fragility of the quality of being "sovereign" that Beauvoir invokes above. For if this is, as she portrays it, a dependent sovereignty, and if it is one that one perceives, but that others will fail to recognize, then the "supremacy or rank above, or authority [of the self] over, others"[3] is called into question. Beauvoir invokes the "sovereign and unique" quality of one's subjectivity, then goes on to undercut it by contrasting it to the similar sovereignty and

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[2] Beauvoir followed the traditionally exclusionary usage of the masculine pronoun for men and 'humans,' and the feminine pronoun when speaking of women only.
[3] OED online ("sovereign") (from the Second Edition 1989): http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00231789

uniqueness of all those others who are subjects to themselves and others to 'me,' and vice-versa. While maintaining the moment of individual sovereignty, Beauvoir simultaneously reminds us that it is conditioned and marked by a social situation that by definition does not always apportion sovereignty equally or on a rational basis.

Beauvoir further contrasts the sovereignty of the subject with the objectifying conditions of modernity in the following passage regarding humanity:

> The more widespread their mastery of the world, the more they find themselves crushed by uncontrollable forces. Though they are masters of the atomic bomb, yet it is created to destroy them. Each one has the incomparable taste in his mouth of his own life, and yet each feels himself more insignificant than an insect within the immense collectivity whose limits are one with the earth's. Perhaps in no other age have they manifested their grandeur more brilliantly, and in no other age has this grandeur been so horribly flouted. In spite of so many stubborn lies, at every moment, at every opportunity, the truth comes to light, the truth of life and death, of my solitude and my bond with the world, of my freedom and my servitude, of the insignificance and the sovereign importance of each man and all men. There was Stalingrad and there was Buchenwald, and neither of the two wipes out the other. Since we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us therefore try to look the truth in the face. (1948b, 9)

In reaction to this world of contradictions and paradoxes, Beauvoir invokes an attempt to find a truth. This truth is not a precept by which to live, a guiding moral compass. Rather, this truth concerns the conditions of one's existence, one's situation, and it is only in light of this knowledge that one can begin to make meaning of an existence that could include the oppositions of mastery and uncontrollability, life and insignificance, grandeur and horror, just war and genocide. Out of the absurdity of the human condition, as described above, and in relation with others, one must establish meaning and value, confronting the truth of that absurdity all along. The moral precepts by which one will live can only emerge after the recognition of the conditions

that bolster or inhibit the sense of oneself as having some mastery of self, i.e. that one's subjective perception is shaped by the intersubjective context one lives.

Beauvoir sets up the ethical imperative that because one cannot know the subjectivity of the other, one must *act* in such a way as to acknowledge or recognize it. In addition, one must acknowledge that one is 'the other' for all those other/subjects, as Beauvoir continues the above passage, asserting, "Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our life that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting" (1948b, 9). Freedom is the foundation of Beauvoir's ethical system, and it must be combined with judgment and action in order to be fully realized. Although Beauvoir presents freedom as a capacity that each has inherently, it is in the exercise of that capacity, and its realization, or the failure thereof, that freedom may emerge. In its beyond-the-baseline sense, freedom is actually a potential, not a property of the subject, and its achievement can never be guaranteed nor achieved once and for all. Freedom's content is a constant set of challenges, or 'problems to solve,' and the opportunity to address them.

In understanding freedom as the foundation of Beauvoir's ethical system, if the truth will not exactly set you free, acknowledging certain truths is at least a precondition to forging that freedom. The first truth that must be acknowledged is that of the difficulty of intersubjective relations. As examined later, Beauvoir will also push her readers to confront the material conditions of human existence and human complicity in producing them. This stems from Beauvoir's concern with intersubjectivity and the ways in which actions are manifestations of the values and

meanings that humans create through and as 'freedoms.' Beauvoir's simultaneous insistence on the fiction that freedom is a property of the subject is a means of creating a foundational value in a system that has lost or diminished traditional sources of valuation.

For Beauvoir, in attempting to do the impossible and close the gap between one subjectivity and another, one renders more possible the exercise of both one's own and others' freedom, and enriches the content of freedom. Out of this fundamental ambiguity of subject and object, self and other, the content of each person's freedom is made manifest, in the kinds of relations that either inhibit or encourage the conditions that could enable freedom for all individuals. Because this ambiguity is construed philosophically as a fixed part of human existence, the achievement of freedom can never be absolute or accomplished once and for all. There needs to be a space, symbolic and social, in which others acknowledge and one can experience one's own subjectivity. This implies a struggle both within the self and with others, and more or less freedom may be brought into existence in the world or in a person's situation, but absolute freedom can never be achieved.[4]

The ontological basis of freedom's fluidity rests in the ultimate irreconcilability of the self and the other. The breach between 'the one' as subject and 'the others' as objects establishes the need for an ethics that can never mend this split but sees it as producing a space where freedom can be generated, but only through the difficult work of ethical action. Ethical action, because it is a reaching of one freedom toward an other or others serves as a bridge between a self that is, in its originary

[4] The flip side is that absolute *un*freedom (short of death) cannot be achieved, because there is always the possibility that one's condition may change.

ambiguity, alienated from those others. Beauvoir simply posits this split as a fundamental part of human existence. Because it is epistemologically impossible to ever *know* the subjectivity of another and ontologically impossible to *be* the subjectivity of another (except in the realm of science fiction or film fantasy), and because she presents this difficulty at the outset of her ethics, she foregrounds it, setting it up as that which must first be confronted and then addressed through one's actions.

However, this existential difficulty that foregrounds her ethical theory is not necessarily a cause for despair, but rather a challenge that pushes humans to live up to the possibilities of their humanity. The challenge is, through one's choices, to create one's own freedom, and as a necessary corollary to enable the freedom of others as well. There will not ever be a full and final success, but the challenge, and it is an ethical challenge, is always there. Each day, in each individual's life, there is a confrontation with the choices that will be made and that will constitute the content of each individual's freedom and the meaning of each individual's life. One chooses each day, in each moment, whether to accept the responsibility of one's freedom, through the actions that one takes in response to the situations that one encounters. Whether or not one acts to advance one's own freedom and the freedom of others determines whether or not one acts ethically.

For Beauvoir, an active ethics is necessary because there is no outside standard of human conduct that upholds human freedom, except one that is created by humans out of their lived existence. Neither God nor Marxism, the two examples she cites in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, can offer the necessary fluidity that can take into account the

split between the self and the other and the changeability of humans' lives, while resting on the foundation of human freedom that she insists on from the beginning.

Beauvoir's is an active freedom, since it is through one's actions that the understanding comes of whether one has contributed to or impeded the necessarily concrete projects of freedom. The content of the specific actions is left to the individual to decide, but those decisions are made in specific situational contexts that allow room for each person to make her own decisions, in the knowledge of the conditions of her world and her own abilities. I will return to the question of freedom's relation to action in a subsequent chapter. For now, it needs to be said that Beauvoir's ethical system is based in the freedom each human has to make choices. However, these choices are always made within the specificity of an individual's situation, and that situation is one of radical relationality. In the end, there is no solipsism in Beauvoir's ethical system, except as an exercise in bad faith, since the ethical actor works within a consciousness of the freedom of others, and a desire to further it. Reaching for knowledge of the other is precisely what one is compelled to do, as an acknowledgment that the other has an existence as subject that is potentially as value-rich and meaningful as one's own.

In Beauvoir's relational ethical system, the freedom of each is linked to the freedom of all because the individual is always situated within a plurality of other freedoms. Each is separate but bound to the others, and in pursuing one's projects or one's necessary engagement with the world (1948b, 78), there is an ethical imperative to pursue both one's own freedom and to facilitate the freedom of [all] others. Despite this imperative, no determination of the content of freedom is ever fixed. This

flexibility comprises both the difficulty and the strength of Beauvoir's ethical system. It demands a recognition of one's own circumstances and one's abilities, then demands that one confront the situation with judgment and action.

In addition, projects of freedom must reach into the future. Beauvoir insists on the difference between one's immanence and transcendence, and the conflicting desires that are evoked by this dualism. To remain on the plain of the immanent is to rest in the here and now and fail to engage in projects that work toward both present and future freedom. This recognition of futurity's importance will be more fully examined in the fourth chapter of this project, "Mapping the Future World."

Freedom's link to the individual's particular circumstances necessitates a certain fluidity to freedom's content. What shores up the uncertainty that could be generated by a fluid concept of freedom, and keeps it from becoming a minimalist excuse to exert one's own freedom at the cost of others, is the robust notion of intersubjectivity that demands an embrace of ambiguity. Not only must one recognize one's ambiguity, but one must also seek to overcome it, by seeking to recognize the other's subjectivity. This kind of 'knowledge' is what ultimately stands in for the drive to know the other, which Beauvoir's appropriation of Hegelian and Sartrian notions of intersubjectivity initially manifests.

It would be helpful to understand how Beauvoir, in drawing on Hegel's master/slave dialectic and Sartre's understanding of it as a conflict involving a struggle for mastery over others in the assertion of the self, begins to think about freedom in ways that become more difficult to sustain as she asks the political questions that most fundamentally occupy her thought. In order to do this, I turn now

to the critique of sovereignty in Hannah Arendt's essay "What Is Freedom?" and then examine Arendt's critique of Hegel's philosophy of progress and the notion of freedom it encompasses. Arendt helps in examining what is lost politically in maintaining a philosophical conception of freedom, and thereby elucidates Beauvoir's struggles against the philosophical frameworks her academic training and intellectual relationships initially yielded. Beauvoir's point of departure is her drive to find meaning in her own life, as desrcribed in her 1927 diary:

> I am intellectually very alone and very lost at the entry to my life... looking for a direction. I sense that I have value, that there is something for me to do and to say... but my thought turns in the void: where should it be directed? how to break this solitude? what to achieve with my intelligence? ... I am in a great distress at the moment to decide on my life. Can I be satisfied with what one calls happiness? or ought I walk towards this absolute that attracts me? (qtd. in Simons 1999, 206)

These personal questions reveal what is at stake for Beauvoir in their answers at the moment she posed them. According to Simons, Beauvoir confronted "the search for a justification for her life and the struggle against despair, the search for self and the desire for love" (1999, 206). The answers Beauvoir proposes, however, at this point are personal. She must find the philosophy that will suit her own desire to make meaning out of her life. These same questions, however, will be posed by Beauvoir over and over again, to herself and to others. The search for a philosophical solution to her personal questions leads eventually to political questions about how to break the wrenching solitude seemingly entailed by human existence, and what to do and say.

Sovereignty's Shortcomings

Hannah Arendt asserts forcefully in "What Is Freedom?": "If men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce" (1993 [1968], 165). She traces

freedom's trajectory from philosophers' interest in "the problem of freedom when freedom was no longer experienced in acting and in associating with others but in willing and in the intercourse with one's self, when, briefly, freedom had become free will" (1993 [1968], 163) to the movement of this concept of freedom into the political realm, all of its problematic elements intact. The most problematic of these is freedom understood as sovereignty, described as "the ideal of a free will, independent from others and eventually prevailing against them" (1993 [1968], 163). Arendt gives a more developed exposition of the problematic of freedom in *Life of the Mind*, in her discussion of "Willing."

In the second volume of *Life of the Mind*, Arendt most explicitly develops a critique of freedom of the will and the notion of freedom as sovereignty that accompanies it. Of the Will, she asserts forcefully that: "[T]he basic trouble with the Will is that it deals not merely with things that are absent from the senses and need to be made present through the mind's power of re-presentation, but with things, visibles and invisibles, that have never existed at all," claiming shortly thereafter, "And just as the past always presents itself to the mind in the guise of certainty, the future's main characteristic is its basic uncertainty, no matter how high a degree of probability prediction may attain" (1978b, 13-14). Later she posits that, "...the Will's need to will is no less strong than Reason's need to think; in both instances the mind transcends its own natural limitations, either by asking unanswerable questions or by projecting itself into a future which, for the willing subject, will never be" (1978b, 14). Discussing this further, Arendt characterizes actions following from the will as, "contingent," as they, "could all be defined as acts about which I know that I could as

well have left them undone" (1978b, 14). In an aside, she notes Aristotle's neologism that characterized "some mental state that must precede action as *pro-airesis*, the 'choice' between two possibilities, or, rather, the preference that makes me choose one action instead of another..." (1978b, 15). She eventually notes that, for the Greeks, "A person was free who could move as he wished; the I-can, not the I-will, was the criterion" (1978b, 19). Focus on the "I-can" rests on the context in which choices are made and the actions that follow, the actions that are possible, not only speculatively, but concretely.

Turning to modernity, there are three main post-medieval philosophical objections to the Will that Arendt identifies. First, she cites disbelief in the faculty's existence (1978b, 23). Second, she notes the will's "inevitable connection with Freedom—to repeat, the notion of an unfree will is a contradiction in terms" (1978b, 26). Finally, she discusses the problem of the contingency resultant from the will, which she says "found its solution in the nineteenth-century *philosophy of history*, whose greatest representative worked out an ingenious theory of a hidden Reason and Meaning in the course of world events, directing men's wills in all their contingency toward an ultimate goal they never intended" (1978b, 28). This reference to Hegel foreshadows Arendt's longer exploration of Hegel's philosophy of history as the answer to the problem of free will's contingency.

Before turning to this, however, she takes up what she calls "The problem of the new" (1978b, 28). One issue is that, "[from] the perspective of the willing ego, it is not freedom but necessity that appears as a delusion of consciousness" (1978b, 31), a restatement of a problem that Hegel's philosophy of history attempts to address. This

is a problem of thinking, and a desire to substitute reason for contingency. Concerning the will, however, Arendt notes that, "Every volition, although a mental activity, relates to the world of appearances in which its project is to be realized; in flagrant contrast to thinking, no willing is ever done for its own sake or finds its fulfillment in the act itself. Every volition not only concerns particulars but—and this is of great importance—looks forward to its own end, when willing something will have changed into doing-it" (1978b, 36-7). She adds shortly thereafter, "In short, the will always wills to *do* something and thus implicitly holds in contempt sheer thinking, whose whole activity depends on 'doing nothing'" (1978b, 37). The will brings about a constant state of tension in the 'willing ego', as it "deals with things which are in our power but whose accomplishment is by no means certain" (1978b, 37-38). This puts the will at odds with solutions that are integrative of human action into a rational grand scheme, leaving only to the 'Will,' the "will not to will" (1978b, 38), within that philosophical schema. For this reason, Arendt turns to the distinction between a philosophical conception of freedom and a political one, and privileges the latter. However, she works first through the solution that Hegel offered as an alternative, and understanding the limits of this solution as Arendt presents them will help us understand the limits of Beauvoir's appropriation of those ideas in her own writings.

Arendt begins with the importance of temporality (past, present and future) for understanding Hegel's philosophy. She cites Alexandre Koyré's thesis that the outstanding feature of Hegel's philosophy is, in Koyré's words, "the primacy ascribed to the future over the past" (qtd. in 1978b, 40). However, Arendt also notes of Hegel's "most important and most influential contribution to philosophy" that it is rooted in

the idea, in Hegel's words, that "what is *thought* is, and what is exists only insofar as it is thought" (qtd. in 1978b, 40). Arendt calls him,

> [T]he first thinker to conceive of a philosophy of history, that is, of the past: re-collected by the backward-directed glance of the thinking and remembering ego, it is 'internalized' (*er-innert*), becomes part and parcel of the mind through 'the effort of the concept' ('*die Anstrengung des Begriffs*'), and in this internalizing way achieves the '*reconciliation*' of Mind and World." (1978b, 40)

Arendt adds pithily, "Was there ever a greater triumph of the thinking ego than is represented in this scenario?" (1978b, 40), and describes this method of conquering contingency: "the mind, by sheer force of reflection, can assimilate to itself—suck into itself, as it were—not, to be sure, all the appearances but whatever has been meaningful in them, leaving aside everything not assimilable as irrelevant accident, without consequence for either the course of History or the train of discursive thought" (1978b, 40).

Arendt turns to Hegel's description of "experienced human time" to find the primacy of the future, "the time sequence appropriate to the willing ego," which, she notes, "when it forms its projects does indeed live for the future" (1978b, 41). Claiming the future for the willing active subject is the obverse of saying that "the past begins with disappearance of the future, and, in that tranquility, the thinking ego asserts itself" (1978b, 42). She notes that for Hegel, "man is not just temporal; he *is* Time," adding thereafter, "Without him there might be movement and motion, but there would not be Time" (1978b, 42). Of Hegel's temporality, Arendt adds that, "the past is produced by the future, and thinking, which contemplates the past, is the result of the Will. For the will, in the last resort, anticipates the ultimate frustration of the will's projects, which is death; they too, one day, will have been" (1978b, 43). She

notes shortly thereafter, "In Hegel, man is not distinguished from other animal species by being an *animal rationale* but by being the only living creature that knows about his own death" (1978b, 43). Cognizance of the inevitable, one's death, is the hinge that brings together the thinking and the willing egos (1978b, 43). Arendt summarizes this as follows:

> To oversimplify: That there exists such a thing as the *Life* of the mind is due to the mind's organ for the future and its resulting 'restlessness'; that there exists such a thing as the life of the *Mind* is due to death, which, foreseen as an absolute end, halts the will and transforms the future into an anticipated past, the will's projects into objects of thought, and the soul's expectation into an anticipated remembrance. (1978b, 44)

Speaking of Hegel and Plotinus, Arendt says that, "in both cases the true fulfillment of time is eternity, or, in secular terms, existentially speaking, the mind's switch from willing to thinking" (1978b, 45).

Given Hegel's understanding, "philosophy has to reconcile the conflict between the thinking and the willing ego. It must unite the time speculations belonging to the perspective of the Will and its concentration on the future with Thinking and its perspective of an enduring present" (1978b, 47). Arendt does not believe that this is accomplished. For her, the infinitely progressive nature of Hegel's cyclical dialectic, "is won at the expense of both—the thinking ego's experience of an enduring present and the willing ego's insistence on the primacy of the future" (1978b, 48). Ultimately, the system fails for Arendt because of Hegel's starting point of 'Being', rather than 'Not-Being', which she believes builds in a notion of infinite progress. The alternative that she believes Hegel refuses to consider is "a process of permanent annihilation" (1978b, 50). For Arendt, that process is a live possibility, and one that her generation of thinkers, and those who have followed, have been forced to

address in confronting the Holocaust and other forms of mass destruction. So it is no wonder that for Arendt the idealism of Hegel's dialectic of progress cannot sufficiently answer the questions engendered by such a history. Arendt's turn to the will is representative of her own answer to the vision of history presented by such moments, and to politics as the manifestation of the will's concretization, i.e. action. For her, political freedom, or the freedom to act, is a much more substantive version of freedom than a philosophical conception that remains rooted in thought.

In the last segment of *The Life of The Mind*, Arendt most clearly outlines the difference between political and philosophical conceptions of freedom, a distinction explored at greater length in chapter four. For now, suffice it to say that Arendt is still dealing with the problematic of the will, but shifts her focus to the alternative of a political freedom that is reliant on action. She begins by recounting that, "Of all the philosophers and theologians we have consulted, only Duns Scotus, we found, was ready to pay the price of contingency for the gift of freedom—the mental endowment we have for beginning something new, of which we know that it could just as well not be" (1978b, 195). Arendt continues shortly thereafter,

> Yet it is precisely this individuation brought about by the Will that breeds new and serious trouble for the notion of freedom. The individual, fashioned by the will and aware that it could be different from what it is (character, unlike bodily appearance or talents and abilities, is not given to the self at birth) always tends to assert an 'I-myself' against an indefinite 'they'—all others that I, as an individual, am *not*. Nothing indeed can be more frightening than the notion of solipsistic freedom—the 'feeling' that my standing apart, isolated from everyone else, is due to free will, that nothing and nobody can be held responsible for it but me myself. (1978b, 195-96)

Eventually, she adds that, "These difficulties and anxieties are caused by the Will insofar as it is a mental faculty, hence reflexive, recoiling upon itself—*volo me velle*,

cogito me cogitare—or, to put it in Heideggerian terms, by the fact that, existentially speaking, human existence has been 'abandoned to itself'" (1978b, 196). Although laudatory of Duns Scotus' insistence on contingency's relation to freedom, Arendt succinctly presents the most fearful elements of existentialism's related concerns of intersubjectivity and foundational, or rather, foundationless principles of being in the world, and the future's uncertainty.

Arendt continues, opposing to the fearful uncertainty of the mind's reflexive capabilities its cognitive capacities that are "intentional," particularly scientific endeavors. In this case, the focus on an object keeps the interference of solipsistic self-reflection to a minimum (1978b, 196). However, not even science is immune, and Arendt points out that, "Professional thinkers, whether philosophers or scientists, have not been 'pleased with freedom' and its ineluctable randomness" (1978b, 198). Hegel's response to the question of necessity and the destabilizing uncertainty of contingency was to posit a notion of historical progress that sees humans as both swept up in history's march and masters over it, in their mastery of the others who confront them.

Arendt is critical both of Hegelian notions of freedom's expansion through historical progress and of the solipsism of Sartrian existentialism because the version of freedom that is substratum to both of them relies on freedom of the will as its foundational principle. Human action is alienated from connection with other humans either because it is subordinate to history or because alienation from others is taken as the ground of human action. Arendt rejects these accounts of freedom. For her, two moments are at the crux of political freedom: the moment of Action, and the enriched

"We" that engages in that Action. Just as she is dealing with a problem of asserting freedom for all in a world in which the possibility of that freedom's denial had been violently manifest, and remained all too real, so is Simone de Beauvoir.

If freedom as sovereignty is represented by Arendt's above-cited definition of being "independent from others and eventually prevailing against them" (1993 [1968], 163) then it is no wonder Beauvoir eventually rebelled against this philosophically. She believed that one should be able to choose one's projects independently of others' coercion, but that one should work together with others, and should work for the freedom of all. There is a tension in Beauvoir's work between her focus on the individual as s/he who must act in the world under her own determination of what is to be done, and what s/he is individually capable of doing, and the drive to act in concert with others, a tension that is present in works such as *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, *The Second Sex*, "Who Shall Die?" and *The Blood of Others*. The goal is not to "prevail against them" unless they are acting to deny one's own freedom, and to overcome them by confronting and killing them does not, in and of itself, advance anyone's freedom. The kinds of questions Beauvoir asks about humans' lived experience, of women's experiences in particular, would lead her away from an understanding of freedom as domination of an other. Her notion of intersubjectivity relies on the possible positive acknowledgement of human relations, contesting the version of the subject of politics as the autonomous individual of much of Western philosophy. Beauvoir also contests Sartrian notions of intersubjective conflict as a battle for prevalence over others in assertion of the self – unless, that is, those others are not willing to grant the space, conceived broadly, for the manifestation of one's freedom.

With this in mind, I turn next to an examination of the influence of Hegel and Sartre on Beauvoir's work, through the lens of the master/slave dialectic.

Subjectivity/Intersubjectivity

Michèle LeDoeuff recounts Beauvoir's first fascination with Hegel's philosophy, and the hours Beauvoir spent in the library in July of 1940 reading *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (60). In Hegel's philosophy, Beauvoir found an inspiration for her own ethical theory, and a means of exploring the confrontation of the self with the other. Hegel's master/slave dialectic is an account of the development of subjectivity and of intersubjectivity.[5] Both elements are present in Beauvoir's writing, the subjective element, for example, when she seeks to confront the subject with the process of becoming entailed in the confrontation with one's ambiguity, that one is simultaneously self and other. At the same time, subject formation is intersubjective, and, as it is appropriated by Beauvoir, it is in the confrontation with the other that one recognizes one's own ambiguity, and is pushed to recognize the other as well.

According to Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,[6] the initial formation of the subject comes through the development in Consciousness of Self-Consciousness. It is when Hegel posits that, "A Self-Consciousness exists for-a-Self-Consciousness," and that, "What still remains for consciousness is the Experience of what Spirit is—Spirit, this absolute substance, which in the completed freedom and independence of its opposite, namely disparate self consciousnesses existing-for-self, constitutes

[5] There are debates within the Hegel literature as to whether this process is primarily a description of subjectivity's formation, (as, for example, in Kelly 1976 [1972]) or provides an account of intersubjective processes of subject formation (as noted by Kainz in Hegel 1994, fn.15 p.52).
[6] I have used relevant selections from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as translated by Howard P. Kainz, with one exception.

their unity: *The I that is a We, and the We that is an I*" (1994, 46-47) that he moves toward the confrontation of two subjectivities or Self-Consciousnesses. In this description of the one as part of the group, and the group as the assemblage of those 'one's, Hegel leaves room for Beauvoir's drive to maintain the individual as part of the collectivity to which s/he belongs. At the same time, however, this individual is not seen as fully formed by either Beauvoir or Hegel, until there is a confrontation with the other, in the intersubjective moment of the dialectic.

The ambiguity of this confrontation leads to two possible interpretations. It can be seen as the confrontation of one Self-Consciousness with itself, the other within, so to speak, as when Hegel says that, "Self-Consciousness must supersede *this* otherness (which is its *own* otherness)" (1994, 51). Alternatively, and simultaneously, it can be viewed as the confrontation of two Self-Consciousnesses with each other. Beauvoir does acknowledge the former, a concept of inner intersubjectivity, as one's own ambiguity in confrontation with the other.[7] As well, in an initial moment, she posits the confrontation of two subjectivities as determinative of their freedom, although it is eventually her understanding of subjectivities confronting each other and working together that Beauvoir sees as ultimately constructive of their freedom.

The result of the confrontation of two Self-Consciousnesses is described by Hegel as, "One individual steps forth over against another individual" (1994, 51) and "And it is thus that each Self-Consciousness must go for the death of the 'other' as it risks its own life" (1994, 55), a statement Beauvoir appropriated as the epigraph to her

[7] Frederika Scarth's thesis chapter, "The Second Sex: Ambiguity and the Body" (2003) discusses "the significance of corporeality in this construction" in Hegel's and Beauvoir's accounts of subject formation.

novel, *She Came to Stay*. This understanding of the confrontation follows from Hegel's presentation of human freedom: "And it is only through the risking of life that one's freedom is proved; only through such risk of life is it proved that the essence of Self-Consciousness is not its existence, not the immediate mode in which it first comes forth, not its immersion in the unfolding of life..." (1994, 55). For Hegel, this confrontation cannot be achieved without fear or terror, of such an extreme form that death seems imminent. However, what makes this dynamic of freedom a living one, continually in process, is not the death of the other, but her life as *Knecht*, described by one translator as having the sense of, "someone who has traded freedom for life and security, at the cost of subjection and dependence" (1994, 49). What is lost in this dynamic of death and fear is Hegel's statement that, "The consciousnesses *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing each other*" (1994, 53), as the dynamic of mutuality made possible in this description is overtaken by the inequality of the dynamic of intersubjectivity understood as lordship and bondage, masterdom and slavery, and an alternate version of recognition, whereby, "the subordinate consciousness cancels itself as existence-for-self, and therewith itself does what the first consciousness is doing to it" (1994, 60). In other words, the oppressed consciousness internalizes the objectification of self imposed by the oppressor.

Hegel's dialectic eventually admits a reversal, whereby the slave recognizes her necessity in the dynamic, and comes to Self-Consciousness, described by Kainz in a footnote as, "in other words, there is the relatively direct and positive road to explicit self-consciousness taken by the Master; and there is also the indirect and negative, but nevertheless reliable, back road taken by the Slave" (1994, 62). While, for Hegel, the

attainment of self-consciousness by both subjects eventually results in their expression through Reason (Hegel 1931, 267), this universal concept, and the notion of progress that inheres in it, is not acceptable for Beauvoir as a resolution of the intersubjective dynamics of the dialectic. It denies the contingency that gives meaning to the choices one makes in confrontation with the other, and denies the past and the future of the possibilities that emerge as humans interpret them through their individual experience. It also masks dynamics of power as they shape human experience. Instead, Beauvoir adopts various moments of these Hegelian intersubjective dynamics in her writings, accepting and rejecting them as they develop her understandings of human freedom.

Beauvoir attempts an understanding of the confrontation with the other as seeking the death of the other, then rejects it, seeing its fictional realization as the resolution to her novel *She Came to Stay* as unsatisfactory. This mode of murderous intersubjective confrontation, according to Beauvoir, fails to contribute to either subjectivity's freedom. However, she does continue to wrestle with intersubjectivity's implications, attempting to understand the alternative moment of mutuality and the dynamics that support it, leading to an understanding of human freedom premised on reciprocity and action in concert with others. She also looks to Hegel as a source for grounding her ethics in history and human experience. According to LeDoeuff, "she needed a philosophy of consciousness that opened directly and radically upon a problematic of the plurality of consciousnesses, in struggle with one another, thus existing in a reciprocal exteriority" (1995, 63). In fact, Beauvoir's appropriation is an attempt to achieve the self-understanding and positive intersubjectivity implied in Hegel's brief mention of one's recognition of mutual recognition, cited above. The

need that is expressed in *The Second Sex*, to interrogate what it means to be a woman, what it might mean to live one's freedom as a woman, is present in Beauvoir's 1927 diary. She opposes Merleau-Ponty's philosophical understanding with the idea that, "These problems that he lives with his brain, I live them with my arms and my legs.... I don't want to lose all of that" (qtd. in Simons 1999, 205). Beauvoir didn't want to lose that sense of lived experience with Hegel's dialectic either. In fact, according to Nancy Bauer, understanding her appropriation of the master/slave dialectic helps her reader understand both Beauvoir's and Hegel's philosophy differently when taken together.

In *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy and Feminism*, part of Nancy Bauer's project is to show that Beauvoir's "existential need, as it were, to investigate the nature of inequality between the sexes spawns a genuinely original appropriation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, one in which philosophy's silence on the fact of this inequality is philosophically redressed" (2001, 84). In order to do this, Bauer offers a reading of Hegel's dialectic that draws on Alexandre Kojève's lecture series, which was profoundly influential in the Paris of Beauvoir's philosophical formation, and which brought Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* to prominence in France (2001, 86). Bauer notes that it is the version of human self-consciousness presented by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* that both Beauvoir and Sartre find attractive (2001, 87). Two attributes in particular are important to them: "first, that the full flowering of human self-consciousness is not, as it were, automatic but instead is the result of a process; and, second, that this process necessitates that human beings recognize each other as capable of this full flowering" (2001, 87).

Bauer notes that all three thinkers "define a subject as a being who *acts*; and action, they claim, is something that goes beyond mere attempts at fulfilling one's desires as one finds them. Genuine action, for Hegel, Sartre, and Beauvoir entails deliberately—self-consciously—undertaking to *transcend* one's given desires by assigning oneself a project the fulfillment of which necessitates the subordination of those desires" (2001, 89). There is also a drive to objective self-certainty, or the confirmation from outside oneself of the truth of one's subjective self-certainty (2001, 89). This is accomplished only "by staking a claim to being-for-self and having the truth of that claim confirmed" (2001, 89). However, Bauer also notes that the staking of the claim, rather than the verification of it, is the more important piece here: "Since transcending one's given desires counts for Hegel as *acting* and since by his definition a being who acts is a *subject*, a being that stakes a claim to be being-for-itself transforms itself into a subject regardless of whether the staking of the claim turns out to be successful or not—regardless, that is, of whether objective self-certainty is actually achieved" (2001, 89-90). It is in "developing and negotiating a sense of being split" (2001, 88) that self-consciousness is achieved. However, Beauvoir and Sartre end up offering accounts of that negotiation that have widely differing import for their philosophical systems.

Bauer points to two critical differences between Sartre's and Beauvoir's appropriations of Hegel's dialectic. Bauer initiates the first difference with the statement:

> For Beauvoir the relinquishing of a certain form of narcissism in favor of risking an uncertain, unfixed, *ambiguous* relationship with the other... *is* the moral moment. For Sartre, quite to the contrary, the inevitable failure of the quest for

> objective self-certainty –the inevitable failure of the quest to overcome the other, understood as depriving him of the ability to objectify you—entails the impossibility of relinquishing precisely that form of narcissism that Beauvoir regards as impeding the moral moment. (2001, 93)

Because the Sartrian subject is stuck on the operation of overcoming the other, he cannot get beyond the kind of solipsistic fixation on the "I," or the attempt to establish the sovereign "I," and its desires, that marks an incomplete appropriation of Hegel's process, and which has marked Sartrian existentialism as limited. Although Beauvoir, taken either as Sartre's personal companion or as philosophically derivative, has generally been written off for the same reasons, Bauer's presentation of the distinctive ways that they appropriate Hegel's dialectic begins to reveal the real differences between them, and that those are clustered around issues of intersubjectivity and its impact.

After the moment of conquering the 'slave,' the moment of terror in which the 'master' wins and the 'slave' loses, and the slave's installation as mediator between objects and the master as such through the slave's labor, there is an interesting transformation that Bauer claims was particularly noted by Beauvoir. This is the moment in which:

> the world becomes not merely 'other,' not merely a collection of objects that may or may not elicit his desire as given but something that explicitly is not his, something to which his relationship can only be one of transformation and not of consumption or destruction.... Thus, the moment of terror—which, of course, leads directly to the slave's binding himself to the master—effectively allows the slave to see the world, through his being forced only to work on it, as something that he can transform. (2001, 101-2)

Beauvoir takes this sense of radical dispossession that is experienced in the subordinate position in this process, and links it to a paradoxical sense that the dispossessed could transform their world. Although Sartre is in some sense right that

the dialectic is an ongoing process, by contrast his arrested appropriation of it leads to a gloss on this important moment of transformation in the 'slave's' understanding of the world.

Bauer goes on to note that Hegel's "dialectic ends only with the observation about the relationship between the moment of terror and the phenomenological significance of work...," continuing, "Famously, it appears at this juncture of the *Phenomenology* that for Hegel the production of genuinely human self-consciousness—of the sense of oneself as, from the point of view of truth, a being whose destiny is 'not to be what it is... and to be (that is, to become) what it is not' (Kojève 5) [Bauer's citation]—requires something Hegel calls *enslavement* to others..." (2001, 102). Bauer claims that something positive can still emerge from this 'enslavement' to others, that the moment of recognizing one's own subjection is potentially liberating and transformational.[8] On this point, however, the difference between Beauvoir and Sartre emerges, in "the emblematic line from his play *No Exit*: 'Hell is—other people!'" (2001, 103). Bauer further asserts that, "Needing to exercise vigilance in our efforts to avoid enslavement by enslaving others, human beings on Sartre's picture of things cannot, as it were, get beyond the life-and-death struggle in the *Phenomenology*" (2001, 103). Against this, according to Bauer, Beauvoir's version of "*Knechtschaft* [enslavement] is to be seen primarily in its enabling aspect, as what leads us, as it were, to bring ourselves to ourselves as human beings" (2001, 103).

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[8] Feminist standpoint theories have taken this insight about the perspective from which oppressed groups gain better knowledge of the conditions of the world, and thence enable its transformation. An example of a *chosen* intersubjective relation that is meant to be both liberating and transformational, and that involves both difference and equality is the relation of "entrustment" expounded by the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective in their book *Sexual Difference*.

Bauer continues, "For her [Beauvoir], appreciating the fact that mastery—our very subjectivity—is achieved only through an acceptance of our bondage to and with one another, through, that is our willingness to *subject* ourselves as ambiguous beings to something she calls 'objectivity,' is the key to achieving the fullest flowering of human self-consciousness" (2001, 103).

According to Bauer, and I believe she is correct, Beauvoir comes to this realization through a deviation in standard philosophical practice necessitated by the kinds of questions she finds interesting: "[I]dentifying Beauvoir's philosophical forebears and comrades is of less import than articulating her *way* of appropriating other philosophers' work – a method... that develops from Beauvoir's making her womanhood the subject of a philosophical investigation in *The Second Sex*" (2001, 251). However, one can see her beginning to gesture at this method in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, and in her philosophical novels of political situation. It takes time to develop, however, because the questions for which Beauvoir is demanding answers are ones that philosophers had not traditionally addressed. And the philosophical vocabulary and the theoretical tools that philosophy could apply to the questions were clearly not sufficient. Instead, Beauvoir was productively forced to blend a variety of forms of writing in order to understand human freedom in realization, and its limitations. Bauer sees Beauvoir as engaging in a philosophical innovation. Beauvoir is also engaged in a project of political philosophy, insofar as the questions that lead Beauvoir to terrain outside the bounds of traditional philosophy are the same ones that push her to a political answer.

One form of addressing these questions involved an examination of the "Lived Experience"[9] of the groups Beauvoir was interested in. According to Bauer, "[T]his negotiation of the everyday and the philosophical is one of the great achievements of *The Second Sex*, one of the achievements that accounts for its undisputed power in galvanizing the fight against sex-based oppression" (2001, 41). This can be accounted for in some respect by Beauvoir's indebtedness to Hegel's reach toward experience in the *Phenomenology*. However, it is Beauvoir's focus on groups whose experiences were previously taken to be outside the realm of properly philosophical investigation that revealed the political import of what she attempted to do in her writing. In her shift toward understanding the means of subjective and intersubjective transformation possible in a world that radically alienated colonial subjects (for example, Algerians fighting for their freedom) and women (whom she urges to work together to undo/overcome their status as "second sex"), Beauvoir moved beyond the philosophical interpretation of "enslavement" or "bondage" and toward a social and political interpretation.

Mastering the Other

Just as the point of departure for *The Second Sex* was Beauvoir's own lived experience, so too did this serve as the origin of her early novel, *She Came to Stay* (1954c), originally published in French as *L'invitée* (1943). In *She Came To Stay*,

[9] This English translation of the title of the second volume of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, "Expérience Vécu," (Beauvoir 1949) more accurately reflects Beauvoir's project than that offered by H.M. Parshley, "Woman's Existence Today" (Beauvoir 1986).

which takes the epigraph, "Each consciousness seeks the death of the other"[10] from Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Simone de Beauvoir sets Hegel's dialectic into motion using fictional characters. It is an attempt to concretize this philosophical system that she found theoretically compelling. In doing so, she could see how it would work in the (fictional) 'lived experience' of the human characters she set in motion. The novel focuses on the relational triangle between three characters: Pierre, Françoise, and Xavière, accepted as semi-autobiographically modeled on Sartre, Beauvoir and Olga Kosakiewicz respectively. Françoise's understanding of their relationships is illuminating, in terms of Beauvoir's appropriation and fictional actualization of Hegel's dialectic, particularly in its intersubjective elements. The novel begins and ends with the notion that "Each consciousness seeks the death of the other," and throughout we see that Beauvoir is both caught within and strains against the Hegelian and Sartrian versions of the dialectic. Her characters live Hegel's dialectic in the intersubjective relations of power that are eventually revealed. In her ultimate conclusion to the novel, she shows the death of the other as an unsatisfactory resolution of the dialectic. At the same time, the relationships among the characters show a tendency toward Sartrian solipsism, in the drive to master the others and one's relations with them, and it is only when the death of the other is revealed as a failed solution to their intersubjective problems that this form of Beauvoir's dialectic is open to question.

[10] "Chaque conscience poursuit la mort de l'autre," translated incorrectly in *She Came to Stay* as "Each conscience seeks the death of the other." Also in the Kainz translation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* as "each one becomes oriented toward the death of the 'other'" (1994, 54).

Toward the beginning of the novel, the terror of the encounter with the other is evoked: "'It's almost impossible to believe that other people are conscious beings, aware of their own inward feelings, as we ourselves are aware of ours,' said Françoise. 'To me, it's terrifying, especially when you begin to feel that you're nothing more than a figment of someone else's mind. But that hardly ever happens, and never completely'" (1954c, 16). This passage reinforces the notion of questioning the certainty of the self that is invoked by the other in the dialectic. It then anticipates the moment of terror that takes place as the drive to confrontation between two consciousnesses, resulting in either the death of one, or its subordination to the other. What Beauvoir also importantly recognizes here is the deferment of that conflict that often takes place. The novel traces one (fictional, and one authorial) woman's attempt to understand her confrontation with another consciousness and her attempts to reconcile this with her previous sense of certainty about herself and her place in the world of her relations with others. In addition, it explores her ultimate drive to master the other who calls that sense of certainty into question. What we find here is no blithe assertion of either certainty or mastery. Indeed, Beauvoir reveals the fragility of that sense of certainty, and the failure involved in relying on relational tools to construct a fictive self-sovereignty as the bedrock of one's identity.

Beauvoir deftly illustrates this uncertainty, and the sense of ungrounding of self-certainty as a process, in the following passage: "Françoise stopped short on the edge of the pavement; she had the painful impression of being in exile. Ordinarily, the center of Paris was wherever she happened to be. Today, everything had changed. The center of Paris was the café where Pierre and Xavière were sitting, and Françoise felt

as if she were wandering about in some vague suburb" (1954c, 119). Here, through a spatial sense of self as subject/object, we see Françoise's perception of herself as de-centered, through the change in her relational circumstances. She has felt secure because of what she perceived as the reciprocity in her relationship with Pierre. Xavière seems to be the element that disrupts that reciprocity, and calls into question Françoise's subjectivity. This is straightforwardly Hegelian in that the disruptive presence of an other, here Xavière, calls into question Françoise's own status.

The addition of the third character, Pierre, helps illuminate the differences between Beauvoir's appropriation of the dialectic and Sartre's. It foreshadows the issues of women's freedom and subjectivity that she explored later in *The Second Sex*. In unmooring the reciprocity of Françoise and Pierre's relationship, however, what emerges are the inequalities that stalked this ostensibly egalitarian relationship, inequalities that Beauvoir approached differently in *The Second Sex*. There, Beauvoir's answer is collective action to change women's position in society such that their sense of self does not pass so fully through their relation with a man, reinforcing the idea that there are multiple poles, individual, social and political from which one gains a relational sense of self. This diminishes the power of any one particular relationship to determine one's subjective understanding, and situates any given relationship in a social and political context open to critique.

In *She Came to Stay*, however, the conflict is played out at the individual level. At this point, Beauvoir is still exploring Hegelian and Sartrian versions of the dialectic, and Françoise must kill the other who threatens her sense of self as it is manifested in her understanding of her relationship with Pierre. Beauvoir's answer to

the competition of two women over the same man, his enjoyment of it, and his insensitivity to Françoise's pain, is that the other woman must die – an answer proposed by this initial appropriation and interpretation of the intersubjective element of the master-slave dialectic.

The relations of power between these two supposed equals and two different approaches to the impact of an other on one's life are evident in the following dialogue between Pierre and Françoise:

> 'You're amazing. You're the only living being I know who's capable of shedding tears on discovering in someone else a conscience [consciousness] similar to your own.'
> 'Do you consider that stupid?'
> 'Of course not,' said Pierre. 'It's quite true that everyone experiences his own conscience [consciuosness] as an absolute. How can several absolutes be compatible? The problem is as great a mystery as birth or death, in fact, it's such a problem that philosophers break their heads over it.'
> 'Well, then, why are you amazed?'
> 'What surprises me, is that you should be affected in such a concrete manner by a metaphysical problem.'
> 'But it is something concrete,' Françoise said. 'The whole meaning of my life is at stake.' (1954c, 301)

Pierre fails to realize that what frightens Françoise is that Xavière has power over her because of their situation. Pierre sees this as only a theoretical or philosophical problem of consciousness of the other, whereas Françoise realizes that there are concrete effects, and that those are fundamental to her own ability to make meaning of her life. For Françoise, her recognition of Xavière's consciousness is inflected with a relation of power that cannot be resolved in a moment of mutual recognition, as Xavière is not willing to engage in this way. She takes what Françoise has to offer, but seeks to assert her superiority to Françoise through her relationship with Pierre. Pierre, however, can only see each individual as striving to see in himself an absolute, and

this is reflective of the Sartrian stance as described above. Françoise attempts to present herself as an equal to both Pierre and Xavière, but is undermined by Pierre's blindness to the gendered dynamics of power that their relationship presents, and Xavière's unwillingness to be an equal. For Beauvoir, understanding these intersubjective dynamics is of such importance because she believes that ultimately one's relations with other humans and one's understanding of them comprise the meaning of one's life. In denying the importance of those others in shaping the fundamental meaning of one's life, and in the drive to master those others in order not to be mastered oneself, we see Beauvoir reflecting through Pierre on this means of adopting Hegel's dialectic. At this point in her work, Beauvoir is ultimately caught, unable to resolve her desire to incorporate the intersubjectivity of existence in a system that is not based on the domination or annihilation of the other, but we see her here working on the two elements that push her to do something different: the questions of circumstance and of concrete effects.

While Xavière has destabilized Françoise's understanding of herself and her relationship with Pierre, it is also the case that Pierre has power over Françoise, in his ability to either maintain or strain the reciprocity of their relationship, as becomes clear in the continuation of the passage cited above:

> 'I don't say it isn't,' said Pierre. He surveyed her with curiosity. 'Nevertheless, this power you have to live an idea, body and soul, is unusual.'
>
> 'But to me, an idea is not a question of theory. It can be tested or, if it remains theoretical, it has no value.' She smiled. 'Otherwise, I wouldn't have waited for Xavière's arrival to find out that my conscience [consciousness] is not unique in this world.'
>
> Pierre ran his finger thoughtfully over his lower lip. 'I can readily understand your making this discovery apropos of Xavière,' he said.

> 'Yes, I've never had any difficulty with you, because I barely distinguish you from myself.'
> 'And besides, between us there's reciprocation.'
> 'How do you mean?'
> 'The moment you acknowledge my conscience [consciousness], you know that I acknowledge one in you, too. That makes all the difference.'
> 'Perhaps,' said Françoise. She stared in momentary perplexity at the bottom of her glass. 'In short, that is friendship. Each renounces his pre-eminence. But what if either one refuses to renounce it?'
> 'In that case, friendship is impossible' said Pierre. (1954c, 301-302)

In this passage, the idea of an egalitarian recognition of an/other consciousness is raised. It is an idea that Beauvor will continue to engage throughout her lifetime of writing and activism. The example in *She Came To Stay* is that of Françoise and Pierre's relationship, which has never before led Françoise to feel the kind of dread that she now feels. The concept of renouncing the idea of oneself as the sole consciousness, of recognizing the desires of both consciousnesses involved in a friendship anticipates Beauvoir's focus on overcoming one's inability to see the other as a subject. However, the situation in this case seems to be that Françoise has so submerged her own subjectivity in that of Pierre that she cannot see them as differentiated. It is only when she feels the destabilizing effects of Xavière's presence that their subjectivity is seen by her as variant. In other words, Françoise has seen them as mostly indistinguishable up to the point in their relationship that they encounter Xavière, whereas Pierre has seen their relationship as one of reciprocity. And yet, the difference in their perceptions of the relationship calls into question the level of reciprocity that they experienced. Pierre remains unconscious of inequalities in their relationship, while Françoise has become conscious of them.

Françoise is suffering because of her realizations, and does not know how to resolve the situation except by lashing out at Xavière, who has called her to

consciousness regarding her situation. It seems likely that prior to her confrontation with this particular other person, she could see Pierre and herself as indistinguishable because she had *chosen*, consciously or unconsciously, to yield her sense of self in certain ways, whereas she has not chosen to do so regarding Xavière's effect on her relationships. It is only in the confrontation with *some* others, or through a change in the conditions in which one experiences others, that the conflict emerges.

It is unclear, for Beauvoir, exactly what about one's conditions precipitates a change, but the coming to consciousness of one's subordinate status in relation to other subjects can have a profound effect. In *She Came To Stay*, it is in many ways a profoundly negative effect, one that violates the standards of law and ethics as established in society. Françoise finds at the end of the novel that she must kill Xavière, and she must do so because she is caught in the destructive dynamic of the Sartrian assumption of Hegel's dialectic. In the confrontation with the other who calls one's own subjectivity into question, the moment of realizing that "Hell is other people," Françoise ruminates: "And yet it was only necessary to pull down this lever to annihilate her. *Annihilate a conscience*[*consciousness*]*! How can I?* Françoise thought. But how was it possible for a conscience [consciousness] not her own to exist? In that case, it was she who did not exist. She repeated, *She or I*, and pulled down the lever" (1954c, 403-404). In the context of the novel, however, one might question whether it is only because Xavière demands the absoluteness of her own desires that Françoise must make the choice between them. Françoise, after all, has not murdered anyone else through the course of the novel. What is it about the

Françoise/Xavière relationship, or about the situation within which their characters exist, that leads Françoise to this act?

Shortly thereafter, the novel concludes, "Alone. She had acted alone. As alone as in death. One day Pierre would know. But even he would only know her act from the outside. No one could condemn or absolve her. Her act was her very own. *I have done it of my own free will.* It was her own will which was being fulfilled, now nothing separated her from herself. She had chosen at last. She had chosen herself" (1954c, 404). Françoise sees this act as a positive choice, and one that restores a self-identity that she had been losing throughout the novel. Defining herself against the challenge of the other, using violence to effect her absolute mastery over the other allows her to think that she has asserted her will and won. In some sense she has, as that other who recalled her to her situation is no longer alive to serve as a reminder. It is this possibility, that one asserts oneself in the annihilation of the other, that pushes Arendt to assert a political version of freedom, rather than a philosophical one. Beauvoir is moving in the same direction, showing in the novel what is at stake in the difference between the two. The philosophical conception does not necessarily entail annihilation, but it remains an open possibility, one that Arendt and Beauvoir both wish to foreclose. *She Came To Stay* reveals some of the problems in effecting this foreclosure.

Pierre presents the problem of the other as a philosophical one, whereas Françoise presents it as a problem entailing concrete actions and having concrete effects. It is no wonder that, unable to resolve the problem of the other, Beauvoir's Françoise must ultimately kill off the other who has called Françoise's subjectivity

into question. Beauvoir's character Françoise kills off Xavière rather than Pierre in order to overcome Xavière's "dependent position" in relation to Pierre. The drive, therefore, was to kill off the person who challenged Françoise's perception of her equality with Pierre, rather than to change their relationship in its actuality. Françoise's freedom was not furthered by her act because she is caught in gendered dynamics of power. In killing Xavière, one can speculate that Françoise could potentially return to the 'innocence' of her own complicity of maintaining her dependent status in regard to Pierre. Beauvoir, however, was cognizant of the inequality in this relationship and asked her readers to confront it, even if Françoise could not. Françoise's murderous act shows one form of resolution of Hegel's dialectic, one that follows the curtailed Sartrian dialectic, which ends at the moment of the struggle to the point of death.

By understanding freedom as freedom of the will, but in also focusing on the concrete actions and effects of that will, Beauvoir is constrained to offer precisely this resolution to the problem. Sartre's *No Exit* leads to the conclusion that we are stuck eternally—"Once and for all. So here we are, forever" (1989, 46)—in the fight for mastery one over the other. Because Beauvoir cannot at this point resolve the issue of the drive to mastery, while she simultaneously sees this problem as one that has concrete consequences, in the circumstances of the novel it seems necessary to Françoise that Xavière be removed as a consciousness from Françoise's world. It would not be sufficient just to banish Xavière from her apartment, or even from Paris by discontinuing her financial support, because in terms of Françoise's sense of her own subjectivity, as seen through the lens of Xavière, a Xavière in provincial exile

still has power over Françoise: "Each morning this abhorred woman, who would henceforth be Françoise, would be reborn" (1954c, 401). This creative power, the power to reflect a self that is unworthy or hateful, is the power of the relations entailed by existence, as Beauvoir understands it at this point. And therefore the difference between Françoise's relationships with others and with Xavière is the lack of equality and reciprocity that may be found in them. It is intolerable for her own sense of self that the Françoise Françoise will imagine coming into existence for Xavière each day is a hateful one, and therefore Xavière must die.

What is crucial about this ending is that it takes to a violent extreme the premise that it is sometimes necessary to eliminate an other in order to achieve one's own freedom. And in this novel Beauvoir confronts problems of individuals' acceptance or denial of their own freedom that she is ultimately not able to sufficiently address. Pierre is blind to the privilege that his position in the relationships brings him, and unwilling to use the power of that privilege to further either Françoise's or Xavière's freedom. Xavière is unwilling to risk the freedom that equality could bring, preferring to assert superiority over Françoise through her relationship to Pierre. And Françoise kills the other whose existence calls her subjectivity into question, so that she will not have to face that subjective uncertainty. In understanding that Françoise's act of violence does not solve her intersubjective problem, Beauvoir rejects violence as a means to assert one's own and others' freedom.

The novel was Beauvoir's attempt to put the dialectic in play in concrete, although fictional, circumstances. Situations such as the Algerian War presented her with a lived experience of material conditions of (colonial) othering, the assertion of

the colonial self against the colonized, in France's assertion of mastery over Algeria. Because the freedom of self and others is the fundamental drive of her ethical theory, Beauvoir found this denial of freedom intolerable. In her appeal to French citizens, Beauvoir again confronted the problems of blindness to privilege and power and an unwillingness to risk one's position manifest in their acceptance of the War. In a case of social injustice, systemic denial of freedom and oppression such as the Algerian War, Beauvoir accepted the necessity of violent revolt as a means of last resort in changing the concrete situation that denied Algerians their freedom. In the novel, however, it is not the case that Xavière's existence prevented Françoise's expression of freedom. Xavière presented a challenge for Françoise that could not be overcome precisely because Beauvoir had not yet surpassed the philosophical limits of this appropriation of Hegel's master/slave dialectic.[11] This form revealed the limits of mastery over others as the goal of one's existence and the ostensible means of achieving one's freedom.

Conclusion

For Beauvoir, freedom is the foundational condition of existence. However, freedom's twofold aspect, first as an ontological ground of human being, and second as achieved through human action, entails a problem, one imbricated with Beauvoir's

[11] Perhaps it is also Beauvoir's personal desire (the autobiographical subtext of this book) that kept the questions of intersubjectivity, and their answers, at the level of the individual. Dorothy Kaufmann McCall notes Beauvoir's dissatisfaction with the murderous ending of this novel. In a footnote, McCall reminds her readers that: "Acknowledging the weakness of that ending from a literary point of view, Beauvoir explains in *La Force de l'âge* its necessity for her in personal terms: 'Above all, by releasing Françoise, through a crime, from the dependent position in which her love for Pierre kept her, I regained my own autonomy .... I needed to go to the limit of my fantasy, to embody it without mitigating it in any way in order to achieve for myself the solitude into which I had precipitated Françoise' (1979, 348)."

conception of the ambiguity of subjectivity. The inability of the self to know the subjectivity of the other, and the failure to recognize either the other's subjectivity or the self's own status as object for others offers an opportunity to see freedom as sovereignty, to continue to insist on one's own subjectivity at the cost of others' subjectivity. By this understanding, those others' having theoretically had an equal opportunity to confront one in the dynamic of the master/slave dialectic renders this acceptable. This 'solution' to the problem of freedom and subjectivity is ultimately not acceptable to Beauvoir. In *She Came to Stay*, Beauvoir's exploration of the implications of Hegelian dialectics, she fails to find an escape from the trap of sovereignty. This version of a Hegelian notion of intersubjectivity fails miserably to engender the kind of human freedom that she sees as necessary to the development of humanity. This failure is understandable, as Beauvoir reveals the comfort that can be taken in one's fictive, and seemingly fixed, position as either dominant or subordinate. Howevber, Beauvoir seeks the risk of contingency, described here through the work of Hannah Arendt.

As Arendt made clear, this contingency is the cost of an active freedom, one that takes seriously the risks and the possibilities of living in the world. The will as the reflection of the drive to self-sovereignty can in fact lead to a resignation from life, from the very material of existence that Beauvoir found both meaningful and productive. At the same time, when Beauvoir, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, raises the question of the situation of slaves or of "women in many civilizations" (1948b, 37) she is beginning the shift to an understanding of freedom as conditioned by one's circumstances. This understanding helps her avoid some of the problems of Hegel's

dialectic, although it entails demands that underscore the difficulty and uncertainty, the risk entailed by an intersubjective ethics based in freedom.

At the same time, Beauvoir builds on the possibility of positive relations between the self and others. Margaret Simons reads this in Beauvoir's 1927 diary. Simons shows that, "There seem to be three basic ways that relationships with the Other nurture the self. The Other brings comfort and consolation, a sense of utility through service, and expansion of the self into the world of the Other" (1999, 218). It is in bringing together the drive toward a positive form of intersubjectivity and the questions of situation that Beauvoir moves in the direction of a political conception of intersubjective relations of freedom. Beauvoir posits that the freedom of each is tied to the freedom of all, in the way that one's existence is shaped materially by the presence of others in the world. Instead of rejecting the difference that these others make, Beauvoir eventually looks to action in mutually chosen projects with them as a solution to freedom's intersubjective problems. In other writings, Beauvoir is clearly working with similar problems of intersubjectivity, but because her focus shifts away from the question of freedom of the will as sovereignty to concrete effects and actions, she begins to resolve the problems quite differently. Beauvoir's dissatisfaction with the resolution of the problem of intersubjectivity found in *She Came to Stay* led her to continue asking the questions, both personal and political, that pushed her to further develop her understanding of intersubjective relations and freedom, especially in situations of inequality. In this way, she was reaching toward Hegel's tantalizingly brief mention of intersubjectively achieved freedom as mutuality of recognition.

Chapter 3: Unveiling the World

"The fact is that he belongs to those who want to change the world and he chooses the means which his concrete situation offers him—that of a bourgeois writer." (Simone de Beauvoir, "Merleau-Ponty and Pseudo-Sartreanism," 32)

"...the aim of the discourse is not to deal with someone who probably will not listen to it, but to reassure, strengthen, and give insight to those who will. ... He [Plato] thought that the power of the ethical was the power of reason, and that it had to be made into a force. He saw it as a problem of politics, and so it is. But he believed that the justification was intellectual and very difficult and, further, that everyone had some natural inclination to break out of the ethical order and destroy it." (Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 26-27)

"This is not to say that the historical I can be obscured and ignored and that differentiation cannot be made, but that I is not unitary, culture has never been monolithic, and is always more or less in relation to a judging subject. Differences do not only exist between outsider and insider – two entities. They are also at work within the outsider herself, or the insider, herself – a single entity." (Trinh T. Minh-Ha "Not You/ Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," 76)

Freedom in Situation: "Merleau-Ponty and Pseudo-Sartrianism"

Sonia Kruks convincingly argues that Beauvoir, rather than being faithful to Sartre's philosophy, inspires it, then diverges from it, ending up more philosophically aligned with Merleau-Ponty, even as Beauvoir criticizes Merleau-Ponty for his critique of Sartre. Kruks argues that, "Beauvoir is trying to describe human existence as a synthesis of freedom and constraint, of consciousness and materiality, which finally is impossible within the framework of Sartrean ontology. It is, however, possible—and indeed clarified—within the framework of Merleau-Ponty's ontology" (1995, 88). For Merleau-Ponty, "We will be more free or less free depending on how far our situation enables us to engage in free *actions*" (1995, 89). Because of this, according to Kruks, for both Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, "Oppression is socially instituted, and to overcome it requires a social as well as an individual transformation" (1995, 90). Sartre's early ontology leaves transformation at the level of the individual, ignoring the impact of one's situation on one's freedom. What is at stake in the

distinction between these two forms of ontology, in Beauvoir's understanding of subjectivity as intersubjectivity is that, "Far from solipsism or relativism resulting from the challenge to traditional epistemologies, situated subjectivity can be shown to inhere, because embodied, in more general modes of human being. There is thus an opening of individual subjects into one and the same world, which ensures that experience and knowledge are not closed in on themselves" (Kruks 1990, 13). Because there is an openness to others, it makes possible both an understanding of the implications of one's own life on others' and action together with them for projects that present a common goal.

One of the crucial texts cited in work on Beauvoir and these two of her contemporaries is an article Beauvoir published in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1955, eight years after her *Ethics of Ambiguity* was originally published, titled "*Merleau-Ponty et le Pseudo-Sartrisme*" (1955b), translated into English as "Merleau-Ponty and Pseudo-Sartreanism" (1989a). Despite Beauvoir's avowed affiliation, personal and/or philosophical to Sartre, or her disavowal of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical attack on Sartre, what emerges in this essay, in the philosophical elements she defends and rejects, is a palimpsest image of her own philosophical principles.

In the first section of this essay, in which she defends (her own understanding of) Sartrian ontology, Beauvoir contests a notion of subjectivity as based in sovereignty. She dismisses as Pseudo-Sartrianism the notion that, "The relationship between the I (Je) and the Other is reduced to the look; each subject lives alone at the heart of that subject's own universe, a universe of which that subject is the sole sovereign: there is no interworld" (1989a, 4). In opposition to this, she posits a notion

of "embodied consciousness," in which "consciousness unveils the world through the unique condition of losing *itself* in the world" (1989a, 5), and, relatedly, that "far from being given by consciousness and closed, significations are real, objective, and opened *ad infinitum* into the universe" (1989a, 6). For Beauvoir, it is in the possible interactions with the Other that meaning both emerges and is made. And it is this understanding of intersubjectivity that grounds the political possibilities inherent to this relationship between the I (Je) and the Other (1989a, 7). She reminds her readers that, "the existence of the other means that I am thrown into a universe which, on principle escapes me," a nod to the uncertainty entailed by freedom, and that "we see signs of the beginnings of a fluid relation between the I and the Other, a relation which develops with time, which is never still, in short, the possibility of a dialectic" (1989a, 8). And yet, if the dialectic results in a productive synthesis, an integration of opposing forces, rather than simply the masterdom of one and the slavery of the other, then Beauvoir is moving beyond the Sartre she cites here, according to whom, "the for-itself experiences itself as an object in the Universe beneath the other's look. But as soon as the for-itself by surpassing the other toward its ends makes of him a transcendence-transcended ... the Other-as-object becomes an *indicator of ends* ... Thus the Other's presence as transcendence transcended reveals given complexes of means to ends" (1989a, 9).

Beauvoir continues to describe the relation of self to other as, "Thus, the Other is present to me in things under the guise of meanings and techniques..." then cites Sartre, who says that, "This means simply that each man finds himself in the presence of meanings which do not come into the world through him" (1989a, 9). If this were

'simply' all that was being said about intersubjective relations, then perhaps Sartre and Beauvoir would be much more closely aligned. However, in the passage above, the references to the other as "transcendence-transcended" and the "Other-as-object" show that there is much more at stake in understanding the dynamics of intersubjectivity than 'simply' a proliferation of meanings that shape a person's context. Indeed, that one finds oneself "in the presence of" them, if one understands the dynamic in the antagonistic way that Sartre seems to, then there is no question of mutual/relational recognition of subjectivity. Instead, intersubjectivity is about endless chains of deference, about being transcendence-transcendent or transcendence-transcended, and there is no possibility of understanding the other-as-subject/object except in the fleeting moment of transcending, when the valor of the other's subjectivity makes the ability to transcend and to render the other's objectivity an enhancement of one's own subjectivity. This is the difficult Hegelian dynamic that Beauvoir works against when she begins to look at subjectivity in situation, when she takes seriously the question of "given complexes of means to ends," taking situation seriously as a simultaneous motivator and inhibitor to freedom's realization.

Beauvoir is also pushing against the bounds of Hegel's philosophy when she says that, "the For-itself is necessary for a world to exist... but the For-itself is far from *constituting* meanings, techniques, a reality that it would project out of itself in the manner of the Hegelian Spirit and where consciousness would find again exactly what it initially accepted. The unveiling of the world, performed in the dimension of intersubjectivity, reveals realities which resist consciousness and possess their own laws" (1989a, 10). Because these laws are not the Hegelian Reason in History, and

because meaning cannot by this understanding, be tethered to an individual subjectivity, Beauvoir is also claiming here a potentially productive indeterminacy of intersubjective relations. For her, it establishes room to re-interpret meanings that derive from the hazards of situation, and to re-claim the initial potential of freedom's exercise, although it is unclear precisely what laws bound the realities, beyond the assertion of situation's importance in comprehending the world.

At the same time, Beauvoir also states, in a discussion of workers and activism that, "Nothing comes from freedom but from the situation" (1989a, 22). Is it that the situation is to be transcended? From her description, the situation seems to entail the set of meanings which, when they go unquestioned, form the everyday background within which one operates. It is only when one begins to explore the meanings that are presented by the situation that one begins to put one's freedom into practice, either by actively accepting those meanings or by contesting them. Either one of these, however, can also be an active rejection of one's freedom, depending on the interpretation of the meanings and the goal one chooses in accepting or contesting them. It is this navigation of the complexes of means to ends that shapes the claiming of one's freedom. However, this relies on a notion of understanding, of knowledge of one's situation, and knowledge of the others who help to shape that situation, insofar as their existence also creates and shapes intersubjective meanings.

Beauvoir notes that, "To make a political theory spring from a series of pure actions without any reference to history or truth will obviously bring about the most absurd consequences" (1989a, 26). So the question becomes, what kind of history and truth are necessary for understanding which actions should form the basis of a political

theory? And what mechanism will allow political subjects to productively confront the epistemological and interpretational challenges of situation, i.e. the meanings that spring from understandings of 'history' and 'truth'? How do political subjects confront the differing interpretations of history and truth that are a part of the meanings that shape our social and political context?

One mechanism that Beauvoir invokes here seems much like the standpoint theory that feminist theorists have wrestled with for many years now.[1] Beauvoir cites Sartre when she discusses the "look of the least favored" and notes that, "Sartre does recognize a truth of society, a truth which is disguised by bourgeois myths and which is unveiled by the man of the masses" (1989a, 29-30). She then recalls the genesis of this nod to truth in Marxism when she notes that, "There is in Sartre, as well as in Marx, this coming and going between truth and ethical decision which, according to Merleau-Ponty himself, characterizes the political judgment" (1989a, 30). Beauvoir is critical of "the bourgeois [who] is satisfied with 'the appearance of the human'" (1989a, 30). Additionally, she reinforces the notion that we are all bound by the *un*freedom that afflicts all in a society that fosters it, saying approvingly of Sartre that, "He wants for himself and for the others who are inextricably bound the abolition of that alienation that all of us bear, but whose true brunt is fully borne only by the least favored in society" (1989a, 31).

[1] Nancy Hartsock's "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism" (1983) is generally understood as the first iteration of feminist standpoint theory. Other feminist theorists working with standpoint theories include Patricia Hill Collins, in "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought" (1989) and Chela Sandoval, in "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World" (1991).

Beauvoir's acknowledgment here is of the inequalities that are to be overcome, and their material manifestations for embodied subjects who live those inequalities in situational constraint. The only way to overcome those inequalities is to act. But the outcome of the actions cannot be certain, as: "By biting into a reality which is probability and not certainty, it is evident that the enterprise entails a risk of failure" (1989a, 32). This kind of action is ongoing, never settled, based in the uncertainty entailed by intersubjectivity and its indeterminacy. That uncertainty means that the experience of the oppressed can be used to gauge the histories and truths that are presented, as a basis for political contestation over the meanings that societies proliferate in representing themselves, but cannot substitute a truth of a higher level. The Sartrian unveiling that Beauvoir invokes is subsequently undercut by her assertion that one works within the realm of 'probability' or uncertainty, rather than the realm of certainty. And yet, what is certain for Beauvoir is that one must act in the world. What emerges from this problem of action's necessity and truth's uncertainty is the epistemological conundrum confronted by philosophers caught in the skeptical problematic. Beauvoir is once again confronting a problem of political philosophy that emerges in light of the political and social questions that she's asking.

Beauvoir asserts that, "Man becomes a living being only when he has an effect on the world through positive projects, and these projects always have a temporal substantiality" (1989a, 31). She adds in a later passage that, "To be for the proletariat does not mean to acknowledge its misery from a distance and let it pass: it is to take its demands seriously" (1989a, 37). In the original French, the passage reads, "Être pour les prolétaires ce n'est pas saluer à distance leur misère et passer outré : c'est prendre

aux sérieux leurs volontés" (1955b, 2119). The term "leurs volontés" can also be translated "their will," situating the terms as still within the realm of human will, of freedom as will, albeit in situation. Beauvoir is navigating the entwined terrain of situations, pre-given meanings and freedom's potential. She is caught between the demands of the dynamics of intersubjectivity and the demand that one act in the world to realize one's freedom. In order to negotiate the ontological and epistemological difficulties this notion of freedom in situation entails, Beauvoir ends up positing (without naming it as such) a notion of judgment as the mechanism that facilitates the reconciliation of uncertainty with the demand of action. However, this judgment cannot be exercised well except in the confrontation with the conditioned freedom of humans as situated beings. In order to judge in conditions of uncertainty, one must acknowledge certain things. The first was discussed in the previous chapter, and that is the ambiguity of intersubjective existence. Relatedly, the notion that one is, by virtue of one's choices, one's actions and inactions, complicitous with the situations of freedom (and of its denial) that form the context within which one lives, is another condition of existence that must be acknowledged in Beauvoir's ethics. It is not at all certain that this recognition will occur, especially when privilege offers a strong incentive to deny or repress one's complicity in the maintenance of a system that denies freedom to others, while seemingly allowing one's own freedom.

Complicity

When, early in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir says, "without failure, no ethics" (1948b, 10) she is evoking the difficulty implied by the ambiguity of the human condition. The difficulty can involve a lack of understanding about the relation

of the self to the other, or a rejection of the ethical consequences of one's understanding. Ideally, recognition of the failure to see the other as a subject pushes the actor who seeks to live ethically toward action that furthers freedom. What happens, however, when this failure fails to push individuals to seek freedom? What happens when, instead of choosing the often arduous tasks demanded by freedom, people deny its imperatives? Failure to make choices that will lead to freedom renders an individual complicitous with those whose actions (or with those institutions and social systems) that inhibit freedom. Complicity, therefore, is the failure to accept responsibility for freedom. Complicity can be in relation to the self or in relation to others. It can involve seeing one's own and others' lack of freedom and failing to address it; it can involve willed blindness to oppression and injustice; and it can involve lost or ignored opportunities.

Complicity in relation to the self can happen when one fails to examine the conditions of one's life. It also happens when any human denies the opportunity, when it is presented, of creating or claiming her own freedom. In existential terms, this is an exercise in bad faith. For Beauvoir, the self-deception involved in this failure to act is, paradoxically, an act of willed complicity. Against Kant, Beauvoir says that, "we do not see man as being essentially a positive will. On the contrary, he is first defined as a negativity... There is within him a perpetual playing with the negative, and he thereby escapes himself, he escapes his freedom. And it is precisely because an evil will is here possible that the words 'to will oneself free' have a meaning" (1948b, 33). Beauvoir later continues, "Men do not like to feel themselves in danger. Yet, it is because there are real dangers, real failures and real earthly damnation that words like

victory, wisdom, or joy have meaning. Nothing is decided in advance, and it is because man has something to lose and because he can lose that he can also win" (1948b, 34). This passage highlights the necessity to understand and to question the not always rational investments that humans make and maintain in systems that may oppress them. It also therefore raises the question of what may signal the necessity of systemic or institutional change. However, in this initial moment, Beauvoir is reiterating that freedom is something that must be made through one's actions, and that this is both a difficult process and one that is perilous. For freedom to have a positive content, one must make it so, and this involves real risks, and an overcoming of the tendency to seek to escape both the sense of those risks and the labor entailed in confronting them.

Part of this work is an examination of one's situation, although as Beauvoir points out in the passage above, humans do not like to acknowledge their own danger. The danger here entails the risks both of "escap[ing] one's freedom" as well as the risk of the discomfort that claiming one's freedom may bring. Pretending that there is no danger may be more comfortable in the short term, particularly if one is in a privileged position. However, as mentioned above, the risk of confronting one's freedom is offset by the possibility of gaining "victory, wisdom, or joy," both in the exercise of one's own freedom and the expansion of possibilities for others.

Complicity in relation to others can take the form of denying others' freedom by failing to see one's situation in relation to those others, failing to see the conditions of others and their material implications or failing to act when possible in light of that knowledge. What is so insidious about the original ambiguity that Beauvoir posits, and

what yields an ethical imperative to overcome it, is the dehumanization and alienation that accompany the view of myself as a subject and others as objects. This is the negative of the positive aspects of Beauvoir's concept of freedom. Seeing life in terms only of one's own subjectivity and one's own desires and projects leads to a continuation of the dehumanization of others and the material effects allowed and engendered by it (e.g. the systematic use of torture in the Algerian War). Acknowledging the subjectivity of the other through one's actions and through the projects that one takes on helps to overcome these possible failures. Examining one's own situation in regard to the situation of others, and acknowledging the interrelated elements helps one to see what kind of actions may be appropriate to undertake.

Projects of freedom 'project' themselves into the future, and the actors who engage in them seek to project themselves into the future through these projects of transcendence. However, it has often historically been the case that one person's or group's project of transcendence has been at the cost of another's. Of course, actively participating in the denial of others' freedom is antithetical to Beauvoir's ethical system. Additionally, complicity in the denial of others' freedom can take the form again of self-deception, and a failure to seize an opportunity to contribute to the conditions that enable others' freedom. One cannot will another's freedom, but one can contribute to creating the conditions that allow another human to seek freedom's content for herself.

Beauvoir saw the acceptance of responsibility for one's freedom primarily in terms of opportunities presented and an individual's response to them. Comparing the givenness of a child's situation with that of "the western woman of today," Beauvoir

distinguishes the two, and finds the woman's complicity in her situation insofar as she "chooses it or at least consents to it" (1948b, 38). Earlier she describes this as:

> Even today in western countries, among women who have not had in their work an apprenticeship of freedom, there are still many who take shelter in the shadow of men; they adopt without discussion the opinions and values recognized by their husband or their lover, and that allows them to develop childish qualities which are forbidden to adults because they are based on a feeling of irresponsibility. (1948b, 37)

Here we see again that freedom must be worked for, achieved and learned, and here that failure to seize one's freedom is equated with an infantile failure to take responsibility for one's life. By inference from the passage, we also see that one of the tools of freedom's achievement is discussion, an exploration of ideas and opinion, and thought, for oneself, about one's situation. Thus learning via apprenticeship, which usually entails learning from those who know something more or something different, is added to one's own understanding of, and even contestation of the ideas put forth by those who may have more authority or more power in the prevailing social and political situation.

Beauvoir sees one manifestation of complicity in the willingness of some women to subordinate their own thoughts, projects, and will to those of their husbands or male lovers and to maintain the system that supports that subordination. This existence can lead to such a profound complicity that when the social structure that supports it is threatened, women who have thoroughly invested themselves in that system may seek to shore it up rather than overthrow it. Beauvoir says that:

> Their behavior is defined and can be judged only within this given situation, and it is possible that in this situation, limited like every human situation, they realize a perfect assertion of their freedom. But once there appears a possibility of liberation, it is resignation of freedom not to exploit the possibility, a

> resignation which implies dishonesty [bad faith] [2] and which is a positive fault. (1948b, 38)

The failure to act when an opportunity is presented represents a resignation from one's freedom. And if in failing to act, one upholds a system of injustice or oppression, then one is denying the opportunity for others to assert their freedom as well.

Les Belles Images

Deborah Bergoffen finds the roots of Beauvoirian bad faith in "nostalgia for the securities of childhood" (1997, 83). The child, "...experiencing values and meanings as already given... experiences itself as having a clearly defined place in the world" (1997, 83). In Beauvoir's novel, *Les Belles Images*, first published in France in 1966, the story turns around a mother trying to help her daughter, leaving childhood, find her place in the world. The struggle that ensues highlights several examples of complicity in the denial of others' freedom. As with *She Came To Stay*, Beauvoir uses a novel to explore her philosophical principles and bring them to her audience in action, so to speak. The main protagonist of *Les Belles Images* is Laurence, a bourgeois woman who has lived her life according to the comfortable credo of her upper-middle-class upbringing. Eventually, however, she is confronted with the meaninglessness of her existence, including her career in advertising. Her realization of what her existence has been happens as she wrestles with the problem of aiding her daughter Catherine to grow into a caring human being, one who sees the problems and

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[2] Beauvoir's original French reads: "...leur conduite ne se définit et ne saurait se juger qu'au sein de ce donné; et il se peut que dans leur situation, limitée comme toute situation humaine, elles réalisent une parfaite affirmation de leur liberté. Mais, dès qu'une libération apparaît comme possible, ne pas exploiter cette possibilité est une démission de la liberté, démission qui implique *la mauvaise foi* et qui est une faute positive" (1947, 56, emphasis mine). The translation of the existential term "la mauvaise foi," as "dishonesty" in the English version robs the original of important valences of its philosophical meaning.

injustices of the world and addresses them, rather than ignoring them, but who is not paralyzed by them. In order to do so, Laurence rebels against the advice of her child's psychologist and her husband's edict. Both of them argue that Catherine must be kept from any disturbing news items, and therefore from Catherine's friend Brigitte, at whose house Catherine has been allowed to read newspapers presenting unsettling accounts of current events. Laurence's husband, Jean-Charles, is all too willing to ignore the problems in the world that have in the past affected his wife and that are currently troubling his child, ignoring them in order to keep them from impingeing on his own existence. And while Laurence has been content to follow his lead, the harm of doing so in the past is brought out in the following passage:

> 'Oh, don't start another guilty-conscience scene, like the one you treated me to in '62,' Jean-Charles said sharply.
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> Laurence felt herself go pale; it was as though he had hit her in the face. She had been trembling, quite beside herself, that day when she read the account of that woman tortured to death. Jean-Charles had taken her in his arms, and full of trust she had let herself go while he said, 'It's appalling'—she had believed that he was moved too. Because of him she had calmed down and she had done her best to expel the memory, very nearly succeeding. It was mainly because of him that she had given up reading the papers from then on. And in fact he had not given a damn; he had said, 'It's appalling,' just to soothe her; and now here he was throwing the incident in her teeth with a kind of malignance. What a betrayal! So sure of his rights, so furious if we disturb the picture he has made of us, the exemplary little daughter and the exemplary young wife, and utterly indifferent to what we are in reality. (Beauvoir 1968, 163-4)

The reference to '62 and the torture of a woman brings to mind the situation of Djamila Boupacha, although it could refer to many such incidents during the Algerian War. Jean-Charles' indifference, while comfortable to him, brings about his failure to perceive the reality of the people and problems that surround him. France was directly involved in this conflict, and the fact that he interprets Laurence's reaction to the torture of a young woman as "a guilty-conscience scene," a scene in which he clearly

cannot see himself involved, reveals his inability and unwillingness to take responsibility for his role as a French citizen in perpetuating this injustice. Laurence's trustful "let[ting] herself go," and attempting to "expel the memory" of a woman's torture are evidence of her own complicity, allowing herself to see things as her husband would have her see them, rather than looking, judging, and acting for herself.

Jean-Charles is made uncomfortable not by the injustices of the world that are causing problems for his daughter and wife, but by their failure to ignore, like him, those injustices, and the rupture to his comfortable bourgeois existence that this brings about. As for Laurence, she has been content to follow his lead until her daughter's confrontation with the world's condition forces her to re-examine her own views, and the portrait that she has allowed her husband to help her form of herself. He has encouraged her to foster his vision of the world, then he has lived as though that image could be preserved in perpetuity.

However, Laurence and Catherine are living beings, and while Laurence may believe it is too late to fully overcome her own jaded regard to the world, she wants something different for her daughter than the meaninglessness of the kind of false images that her husband has held of them, and that she has sold as an advertiser:

> They bought a camera that was easy to work.... Catherine would be pleased. But it's something else that I should like to give her: security, a happy mind, the joy of being alive. I claim to be selling these things when I launch a product. All lies. In the shop window the things still retain the halo that surrounded them in the glossy picture. But when you have them you no longer see anything but a lamp, an umbrella, a camera. Lifeless, cold. (Beauvoir 1968, 171)

Laurence intends to save her daughter from the death and chill of the kind of meaninglessness that she has lived and perpetuated in her work. While she cannot undo her own past complicity, or rid herself of her past willed blindness, she opens her

eyes and reaches into the future as she tries to help her daughter develop an enriched sense of ethical responsibility. This is done with the intention to foster her daughter's independence, rather than to impose a particular future or legacy upon her. Laurence hopes to instill a regard to the world that will help Catherine make her own critical judgments and choices in light of her knowledge of the world, rather than repressing or ignoring information because it does not conform to the facile image that she would prefer to see. In this way she is enabling her daughter to live her freedom, and to act in the face of situations that may demand action. However, the goals that Laurence asserts may also be problematic. What kind of security does she want Catherine to have? What would make for a "happy mind"? One could imagine that Jean-Charles has been very happy to ignore the problems in the world around him as long as they did not disturb his own sense of security, and has thereby maintained his version of a 'happy mind'. As for Laurence, while she seems to have a somewhat fatalistic sense that her past complicity has determined her path in the future, Beauvoir's ethics seems more hopeful in its understanding that living ethically is not a choice that is ever finally determined one way or the other. When there is an opportunity, the possibility is open to begin to live in a way that accords with and works toward one's freedom and others'.

For herself and for Catherine, Laurence has taken an important step, and that is to inform themselves about the world they live in. For them, this means reading the newspapers that engender discomfort because the images they present are not picture-postcard perfect. It also means coming to understand that although they are in contexts of intersubjective dependence, it is not legitimate to simply let others form one's

notions of the world and of themselves. Laurence has allowed Jean-Charles to form her vision of the world and of herself, and even of what kind of solace is available in confrontation with realities that are disturbing. The solace that Jean-Charles offered, however, was not that of working to make the world a place of further freedom. Of this, Laurence is certain. Laurence is seen at a party in the novel, thinking in response to a discussion, "Values, truths that stood out against fashion—she believed in that. But just which values, and which truths?" (Beauvoir 1968, 183). What images of the world and the humans in it can a woman whose work is to manipulate images believe in? And what can she do, given the circumstances she finds herself in?

In the end, Laurence stands firm against her husband regarding Catherine's spending time with Brigitte, in an assertion of maternal authority and personal resignation against medical and paternal authority. The argument she makes also finds Laurence invoking her role as primary caregiver for their child, invoking a kind of knowledge that Jean-Charles does not have: "Where Catherine's concerned I shall not give in. As for me, it's all over: I've been had. All right, fine, I can take it. But she's not going to be maimed. I won't have her deprived of her friend: I want her to spend her holidays at Brigitte's. And she's not going to see this psychologist anymore" (Beauvoir 1968, 222). Jean-Charles' reaction is an assertion that, "I don't understand a thing of what you're saying" (Beauvoir 1968, 223). To which Laurence replies:

> 'It's easy enough. I'm the one who looks after Catherine. You do come in now and then. But I'm the one who brings her up and it's for me to make the decisions. I am making them. Bringing up a child doesn't mean turning it into a pretty picture...' In spite of herself Laurence's voice was rising; she talked on and on, she was not quite sure what she was saying but it did not matter—what did matter was to shout louder than Jean-Charles and all the others and to reduce them to silence. (Beauvoir 1968, 223)

In a self-sacrificial gesture, one designed to placate the husband she has just defied, Laurence then forces a smile, and eventually looks at herself in the mirror. She sees an image of herself, "rather white and haggard." What she also sees is the worth of her gesture of defiance: "But the children will have their chance. What chance? She did not even know" (Beauvoir 1968, 224). What's at stake in Catherine's ability to inform herself and her education about what to do with that knowledge is the future as unknowable but worth reaching for. And although Laurence may believe that her opportunities have passed, her actions on behalf of Catherine, and her re-interpretation of the events of her life are evidence that she, too, is reaching for her freedom, however the situation in which she finds herself may constrain her choices or the means to make them.

Knowing and Acknowledging: Sidestepping Skepticism

Reliance upon *knowledge* of the conditions of one's existence does not mean for Beauvoir that that knowledge is absolute. In fact, she warns against adhering too closely to any one truth as the basis of one's actions. This lack of epistemological certainty leads to the necessity to judge one's situation and the actions possible and appropriate to it, in part, perhaps, as an additional layer of testing or examination of the knowledge that one has come to. Although this may be intended to serve as a failsafe for an ethical system that is based on knowledge of one's and others' situations, the limits and the validity of that knowledge as the foundation of Beauvoir's ethical system need to be examined.

Nancy Bauer argues that Sartre is rooted in a particularly Sartrean version of the skeptical problematic that Beauvoir manages to avoid, and that Beauvoir doesn't thereby simply fall into the traditional version of skepticism either. According to Bauer, "On Sartre's view, to experience the certainty of the Other's subjectivity... the Other's humanity... comes at the high ontological cost of relinquishing one's own subjectivity" (2001, 130). It also has a high epistemological cost, as "We can speak of another person's judgment of me as warranted only to indicate that the judgment has... reduced me to a state of shame, pinned me like a butterfly to his picture of me. There is no epistemic court of appeal in Sartre's picture" (2001, 131). Ultimately, Bauer argues that:

> What makes his [Sartre's] philosophy skeptical, then, is... that the only way to be truly human... is to *deny* the existence of the Other and his (version of the) world. To be a Sartrean subject requires that I overcome what is all too plainly and painfully for me the fact of the Other's existence. I must will a radical separation between myself and the Other, and I must abandon any investment I have in the idea of our genuinely sharing a world. So it turns out, perversely enough, that to be a Sartrean subject I actually am obliged to *will* what the traditional skeptic *fears*. (2001, 131)

According to Bauer, Beauvoir manages to elude both the Sartrian form of skepticism and traditionally Cartesian forms when she begins her *The Second Sex* by interrogating what it means to be a woman. Bauer notes that, "The problem, after all, with being a 'woman' is being *treated* as such by other people (and perhaps internalizing this treatment, so that your sense of yourself is shaped by it)" (2001, 72). This is philosophically important since, "For Beauvoir to identify herself from the start as a woman, to offer herself as a representative example of a woman, is to declare that the ontological status of the world cannot be a question for her, that she cannot be a philosopher in a certain sense of the word, at least until she comes to understand what

it means to be—to be called, and to call herself—a woman" (2001, 73). Beauvoir's turn is to an understanding of her own experience of the world, and an acknowledgment of the difference that it makes in her life, then an attempt to comprehend the difference that "being a woman" made in others' lives.

This would seem to begin to gesture at one aspect of acknowledgment that Patchen Markell highlights in *Bound by Recognition*. He notes that "For [Stanley] Cavell, acknowledgment is different from but not opposed to knowledge, for it involves acting on and responding to what we know" (2003, 34). Markell goes on to emphasize that one of Cavell's "aims [is] to change our understanding of the relevant knowledge" and that, "At least in some of his formulations, to acknowledge another is in the first instance to respond to, to act in light of, something about oneself; and conversely, the failure of acknowledgment, the 'avoidance' of the other, is crucially a distortion of one's own self-relation, an avoidance of something unbearable about oneself" (2003, 34-35). This seems, in some ways, evocative of the Sartrean shame that Bauer describes above. However, as Markell insists that this turn is not toward the suffering that one experiences as subjectivity negated, but, as analogous to an earlier "shift... from a conception of injustice that focuses on its significance for those who suffer it, to one that focuses on its meaning for those who commit it" (2003, 35) it is not this sense of shame. It is closer to Beauvoir's drive toward the recognition of one's complicity in the concrete conditions of the world, and the impact of those conditions on the people who live within them. Intersubjective experiences bring subjects closer, even across shared injustice. What matters is the meaning given to those experiences, and action in response.

In "The Skepticism of Willful Liberalism," Linda Zerilli offers an important cautionary note when she asserts that, "Rather than treat the important insight into human separateness as the basis for a different way of relating to the other, the skeptic becomes obsessed with reiterating the impossibility of knowing the other" (2002, 45). Beauvoir seems in places to be doing both things. She clearly states and reiterates at various points the impossibility of knowing the other, although she is perhaps not "obsessed." At the same time, she is also attempting to do the former, and find a different mode of intersubjective relations. Zerilli is critical of those who:

> blur the crucial distinction between acknowledging a limit to knowledge of the other and acknowledging the other. ...The problem with this interpretation is that it misses Cavell's whole point, which is not that we fail to know the other and thus must acknowledge him, but, rather, that our failure to acknowledge the other is not a failure of knowledge. We know all we need to know, but we fail to acknowledge it. (2002, 48-49)

Beauvoir wants to hold us accountable for this latter version of failure to recognize the subjectivity of the other.

Judgment is necessary because of epistemological uncertainty. It offers a layer of testing or examination between perception or comprehension of one's situation and the decision to act in response to it. Situation as a motivator and inhibitor of political action has to be combined with one's understanding of it. In this way, we end up reading and re-reading, and speaking and developing the narrative of our lives, as Laurence from *Les Belles Images* does above. What keeps this from being a moment of skeptical solipsism is the comprehension that these narratives are based in and contain necessarily partial truths about ourselves and others. Some truths are better than others, however, and the mechanism that contributes to our 'unveiling of the world' is judgment. Judging enables subjects to negotiate their intersubjective

cognizance of self and others in the world and the need to act in the world, sidestepping the skeptic's fall into pure subjectivity.

Judging

Examining Hannah Arendt's writing on judging helps elucidate Beauvoir's work on ethical action and responsibility. Arendt offers judging as a crucial element of human existence, intended to serve as the resolution to the philosophical problems she uncovered in her exploration of thinking and willing. Neither one nor the other, but involving elements of both, judging offered a way to bridge the gaps that she had explored in *The Life of the Mind.* In her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Arendt sets forth the concept of 'judging' as a distinct mental activity (1982, 4). History is about judging; and it is the spectator who judges, who stands between the events of the past, and judges them, with an eye toward the future that is influenced by those judgments. In her lectures on Kant's third critique, the *Critique of Judgment*, Arendt characterizes Kant's notion of this relation of spectator to event in the following manner: "The importance of the occurrence (*Begebenheit*) is for him exclusively in the eye of the beholder, in the opinion of the onlookers who proclaim their attitude in public. Their reaction to the event proves the 'moral character' of mankind. Without this sympathetic participation, the 'meaning' of the occurrence would be altogether different or simply nonexistent" (1982, 46). Later, Arendt says that "Morality here is the coincidence of the private and the public.... Morality means being fit to be *seen*..." (1982, 49).

Judging, for Arendt, is a solitary endeavor that involves two linked mental operations: the imagination, and, in Kant's terms, "the operation of reflection" (1982,

68). The imagination is necessary insofar as it can "make present what is absent.... by reflecting not on an object but on its representation. The represented object now arouses one's pleasure or displeasure.... Kant calls this 'the operation of reflection'" (1982, 65). This latter step is "the actual activity of judging something" (1982, 68).

Later, noting that judging is done with some cognizance of the "community sense," Arendt cites Kant's observation that "the beautiful, interests [us] only [when we are] in *society*...." (1982, 67). Lisa Disch, however, in *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy* (1994), argues that the distinction between Kant's common, or community, sense, and Arendt's is that Kant's "involves abstracting from the 'limitations' of a contingent situation to think as 'any' man." Disch continues, "By contrast, Arendt describes feeling and thinking simultaneously from a plurality of standpoints" (1994, 153). The mechanism through which judging makes present this plurality is, according to Arendt, an exercise in which one "train[s] one's imagination to go visiting," (1982, 43). Disch describes this form of representative thinking as: "It does involve a withdrawal from action, although not into utter solitude; rather, in judging, one exercises the imagination to simulate the condition of plurality in the mind" (1994, 155). Beauvoir's notion of freedom also rests in a social setting, and is dependent upon the perspectives of others, and the ability to accept and incorporate those into the project of freedom that the subject creates for herself. The notion of a contextual freedom, based in the particular circumstances of an individual's life, also finds affinities with Arendt's account of judging insofar as it is concerned with the particular, rather than with some notion of universal validity. Both Beauvoir and Arendt are concerned with the partial truths that judging can impart to s/he who

judges, not as an imperfect reflection of a universal law, but as a necessary acknowledgment of and confrontation with the imperfections of the human condition. With the aid of Arendt's conceptual vocabulary, we now turn to Beauvoir's work in order to understand how judging operates in her ethical system. Although I am arguing that this concept, judging, is central to Beauvoir's ethical theory, it emerges indirectly from her ethical theory rather than being directly addressed.

Acknowledging others in judging

For Beauvoir, the overall goal out of which each person must make meaning of her life is the search for the conditions that will allow all people to choose freedom. Beauvoir asserts that "An ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny *a priori* that separate existants can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all" (1948b, 18). However, this is difficult as the modern condition imposes constraints whereby, "Men of today seem to feel more acutely than ever the paradox of their condition. They know themselves to be the supreme end to which all action should be subordinated, but the exigencies of action force them to treat one another as instruments or obstacles, as means." (1948b, 8-9) The content of this knowledge of themselves is not determined, however. Additionally, while one is free to choose the means, mode and content of one's action, it is not ethical action unless it gestures in the direction of freedom for all. Failure to hold oneself to this standard would involve life lived on the mere order of being, whereas engaging in ethical action involves a move toward 'authentic' existence, which is lived not only in the present but gestures toward the future. At the same time, the choice, in existentialism, through one's actions to reject one's own freedom, or to

reject that of others and also thereby curtail one's own freedom, is an open possibility, and it is against this that Beauvoir writes in her *Ethics of Ambiguity*.

There is no way of permanently resolving the subject/object, self/other conundrum of existence. In fact, since the means of attempting to resolve this problem is at the heart of one's ethical being, to resolve it permanently would be to cease to function in the realm of ethics. This would be life lived at the level of 'mere existence.' The means we employ to attempt to resolve this irresolvable problem continually present us with challenges. One of the crucial mechanisms involved is our ability to judge. Clearly, the principles upon which our judgments are based do not come from nowhere. In many ways, we derive these for ourselves. For Beauvoir, there is no God from whom we can take *a priori* ethical principles, the Ten Commandments notwithstanding. Not only because these purport to come from outside human existence, and therefore don't have a meaning that is intrinsically human, but also because even if one were to accept them, these principles would need to be applied to particular situations, and for Beauvoir, the devil, so to speak, is truly in the details. While there are for her few absolutes, one of these is that the goal in our interactions is to take into account the subjectivity of the other, despite the difficulty of this task. In the case of applications of ethical precepts, what it means to take the subjectivity of the other into account can only be worked out as one interacts with others.

Just as for Arendt judging is a solitary activity, so it is for Beauvoir, as each person must make her own meaning out of existence. However, in so doing, one must not merely forge on boldly, but blindly. One must acknowledge the others whose freedom is also at stake. And, not only must one take into account the subjectivity of

the other(s), but one must also recognize one's own otherness. In *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, written in 1944, Beauvoir claims that: "In enlightened, consented recognition, one must be capable of maintaining these two freedoms, face to face, that would seem to be mutually exclusive: that of the other and my own; I must comprehend myself at the same time as object and as freedom, that I recognize my situation as founded/justified by the other while affirming my being beyond the situation" (1944, 84).[3] Given that we exist in the world, and therefore in the presence of these other subjectivities, there is no evading the existential fact that our own existence is based in others' existence, short of a willed blindness that allows one to see only oneself as present in the world, and one's projects as the only worthy projects to be fulfilled. However, it seems to be fairly easy to maintain at least some level of willful blindness. The challenge to "maintain face to face... two freedoms" is a challenge to continually seek to recognize the subjectivity of the other, and her potential for freedom, at the same time that one forges one's own subjectivity.

Only in attempting to incorporate an awareness of others' subjectivities can one make informed judgments about how to act in the world. After recognizing one's complicity with the denial of others' subjectivity, the moment of judgment comes in seeking to overcome the burdens of complicity first through recognition of those others in the moment of judging, and then through one's actions. Others may seek to align one with their projects, and one will also seek to align others with one's own project, and this is the way Beauvoir believes things should function. One must gather

[3] "Dans la reconnaissance éclairée, consentie, il faut être capable de maintenir face à face ces deux libertés qui semblent s'exclure: celle de l'autre et la mienne; il faut que je me saisisse à la fois comme objet et comme liberté, que je reconnaisse ma situation comme fondée par l'autre tout en affirmant mon être par delà la situation."

information and then judge what is before one. In this way, one chooses one's own projects, even as they are aligned with others. It would be a failure of ethics and a failure of judging to merely follow precepts which one had not chosen for oneself, undercutting cognizance of one's own freedom, and a desire to further the freedom of others.

Seeking to recognize another's subjectivity is a gesture of generosity, as, "between that which he has done for me and that which I will do for him, no commensurability can be known. ...Generosity knows itself and wills itself free and demands nothing more than to be recognized as such," and immediately following, "It is a lucid generosity which must guide our actions"[4] (1944, 84). Why talk about a "lucid generosity" rather than just generosity itself? One must be conscious of what one is doing, and one must reflect upon the situation when one judges. Not only so that one has some idea of the consequences of the acts that may follow one's judgment, but in order to give oneself a moment of reflection in which one is opened to the subjectivities of the others involved, as well as one's own otherness. One must, in a sense, "go visiting." In many instances, seeking to recognize others and their situations, and to confront those subjectivities generously would clearly lead to some discomfort. This imaginary confrontation with the other in an effort to judge a given situation could often be difficult, given the ambiguities of existence, and one's complicity in denying the freedom of others. However, for Beauvoir, one must "go visiting" not only in order to find the perspectives of those others who may also be

[4] "[E]ntre ce qu'il a fait pour moi et ce que je ferai pour lui, il ne saurait y avoir aucune mesure. ...La générosité se sait et se veut libre et ne demande rien que d'être reconnue comme telle," and "C'est une générosité lucide qui doit guider nos actes."

caught up in a particular situation. Additionally, one must confront the other in oneself in an effort to find an even more generous moment of recognition of self and of the subjectivity of the other.

When confronted with a situation that demands ethical action, the moment of judgment is what enables citizens to reflect upon their traditions and beliefs, and reflect upon whether these should be upheld, and if they should, to begin to understand how to better fulfill the promises therein. This will not always happen, as Beauvoir is fully (and in the case of the Algerian War, distressingly) aware, although confronting some of the ethical evasions humans are capable of may help in avoiding them.

Evading Ethics

In her *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir discusses several different types of persons and their ways of living, some of which contravene her imperative that: "It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our life that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting" (1948b, 9). In some way, each of these types represents a flight from recognition of the conditions in which s/he lives, or failure to recognize the commitments which Beauvoir would have each of us acknowledge. In so doing, they fail to offer themselves the necessary data for making an informed judgment, and in some cases they fail to judge, or judge wrongly.

These typologies are Beauvoir's descriptions of what persons may, through the choices they make, be or do at a particular moment in time, or perhaps over a long period of time. However, people are not inherently of a certain type, and a person can, by virtue of the choices and actions s/he makes and undertakes, fall into one category or another, or overlap categories. In fact, looking at these 'types' is most helpful as a

heuristic that provides a means of concretizing her theory and showing examples of some of the potential pitfalls that may lead to ethical evasions.

To begin with the hazards, the first type Beauvoir calls the "sub-man." This person "feels only the facticity of his existence," (1948b, 44) which is to say that the sub-man is content with living only in the realm of being, thinking only of the present. The sub-man acts against the impulse to engage the world through ethical action, remaining in a cycle of stagnation and nothingness. What is particularly dangerous about the sub-man is that because s/he chooses no project, s/he is open to the manipulation of others, for purposes that s/he does not choose (1948b, 43-44). This type of person has no real ethical existence. Thought for this person is only about the immediacy of being. This person does not judge what s/he sees in the world. This person does not make meaning out of the possibilities for transcendence that present themselves. Meaning for this person stays within the realm of being, and is based either in immediate needs and desires, or comes directly from others. This type of person does not contribute to a project in his or her subjectivity, but may adopt someone else's project without claiming it through thought and judgment. The action of the sub-man is unexamined action.

The "serious man" also rejects ethics, but does so in such a way that, "He loses himself in the object in order to annihilate his subjectivity" (Beauvoir 1948b, 45). This object is a project of sorts, and it can take many forms, but the crucial aspect of the life of the serious man is the subjugation of self in the service of an object that is unquestioned and taken as an unchanging given. For Beauvoir, the content of one's project of freedom is constantly changing, and one chooses each day, each moment,

what the content of one's project(s) will be. The serious man chooses the comfort of an unchanging, unexamined basis for action and for this reason, the actions that follow are inauthentic. This type seeks a project as a means to develop his subjectivity, but fails to realize that ethics is not a one-stop-shopping proposition. One must continually engage in a process of examination of one's projects and their relation to oneself and others. Failing to do this is a failure of judgement insofar as this person does not continue to judge the world around him, and therefore fails to engage in the continual process of making a meaningful existence. Once this person stops judging, the project engaged has no meaning as far as his own subjectivity is concerned, because he does not continue to examine, judge, and then act.

The serious attitude can fall into that of "the nihilist," someone whose object becomes the pursuit of nothingness. This attitude is different from that of the sub-man in its cognizance that life must have an object beyond mere being. However, the failure of the object as pursued by the serious man leads to nihilism, and the object is then to "be nothing" (Beauvoir 1948b, 52). Beauvoir asserts that the nihilist is both correct and tragically wrong: "The nihilist is right in thinking that the world *possesses* no justification and that he himself *is* nothing. But he forgets that it is up to him to justify the world and to make himself exist validly" (1948b, 57). Here the object pursued is destructive to one's subjectivity, and cannot contribute to the projection of that subjectivity into the future. This is a failure of judgment insofar as the nihilist pursues a project that cannot help her make meaning in an absurd world, and insofar as the project is not a project of transcendence, but of self-destruction.

Next, Beauvoir examines the type she calls "the adventurer." This person is constantly in action, but there is no purpose behind the action other than "action for its own sake" (1948b, 58). This person "finds joy in spreading through the world a freedom which remains indifferent to its content" (1948b, 58). Like the serious man, the adventurer acts, but the lack of a coherent project of freedom informing the action robs it of ethical significance. This person does not take the time to judge, and lives only in the world of today, thinking of the future only in terms of the next thrill to be found, and ignoring the ethical ramifications of the situations and actions in which s/he is engaged. Against the bad example of the adventurer, whose action is without purpose, is posited that of the "genuinely free man," described by Beauvoir as one "whose end is the liberation of himself and others" and who acts in such a way that the means to his desired end do not contravene that end (1948b, 60). The adventurer acts, but without purpose, whereas the "genuinely free" person acts with an ethically informed purpose. The remaining failures are in the type of purpose chosen.

The "passionate man" is like the serious man in his selection and adherence to an object, but whereas the serious man sees that object "as a thing detached from himself," the passionate man believes that "it is disclosed by his subjectivity" (1948b, 64). Because he believes that this freedom is his alone, he does not hesitate to treat other humans as things, consigning them through thoughts and actions to the realm of everyday facticity in the search for an ostensibly higher object (1948b, 66). For this type, nothing is ambiguous about existence at all. This person is a subject, and all others are objects, whose projects either contribute to the fulfillment of his, or are not relevant. The failure of this person is a failure to recognize the validity and value of

others and their viewpoints. This person would have a hard time judging anything, as s/he would be incapable of acknowledging anything other than what s/he would be predisposed to see, and as far as judging goes, this person would be incapable of doing so, as the only subjectivity this person recognizes is her/his own. This person's actions are in the service of a particular project that would perhaps even seek to reach into the future, but the solipsistic nature of that project and of that future renders those actions meaningless in the context of the ambiguity Beauvoir sees as the fundamental fact of human existence.

The "critic" fails in the realm of epistemology. For this type of person "defines himself positively as the independence of the mind." And his failing is revealed in that, "He understands, dominates, and rejects, in the name of total truth, the necessarily partial truths which every human engagement discloses. But ambiguity is at the heart of his very attitude, for the independent man is still a man with his particular situation in the world, and what he defines as objective truth is the object of his own choice" (1948b, 68-69). Thus, the critic, even when engaged solely in his own intellectual pursuits, makes the mistake of substituting his own absolute truth for truths which can only ever be partial, and which cannot be realized at the level of theory alone. One must act to find the truths of one's existence. For Beauvoir, judging helps to define one's ethical truths and is a prelude to action. Even inaction is a choice that can be made when one takes one's situation into account and judges. However, the critic fails to move beyond the realm of thought. In seeking an absolute truth, this person fails to judge by refusing to do so until the standard of absolute truth is the standard by which s/he judges, or in using that standard and thereby ignoring the

partial truths that Beauvoir believes are much better means of making meaning out of existence, as they enable judgment and action.

Called to make meaning out of an existence that is absurd, and to engage in the impossible project of recognizing the subjectivity of those others whom we much more readily see as objects than subjects, it is no wonder that the opportunities for failure are many. And yet, the possibilities of success make the search for an ethical existence one that is worthwhile. Difficult, nigh on impossible, sometimes? Yes. And yet, failure to attempt the recognition and acknowledgment of others through seeing, judging, and acting, is, for Beauvoir, a failure to live one's freedom. Why are the failures of judging so problematic? Because without this crucial exercise linking acknowledgment of one's subjectivity and situation to the subjectivity and situation of others, with action, one cannot make for oneself an ethically meaningful existence. As we've seen above, failing to engage the world; or doing so on someone else's terms; or making one's project a project of negation of self; incidentally acting in ways that may benefit others, but doing so only for the sake of the next adventure; or recognizing one's project as the only possible project; or a universal truth as the only valid truth, are all typical evasions practiced regularly in the fallibility of human existence.

All of these scenarios involve a failure of judgment. Given this, it would perhaps be difficult to explain how and why judging does happen, and even more difficult to account for the desire to live an ethical existence, when it would seem to be much easier to fall into one of the evasions discussed above. And yet, there is a determination on Beauvoir's part to show the value inherent in the attempt to live

ethically, to whoever is willing to read her work. She is in many ways an exemplar of the writer, another type of person mentioned in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Cognizant of the fact that we are all responsible for our own ethical existence, Beauvoir discusses two types of persons whose work aids not only themselves but their audiences as well in the pursuit of an ethical existence. These are the writer and the artist.

'The Writer' and 'the Artist': Ethical Midwifery and Narrativity

Given the difficulty of judging—of incorporating other perspectives, of recognizing one's own otherness, of discerning what it is that moves one toward one's own project of freedom, and toward the freedom of all—it is no wonder that Beauvoir sees a potential aid to this process in the artist and the writer. Her own writing was both literary and philosophical. This gave Beauvoir the opportunity to reach a wider audience, and, through the characters in her novels and plays, to present her readers with ethical dilemmas and alternate perspectives that they would be pushed to think through. This presented not just a flight of fancy, but an exercise in ethical thought, salutary practice for the ethical dilemmas that would confront her readers in their own lives.

Against the evasive types mentioned above, Beauvoir upholds, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, "the artist and the writer," who, when acting authentically, seek to reify existence, and to make meaning, but without attempting to thereby assert their own being as fixed. In this way, they avoid the 'falling into facticity' of the sub-man. Additionally, the authenticity of the search for human existence and the understanding of the partiality of the truths revealed through art lead them to avoid the pitfalls of the serious man, the passionate man, or the critic (1948b, 69), as they engage with the

world. An appreciation of what the artist and writer can do insofar as they can arrest the play of significations, and freeze a moment of existence, is valuable precisely because both they and those who observe what they have created are pulled out of the limited frame of their own subjectivity. Their own existence is opened to an experience of another subjectivity, and they are pushed to judge not only the particular work being observed, but more importantly the status of existence itself.

It seems that Beauvoir saw the role of the artist and writer as potentially that of an ethical midwife working for radical change primarily through their art. Hopefully, they would assist their audience in seeing, judging and acting. This type of work would present a call to embrace the ambiguity of the human condition, and to let the ability to judge help in navigating a life full of the choices offered by the particularity of one's existence. For Hannah Arendt, too, literature offered such an opportunity. Lisa Disch discusses Hannah Arendt's "Political Experiences" course, saying that, "The syllabus demonstrates Arendt's implicit assumption that literature makes it possible to enter into both aspects of another's standpoint: the intellectual perspective *as well as* the circumstances that give rise to it" (1994, 154). As a writer whose works were both literary and philosophical, Beauvoir clearly also regarded literature as an effective means to push men and women to examine their lives and the times in which they were living. In this way, she could communicate the political and ethical principles she found most important. There is an effort at persuasion, not only in pushing her readers to judge in the first place, but in some instances in pushing them to reach a particular kind of judgment. It is in this sense of potential persuasion, that

s/he who judges would seek the agreement of others, that judging takes place in a community, according to Arendt (1982, 72).

In "Hannah Arendt, or Life Is a Narrative," Julia Kristeva traces the concept of narrativity throughout the work of Hannah Arendt, using the idea of "human life as a political action revealed in the language of a story/history" as a bridge from Arendt's early to her later work. Kristeva claims that: "The art of narrative lies in its ability to condense the action down to an exemplary period of time, to take it out of the continuous flux, and to reveal a *who*.... The very brevity of the account takes on the value of a revelation, for the manifestation of the *who* works in oracular fashion..." (2001, 55). As noted earlier, the writer, for Beauvoir, is someone who can potentially reify a moment for ethically heuristic purposes. In this sense, the question is not just who is revealed in the moment represented in the narrative, but the form of the narrative also allows the question 'who would *I* be revealed to be,' in the same situation. It is the 'oracular fashion' of revelation that allows the person who interprets the writing/art presented to step into the moment, as oracles, "neither reveal nor hide in words, but give manifest signs" (2001, 55). Kristeva continues, "The sign is condensed, incomplete, fragmentary: it launches the infinite action of interpretation," and finally asserts that, "There remains, nevertheless, the immanent risk of speech, which hardens or reifies the fluidity of signs and can at any moment freeze the *energeia* of this action and its narrative (*muthos*) in the finitude of a character, even when it does not freeze it in the idea that the story is 'produced' by one or another

'author'"(2001, 56).[5] The tension here for Arendt is one that is different than that found in Beauvoir. For Arendt, the tension is between the necessity of narratives for giving meaning to great actions versus the incompleteness of the narrative, which may subvert its usefulness in the public, political realm of appearance or, paradoxically, the reification of the action through the overwhelming power of narrative to fix a particular action.

For Beauvoir, because of her focus on the subject's ethical choices, the moment of the reification of human existence is, in its combination with a multiplicity of narratives, one that becomes ethically useful insofar as it asks each person to contemplate how s/he would act in the situation presented. Is this in contrast to Arendt, who would use the narrative as a means of revealing to citizens how they *should* act politically? Not necessarily, as for Beauvoir there were instances in which there definitely was a *should act*, for example in the moment of the Algerian War. For Arendt, the proliferation of a narrative of greatness in the public realm of appearance is a means to keep the realm of the political alive or to reinvigorate it. Beauvoir has similar goals. Both are working after Auschwitz, and Kristeva's understanding of Arendt is that, "...for Arendt, it is what we call the imagination, including poetic deployment in a narration, that is alone able to *think* horror" (2001, 87). It is in Beauvoir's earlier *Ethics* that one can also see the use of narrative, in the stories revealed either through visual arts or writing, as a means of confronting horror, and *thinking* it through. Absent this thought, the power of narrative is lost, and the actions

[5] Kristeva noted earlier that, "Arendt warns against the limitations inherent in the production of works: works, or products, reify the fluidity of human experience into objects that are utilized as a means to an end..." (2001, 51).

that could have interrupted it or that can prevent present or future horrors are left to chance, and the horror is free to continue or to be recreated in a future moment. This concerns not just the stories that we as a society put forth about who we are, in the sense that Arendt would have it, such that each of us tries to participate in the active political moment generated by the who that is revealed in the narrative. For Arendt, it is as if each of us seeks to find (a bit of) that who, given and approved, and constitutive of an us as a society, in ourselves. For Beauvoir, the narratives include the stories of a reified moment that help us determine who we are as a society, as in the Arendtian moment described above, as well as the individual stories that each of us tells herself.

From this comes a potentially liberatory moment, for example, when one can retell a narrative from which one has been excluded in a manner such that one is brought into the play of the narrative. In this way, retelling a narrative can work against prior constraints that were a part of the narrative in an earlier formulation. This, of course, reveals just how political the construction and dissemination of narratives can be, as it is not simply the case that once a more inclusive narrative has been promulgated that it will trump previous narratives of exclusion. In fact, this reminds us that we need to be vigilant about the narratives that emerge in a particular society, paying attention to the work of building/including or diminishing/excluding subjectivities in which the narrative is implicated. It is not just the case that a multiplicity of narratives will guarantee a more inclusive society, or one that is more ethically enriched. As Beauvoir shows in *The Second Sex*, a multiplicity of narratives has been told of "Woman," many of them contradictory, and rather than leading to a

moment of positive development of women's subjectivities, it has entrapped women in dichotomous formulations to which no person could actually conform. Beauvoir also reveals, however, in the many examples of strong women from history that are present in the French version of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, although mostly expunged from the English translation, that having a set of stories that give one a history of strength and power can be a powerful tool for one's own development. Likewise, the authors of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, in their book, *Sexual Difference*, rely upon practices of citationality and intergenerational friendship as a form of mutual recognition in order to create an atmosphere that allows for a flourishing of feminism and of feminist subjects and citizens.

Indeed, the focus of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective on seeking sources of subjectivity in interpersonal relations and in history emphasizes Kristeva's statement that, "We note that the *actor* himself, the actor alone, no matter how heroic his exploit, does not constitute the marvelous action. Action is marvelous only if it becomes memorable. Where is memory to be found? It is the *spectators* who bring the story/history to completion, and they do so by virtue of the *thought* that comes after the act, and this is accomplished via *recollection*, without which there is, quite simply, nothing to be told. It is not the actors but the spectators who make the *polis* a creative organization of memory and/or of history, histories, stories" (2001, 54).

Here it is clear that as for Beauvoir, action is situated in a particular context. It takes meaning from that context. However, is Beauvoir's system about performing an action that is or will hopefully be retold by someone else, or is it about something else, for example, telling myself stories of others' actions, in order to act myself? The

indeterminacy of the meaning of the action, its openness to interpretation, means that it can be told and retold in a variety of ways to suit the problems or questions at hand. The narratives live on into the future, and ask us to engage in such a way that our own actions will be the subject of narratives that reach into the future as well. One tells oneself a story about the actions one will or will not undertake, in part based on the narratives that one tells oneself about others' actions.

Kristeva cites Arendt on Aristotle, saying that, "Arendt discerns a communal space made up of political gazes that are somehow pre- or post-theoretical, a space that admires neither man as such, nor the mortal, but the ability of narrated action to immortalize the living.... 'One' is immortalized by becoming a *who* acting in the political space, in this way alone giving rise to a memorable narrative" (2001, 58). For Beauvoir, there is no pre- or post-theoretical political gaze, as one is continually in the moment of thought, by virtue of one's confrontation with the world. One may choose to deny the moment, but it cannot be escaped, short of death or *immortality*. While Beauvoir's drive toward transcendence in her ethics would seem to agree with the Arendtian version of immortality, it is because of the denial of a pre- or post-theoretical space that it does not.

In Kristeva's words, "Thus telling the story of one's life is, in the end, the essential act for giving it meaning.... Storytelling is important, but action takes precedence, as long as it is narrated action" (2001, 49-50). As a step preceding ethical action, judging involves an interpretation or set of interpretations, and one's freedom is as conditioned by the interpretations one gives the world as it is by the material conditions one lives. As Patricia Williams notes in *Seeing a Color-Blind Future*:

> This tension between material conditions and what one is cultured to see or not see—the dilemma of the emperor's new clothes we might call it—is a tension faced by any society driven by bitter histories of imposed hierarchy. I don't mean to suggest that we need always go about feeling guilty or responsible or perpetually burdened by original sin or notions of political correctness. I do wish, however, to counsel against the facile innocence of those three notorious monkeys, Hear No Evil, See No Evil, Speak No Evil. Theirs is a purity achieved through ignorance. Ours must be a world in which we know each other better. (1998, 5)

Given the above discussion of knowing versus acknowledgment, it might be helpful to shift the focus from "know[ing] each other better" to acknowledging each other (better). Williams' point is that ignorance cannot be an excuse for continued material conditions of oppression.

Stanley Cavell makes a similar point in the example he offers as a possibility: "But I am filled with this feeling—of our separateness, let us say—and I want you to have it too. So I give voice to it. And then my powerlessness presents itself as ignorance—a metaphysical finitude as an intellectual lack" (1976, 263). In opposition to this, Cavell proposes acknowledgment as a claim one makes upon another, which may or may not receive a response (1976, 263). However, for Cavell, "A 'failure to know' might just mean a piece of ignorance, an absence of something, a blank. A 'failure to acknowledge' is the presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness" (1976, 264). In addition, "Acknowledgment goes beyond knowledge... in its requirement that I *do* something or reveal something on the basis of that knowledge" (1976, 257). What is to be revealed? According to Cavell, "an individual will take *certain* among his experiences to represent his *own* mind... and then take his mind (his self) to be unknown so far as *those* experiences are unknown" (1976, 265). Is it the same in constituting a community through the

narratives of experience that are chosen to represent a 'we'? If so, the stories that contribute to that project of construction must be held to standards of the partial truths that are constructed in the judgments we accept and reject, and, in light of our acknowledgment of others, guard against the "dangerous if comprehensible temptation to imagine inclusiveness by imagining away any obstacles" (Williams 1998, 5-6). The stories told of the 'we' cannot necessarily change the conditions of the people who comprise it. They can, however, motivate action. They can call for possibilities that respond to the claim of another that will remain hidden if the we cannot imagine a future beyond its present limitations, and cannot see in its past the roots of alternative political and social arrangements.

Chapter 4: Mapping the Future World

"It is only through tenuous and complex mediations that word becomes action. Neither silence nor absence can be condoned." (Michel-Antoine Burnier, *Choice of Action*)

"To educate man to be *actional*, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act." (Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 222)

"On travaillera toujours pour certains hommes contre d'autres." (Simone de Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, 49)

"Who Shall Die?"

The previous chapter ended with a discussion of narratives as a means of shaping the self and the community, through their ability to inspire political action and make visible possible alternatives to the present situation. There is a narrative of political decision, freedom and action that Beauvoir recounts in two separate pieces of writing. For her it is exemplary of human failings and of human possibilities. In "*Idéalisme Moral et Réalisme Politique*,"[1] Beauvoir cites briefly an anecdote from Michelet's *Histoire de la Révolution Française*:

> an Eastern town, under siege by the Austrians and having reached the end of its resources, reluctantly decided to force the old/aged, women and children outside its walls, but the Commissioner of the Republic opposed this measure, declaring, 'We want/will freedom for all.' The aim was not only to save the town from the Austrians; the town was precious/valuable because in it were incarnate the new principles of liberty and equality; a victory obtained by disowning the ideal one was defending would have been the worst sort of defeat.[2] (1945a, 261)

This, in a nutshell, is the plotline of *Who Shall Die?* Beauvoir's theatrical exploration of the mechanisms of human interaction that facilitate certain modes of decision,

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[1] This essay has not been published in English translation. Translations presented here are my own; I have provided the original French in footnotes.

[2] "[U]ne ville de l'Est, assiégée par les Autrichiens et arrivée au bout de ses ressources, hésita un instant à chasser hors des murs les vieillards, les femmes et les enfants, mais le commissaire de la République s'opposa à cette mesure, déclarant: 'Nous voulons la liberté pour tous.' C'est que le but n'était pas seulement de sauver la ville des Autrichiens; la ville était précieuse parce qu'en elle s'incarnaient les principes nouveaux de liberté et d'égalité; une victoire obtenue en reniant l'idéal qu'on défendait eût été la pire des défaites."

action and freedom. In this play, action and its positive principle of love for others are Beauvoir's primary concerns. She also explores the harm of action that privileges the future freedom of some members over the present freedom of all members of the community, and action that is based in a single individual's egocentric assertion of self over others.

Who Shall Die? (1983) is a translation of Beauvoir's *Les Bouches Inutiles*, a play originally published in 1945. It is set in the fictional 14th century town of Vaucelles, in Flanders. Knowing that the siege the town has been under cannot be lifted for another three months, but that there are only six weeks' worth of rations left, the all-male City Council votes to expel the old, the young, the sick and all women. The actions and reactions of the principal characters exhibit a range of human ethical possibilities. In presenting these possibilities, Beauvoir asks her audience to consider what it means to live and to pursue one's freedom in a community faced with difficult ethical and political choices.

Jean-Pierre is a young man who has brought back the news that relief will not arrive for another three months. He is an idealist who has refused the offer to become a member of the City Council, because he cannot stand to think of himself as guilty for the sufferings that are the consequence of an earlier Council-imposed rationing system. After the decision to expel the "useless," however, Jean-Pierre changes his mind. He accepts that because his voice can be influential, and in light of his ideals, to deny the leadership position that he has been offered is to abnegate responsibility for others in a way that is just as bad as, if not worse than, the guilt he would carry in that position. In the end, Catherine, his adopted mother, points out to him that to refuse to

choose is to have an impact. She offers as an example that in initially refusing a seat on the council, he was not present for the deliberations that resulted in the decision to make the expulsions. Had he been there, it is possible that he would have been able to persuade fellow council-members to vote against it, or at the very least push them to recognize their betrayal of the principles for which the city is fighting. Jean-Pierre recognizes that the decision to expel the "useless mouths" effectively kills the community, asserting that, "This is no longer a community. On one side there are executioners; on the other, victims" (1983, 45). He also points out to the Council when he finally addresses them that to maintain the mere existence of the town by eviscerating the principles it claimed when it began to fight is to gain a hollow victory.

In opposition is the character of his adopted brother Georges, who takes the decision to expel the weak and let them die outside the walls of the city as an excuse to attempt the rape of his adopted sister, Jeanne, and to plot a coup. Georges' rationale is that the expulsions are only the first step in weeding out the weak, and that his seizure of power is simply an extension of the principle of rule by the strong. By acting in response to his situation, he is certainly fulfilling one of the criteria for living his freedom that Beauvoir would expect. However, his inability to see others as his equals, and to treat them as such, undermines the freedom-value of his actions. In acting, he is working against the freedom of everyone else in the town, privileging a false conception (by Beauvoir's criteria) of his own freedom above all others' freedom. He is an extreme egoist who takes the opportunity offered by the devaluation of some members of the community to actively devalue all others.

The drive to love others is Beauvoir's secondary theme in this play, while the drive to action is the primary impetus of this particular fictional instantiation of her understanding of freedom's meaning. Those "useless persons" who are denied the right to choose their own freedom, even if it is to sacrifice themselves by storming the besieging Burgundians, have been robbed of the choice to live the principles of freedom and self-determination that the town of Vaucelles has been fighting for. Beauvoir's references in this play to men's inability to look into the eyes of their wives and children, or at each other, reveal the negative effect on the relatively more powerful when they decide to actively deny others' value and freedom. When they see those whom they have loved and who are now considered useless as obstacles to the freedom of those who are considered more worthy, they know they are guilty of depriving those others of life and choice, and when they see each other, they know they are complicit in this crime.

In the end, there is collective action. The town reverses its decison, and each person, no matter how previously judged to be weak or strong, is allowed to make the choice to fight. The resolution of the decision is not given by Beauvoir. We do not know whether the Burgundians are defeated, or whether the townspeople of Vaucelles, acting together, survive their last-ditch attempt to repel those attempting to conquer them. And for Beauvoir, although outcomes do matter, the means of achieving them matter more. To achieve the end of maintaining the 'freedom' of Vaucelles by denying the freedom of the people of Vaucelles is indeed to achieve a Pyrrhic victory.

What we do see, however, is a literary counter-example to the problems evidenced in *She Came To Stay*, developed in a preceding chapter. Against the

individual dynamic of the Hegelian dialectic played out in the relation between two people, one of whom feels directly threatened by the other, we see here a communal response to threats to human freedom. One threat came from outside the group, from the Burgundians who wish to conquer the town. The other threat emerged from within the community, in the attempt to defend some humans' freedom in the denial of others' freedom. However, the solution is reliant on the actions of individuals, although Beauvoir is trying an alternative mode of intersubjectivity, one that is based in the community, and premised on action with others. The fact (of the story) remains that at a certain point the community had determined that expulsions were a legitimate form of preservation of the community, while in the end the community is only actually preserved by virtue of the charismatic abilities of Jean-Pierre. This ignores the question of who voted for the expulsions in the first place, and the motive or force that resulted in their change of heart.

The meaning of the community's action is ultimately indeterminate, both in the play and in the real world. Who wins? We do not know whether the people of Vaucelles defeat the conquerors or die, and yet, Beauvoir would also say that the people of Vaucelles have won, because they have conquered their own drive to assert their own freedom at the cost of others'. The future meaning of that act will be shaped by the narratives that are told of it, or by its disappearance into the abyss of historical unknowns. This could happen because it does not fit the present meanings being made by those who claim the past in making their own present and future, or because it is not known. For Beauvoir, this is an example of freedom's reclamation, and a community making the right choice. At the same time, it highlights the uncertainty

that is built into Beauvoir's system. It does not necessarily, however, present a sufficient mechanism for making such decisions in a community and accounting for them.

For Simone de Beauvoir, politics means action with others, taking as its ground a drive toward freedom for all and the world of meanings made possible by that freedom. She pushed her readers to respond to the decisions made by their political leaders, and accept responsibility for their consequences. She recognizes that difficult choices may be a part of deciding how to act.[3] What must then inform those decisions is a set of ethical values put into action in cognizance of the material situation that presents opportunities for action. The interplay between ethics and politics and the values that inform them was directly addressed by Beauvoir in an essay, "Idéalisme Moral et Réalisme Politique" (1945a), "Moral Idealism and Political Realism," published the same year as *Les Bouches Inutiles* (1945c), translated as *Who Shall Die?* (1983)).

Beauvoir's Political Bite: "Moral Idealism and Political Realism"

Of the motive force behind all ethical action, Beauvoir says that: "It is desire which creates the desirable, and the project which sets up the end. It is human existence which makes values spring up in the world on the basis of which it will be able to judge the enterprise in which it will be engaged." (1948b, 15) The judgment is determined both at the communal level, in the laws and precepts that societies establish as their guiding principles, and at an individual level, by the person

[3] Another ficitional example of this dilemma, in the context of the French Resistance, is found in her novel *The Blood of Others* (1948a).

contemplating the particular action in question. On the one hand, Beauvoir says that we must all decide which actions to take for ourselves. We are free to act in ways that promote neither our own nor anyone else's project of freedom. On the other hand, in order to be a part of ethical action, that decision must take into account the presence of others, and the impact that the action will have on those others. This moment of decision and the form that it takes is left to the individual to shape, be that through positive action and the desire to claim one's own freedom, or through renunciation of the moment of acknowledgment and potential freedom. Additionally, the realization that one's actions can have unintended consequences does not negate the responsibility one has for them. In fact, taking responsibility for one's actions as well as for one's inaction, is one of the first ways in which one realizes one's freedom. This responsibility cannot, however, be used as an excuse to do nothing.

In her *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir says that ethics does not furnish recipes, that it is up to politics to determine the actions that should be undertaken. However, what is missing from this statement, albeit scattered elsewhere in her *Ethics*, is present in a concentrated form in her essay "Moral Idealism and Political Realism." This is the crucial linkage of ethics and politics through values. For Beauvoir, these values must come neither from what she describes as the ethereal plane of abstract idealism nor from the arid vantage point of realpolitik, but from the lived existence of the individual humans and their communities, whose actions are in question. "Moral Idealism and Political Realism" was published in November of 1945, and has two primary and related goals. One of Beauvoir's aims is to explore the question of when compromise of principles becomes collaboration, a pertinent question in the wake of

France's Nazi occupation. The second is to argue for a politics based in an existential ethics.

This essay begins with an invocation of two different and enduring extremes on the political continuum ranging from "intransigent moralis[m]" to "realpolitik," or, figurally, from the "moralist" to the "man of action" (1945a, 248) represented respectively by Antigone and Creon. The accusations and counter-accusations from the two polar positions are that "politics is incapable of achieving the true good"[4] (1945a, 248), according to the moralist, while "moral discourse is nothing but useless chatter, scruples a tactical weakness"[5] (1945a, 249), according to the politician. However, Beauvoir asserts that whereas the conflict for Antigone and Creon concerned one's celestial versus one's terrestrial obligations, and was limited, in many ways, to specialists, the claims that one feels in 1945 are different. What renders 1945, Beauvoir's then contemporary situation, different is that, "Currently, almost all men have a political existence, for almost all of them the problem of action is posed"[6] (1945a, 249). Continuing, she also points out that one's ties are not only to one's country, but to one's class; to a civilization that exceeds the borders of one's nation, and finally to an "entire world in which all of the parts are tightly interdependent"[7] that the effects of one's actions form a part of one's existence and that the projects one chooses may be multiple and contradictory (1945a, 249-250). Having thus defined the political question as one of action, and the field of action as large-scale and

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[4] "[L]e politique est incapable d'atteindre le véritable bien."
[5] "[L]es discours moraux ne sont... qu'un vain bavardage, les scrupules une faiblesse tactique."
[6] "A présent, presque tous les hommes ont une existence politique, pour presque tous le problème de l'action se pose...."
[7] "...monde entier dont toutes les parties sont étroitement solidaires..."

intertwined with multiple allegiances, Beauvoir then turns to the moral side of the spectrum, and says that one does not know what one should want, and does not know how to achieve it. The result is fear arising out of freedom: "their freedom makes them afraid"[8] (1945a, 250). The questions: "What should one want/will? And in order to attain that which one wants/wills, what must one do?"[9] (1945a, 250), lead to anguish rather than answers. And in the face of this fear and anguish, the tendency is to cling unthinkingly to one side of the spectrum of "intransigent moralism" or "cynical realism" (1945a, 250). The first is described by Beauvoir as "enclosure in pure subjectivity"; the second as "losing oneself in objectivity" (1945a, 250). Neither stance can address the questions fully, or overcome the fear they entail.

Against this polarization, Beauvoir poses the question of whether, "the two spheres in which human activity unfolds"[10] (1945a, 250), ethics and politics, can commingle. Her answer is to look more closely at each realm to determine its essence and goals. Turning first to ethics, Beauvoir describes the vestiges of Kantian ethics: evoking 'universal imperatives' and "Justice, Right and Truth," and "positing its principles as absolutes, it considers itself as being for itself its own end"[11] (1945a, 250-51). According to Beauvoir, the drive to absolutes puts ethics out of the realm of the real-world, and the person who adheres to this path could do well to do nothing, in order not to do harm. This form of ethics does no good for politics, as it presents only negative precepts. Beauvoir describes this: "In the idea of Justice, in the idea of Right,

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[8] "[L]eur liberté leur fait peur."
[9] "Que doit-on vouloir? et pour atteindre ce qu'on veut, que doit-on faire?"
[10] "[L]es deux plans où se déploie l'activité humaine..."
[11] "[P]osant ses principes commes des absolus, elle se considère comme étant à elle-même sa propre fin."

the map of the future world is not drawn"[12] (1945a, 251). She asserts thereafter that, "the general and abstract principles of ethics can do nothing but limit the field of action of politics without helping it to find a solution to the unique problems it faces"[13] (1945a, 251). This version of ethics presents a barrier: it is confronted by politics, "and since the role of politics is to modify the face of the earth, to surpass what is given, it is natural that it tries to break this barrier"[14] (1945a, 251). The barrier needs to be an active one: "an ethics that has no bite on the world is but an ensemble of dead structures"[15] (1945a, 252). For this reason, Beauvoir wants to blend ethics and politics constructively. Here she pushes against an overly abstract version of ethics that does not deal with the singularity of human existence, that cannot aid in tracing out the 'map of the future world,' because that map is based in those human experiences as well as those principles that inform human action. Ideally, that map also charts the productive limitation of politics' terrain. Although Beauvoir disparages their negativity above, limitations are also a necessary element to that blend of ethics and politics that she sees as ideal, as politics needs guiding values in order to avoid the problems represented by the decision to expel the useless in *Who Shall Die?*; in order to confront difficult decisions with freedom in mind.

At the same time that she offers a critique of ethics' abstraction, Beauvoir is critical of politics when it becomes an excuse to hide from oneself the agonizing reality of human freedom (1945a, 253). Shortly thereafter, Beauvoir juxtaposes the

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[12] "Dans l'idée de Justice, dans l'idée de Droit, la carte du monde futur n'est pas tracée."
[13] "[L]es préceptes généraux et abstraits de la morale ne peuvent que limiter le champ d'action du politique sans l'aider à trouver la solution des problèmes singuliers qu'il se pose."
[14] "[E]t puisque le rôle du politique est de modifier la face de la terre, de dépasser le donné, il est naturel qu'il essaie de briser cette barrière...."
[15] "[U]ne morale qui ne mord pas sur le monde n'est qu'un ensemble de constructions mortes...."

career of those politicians to, "authentic politics, which intends the elaboration of the world to come"[16] (1945a, 253). So far, we see that politics is about action and singularity; it happens in the present and is concerned with the future. However, the fundamental element of politics, for Beauvoir, is the human freedom that gives the answer to the question of what is to be done. Beauvoir describes this as: "it's always man who forges the grand ideals to which he devotes his life. So much so that one can say without paradox that any coherent and worthwhile politics is first idealistic insofar as it is subordinate to an idea it propses to actualize"[17] (1945a, 253-54). Because of this foundation in an idealized vision, politics and ethics taken together allow humans to chart the map of a future through the projects that they undertake. One without the other can lead to a skewed image of what that future can or should be.

Beauvoir notes that attitudes and actions shape the future that emerges from one's current context. She uses the example of those in France who collaborated with the Nazi regime and their excuses for doing so. Their claim of a simple "intellectual error" in presuming Germany could not be defeated contributed to making that defeat less likely: their decision to accept this judgment of the situation was not 'simply' a recognition of something; rather, it was a creation in the act of recognition (1945a, 255). Just as intersubjective engagement involves a cognizance that there is a project (or many projects) of the other and an engagement with or refusal of this, so too is this the case regarding governments, as "to recognize a government is to bring it into existence as such; coming to consciousness is never a purely contemplative operation,

[16] "...du véritable politique, qui se propose d'élaborer le monde à venir."
[17] "...c'est toujours l'homme qui forge les grandes images auxquelles il dévoue sa vie. Si bien qu'on peut dire sans paradoxe que toute politique cohérente et valable est d'abord idéaliste en ce qu'elle est subordonnée à une idée dont elle se propose l'actualisation."

it is engagement, agreement or refusal"[18] (1945a, 255). Here Beauvoir shifts focus from the individual engaged in her own projects to the governmental structures that shape and are shaped by the projects chosen by those individuals. Beauvoir urges citizens to understand that in accepting or contesting the actions of the regimes they recognize, so do they contribute to the shape of the possible future of the world. Unless they actively disavow actions taken by their government that they judge to be wrong, they are complicit in the denial of freedom entailed by those actions. Even in so distancing themselves, as Beauvoir found out during the Algerian War, it is difficult to completely separate themselves from the community of which they have been a part, and their sense of it.

One can also be complicit in freedom's renunciation in excusing one's actions by being caught up in the trajectory of history. Beauvoir is critical of Hegel when she rejects the notion of the subject as subsumed by history's progress and invokes those who deny their own freedom by allowing themselves to be taken up in what is presumed to be the flow of history. Instead of disavowing one's freedom in this way, by subordinating it to history, "A lucid politician, who truly has a grasp on things is one who is conscious in himself and in others of the power of freedom"[19] (1945a, 256). Freedom rightly undertaken is a force that adds clarity to politics, whereas the fear and anxiety that are possible responses to one's freedom inhibit the extent of one's political understanding. The danger is not just that one will fail to understand, but that in failing to see clearly, one will neither act appropriately nor recognize proper

[18] "[R]econnaître un gouvernement, c'est le faire exister comme tel; la prise de conscience n'est jamais une opération purement contemplative, elle est engagement, adhésion ou refus."
[19] "Le politique lucide et qui véritablement a prise sur les choses, c'est celui qui a conscience en lui et chez les autres du pouvoir de la liberté."

political or governmental authority. Linked to this political recognition, of course, is the ethical authority that can only be recognized in the ends toward which action is undertaken. For Beauvoir, political and ethical questions are inextricably intertwined through goals and their justification, as well as through the institutional arrangements that facilitate or hinder them.

The impact of outcomes for humans' lived experience is therefore an integral part of rendering the meaning of political action (1945a, 256). Outcomes considered absent their human cost and consequences cannot be the reckoning of political success. To operate in this way would simply be technique, or administration, involving "tactical problems" but no "moral hesitation" (1945a, 256). Simple maintenance of human life is not sufficient as a political goal (1945a, 258). There is always, for Beauvoir, a human element, as "politics commences only at the moment when men surpass themselves toward general human values"[20] (1945a, 258). As opposed to her earlier description of politics as not subject to universal principles but rather concerned with the specifics of human lives, there is here a necessary tension between the political and the ethical. The ethical is the starting point for defining the ends of the political action, and determines which paths are acceptible, and what outcomes are legitimate, in terms of their human costs and consequences. At the same time, politics for Beauvoir comprises human action and pulls ethics from the ideal into the realm of the humanly possible and the feasible. It pushes toward achievements possible only through combining human efforts. The ethical impetus behind politics keeps it from becoming an excuse to achieve great things to be enjoyed by a few to the

[20] "...la politique commence seulement lorsque les hommes se dépassent vers des valeurs humaines génerales."

detriment of the many. It involves work with others in service of a goal that reaches into the future.

It is important to note the formation of the subject that Beauvoir proposes as part of a political project. She notes that political action is, "the actualization, the expression of the idea that the worker develops of himself"[21] (1945a, 259). The worker was her chosen example, but the principle that emerges is that one mirrors (to oneself and others) a self-understanding that one shapes and creates through action. The idea that one has of oneself can be a powerful motivator, but not without the accompanying action that seeks to realize that idea. And yet, it is not simply the idea or its accomplishment that matters. Speaking of the French Revolution, Beauvoir says that even if the democratic reforms engendered by the Revolution were achievable by the king and his ministers, the same result with a different origin would matter differently (1945a, 259). It makes a difference that certain people rather than others engage in action in service of certain goals that they seek to realize both governmentally and personally. It shapes both the people and the institutions involved. Action then does not simply result from an image of freedom; it is an integral part of its creation.

At the same time, action is not tied to a goal, freedom, that is simply a contentless ideal. According to Beauvoir, each action has a particular, material desired end. And although the achievement of that end opens up possibilities that may or may not have been foreseen, it is also an end in itself. Because the ultimate end-goal is human freedom and its enlargement, however, the end and the means of its achievement cannot be separated. This is all well and good in a system in which

[21] "...l'actualisation, l'expression de l'idée que l'ouvrier se fait de lui-même..."

intersubjective actors are benevolent and predisposed to enlarge freedom's terrain to encompass all other humans. She describes action's end as not simply an outcome but also as the meaning that informed it, created it, marks it. Against the jeering of the 'realist' at such scruples, Beauvoir asks, "what good is it to fight if one abolishes in the struggle all the reasons for which one had chosen to fight?"[22] (1945a, 261). However, she is critical of inter-war pacifists, accusing them of having "served peace ill" (1945a, 261). Beauvoir's hindsight of 1945 allows her to scoff a bit at pacifists who resisted fighting the war, and their failure, in her mind, to understand that, "it is absurd out of respect for the values that one wishes to see triumphant, to thereby assure their defeat," then continues, "however, it is no less absurd to renounce an idea under the pretext of thereby assuring its efficacity"[23] (1945a, 261). As far as this example is concerned, Beauvoir's willingness to accept violence as a means of last resort renders this choice no choice at all for her. She would work peacefully until she judged it appropriate to fight, having accepted violence as an acceptable possibility all along. For the pacifist, the situation would appear quite different, and rather than simply accepting Germany's 'inevitable' victory, and therefore refusing to fight as a refusal of freedom, the principled pacifist could weigh the loss of freedom in violence against others as a greater harm than a refusal to commit that violence. It seems, then, that the tension between ends and means, and the desire to fulfill the ideal informing the end without betraying it through the means of its achievement, is difficult. What

[22] "...à quoi bon lutter si on abolit dans la lutte toutes les raisons pour lesquelles on avait choisit de lutter?"
[23] "[I]l est absurde par respect pour les valeurs qu'on souhaite faire triompher, d'en assurer la défaite"; "mais, il n'est pas moins absurde de renier une idée sous prétexte d'en assurer l'efficacité."

tools, then, does Beauvoir offer to negotiate the possible tension between one's principles and the compulsion to act?

Negotiating the tension seems to require capabilities of (self-)understanding and critical analysis. Beauvoir opposes the arguments of those who believed the Vichy regime was the means of maintaining French territorial integrity with the notion that this was instead a vitiation of that which made France French. In conditions of uncertainty, the unwary or the opportunist may, "Under the pretext of going forth with a firm step... finish by not going anywhere any way"[24] (1945a, 262). The realist may deal with the question of means as a question of the present, leaving to the future the question of the ends of the action. For 'the realist' described above, the future is taken as "a given," determined; for Beauvoir, the future is an open question that each person must confront, but that must be confronted in the context of a community as "an ensemble of individuals none of whom is more real than any other"[25] (1945a, 262-3). That is, my future cannot come at the cost of yours; my reality should not destructively impinge on yours. According to Beauvoir, the de-personalization and the de-particularization that accompany the regard of humans as "numérable," or as quantifiable objects, whose value increases or decreases mathematically depending on how many are grouped, is opposed to an understanding of humans as intrinsically valuable in their particularity.[26] To see humans as an aggregate mass of humanity rather than an ensemble of particular individuals comprising a variety of human experiences changes the way one can imagine the map of the future world. It limits

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[24] "Sous prétexte d'aller devant soi d'un pas ferme... finit par ne plus aller nulle part."
[25] "...un ensemble d'individus dont aucun n'est plus réel qu'un autre...."
[26] As in Wolin's linking of method with making meaning of the world, so too is Beauvoir cognizant that seeing people in a certain way diminishes the possible meanings to be made of their actions.

possibilities by envisioning only a narrow, lowest-common-denominator range of human experience, diminishing the possibilites for action that can be proposed.

The future and the present are united in the project one chooses (1945a, 264). That one has chosen and worked for the desired project gives the future value. Absent personal investiture, "my project" can have no value for me. Such an individualist understanding of ethical value strains against a future that reaches toward the "totalité humaine." However, there is no meaning to that totality, to the future, or to one's project, unless the three come together through one's actions. This intersection is where politics and ethics also productively come together: "the political person cannot avoid deciding, choosing; no ready-made response is to be found in things, in the sphere of being, nor in the sphere of values. In each new situation one must interrogate one's ends anew, one must choose and justify them without assistance. For it is precisely in this free engagement that ethics is found"[27] (1945a, 264). The openness or indeterminacy of the political decision calls both the ends and means of action into question, while ethics offers a positive justification of those actions in its cognizance of human freedom.

Far from being simple rule-makers or rule-abiders, the ethicists Beauvoir admires are those who:

> [C]reated a new universe of values through speech that was action, through action that took a bite out of the world; ...Ethics is not negative, it does not demand of man to remain faithful to a fixed image of himself: to be ethical is to seek to found one's being, to render one's contingent existence necessary; however, the being of man is 'a being in the world'; it is inextricably linked to

[27] "[L]e politique ne peut éviter de décider, de choisir; il ne trouve dans les choses, ni sur le plan de l'être, ni sur celui des valeurs aucune réponse toute faite. Dans chaque nouvelle situation il faut qu'à nouveau il s'interroge sur ses fins, qu'il les choisisse et les justifie sans secours. Mais précisément c'est dans ce libre engagement que réside la morale."

> this world he inhabits, without which he could neither exist nor likewise define himself; he is linked to it by action, and it is these actions which must be justified. Every act being the surpassing of a concrete and particular situation, one must each time invent anew a mode of action that carries within it its justification.[28] (1945a, 265)

The kind of ethics that Beauvoir proposes is bound up in one's actions, and the justification for one's actions is, instead of a particular, fixed vision of oneself that one then attempts to live iconically, a fluid image of oneself in the world, grappling with it, shaping the world, creating in it a space for the values that one desires to manifest in the world through one's actions.

It is through actions and their justifications, according to Beauvoir, that ethics and politics come together. And because of the lack of fixity in what she has described, the ties between ethics and politics are fluid and changing as humans make and break them in their attempt to chart the course of the future world:

> And so ethics will find its true expression; it is nothing other than concrete action itself, insofar as that action seeks to justify itself. That is to say that an authentic ethics is realistic; through it, man realizes himself in realizing the ends he chooses... And since a political person cannot avoid questioning himself as to the justification of his actions, since a politics is valuable only if its ends are freely chosen, ethics and politics appear to us intertwined. Man is one; the world that he inhabits is one; and through the action that he deploys throughout the world he engages himself in its totality.
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> To reconcile ethics and politics is thus to reconcile man with himself.[29] (1945a, 266)

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[28] "...ont créé un nouvel univers de valeurs par des paroles qui étaient des actes, par des actes qui mordaient sur le monde;.... La morale n'est pas négative, elle ne demande pas à l'homme de demeurer fidèle à une image figée de lui-même: être moral, c'est chercher à fonder son être, à faire passer au nécessaire notre existence contingente; mais, l'être de l'homme est 'un être dans le monde'; il est indissolublement lié à ce monde qu'il habite, sans lequel il ne peut exister ni même se définir; il y est lié par des actes, et ce sont ces actes qu'il faut justifier. Toute acte étant le dépassement d'une situation concrète et singulière, on devra chaque fois inventer à neuf un mode d'action qui porte en soi sa justification."

[29] "Alors la morale trouvera son vrai visage; elle n'est pas autre chose que l'action concrète elle-même, dans la mesure où cette action cherche à se justifier. C'est à dire que la morale authentique est réaliste; par elle l'homme se réalise en réalisant les fins qu'il choisit... Et puisque le politique ne peut éviter de s'interroger sur la justification de ses actes, puisque une politique n'est valable que si les fins en sont

Beauvoir once again weaves together the strands of intersubjective engagement with the world and subject-formation in suggesting that bringing ethics and politics together is, in effect, a reconciliation of an individual with herself through freely chosen projects in common with others. However, this reconciliation is demanding, and cannot be permanently achieved. It must be recreated with each new situation. Beauvoir describes the lack of permanence at the end of her article as:

> ...the rending that is his lot is the price of his presence in the world, of his transcendance and of his freedom. ...He must forgo knowing rest, he must assume his freedom. Only at this price does he become capable in reality of surpassing the given, that which is the real ethic, to found concretely the object in which he transcends himself, this which is the only valid politics; at this price his action is concretely inscribed in the world, and the world in which he acts is a world gifted with meaning, a human world.[30] (1945a, 268)

Living one's freedom was revealed in chapter two to entail a connection with other subjects, to be determined intersubjectively in the difficult confrontation with human ambiguity. And chapter three revealed the importance of judging one's situational constraints in order to act and claim one's freedom. Here freedom's content emerges in the balance to be found between ethics' idealist demands and politics' amoral practicalities. In proposing the intersection of ethics and politics as a necessity, Beauvoir is attempting to found freedom on human action, albeit action that is infused with human values. This is Beauvoir's attempt to found freedom politically rather than philosophically, and thereby to ensure freedom's ground in, to borrow Arendtian

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librement choisies, morale et politique nous apparaissent confondues. L'homme est un, le monde qu'il habite est un, et dans l'action qu'il déploie à travers le monde il s'engage dans sa totalité.

"Réconcilier morale et politique, c'est donc réconcilier l'homme avec lui-même...."

[30] "...le déchirement qui est son lot est la rançon de sa présence au monde, de sa transcendance et de sa liberté. ...Il doit renoncer à connaître le repos, il doit assumer sa liberté. A ce prix seulement il devient capable de dépasser réellement le donné, ce qui est la véritable morale, de fonder réellement l'objet dans lequel il se transcende, ce qui est la seule politique valable; à ce prix son action s'inscrit concrètement dans le monde, et le monde où il agit est un monde doué d'un sens, un monde humain."

terms, the "I-can" of concretely achieved action rather than the "I-will" of ideally envisioned principles.

Political versus Philosphical Freedom

Coming back to Hannah Arendt's understanding of freedom and its relation to politics as action is illustrative for Beauvoir's writings on politics and action. Both Beauvoir and Arendt understand narrativity as part of the birth and re-constitution of the "We" that is necessary to any society. Both see this process as ongoing, and see it as decoupled from a notion of progress as historical linearity. Both turn to action as a necessary ground to freedom, as opposed to a notion of freedom grounded in the willing ego. Both assert the necessity of the community in which action happens, which is founded through the acts of its members and the meanings those actions take on. Although both wish to ground freedom in action, neither wants to affix the meaning that action may take on, choosing the contingency of action's incertitude to the fixity of a Hegelian notion of progress, or reason in history.

In "The abyss of freedom and the *novus ordo seclorum*," the last chapter of "Willing," volume two of *Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt most explicitly develops what a philosophical conception of freedom as freedom of the will entails, and then differentiates it from a political conception of freedom. As noted earlier, she claims that, "Professional thinkers, whether philosophers or scientists, have not been 'pleased with freedom' and its eluctable randomness" (1978b, 198). Her suggestion, therefore, is to turn to "men of action, who ought to be committed to freedom because of the very nature of their activity, which consists in 'changing the world,' and not in interpreting or knowing it." Arendt describes this as the move from "philosophical

freedom to political liberty" (1978b, 198)[31] in that, "Thus political freedom is distinct from philosophic freedom in being clearly a quality of the I-can and not of the I-will." And it does not adhere to us as humans, but rather to citizens in communities. And not merely to citizens as a particular type of *individuals* whose individual experiences are additively combined -- "not simply an extension of the dual I-and-myself to a plural We." Rather, "Action, in which a We is always engaged in changing our common world, stands in the sharpest possible opposition to the solitary business of thought, which operates in a dialogue between me and myself" (1978b, 200). Here Arendt draws a distinction between the public self of political freedom's action, and the private self engaged in the solitary endeavor of thought. In Beauvoir's understanding of freedom, these two elements of subjectivity, the private aspect of the thinking self and the active aspect of the political self are too closely intertwined to disaggregate them in the way that Arendt does.

Beauvoir would agree with Arendt, however, that the narratives told that found the community provide a ground in groundless times. Arendt makes note of "the men of action of later generations who ransacked the archives of antiquity for paradigms to guide their own intentions" (1978b, 204). She continues, contra Hegelian notions of

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[31] She further describes the distinction as: "Philosophic freedom, the freedom of the will, is relevant only to people who live outside political communities, as solitary individuals. Political communities, in which men become citizens, are produced and preserved by laws, and these laws, made by men, can be very different and can shape various forms of government, all of which in one way or another constrain the free will of their citizens. Still, with the exception of tyranny, where one arbitrary will rules the lives of all, they nevertheless open up some space of freedom for action that actually sets the constituted body of citizens in motion. The principles inspiring the actions of the citizens... are all, as Jefferson rightly called them, 'energetic principles'; and political freedom... 'can consist only in the power of doing what we ought to will and in not being constrained to do what we ought not to will.'

The emphasis here is clearly on Power in the sense of the I-can; for Montesquieu, as for the ancients, it was obvious that an agent could no longer be called free when he lacked the capacity to do what he wanted to do, whether this was due to exterior or interior circumstances" (1978b, 199).

progress, "The legendary hiatus between a no-more and a not-yet clearly indicated that freedom would not be the automatic result of liberation, that the end of the old is not necessarily the beginning of the new, that the notion of an all-powerful time continuum is an illusion" (1978b, 204). Looking to the past for narratives of beginning, in order to counter the arbitrariness of beginning (again) salves the uncertainty and indeterminacy of freedom. The spontaneity and uncertainty of the new, therefore, is accompanied by the contradictory impulse to fix a freedom into the system that emerges. For Rome, Arendt tells us, this comes about through action in concert, "a new body politic," rather than violence and destruction (1978b, 204).

At the same time, Arendt notes that in light of knowledge of "the bewildering spontaneity of a free act" (1978b, 210), thinkers (founders) "starting with Machiavelli, had gone to Roman antiquity to learn how to conduct human affairs without the help of a transcendent God" (1978b, 211). What they found was that "the thread of continuity and tradition, demanded by the very continuum of time and the faculty of memory... had never been broken. Seen in this light, the foundation of Rome was the re-birth of Troy, the first, as it were, of the series of re-nascences that have formed the history of European culture and civilization" (1978b, 212). So in the end, the break is no break, and the beginning entails an abyss, but it is not a lack of continuity. For Arendt, the fact of natality means that we are "doomed to be free," to create, and re-create, that "all such foundations —taking place exclusively in the realm of human affairs, where men enact a tale to tell, to remember, and preserve— are re-establishments and re-constitutions, not absolute beginnings" (1978b, 213).

Beauvoir and Arendt diverge in Beauvoir's blurring of the Arendtian line between public self, acting in concert with others, and the private self of solitary reflection. Beauvoir's understanding of the way that the concrete circumstances of lived experience shape the possibilities of freedom would perhaps contest the division between the two, albeit maintaining the necessity of each, in the need for reflection on one's circumstances and one's complicity in them. Alternatively, it is possible that Beauvoir's integration of intersubjectivity and action could result in a destructive "dialogue between me and myself," one in which the self seeks assertion in violent confrontation with others. This is the kind of radically subjective internal dialogue that results in a *She Came To Stay* style denouement. There is too much reliance on that inner dialogue and not enough interaction with others, not enough incorporation of the intersubjective into the narrative of self that one is telling oneself. Indeed, the content of the narratives that are available for appropriation in that inner dialogue also bears on the possibilities that open for political action, action oriented toward the future.

The necessity of narratives of the past that open future possibilities is reflected in the wealth of myths and information on women throughout history that Beauvoir meticulously assembled and presented in *Le Deuxième Sexe*. When it was translated into English as *The Second Sex*, much of this material was cut by the translator, at the request of the publisher, who did not believe such a large tome would be acceptable to an American audience. According to Margaret Simons:

> In that 1952 translation by a professor of zoology, Howard M. Parshley, over 10 percent of the material in the original French edition has been deleted, including... the names of seventy-eight women in history. These unindicated deletions seriously undermine the integrity of Beauvoir's analysis of such important topics as the American and European nineteenth-century suffrage

> movements, and the development of socialist feminism in France." (Simons 1983, qtd. in Simons 1999, xviii)

The irony of the English translation, from which the historical material was cut, is that knowledge of the absence of this material reinforces Beauvoir's argument about women's historical absence and presence, at the same time that it presents a future of fearfully open possibility. There is a battle for narrative space it seems, and in looking to the past and constituting the "we," we need to be vigilant about what gets brought in, or at least about understanding how what comes in may be both more and less than the face value of the narrative in question.

Claiming the World: *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, Part I[32]

The parameters of possibility are forged in their links with the past, present and future through the narratives we construct about past, present and potential actions. These narratives help us reconcile the discontinuities of past, present and future, through the interpretations that we give of the events we recount. They frame the possibilities that we can envision and offer a foundation for actions undertaken. Given the necessary partiality of the truths that one can discover, and the way that those truths may change over time, there *could not* be a simple unity to the meaning of one's actions in past, present, and future, except insofar as one wills this. For Beauvoir, to choose to see one's life this way is unacceptable, which imposes a burden on humans to continually reflect and to act in light of that reflection. Acts and their consequences may set up further choices, but they are linked *a priori* only temporally, and the meaning to be assigned to them and the choices derived from them are not pre-given.

[32] This essay has never been fully published in English translation. Translations in this section are my own; I have provided the original French in footnotes.

The context can aid in determining the action that will follow, but it cannot absolutely determine it. There is no ultimate ethical determination that one can seek to attain at a certain point, that will fix one's understanding and actions through the rest of one's existence. Things would be much simpler, perhaps, but Beauvoir would see this as a denial of our potential as existants, as well as a dangerous way of interacting with each other. It is not that there is a progress that is denied if one denies oneself the ethical choices that confront one through a lifetime. It is that there is a value in seeking to choose ethically, and in so doing confronting the others involved in the situation demanding a choice. Against those who would assert that a denial of progress is a pessimistic view of humanity's future, one could argue that in giving the choice to act ethically to humans in each moment of their lives, one gives them perhaps a greater burden, but also greater opportunities to fulfill the potential of their freedom. They will not always accept that burden, and their choices may not always reach into the future in the way that they would like, but they are continually given opportunities to reach toward their own freedom, and others' as well. In an early philosophical essay, Beauvoir relates two dangers of narratives of action that are to be avoided, determinism and quietism, then proposes action undertaken with others as a guard against these two problematic approaches to living.

Beauvoir's essay *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, published in 1944, takes up the themes of intersubjectivity, temporality and action. It comprises two untitled parts and a short introduction.[33] The introduction offers an entry to the ideas Beauvoir will discuss through several provocative stories. The first of these stories presents Pyrrhus and

[33] The second section of the essay will be discussed later in this chapter.

Cinéas, with Cinéas questioning Pyrrhus as to why he will venture from his home in order to conquer other lands, only to eventually return home. The second story is of a stubborn schoolchild who refuses to say "A," because "afterwards, one must say B"[34] (1944, 9). The final point of departure is Candide's statement that "One must cultivate one's garden"[35] (1944, 11). For Candide, whose early life of upheaval and failed ventures led him eventually to seek a quiet life in his own garden, this meant a minimal engagement with the world. Pyrrhus' inclination is to engage in a grand manner, choosing the increments and limits of his battles, then finally to enjoy his conquests in repose. The schoolchild's refusal makes sense if the world is perceived as simply a pre-determined path laid out before one. Why engage if the outcomes are already set? According to Beauvoir, they are not, and because of this, we are challenged to explore the limits and opportunities of our own becoming, through the actions we undertake. Indeed, in the final paragraph of the introduction, Beauvoir asks three questions: "What, therefore, is the measure of a man? What aims can he propose for himself, and what hopes are permitted him?"[36] (1944, 12). Only in refusing to live can one refuse to "say 'A,'" and the meaning that one's life takes on is intertwined with the tasks that await, and that one chooses.

Beauvoir begins the first part of this essay with a discussion of the extent of the interrelatedness of people in the world, and one's responsibility in it. She focuses on the 'cultivation of one's garden', presenting actions as the means of claiming the world, or at least the corners of it one chooses to engage. She says that, "In identifying

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[34] "[A]près ça, il faudrait dire 'B'..."
[35] "Il faut cultiver notre jardin..."
[36] "Quelle est donc la mesure d'un homme? Quels buts peut-il se proposer, et quels espoirs lui sont permis?"

with one's sex, one's country, one's class, with the entirety of humanity, one can expand one's garden; however, it is not expanded through words alone; this [*identification*] is nothing but an empty pretense"[37] (1944, 15). Words, then, are not a sufficient means of engagement with the world, and only serve as false markers of identification. In order to accomplish for oneself the identifications with either the examples she mentions or others that we could imagine, one must actualize them. Beauvoir describes this as, "The only reality which entirely belongs to me is therefore my act(ion).... That which is mine is first the accomplishment of my project..."[38] (1944, 16).

This identification with others through actions, however, comes out of Beauvoir's understanding of human existence. She notes that,

> It is because my subjectivity is not inertia, withdrawing into itself, separation, but on the contrary movement toward the other, that the difference between the other and myself is abolished and that I can call the other mine. Only I can create the link/tie that unites me with the other. I create it in the fact that I am not a thing but a project of self toward the other, a transcendance.[39] (1944, 16)

Subjectivity and intersubjectivity are once again being defined here. Beauvoir again presents subjectivity as other-seeking, or necessitating an other. However, given the dynamism of the self/other relationship, and the knowledge that it switches, depending on whose perspective in the dyad is taken, the potential opportunities and difficulties of this relationship once more become evident. For here we have a self defined as

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[37] "En s'identifiant à son sexe, à son pays, à sa classe, à l'humanité entière, un homme peut agrandir son jardin; mais il ne l'agrandit qu'en paroles; cette identification n'est qu'une prétention vide[.]"
[38] "La seule réalité qui m'appartienne entièrement, c'est donc mon acte.... Ce qui est mien, c'est d'abord l'accomplissement de mon projet..."
[39] "C'est parce que ma subjectivité n'est pas inertie, repliement sur soi, séparation, mais au contraire mouvement vers l'autre, que la différence entre l'autre et moi s'abolit et que je peux appeler l'autre mien; le lien qui m'unit à l'autre, moi seul peux le créer; je le crée du fait que je ne suis pas une chose mais un projet de moi vers l'autre, une transcendance."

reaching toward an other through its project, forging a link that unites, and the possible dissolution of the differences between them. In this process, however, is a moment of "call[ing] the other mine" and this is potentially troublesome. If it is meant to signify the confrontation with the other that leads to the subordination of the other/slave and the masterdom of the self, then it falls into a form of Hegelian intersubjectivity discussed earlier. Another alternative is that, because Beauvoir is trying to maintain both the subjective development and the mutually acknowledging form of intersubjectivity that can be read out of the master/slave dialectic, she sometimes produces awkwardly one-sided statements, such as this one. Beauvoir's focus on actions up to this point, and her turn to the goals or aims that those actions take, may indicate a mitigation of this "calling the other mine," in the sense of claiming the subjectivity of the other as somehow my possession, and yield instead a more reciprocal intersubjective engagement. The call, then, is for the self and the other to unite, and the link is through a project, or goals that both can agree on. In this way, the claims that one makes are claims toward a common future, achieved through common projects, rather than a domination of one subjectivity over another into the future.

Although the goal(s) may be common, each individual will approach it from a perspective that is informed by the understanding of the past that she brings to it. Beauvoir says of this past that, "In order that this past be mine, I must make it mine anew in each instant by bringing it toward my future; even those aims that in the past were not mine, because I did not found them, I can make mine in founding something

upon them"[40] (1944, 17). Because the past is open to interpretation, and because of the multiplicity of subjectivities whose interpretations shape that past into a project of the future, it remains claimable. A past interpreted one way to exclude or deny the subjectivity or participation of certain humans can be reshaped in moving toward a future that repudiates those exclusions. However, this cannot happen without the actions and projects taken on by each individual as the manifestation of the desire to found something. That foundation, however, is transitory. It marks an endpoint, perhaps of accomplishment, and a point of departure. It may or may not remain part of the narratives of the past that help humans move toward the future, as an end that may be superseded or surpassed in the future goals that in their turn are worked for and perhaps achieved. Because of this, the nature of the project is continually changing, and no act is a fixed act, insofar as it is part of a present that will become the past, and that leads to a future that will engender other acts.

At the same time, however, the chosen goal must have a meaningful, concrete aim, rather than a 'reality' as a goal. What would it mean to make a reality one's goal, however? Recalling her discussion of the idealist earlier in this chapter, this could be seen as a nebulous excuse not to act, or an attitude that leads to paralysis. For example, to say that one is working for feminism or equality for women, without specifying the concrete projects through which one seeks to achieve that end could be an example of making a 'reality' one's goal. An example of this from Beauvoir's own life is her commentary regarding the French *Mouvement de la Libération des Femmes (MLF)*,

[40] "Pour que ce passé soit mien, il faut qu'à chaque instant je le fasse mien à nouveau en l'emportant vers mon avenir; même les objets qui au passé ne sont pas miens parce que je ne les ai pas fondés, je peux les faire miens en fondant quelque chose sur eux."

and her involvement in the women's movement only later in her life, based in her agreement with actions being taken by radical feminists of the *MLF* (Schwarzer 1984). That is, because their goals were concrete, Beauvoir could support and work toward some of those goals herself. Because one project leads to another, the concrete end opening up beginnings to follow, and the continual shift of the past into the present into the future, the ability of humans to envision as an end a project that will inevitably generate new beginnings is another form of ambiguity invoked here by Beauvoir (1944, 29). Just as the intersubjective ambiguity invoked earlier in this project is one that is a powerful motivator, so is this dynamic of ends and beginnings. What is powerful about this ability to both see something as an end, and at the same time know that it will entail a beginning is the push that it gives us to make meaning of our lives through the actions that we undertake to realize those ends. Those actions have meaning because they are chosen, not predetermined, even in a situation of constraint where choices are curtailed.

It is through one's acts that one takes one's place in the world. To take one's place is to effect something that is not pre-given, and that has no meaning prior to its happening, but that will affect others as well. Taking that place, however, can lead to solidarity or conflict with others in the choice of projects. Insisting that, "I am not an instrument for certain ones except in becoming an obstacle for others," Beauvoir shortly thereafter asserts that, "Freedoms are neither united nor opposed: separate. It is in projecting oneself into the world that a human situates himself in situating others

around him. This gives rise to interdependences/solidarities"[41] (1944, 48). One's project is always one's own, although one seeks in others situational solidarities. Through a process of claiming those actions, and examining them, subjectivities maintain the distance between themselves that allows them to continue to choose their own projects, and to form alliances without completely surrending their liberty or their existence to the others with whom they take on shared projects. At the same time, reading this dynamic in terms of Beauvoir's *Ethics* suggests intersubjective necessity is also implicated in this dynamic. Action with others is not simply strategic, but fundamental to one's sense of the world. It also poses opposition to others whose projects are antithetical as an outgrowth of human interaction. Conflict is a given part of human interaction, although not all human interaction need be conflictual, and not all conflict is of the same magnitude. Beauvoir reasserts that: "One will always work for certain humans against others"[42] (1944, 49). This reinforces on a larger scale her opposition of self and other; definitionally, one or one's group is defined in opposition to an other or another group. However, the group that one has chosen to ally with is not fixed. It is determined only through the projects of action that one and others take on, and changes depending on the situation, and one's judgment of what is best to be done.

Beauvoir rejects the idea that this sets up a kind of linear progress or continuity in human relations. She finds that this would deprive humans of an agency that is theirs to seize (1944, 51). This is not to say that acts are neither situated in a past nor

[41] "Je ne suis instrument pour les uns qu'en devenant obstacle pour les autres"; "Des libertés ne sont ni unies ni opposées: séparées. C'est en se projetant dans le monde qu'un homme se situe en situant les autres hommes autour de soi. Alors des solidarités se créent...."
[42] "On travaillera toujours pour certains hommes contre d'autres."

have repercussions in the future. However, their present meaning and the ways that they are appropriated in the future are the result of the individual subjectivities who both create and feel the impact of those acts. History is idiosyncratic. In this we see that it could not take on a linear progression, as each end attained is not necessarily tied to a particular beginning, but instead, in the fluidity of history, to a multiplicity of potential beginnings, shaped by human (inter)actions (1944, 52).

Those actions do not aim at a particular reality. Instead, reality comes to be and changes through those actions, as, according to Beauvoir, one "does not transcend for humanity: it is humanity which transcends itself through him. This transcendance is not *for* anything: it is"[43] (1944, 54). This relieves humans of a long-term burden, perhaps, but makes them responsible for that which falls within the sphere of their situation. Rather than taking on the goal of some kind of overarching improvement to the state of 'humanity,' one is released from the burden of (the entirety of) humanity's woes. However, the woes of those humans one does encounter then become the subject of the choices one makes about acting in concert with those others (or not doing so). This is not to say that one's actions will not have impact beyond the scope one might desire, but rather that as participating as a part of the whole, one is responsible for one's part, rather than the whole. Once again, Beauvoir is pushing for the concrete end as opposed to the more grandiose "reality," and thereby limiting the scope of an individual's responsibility. She reinforces the responsibility one bears for the choices one makes in the particular situation one lives.

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[43] "...il ne transcende pas pour l'humanité: c'est l'humanité qui se transcende à travers lui. Cette transcendance n'est *pour* rien: elle est."

At the same time, she asserts that: "In realizing his historic and singular destiny, each person can therefore find his place at the heart of the universal. My accomplished action becomes other than I at first willed it, but it does not thereby undergo a strange perversion: it achieves its being and this is when it is truly accomplished"[44] (1944, 55). Her earlier critique is of the universal as that which destroys the particularity of the individual. In this instance, Beauvoir is invoking a sense of the universal as rooted in the singular, the historical, the material accomplishment of one's finite goal. In so doing, she decouples the act at its end for one subjectivity from its aspect of beginning for others and invokes the ambiguity of human existence when she reminds her reader that humans exist as both object and subject. She then criticizes Hegel's dialectic as preserving only human facticity in the choice, rather than the human subjectivity that makes of a choice a project that is one's own. (1944, 56-57). As part of this critique she notes that, "one cannot save a man by showing him that [only] this dimension of his being by which he is a stranger to himself and object for others is retained"[45] (1944, 56). Although we have seen that it is harmful to see oneself only as subjectivity, it is also profoundly damaging to envision oneself as existing only as an object, as has been shown, for example both by Beauvoir, and in the colonial context, by Frantz Fanon. What is missing is the accomplishment of one's own project (1944, 57). However, one cannot pretend that one's own project is a universal, both because of the temporal limitations to its

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[44] "En réalisant son destin historique et singulier, chaque homme peut donc trouver sa place au coeur de l'universel. Mon acte accompli devient autre que je ne l'avais voulu d'abord, mais il ne subit pas là une perversion étrangère: il achève son être et c'est alors qu'il s'accomplit vraiment."

[45] "[O]n ne peut sauver un homme en lui montrant que se conserve cette dimension de son être par quoi il est étranger à soi-même et objet pour autrui."

realization through actions, and because of the (productive) incertitude of their consequences. At the same time, the intersubjective limitations make it such that there is no universal, except through the material experiences of a multiplicity of subjectivities, subjects and objects in their turn and with a multiplicity of perspectives from which to see the project: "The universal spirit is without voice, and every human who would pretend to speak in its name does nothing but lend it his own voice.... One does not know how to have a point of view other than one's own"[46] (1944, 58). And as for the universal as manifest in the project, "To pretend that a human renounces the singular character of his project is to kill the project"[47] (1944, 58).

In this way, "To act for a goal is always to choose, to define. If the singular form of his effort appears to the human as indifferent, in losing all shape his transcendance disappears, he can no longer want anything since the universal is without lack, without expectation, without appeal"[48] (1944, 59). This universal is deceptively attractive, but deadly, not just to the project, but to the self. A self that is willing to subsume itself to such a universal has only the one choice (that fixed universal), rather than a life full of choices and determinations. Although what Beauvoir proposes is a more limited set of options, she sees it as an exercise in futility to seek to attain the infinite, universal, or God.[49] It is a futility that blinds one to the

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[46] "L'esprit universel est sans voix, et tout homme qui prétend parler en son nom ne fait que lui prêter sa propre voix.... On ne saurait avoir d'autre point de vue que le sien."
[47] "Pretendre qu'un homme renonce au caractére singulier de son projet, c'est tuer le projet."
[48] "Agir pour un but, c'est toujours choisir, définir. Si la forme singulière de son effort apparâit à l'homme comme indifférente, en perdant toute figure sa transcendance s'évanouit, il ne peut plus rien vouloir puisque l'universel est sans manque, sans attente, sans appel."
[49] A literary example of this is the missionary father in Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* who lives the vanity of seeking the infinite, and is wrapped up in it in such a way that he does not truly encounter the others in his situation. Despite the fact that his acts are ostensibly engaged with other

challenges invoked in Beauvoir's characterization of the universal. Beauvoir throws us continually back to our fellow humans in their lived existence.

Returning to one of the examples with which she began, Beauvoir makes a broad statement of parameters: "Candide's garden cannot therefore either be reduced to an atom, nor confused with the universe"[50] (1944, 60). She immediately follows this with a restatement of the importance of choice in existence, then argues that, " The paradox of the human condition is that every end may be surpassed; and yet, the project defines the end as end; to surpass an end, one must first have projected it as that which is not to [be] surpass[ed]"[51] (1944, 60). First, one must choose oneself, and all else comes from that. However, as presented throughout this project, that choice does not simply mean privileging the self over others, or privileging one's own projects over others'. The value of the goals taken on is great, in that they are envisioned as ends in themselves. At the same time, those ends entail new beginnings, and acts are continually re-interpreted, and values are continually re-defined, in light of human understandings of those acts and their meanings. Beauvoir privileges the individual, and *intention*, when she asserts that, "In truth, only the subject defines the sense of his action; there is no flight except in a project of flight; when I love, when I desire, I flee nothing: I love, I desire"[52] (1944, 63). Because love and desire take place in a necessarily intersubjective world, an individual's interiority and intentionality

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humans, this man cannot see beyond the abstract principles of his own faith. Because he has not authentically made them his own, they destroy him, and through him, those around him.

[50] "Le jardin de Candide ne peut donc ni se réduire à un atome, ni se confondre avec l'univers."

[51] "Le paradoxe de la condition humaine, c'est que toute fin peut être dépassée; et cependant, le projet définit la fin comme fin; pour dépasser une fin, il faut d'abord l'avoir projetée comme ce qui n'est pas à dépasser. L'homme n'a pas d'autre manière d'exister."

[52] "En vérité, seul le sujet définit le sens de son acte; il n'y a fuite que par un projet de fuite; lorsque j'aime, lorsque je veux, je ne fuis rien: j'aime, je veux."

incorporate the context of the loving and desiring subject, and the object(s) of one's love and desire. Cognizance of one's limitations demands a frankness with oneself about one's fears, desires and intentions, such that choosing oneself cannot become an excuse to assert a false infinity of one's own goals or ends. Nor again can one simply accept given universals, those in some other subjective voice, as one's own.

Some will try to escape their own inevitable end in asserting their own voice as a (false) universal. However, this is to choose oneself in bad faith, evading the intersubjective in existence, asserting only the subjective. Others will accept the false universal of an other, instead of claiming the project of their own volition. Death or finitude in these instances becomes an impetus to evasion. Against these attitudes toward mortality, Beauvoir writes that, "Human finitude is not therefore endured, it is wanted: death does not have here that importance with which it has often been invested. It is not because the human dies that s/he is finite. Our transcendance is always defined concretely on this side of death or beyond" then adds later, "Although for me, living, my death does not exist; my project crosses it without encountering any obstacle" [53] (1944, 60-61). Death is presented here simultaneously as an impetus to human action, and as nonexistent, no barrier whatsoever to the projects taken on. Because one must give so much meaning to the living one does through one's projects, one cannot devote too much value to one's own inevitable end. Because it is inevitable, and therefore a fact of existence, it cannot take on too much value, either as something to be evaded, or as something to be confronted. Insofar as it simply is, it is

[53] "La finitude de l'homme n'est donc pas subie, elle est voulue: la mort n'a pas ici cette importance dont on l'a souvent revêtue. Ce n'est pas parce que l'homme meurt qu'il est fini. Notre transcendance se définit toujours concrètement en deçà de la mort ou au delà"; "Mais pour moi vivant, ma mort n'est pas; mon projet la traverse sans rencontrer d'obstacle."

not. What matters more for Beauvoir is the path one follows (1944, 61), the projects one chooses, and the meaning one imbues them with. As we will see in the following section, in the face of immortality, nothing has meaning, but in the process of making meaning, one's death does not exist, insofar as the project is based in one's concrete, living experiences. In addition, one's projects will surpass death, in reaching into a future that one will not be here to experience. Trying to control and ultimately determine the meaning of that reach into the future is the real folly of those who attempt to escape the consequences of human finitude, as Beauvoir argues in her novel *All Men Are Mortal.*

All Men Are Mortal

In the novel *All Men Are Mortal*, originally published in 1946, Beauvoir underlines what is most human in humans, the drive to assert their freedom through projects that reach toward the future, by confronting life's risks and uncertainties. This mode of living life's possibilities is the only way to evade death's consequences. Beauvoir's ironically titled book tells the story of a man who has become immortal. The narrative confronts the reader with what it might mean to be immortal, and what is first revealed is that life becomes meaningless. Raimondo Fosca, the protagonist of the novel, eventually realizes that there is nothing left for him but ennui: "But for me, on this earth to which I was eternally bound, happiness was worth no more or less than unhappiness, hate was as insipid as love. There was nothing they could do for me" (1955c, 243). Or later, "A man of nowhere, without a past, without a future, without a present. I wanted nothing, I was no one. I advanced step after step toward the horizon which retreated with each step; drops of water squirted up and fell to earth again, each

instant destroyed the next, the last. My hands were forever empty: An outsider, a dead man" (1955c, 339). This dead man who will never die is discovered by Regina, a contemporary woman, an actress who seeks in others (and her ability to make trouble in their lives) the validation for her own existence. When she discovers Fosca, she is at first quite taken with the idea that she will live forever in his memory. As his history unfolds, however, she comes to realize just how little she will eventually mean to him, and how the press of time will eventually eradicate her presence. She seeks immortality through him, but realizes that seen through his eyes, she is, like but unlike him, nothing. The reality that she seeks to make permanent is rendered evanescent, insubstantial, in the fact that Fosca will continue to exist through time, and Regina will not. What makes this even more cutting than one's mortality ordinarily would, is that he will remember that he has forgotten her. That is, what will be carried of her into the future, is just how insignificant her existence is. This eventuality drives her mad.

Before this happens, however, Fosca tells his tale, one that spans numerous historical events, but that begins with the simple goal of saving his beloved city of Carmona from those who would conquer it. As ruler, he has already expelled women, the weak and the old. Before he can be expelled, an old beggar offers Fosca the elixir of immortality, a potion that has ruined the beggar's life, but that he has never consumed himself, for fear of the consequences. Taking the elixir enables Fosca to live through the siege, and at first he is pleased that he will be able to live to see the achievement of his long-term goals, thinking only, "*The things I'll be able to do!*" (1955c, 86). He sees to Carmona's revival, and by some measures, it fluorishes under his leadership. However, Fosca begins to realize how solitary his existence will be:

> My wife was dead, and her son and my grandchildren; all my friends were dead, I alone lived on, and there were no others like me. My past was buried; there was nothing now to hold me back, neither remembrances, nor love, nor duty. I was above all laws, my own master, and I could dispose of puny human lives as I pleased, lives destined only for death. Under the formless sky, I drew myself up erect, felt myself alive and free, knew that I would forever be alone. (1955c, 100)

Fosca envisions himself as living the fantasy of freedom as sovereignty explored in a previous chapter. He is still able to believe that there is unlimited good to be made out of his immortality, and that he will have complete control of it. He is realizing, however, that there are costs, and loneliness is one of them. His inability to see the value of all but a few humans that he encounters renders him incapable of the kind of intersubjectivity that could positively shape the value and meaning of his existence. It is not yet completely alien to him. At this point possibility abounds for him; ennui has not yet set in.

Eventually, however, all stories are the same. Discussing his long-deceased wife with Regina, Fosca says:

> "'She's dead.'
> "Regina smiled sardonically. 'When you get right down to it, all stories have a happy ending, don't they.'" (1955c, 143)

In her sarcastic reply to Fosca's minimalist description, Regina highlights the meaninglessness one could understand human lives to entail. The narrative that Fosca offers reveals nothing of the subjectivity of this other person, nor does it reveal anything about the intersubjective elements of their relationship. He describes nothing, neither her experience of the world, nor his own experience of the world or the world with her, because that world has no meaning to him anymore.

What has robbed Fosca's world of meaning is an absence of risk. A mortal human faces uncertainty and risk in the projects s/he chooses. When those entail danger beyond the everyday, and it is chosen, that risk can add an element of excitement to one's achievement. When Fosca encounters an explorer charting unexplored lands in the Americas, he is at first enlivened by this other person who has embraced the unknown and with great enthusiasm. Because the explorer can find no reciprocal humanity to their relationship, however, Fosca's gaze as the other fails to mirror back to him his *life*: "It's a terrible thing to have to live under that gaze of yours. You look at people from so far off; you're on the other side of death. For you, I'm already dead, a corpse..." followed by an account of what for the explorer are his (now meaningless) deeds (1955c, 225). The explorer stops exploring and chooses to die rather than allow Fosca to explore for him or bring him food when his own resources are exhausted.

Armand, a descendant of Fosca's living in Paris of 1848, active in the class struggles of his time, reacts differently to Fosca's immortality. Because he defines his goals in a more limited way than either the explorer or Fosca when he decided to drink the potion and in the relative short-term thereafter, Armand is better able to accept Fosca's presence. When Fosca asks Armand what the point of fighting now is, when humans will surely go on wanting things, Armand's reply is that even what would be considered Paradise for those now doesn't mean no needs, desires, or demands of those to come (*All Men* 327). Armand recalls to Fosca his own long-distant past, to which Fosca replies:

> "'Yes, I've had desires,' I said. 'I know.' I paused a moment and then went on, 'But it's not simply a question of desires. You're fighting for *others*. You want *others* to be happy.'
> "We're fighting together, for us'..." (1955c, 327).

Armand points out to Fosca the intersubjective aspect of the struggle he's involved in, whereas Fosca can only see one subjectivity as working for others, not with them. When Fosca imagines his own possible interactions with others, he describes them as, "Because I wanted nothing for myself *with* them, there was nothing I could want *for* them" (1955c, 333).

Even Armand's meaningful action *with* others is not unlimited, as action seeking an unlimited reach would be as meaningless as the unlimited life which Fosca inhabits. Armand claims that "...we should concern ourselves only with that part of the future on which we have a hold. But we should try our best to enlarge our hold on it as much as possible" (1955c, 328). For Fosca, that has meant achieving great power to determine the shape of empires, only to see alliances and fragile peace fall before others' desire to conquer. Enlarging his hold on the future simply taught him the futility of the grandiose goals he initially tried so hard to achieve, so he has renounced practically all goals at this point.

In this novel, Beauvoir again confronts problems of intersubjective experience, resolved so unsatisfactorily in *She Came To Stay*. Instead of trying to resolve the dialectic, however, in this novel she offers an anti-resolution, or the impossibility of any final resolution. At the same time, she poses the certainty of one's death as the motivator for one's actions. As the desperation and desolation of her immortal man show, there is no meaning to the moments in life absent its inevitable conclusion. What sets her immortal man apart is his inability eventually to interact with other

human beings, his profound loneliness, and the apathy that is generated by this inability to connect. So perhaps she is also suggesting that even for mortal 'men,' if they do not live in a situation that allows them to interact meaningfully with other humans, or do not have the ability to do so, there can be no ethical existence. The following section of this chapter and the concluding chapter of this dissertation discuss the perspective that when reciprocal intersubjectivity fails, violence is often what is left in beginning to claim one's freedom.

Masking the World: *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, Part II

Beauvoir closed the first half of *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* with the statement, "But man is not alone in the world"[54] (1944, 65), and it is in light of this declaration that both halves (indeed, all of Beauvoir's works) are best interpreted. The necessity of an other is invoked in a metaphor: "...the drawing demands an eye to see it"[55] (1944, 68), and the question is posed, "What can we expect of another?"[56] (1944, 69). One option is to simply find or force another into subservience. And, from an other's perspective, Beauvoir offers a glimpse of how restful devoting oneself to someone else might be. However, she eventually claims that, "A man can never abdicate his freedom; when he intends to renounce it, he does nothing but mask it from himself, he masks it from himself freely. The slave who obeys chooses to obey and his choice must be renewed in each instant"[57] (1944, 72). The visual metaphors that Beauvoir employs here present a dynamic of reflection between the self and the other that shapes their

[54] "Mais l'homme n'est pas seul au monde."
[55] [L]e dessin exige un oeil qui le regarde...."
[56] "Qu'attendons-nous donc d'autrui?"
[57] "Un homme ne peut jamais abdiquer sa liberté; lorsqu'il prétend y renoncer, il ne fait que se la masquer, il se la masque librement. L'esclave qui obéit choisit d'obéir et son choix doit être renouvelé à chaque instant."

subjective development. As chapter two showed, however, that dynamic can either enable or disable the manifest freedom of the subjectivities in question. One path leads to a dynamic of domination and subordination. This may end in violence in the subordinate's assertion of freedom, and is often accompanied by violence in the assertion of dominance.

Alternatively, a form of intersubjective freedom that projects an image of subjectivities' freedom into the future is possible, if often perilous, given that:

> ...just as one can never act for humanity in its entirety, one never acts for a man in his entirety; the will of a man does not stay the same throughout his entire life; the blame or the approbation to come will not be an objective verification, but a new project, which enjoys no privilege over this project whether it confirms or contradicts it. There is not a moment in a life in which all of its moments are reconciled. Not only can one not know with certainty the good of another; but there is not *one* good which would definitively be this good. A man must often choose between these different goods presented by his different projects.[58] (1944, 77)

Although the extent of one's action has limits, given the conditions and ambiguity of human existence, there are complications in confronting the choices of which good or goods to privilege over other goods in the choice of one's projects. In this regard to an other, humans are also forced to choose, when the possibilities inherent in the multiplicity of others and their projects confronts them. Cavell's dynamic of recognition is once again in play, and recognition of the other is achieved in acts that are acknowledgments of an other and her projects, or failures to do so.

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[58] "...les moments successifs d'une vie ne se conservent pas dans leur dépassement, ils sont séparés; pour l'individu comme pour l'humanité, le temps n'est pas progrès, mais division; de même qu'on ne peut jamais agir pour l'humanité entière, on n'agit jamais pour un homme tout entier; la volonté d'un homme ne demeure pas la même à travers toute une vie; le blâme ou l'approbation à venir ne seront pas une constatation objective, mais un projet neuf, qui ne jouit d'aucun privilège sur le projet qu'il confirme ou qu'il contredit. Il n'est aucun instant d'une vie où s'opère une réconciliation de tous les instants. Non seulement on ne peut connaître avec évidence le bien d'autrui; mais il n'y a pas *un* bien qui soit définitivement ce bien. Entre ces différents biens posés par les différents projets d'un homme, il faudra souvent choisir."

When one does choose, it is, "conscious of the freedom of my actions, the risks they carry, the limits of their success, I decide again to respond to that call which rises toward me"[59] (1944, 78). Responding to a call is an intersubjective moment in the choice, especially since one responds in cognizance of the risks and limits of the act. As always, however, one must make the choice one's own, although the possibility of responding to another's call sets up the possibility of acting together for the achievement of a common goal. Again, the back and forth is between an individual and an other, and Beauvoir says that the individual's situation, including that which others have done for him, is that which she transcends, and that while she must be in one situation or another, she *is* not that situation (1944, 80). In other words, she lives the concrete situation of her life in a way that is fully determinative of her freedom only if she chooses this.

Further evoking the possibility of reciprocity in the relationship of one to the other, Beauvoir asserts that:

> The generous man knows well that his action reaches nothing but the exterior of another; all that he can demand is that this free action not be confused by the one who benefits from it with a pure facticity without foundation: that it be recognized as free. The ingrate often refuses such a recognition. He does not like to acknowledge that he has been seen as an object by a freedom foreign to him: he does not want to believe in anything but his own freedom.[60] (1944, 83)

Here Beauvoir juxtaposes a generous intersubjectivity with a failure to recognize a crucial part of what she describes in her *Ethics* as the ambiguity of existence.

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[59] "...conscient de la liberté de mes actes, des risques qu'ils comportent, des limites de leur succès, je décide encore de répondre à cet appel qui monte vers moi."

[60] "L'homme généreux sait bien que son action n'atteint que les dehors d'autrui; tout ce qu'il peut demander, c'est que cette action libre ne soit pas confondue par celui qui en bénéficie avec une pure facticité sans fondement: qu'elle soit reconnue comme libre. L'ingrat refuse souvent une telle reconnaissance. Il n'aime pas s'avouer qu'il a été visé comme objet par une liberté étrangère: il ne voudrait croire qu'en sa seule liberté."

Interestingly, she describes the ability to recognize it as "generosity." She dismisses the notion that there is some debt between the two (1944, 84), and invokes the notion of a "lucid generosity" in the relation between a self and an other. This idea returns us to the thoughtfulness of our actions –the moment of reflection that pushes us to judge whether or not they actually do further rather than hinder the project in question- with the addition of the selflessness of the kind of generosity Beauvoir is invoking here. In part, it is because that generosity can only extend so far.

While my actions may be the starting point of someone else's project, they can only be that. The other's project must be the other's: she makes choices and acts *for* herself. This is something that one cannot do for someone else. Building on this, Beauvoir asserts that, "And if I can do nothing for a man, neither can I do anything against him"[61] (1944, 85). She seems to be speaking here of a person as abstract freedom, rather than of a person as embodied and situated within a context which is amenable to manipulation or abuse by others. Beauvoir seems cognizant of these possibilities, as she says shortly thereafter:

> Certainly violence exists. A man is at the same time freedom and facticity; he is free, but not in this abstract freedom... he is free within a situation. One must distinguish here... between one's freedom and one's power: his power is finite... but his freedom rests infinite in every case;.... It is only on the facticity of a human, on his exterior that violence can act...[62] (1944, 85-86).

What Beauvoir fails to acknowledge here are the physical limitiations or the psychological effects imposed by violence. She seems to disregard that this violence

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[61] "Et si je ne peux rien pour un homme, je ne peux rien non plus contre lui."

[62] "Certes, la violence existe. Un homme est à la fois liberté et facticité ; il est libre, mais non de cette liberté abstraite... il est libre en situation. Il faut distinguer ici... sa liberté et sa puissance: sa puissance est finie... mais sa liberté demeure infinie en tout cas;.... C'est seulement sur la facticité de l'homme, sur ses dehors, que la violence peut agir...."

may have an effect on one's ability to see oneself as a free being with choices. If so, she undercuts the insight that subjectivity is achieved intersubjectively, in relations of mutual acknowledgment and reciprocity. Alternatively, she sees violence as just part of the conditions which one must seek to transcend, starting from one's given situation.

One reason for Beauvoir's unwillingness to concede violence's potential harms lies in her assertion that as a freedom, one may choose to manifest one's freedom when the opportunity arises, despite the fact that in one's relations with others one suffers oppression or denial of one's freedom. One is always in relation with others, although she says that intersubjectively, one is ultimately responsible for one's own actions, and the weight of that in ethical terms falls more heavily on the self than on the other. As for the other, the effects of one's actions may be profound, but this is not the part that lends those actions such weight, as they become obstacles to be confronted. They are unable, according to Beauvoir, to change a human's status from freedom to unfreedom without that person's complicity. In this characterization of freedom, Beauvoir still relies on an understanding of existence that undercuts the push to action as the measure of freedom. It lends hope to those who are immiserated, but, as we have seen, it is a false hope, and in relieving those who immiserate from the weight of responsibility, it undercuts the necessity to act to change the world. On this understanding, it seems possible not to "bite into the world," but rather to nibble or decline politely to partake.

However, Beauvoir later says that, "Me, I am responsible for that which I can do, for that which I do"[63] (1944, 89). Importantly, we see here that it's not just what one does, but what one could do and fails to do, for which one is responsible. She continues:

> There is a convenient and false mode of thought which authorizes all abstentions, all tyrannies; untroubled and satiated, the egoist declares: 'the unemployed, the prisoner, the ill are as free as I am; why refuse wars, misery if in the worst of circumstances a human remains equally free?' But only the wretched can declare himself free in the depths of his misery; I who abstain from helping him, I am the very face of this misery; the freedom which it refuses or which accepts it does not exist at all for me; it does not exist except for he in whom it is realized. It is not in his name, it is in the name of my freedom that I can accept it or reject it.[64] (1944, 89)

Beauvoir is reiterating that the other's (originary or possible) freedom, in whatever circumstances she lives, offers no excuse for an ostensible abstention from action. In fact, one's own freedom is at risk if one chooses this 'out.' Beauvoir asserts again, as she has before, that one must be cognizant of one's relation to the other, i.e. to intersubjectivity, insofar as the world itself and individual experiences are intersubjectively shaped. In this section, then, she seems to be rejecting the possibility for abstention that seemed an open question earlier, and adding a responsibility for one's own freedom that takes into account the freedom of the other. This works such that I do not make the other's freedom, or make her "have" it, but instead act to make the world such that she can choose it for herself in the conditions in which she lives.

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[63] "Moi, je suis responsable de ce que je peux faire, de ce que je fais."

[64] "Il y a une pensée commode et fausse qui autorise toutes les abstentions, toutes les tyrannies; paisible et repu, l'égoïste déclare: 'le chômeur, le prisonnier, le malade sont aussi libres que moi; pourquoi refuser les guerres, la misère si dans les pires circonstances un homme demeure aussi libre?' Mais seul le misérable peut se déclarer libre au sein de sa misère; moi qui m'abstiens de l'aider, je suis le visage même de cette misère; la liberté qui la refuse ou qui l'accepte n'existe absolument pas pour moi; elle n'existe que pour celui en qui elle se réalise. Ce n'est pas en son nom, c'est au nom de *ma* liberté que je peux moi l'accepter ou la refuser."

Part of what is so difficult about the subject/object duality is that when confronted with the other, one confuses the other with the rest of that which is not one. Rather than seeing the other as an existence in situation, s/he is perceived as merely a part of my situation, a part of the facticity of everyday life. However, Beauvoir emphasizes the particularity of the situation with which one is confronted, and the subjectivity-as-object who exists as part of that situation. Finally, Beauvoir concludes with the idea that: We do not have a choice: we choose.

Beauvoir claims that, "My essential need is therefore to have free humans before me... the time of contempt is also that of despair"[65] (1944, 96). As revealed in *Who Shall Die?* and *All Men Are Mortal*, it is necessary to have someone who is capable of reflecting back to oneself one's freedom in the world and that there is meaning to one's actions. Only someone who is choosing, out of her own freedom, to engage in this way, can be in a free relation of reciprocity. Mutual recognition is also necessary, manifested in acknowledging their reciprocal subjectivity. Contempt and despair are opposed to the mutual acknowledgment and hope that reciprocal recognition of freedom can entail.

Beauvoir maintains that we communicate through projects that are the externalization of one's life and freedom. What we communicate are our hopes, desires, our values. Since she says also that there is no communication without the project, this means that what the other mirrors back to the self is nothing if one has done nothing, and has substance only if one has acted in light of one's hopes, desires and values. The other, therefore, can show me a positive only if that is what I have

[65] "Mon besoin essentiel est donc d'avoir des hommes libre en face de moi... le temps du mépris est aussi celui de désespoir."

shown to the other (1944, 96-97). This form of communication involves knowledge both of what one communicates and of the other with whom one is communicating (1944, 99). This knowledge of the other, and of the self, emerges reciprocally through the projects and engagements that have been taken on in common by the self and those others. It makes sense that those with affinities for projects that emerge from the externalization of their freedom would seek each other. Perhaps, too, one seeks those who have engaged in projects one would have liked to have taken on but could not, situationally. However, Beauvoir cautions that agreement among humans is not easily reached, which presents a complication, since in some projects one seeks to communicate with many others rather than only one other (1944, 101).

Of the difficulties of communication Beauvoir maintains that, "The easy solution would be to reject the judgments that bothered me by considering the men who made them as simple objects, thereby denying their freedom"[66] (1944, 103). In this context, she discusses not those whose opinions might not agree with one's own, but those whose lives are at stake in the opinions one holds and the actions one takes. She decries the process of dehumanizing those who stand in the way of one's taking what one wants. If one is engaged in a project that involves one's benefit at the cost of the immiseration of others, if one can deny their humanity, this presents a simple solution to the problem. This solution, however, is not acceptable for Beauvoir. She cites language as one reminder that a master/slave dynamic is not an acceptable solution when she insists, "Despite taboos, prejudices, and willed blindness, the master knows that he must talk to the slave: one speaks only to men; language is an appeal to

[66] "La solution la plus commode serait de récuser les jugements qui me gênent en considérant les hommes qui les portent comme de simples objets, en leur déniant la liberté."

the freedom of the other as the sign is not a sign except in the consciousness who recaptures it"[67] (1944, 104). The reciprocity entailed by linguistic exchange is a reminder of the humanity of the other, and of her subjectivity. On the other hand, silence evidences contempt for the other (1944, 107). Scorn or contempt for another mark a refusal to engage in good faith the liberty that the other represents or manifests through actions, and the impact that the other's freedom, or the denial of it, has on one's own freedom.

In addition, Beauvoir claims that communication's reciprocity is intentioned. Based in action, it should not further a project antithetical to that chosen by the communicator (1944, 105-106). On the other hand, however, Beauvoir also contends that, "to be free is to throw oneself into the world without calculation, with nothing at stake, it is to define oneself what is at stake, what counts"[68] (1944, 107). On the one hand, she invokes the risk that one's actions may be appropriated by one's opponents/oppressors, and denies the validity of this kind of adoption in the service of denying others' freedom. At the same time, she absolutely insists that the project that others engage with one cannot be so transformed that it ceases to work in service of the values with which one imbues it.

Continuing with both the situational and the relational aspects of interaction, she asserts, "In order that men can give me a place in the world, I must first bring into appearance around me a world in which humans have a place: I must love, desire, do.

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[67] "Malgré les tabous, les préjugés, et sa volonté d'aveuglement, le maître sait qu'il lui faut parler à l'esclave: on ne parle qu'à des hommes; le langage est un appel à la liberté de l'autre puisque le signe n'est signe que par une conscience qui le ressaisit."

[68] "...être libre, c'est se jeter dans le monde sans calcul, sans enjeu, c'est définir soi-même tout enjeu, toute mesure...."

It is in my action itself that must be defined the public to which I present it... I cannot make a concrete appeal except to humans who exist for me; and they do not exist for me except if I have created linkages with them, if I have made them my neighbor; they exist as allies or as enemies depending on whether my project accords with theirs or contradicts it"[69] (1944, 109-110). My action in regard to them will change depending on whether they are "allies or enemies."

Beauvoir recognizes that the other may not respond to one's (call to) action as desired: Two things are necessary for Beauvoir in establishing a rapport between a self and others: first, that I am permitted to make an appeal to others; second, following from the first, that others are free to respond to my call (1944, 113). This dynamic is communicative: what is necessary is someone who can make an appeal, and someone who can respond to it, should they choose to do so. In this, the freedom of both is necessitated, as the call and the response are made across concrete projects. Absent the ability to make the call and respond to another's call, the dynamic of freedom is thwarted, and other means must be adopted to create conditions of freedom.

Beauvoir sees the welfare of all humans as linked when she says, " I must therefore strive to create for men situations such that they can accompany and surpass my transcendance.... I ask for humans health, knowledge/learning, well-being, and leisure, in order that their freedom is not consumed in combatting sickness, ignorance

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[69] "Pour que les hommes puissent me donner une place dans le monde, il faut d'abord que je fasse surgir autour de moi un monde où les hommes aient leur place: il faut aimer, vouloir, faire. C'est mon action elle-même qui doit définir le public auquel je la propose... Je ne peux en appeler concrètement qu'à des hommes qui existent pour moi; et ils n'existent pour moi que si j'ai créé des liens avec eux, si j'ai fait d'eux mon prochain; ils existent comme alliés ou comme ennemis selon que mon projet s'accorde avec le leur ou le contredit."

and misery"[70] (1944, 115). After all, she maintains, if humans' basic needs, as she has enumerated them, are not met, then how are those humans to live their freedom? Once again, she is recognizing that situational constraints inhibit the exercise of one's freedom; and not only for oneself, but for the others with whom one is not free to engage.

Making an appeal to others relies upon persuasion up to a certain point, although Beauvoir presents this as a defensive rather than an offensive moment, and invokes violence as the method of last resort, when persuasion fails (1944, 116). Speaking of violence at further length, she says, "Precisely, in choosing to act on this facticity, we renounce taking the other as a freedom and we thereby constrain the possibilities of expanding our being; the man against whom I am violent is not my equal, and I need others to be my equals"[71] (1944, 116). For Beauvoir, there are some situations, and they are defensive ones, in which one has no choice but to (re)act violently. However, to do so is to deny the other's humanity and freedom, which denies a necessary part of any interaction that furthers my own freedom. Because violence takes place in the realm of facticity, it cannot actually further one's freedom, although it could lead to one's release from situational constraints that have inhibited the exercise of one's freedom. One can further one's own freedom only through acts that further others' freedom as well, in interactions with them as people bearing their own subjectivity. A violent act, therefore, is an act that makes no contribution to one's

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[70] "Il me faut donc m'efforcer de créer pour les hommes des situations telles qu'ils puissent accompagner et dépasser ma transcendance.... Je demande pour les hommes la santé, le savoir, le bien-être, le loisir, afin que leur liberté ne se consume pas à combattre la maladie, l'ignorance, la misère."

[71] "Mais précisément, en choisissant d'agir sur cette facticité, nous renonçons à prendre autrui pour une liberté et nous restreignons d'autant les possibilités d'expansion de notre être; l'homme que je violente n'est pas mon pair, et j'ai besoin que les hommes soient mes pairs."

freedom, even as it removes those who are an obstacle to one's freedom in the first place. No act of violence is an expression of freedom, but some are in defense against the denial of the opportunity to live one's freedom, although not in the way that *She Came To Stay* was resolved by a violent act against a woman who was considered to be impeding another's sense of self. Claiming the establishment of a situation that could make freedom an active possibility is what makes action, particularly violent action, political. It is in the determination of the rightness of the cause, and the determination that all other methods have been exhausted, that violence is accepted as a course of ethical last-resort. When one has recourse to violence, Beauvoir asserts that, "One cannot accept with a light heart the recourse to force: it is the mark of defeat for which there is no compensation..."[72] (1944, 116-117). At the same time, she sees in the assertion of violence to overturn conditons of oppression the possibility of freedom's future manifestation.

Beauvoir closes this essay with an invocation of risk and uncertainty as definitive of freedom (1944, 118). The actions that one chooses take their meaning only from the concrete lived experience that Beauvoir took such great pains to evince in both her literary and philosophical works. As Beauvoir continually reminds us, the human condition that we live is the ground of our judgments, the basis of our ethical understanding, and founds our actions, violent or otherwise (1944, 123). However, we have choices about how we live our lives, the ways we act, the projects we take on. What renders this political is that those choices shape the common understanding of

[72] "On ne peut donc accepter d'un coeur léger le recours à la force: il est la marque d'un échec que rien ne saurait compenser...."

what is possible in a multiplicity of lives, in the common values that are lived as part of the community through individual and collective action.

A Cartography of Critique

Beauvoir's vision of politics is not fully-developed enough to offer a positive alternative, in the sense of institutional arrangements or mechanisms of communal interaction, to the idealism of which she is so critical. Instead of offering a cartography of political action, she offers a cartography of critique, designed to inspire free subjectivities to live their freedom in action, to map for themselves the arrangements that will meet her criteria. The push to determine in a community the values that will be lived by that community, and the drive to judge the structures and situations within which freedom is or is not fostered, gives a political impetus to her understanding of humans' lived experience. The means of determining what and who will be valued, and how their voices will be heard, "the recipes" for political activism are not described by Beauvoir. Indeed, this is part of the flexibility of her understanding of freedom, that allows humans to shape their political and social arrangements out of their lived experience. However, that experience is subject to examination and re-examination, in light of historical narratives of how the "we" of a society has come to be, and in light of the future goals that are made possible in the imagination of the group and its individuals.

It is only in working back and forth between lived experience and the meaning that can be made of it that a Beauvoirian politics can come alive. The forms are left to us to make. Can we imagine or create something that will fulfill her primary criteria: that politics takes as its baseline the drive toward human freedom, the capacity of each

to shape meanings in the world of her own life, in a situation absent the threat of physical or other harm in the assertion of subjectivity? Who shall die? We all will. However, Beauvoir insists that in realizing one's freedom in the world intersubjectively, one's projects will reach into the future in ways that are unanticipated.

The problem, however, is when there is opposition to this goal of freedom's extension, when the very definitions of who is human, and to what extent, are at stake, and there is an active opposition to human freedom, by virtue of ignorance or the desire to assert the self at the cost of others' freedom. In this case, Beauvoir claims that recourse to violence is a possible answer. The questions, then, would seem to be how to recognize such an impasse, and what ethical consequence the utilization of such a means would have on the desired end of human freedom.

Chapter 5: Algerian Echoes

"There is no alternative, and I hope this book will help convince you of the fact. The truth confronts you on all sides. You can no longer mumble the old excuse 'We didn't know'; and now that you *do* know, can you continue to feign ignorance, or content yourselves with a mere token utterance of horrified sympathy? I hope not." (Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction," *Djamila Boupacha*, 21)

Oppression, Violence and Women

In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Iris Marion Young discusses the concept of oppression, describing five elements, often overlapping, although not always all present in the oppression of particular social groups. They are: Exploitation, or insufficient compensation for one's labor; Marginalization, where Marginals are "people the system of labor cannot or will not use" (1990, 53); Powerlessness, the denial of development and autonomy; Cultural Imperialism, the simultaneous process of being marked by stereotypes and one's difference from the norm, at the same time that one is rendered invisible because of the cultural domination of the norm; and Violence as a social practice or systemically accepted practice in relation to specific social groups. These criteria offer a means of assessing and comparing the situations and experiences of different groups and different individuals, without universalizing any one experience or set of experiences of oppression, or seeing any one form of oppression as more fundamental than others. In this way, we can understand that, "all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings" (1990, 40). Despite the fact that it is individuals who live the specificity of their individual experiences of these different elements of oppression, Young reminds us that oppression, "also refers to systemic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a

tyrant. Oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of a few people's choices or policies. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences following those rules" (1990, 41).

Simone de Beauvoir's early definition of oppression understands those collective consequences in terms of the freedom, both ideal and concrete, that is made possible or denied by relations of oppression, and the opportunities to disrupt those relations between two groups, oppressors and oppressed, when she posits that:

> Oppression divides the world into two clans: those who enlighten mankind by thrusting it ahead of itself and those who are condemned to mark time hopelessly in order merely to support the collectivity; their life is a pure repetition of mechanical gestures; their leisure is just about sufficient for them to regain their strength; the oppressor feeds himself on their transcendence and refuses to extend it by a free recognition. The oppressed has only one solution: to deny the harmony of that mankind from which an attempt is made to exclude him, to prove that he is a man and that he is free by revolting against the tyrants. In order to prevent this revolt, one of the ruses of oppression is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one can not revolt against nature. (1948b, 83)

This representation of oppression presents an Aristotelian ideal of citizenship as made manifest in a class of citizens who are free to be citizens precisely because they are supported by another class, non-citizens, who maintain the everyday needs of the *polis*. It also evokes the Hegelian concept of the master as served by a slave whose subjectivity he has conquered in a direct confrontation of the self with the other. And in the context of Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*, from which it is taken, it describes her image of the colonial situation of Algeria. In preceding chapters, I argued that Beauvoir surpasses her initial understanding of intersubjectivity as always a challenge of the self by the other, and vice-versa, leading to the domination of one by the other.

Instead, Beauvoir wants to imagine a political alternative that leads to action freely chosen by individuals, although taken together with others, who, rather than confronting each other with death or domination, challenge each other to collectively realize their freedom through mutuality and reciprocity. What projects of action could they choose together? What projects will challenge the structures of oppression described by Young and Beauvoir? The answer for Beauvoir is rooted in the three forms of freedom that she struggles with and develops.

She rejects the first form, freedom as sovereignty over another, or alternatively absolute sovereignty of self. She develops the following two forms, and their interplay, throughout the rest of her working life. Freedom understood as conditioned by the situation one lives means a comprehension of the possibilities foreclosed and engendered by that situation. At the same time, she presents freedom as embedded in action, and action as shaped by politics. Which projects should one take on? On this, Beauvoir is theoretically quiescent, leaving it to one's own judgment and to politics, loosely described, to make this determination. For her, this is a structural element of her philosophical approach, as, "Whatever the given situation, it never implies necessarily this or that future, as the reaction of man to his situation is free. How could one decide in advance that peace, war, revolution, justice, goodness, defeat or victory is impossible?"[1] (1945a, 254). While she talks of it here in terms of foreclosing possibility by deciding in advance what one could do, in the context of the political causes that she chose, a failure to act somehow was seen as a failure to respond to a

[1] "Quelle que soit la situation donnée, elle n'implique jamais nécessairement tel ou tel avenir, puisque la réaction de l'homme a sa situation est libre. Comment décider d'avance que la paix, la guerre, la révolution, la justice, le bonheur, la défaite ou la victoire sont impossibles?"

'should do' entailed by human freedom. Why do we need the writer to help us confront the situations we live? One answer is that we may not understand them properly, and may therefore fail to act (properly).

Beauvoir posits that freedom as the ground of human existence means that humans should seek to further their own and others' freedom. One element of this is the call that one must be free to make to another to participate in a common project. When even the ability to make that call is denied, or when making that call so subverts the dominant system that it would forbid it if it could, then what is left is revolt. As noted in the previous chapter, when persuasion fails, one is left with violence. Proponents of France's colonial presence in Algeria made arguments based in utility, progress, even fear of the harm that would be done absent the civilizing influence of the French in Algeria. None of these arguments were persuasive for Beauvoir, as they were rooted in a denial of the freedom that Algerians were attempting to claim. Although Beauvoir did not herself decide to take violent action, she was an advocate of this course, given the violence that was being done by the French in Algeria, and the failure of other means that had been taken by those working for Algerian liberation.

Beauvoir admired the work of Frantz Fanon. His *Black Skin, White Masks* described the psychological and social harm done by the experience of racial othering. He focuses on the Hegelian dialectic and its reciprocity of recognition to show what is absent in the relation of the "white man, in the capacity of master" and the (non-Hegelian) slave. This master "wants from the slave...not recognition but work" and this slave "wants to be like the master" (1967, 220-21). There is no drive to mutuality

in this dynamic. At the same time, Fanon emphasizes the elements of undertaking risk and of struggling to overcome that Hegel's dialectic requires for "recognition as an independent self-consciousness" (Hegel, qtd. in Fanon 1967, 219).[2] Struggle against the oppressor says, "*No* to scorn of man. *No* to degradation of man. *No* to exploitation of man. *No* to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom" (1967, 222). Fanon asserted the value of a critical regard to one's world as well, and further examined the dynamics of colonization and revolution.

Fanon's experience of Algeria and professional training gave a unique perspective to his writings about the Algerian War. In *A Dying Colonialism*, he is a clear advocate of the Algerian fight for liberation, as a Hegelian assertion of Algerians' subjectivity and their ability to claim nationhood. At the same time, he is an advocate of the use of appropriate violence, as, "In a war of liberation, the colonized people must win, but they must do so cleanly, without 'barbarity.' The European nation that practices torture is a blighted nation, unfaithful to its history. The underdeveloped nation that practices torture thereby confirms its nature, plays the role of an underdeveloped people" (1965, 24). In "Algeria Unveiled," Fanon discusses two related means of waging the war that came together in the strategic necessity of fighting a colonial power. He presents both the use of terrorism as a tactic and the need to bring women into the conflict as revolutionaries as wrenching decisions for the Algerian leadership. The former is presented as a necessity to counter the terror generated by the occupying French force in the Algerian people (1965, 54-55). It is

[2] The non-risk form of recognition as a *person* rather than as an "independent self-consciousness" is also invoked here. This is the recognition of the freed slave, rather than the slave who has taken a risk and fought for his freedom.

not, according to Fanon, without its crises of conscience, nor the political expediency of hesitating to act in order not to alienate observers sympathetic to the cause (1965, 55). According to Samira Kawash, Fanon's attempt to present the violence of terrorism as explainable and justifiable in this text is countered in other texts with an excess that makes it impossible to finally judge, for or against, violence. This uncertainty creates a possibility, however, that the future of decolonization will "be a rupture with, rather than a re-formation of, the colonial past" in its opposition of dominant and subordinate (1999, 237). In Beauvoir's Hegelian terms, this goal not to simply establish an alternate hierarchy would represent a move toward mutuality of recognition.

Women's involvement is described in "Algeria Unveiled" in more complicated terms. Fanon explores the colonizers' fixation on the veil and its representation for them of women's subordination within Muslim societies. It is also, according to Fanon, the generator of a desire to rip the veil away that becomes a fixation, and representative of the colonization of a people in the co-opting of their women. For the colonized, then, it becomes a symbol of opposition. At the same time, unveiled Algerian women going into European sections of cities is described as a tactic that enabled revolutionary forces to circulate information and to carry out terrorist acts. Women who could pass freely from one section to the other gave a mobility to the fight that had been foreclosed by intense military scrutiny. When this tactic was exhausted, women turned again to the veil as a means of hiding bombs or other weapons that would be handed off and used by male revolutionaries, according to Fanon. Interestingly, Fanon describes this process of unveiling and veiling as one in

which an Algerian woman, "relearns her body, re-establishes it in a totally revolutionary fashion. This new dialectic of the body and of the world is primary in the case of one revolutionary woman" (Fanon 1965, 59). However, Marnia Lazreg's *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* argues that this new dialectic is essentially the old dialectic in new clothing. In any case, it is not the dialectic of mutuality of recognition. On one interpretation, supported by Fanon's description of the hand-off of the weapons, perhaps women did not engage in sufficiently risky ways, or did not confront the violence of the other with a violence shocking enough to engender recognition. This could not be so, however, as Fanon himself says that, "The Algerian woman is at the heart of the combat. Arrested, tortured, raped, shot down, she testifies to the violence of the occupier and to his inhumanity" (1965, 66). This would seem sufficient risk by even the most stringent standards.

A second possibility is that even in the drive to assert a future mutuality of recognition between the Algerian man colonized by the French man, the Algerian woman was left in a past read only through her absence. Lazreg is critical of Fanon's focus on veiling and unveiling as, "his emphasis on women's 'conflict' with their body transforms their participation in the war into a struggle over the veil" (1994, 127). She offers as an alternative the "relative ease with which women moved in and out of the veil" (1994, 127). What is lost in Fanon's account is "a historical analysis of the ways in which colonial domination affected women as women, and the meaning of the war as a momentous opportunity for women who decisively stepped into it" (Lazreg 1994, 129). Lazreg's project attempts to present Algerian women as other than the figures caught in a dichotomy in which, "Women are seen either a

embodiments of Islam, or as helpless victims forced to live by its tenets" (1994, 14). What Lazreg found was that Algerian women were caught in a web of myth, fiction and fantasy when they were represented, and that they were otherwise written out of Algerian history. The legacy of their hidden history, which she attempts to reveal, is that women sacrifice for the cause, yet are denied participation in the state. During the time of the Algerian War, for example, goals specific to women were put on hold in order to achieve unity within the revolutionary Front of National Liberation (FLN). The expectation was that once the revolution was accomplished, with women's participation, their subsequent participation in the state as full citizens would be assured. However, Lazreg points out that the ambivalence with which women were treated during the war in public statements by the FLN, along with the FLN's willingness to turn to religion as the proper forum to address 'women's issues' were both indications of what was to follow. According to Lazreg, "The F.L.N. was caught in a contradiction that was the hallmark of its rhetorical view of women, which had acquired a life of its own quite divorced from women's lived reality" (1994, 132).

Like Beauvoir's project in *The Second Sex*, Lazreg's project involved a demythologization of women and a reclamation of their lost history. What Beauvoir's evolving concept of intersubjective freedom pushes us toward is an understanding that those deferred goals specific to women are of concern to everyone. In denying the material conditions that would enable women's freedom, even at the cost of men's (and some women's) privilege, these goals must be achieved. This is what is at stake in a notion of freedom that recognizes the freedom of each as bound up in the freedom

of all, and vice-versa. Beauvoir's mechanism for creating that freedom is relational intersubjectivity.

Beauvoir's Relational Intersubjectivity

While the subject/object split is one that means an irreconcilable unknowability between subject and subject/object (the other), that split yields, according to Sonia Kruks, "two different kinds of relations of otherness: those between social *equals* and those that involve social *inequality*. Where the relation is one of equality, she [Beauvoir] suggests that otherness is 'relativized' by a kind of 'reciprocity': each recognizes that the other whom he or she objectifies is *also* an equal freedom." Later, Kruks asserts that "Where, however, otherness exists through relations of inequality, there 'reciprocity' is to a greater or lesser extent abolished" (1995, 84). This is the dynamic that plays out along various axes in *She Came To Stay*, as developed earlier. Because Beauvoir has no political alternative to the relations of inequality that are experienced by her characters, there is no alternative but to destroy the other, Xavière, who is responsible for revealing that inequality, even if Xavière is not responsible for it in fact. Limited to an intersubjective analysis that does not explore the social dynamics that she examines in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir contrives an individualist solution that her subsequent work reveals she is ultimately dissatisfied with. While she maintains her focus on the individual as the actor within her ethical system, she also turns to institutions and collective action in relation to the individual.

As we've seen, in Beauvoir's ethical system, one's freedom is tightly bound to one's relations with others. Because my freedom relies upon that of others, and theirs

depends on mine, I am always in relation to them. The weight of this would be heavy indeed if not for two things. First, Beauvoir sees that because I exist in relation to others, I can act with them. Collective action is called for as a necessary step in creating the conditions of the freedom of all. Second, as Sonia Kruks reveals, Beauvoir also sees this relation as mediated by social institutions (1995, 85). According to Kruks, this insight is developed later in Beauvoir's writings, particularly in *The Second Sex*, where institutions mediate both the extent of one's complicity, and can both enable and inhibit one's freedom. However, Beauvoir also sees that we are responsible for the institutions and their workings as citizens of a particular society. This limits the sphere of activity for which I am directly responsible, but does not prohibit me from taking on projects as the circumstances of my life present opportunities to do so. This insight was nascent in her early writings, insofar as she focused on intersubjective relations and their possibilities, and the situational arrangements that hinder or contribute to opportunities of freedom. As we have seen, however, Beauvoir was limited by the philosophical framework of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic and her assumption of Sartrian intersubjectivity.

For these reasons, intersubjective relations might seem an unusual idea for an existentialist to present as a linchpin for an ethical theory. After all, existentialist philosophy is most often characterized as radically individualistic. In many ways, Beauvoir retains this focus on the individual as responsible for herself. At the same time, however, her focus on intersubjective relations, the subject as always opposed to an object, and seeking to live ethically through the challenge that this opposition creates, also leads her to see the many ways in which action taken together with others

is a necessary means of developing one's ethical life. This implies that the scope of ethics must not rest at the level of the individual, and any particular individual's particular actions, although they are important, but that the individual must address the larger issues of the world in which she lives, and the institutional structures within which her actions or failures to act are implicated.

This is a recognition of the extent of one's own existence. As someone who is situated in a particular historical moment, with all of the social and historical freight that this carries, yet at the same time being a freedom who has the potential to *transcend* the given situation and reach into the future through one's actions, one must look to the projects of one's society and one's government as one's own projects as well. In trying to shape those projects, and realizing that one cannot finally determine them, i.e. that there is conflict about those projects, one must work with others who seek a project of similar scope and trajectory as the project that one desires. Putting one's politics into action involves not just the application of founding principles, but an examination of them, and of their implications for the particular conditions of individuals' lives.

The shift from the level of the individual to the level of society is one that is present in many places in Beauvoir's work, and it also comes as no surprise given her early cognizance of the importance of one's situation for one's opportunities to make choices and exercise one's freedom. Beauvoir relates that, "There are beings whose life slips by in an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude or ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads. Like the child, they can exercise their freedom, but only within this universe

which has been set up before them, without them" (1948b, 37). This takes into account an individual's situation in a way that the radically individualistic Sartre of *No Exit*, for example, would not have recognized. It also shows Beauvoir questioning the constraints that situation imposes, but she is not yet able to incorporate this into a political, rather than an ethical philosophy. And yet, allied with Merleau-Ponty (in her theory if not in her avowed Sartrian stance) Beauvoir forces us to confront the inevitable facts that individuals' lives are complicated and that the potential to exercise their freedom is circumscribed by the institutional and social relations they experience. Sonia Kruks' exploration of the concept of "reciprocity," present in Beauvoir's later work, describes it as "not essentially a relation of *looks*. It is expressed and mediated through *institutions*..." (1995, 84). This development is a necessary step in Beauvoir's movement from an ethics of individual intersubjectivity to an exploration of how the institutional as structural constraint pushes toward an understanding of freedom as conditioned.

Involved in this collective confrontation is not just a pragmatic realization that the pooled efforts of many citizens may yield greater results than the efforts of lone individuals, but an attempt at a relation of reciprocity in the process of collective action. While the direct relation of each one person to each other person whom she encounters is fundamental to Beauvoir's ethics, the institutional relationship, through one's society and the projects pursued as such, both creates ethical responsibilities and limits the extent of one's responsibilities. Among the responsibilities is the question of when to seek institutional change, and when there is a moral imperative to do so. If institutions do not foster relations of equality among individuals, and therefore of

reciprocity in and among the citizens they are supposed to serve, then they are failing in a very crucial area.

The burden of responsibility would be great, as it sometimes can be, by virtue of the many failures of freedom wrought by societies whose values undercut opportunities for creating conditions that would enable the freedom of all. The weight of this falls upon citizens when their governments engage in oppressive policies both internally and in their relations with other nations. As citizens of a nation, they carry a responsibility to encourage policies that lead to greater freedom, and to respond when the government that represents them acts in ways that inhibit their own or others' freedom.

Additionally, Beauvoir believes that citizens must accept the responsibility for their complicity when they fail to act to prevent freedom's constraint, particularly when it is done in the name of the nation of which they are citizens. Ethical action will not always yield the desired outcome, and Beauvoir is aware of this. All that one can do is the best that one can do, given one's circumstances. Recognizing this, Beauvoir shows that the scope of one's ethical action is also limited. However, this is not meant to be an excuse not to act. While one is responsible for actions to which one has a direct relation as individual or citizen, one could not be responsible for all failures of freedom in the world, or solely engaged in the creation of opportunities for freedom. Acting with other citizens to change the policies of one's own government means that one shares responsibility for creating conditions that enable freedom. And insofar as one is able to change things, given one's situation and the opportunities available, so is one more complicit when one does not.

While intersubjectivity and reciprocity offer the possibility of a strong ethics in their demand that one recognize the other, they are in tension with the individualist limits of Beauvoir's existentialism. Her ultimate reliance upon the individual as the primary ethical actor and her willingness to allow that individual to do as s/he pleases also builds into the system the potential for failure. As it plays out in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, it results in the didactic and sometimes confusing insistence that things must be done, but that she cannot tell the reader what they are. This fluidity rests in Beauvoir's existential philosophical demand that we make meaning of our own lives. As revealed, however, by Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, and in the narratives of Algerian women, women are often bearers of meaning, rather than makers of it.[3] In examining the social and political arrangements that denied or gave voice to colonial subjects and to women, Beauvoir called into question the system that could so blithely ignore, for example, the repeated allegations of the systematic use of torture during the Algerian War (and continues to do so).

Beauvoir's address to French citizens implied a certain collective responsibility on their part for the war and its conduct, and an expectation that they would take some action because of it. Behind her understanding of this collective responsibility was an impulse to look beyond the mundanity of everyday actions, and confront their ethical meanings in political context. It also leads one to examine the demand of extraordinary times for understandings of the political responsibility borne in those times. What happens when most people, in fact, fail to act? What collective

[3] Laura Mulvey expresses this well in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema": "Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning." (1990, 29).

responsibility is entailed by this failure? This was the problem that confronted, and disheartened, Beauvoir during the Algerian War. She was looking for a widespread oppositional response based both in universal principles of humanity and the particular understanding of what it meant to be a French citizen, while most of her fellow citizens found acceptable the military resolution of the conflict, and the continued oppression of the Algerian people.

When Beauvoir asks which of the enemies of the "Arabian fellah," or peasant, must be confronted, or when she asks whether the interests of the French proletariat or colonized subjects of the French should take precedence, she is acknowledging her own complex confrontation with conflicts of class and colonialism, as well as her contemporaries'(1948b, 89). She's acknowledging that political claims are necessarily partial, unable to encompass the totality of a given situation. At the same time, her understanding that our choices are never finally determinate leaves room to make further claims that may or may not compete with claims previously made. In posing these questions that link ethics and politics, Beauvoir is also confronting that which she believes gives human freedom content and meaning, and that is the attempt, in the face of her understanding of intersubjectivity, to minimize the harm and maximize the opportunities for each individual's freedom, one's own and others'. She does not believe that one's own freedom can be achieved by simply ignoring conditions that deny the freedom of others, and this is what she posits should motivate us to act ethically. Beauvoir's understandings of freedom as conditioned and as based in (political) action offer a method of proposing and judging the projects one undertakes. One's analysis of the situation enables a judgment of the best action, preferably one

that will lead to greater freedom. However, this is not always an option. Sometimes the best action is a violent action, according to Beauvoir, one that has no freedom-value whatsoever in the present, but that may lead to future freedom, in the shifting of the situational constraints that have denied freedom.

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir describes the difficult dynamic of violence's denial of freedom, even in the drive to change the conditions that constrain one's possibilities of freedom:

> Thus, here is the oppressor oppressed in turn; and the men who do violence to him in their turn become masters, tyrants, and executioners: in revolting, the oppressed are metamorphosed into a blind force, a brutal fatality; the evil which divides the world is carried out in their own hearts. And doubtless it is not a question of backing out of these consequences, for the ill-will of the oppressor imposes upon each one the alternative of being the enemy of the oppressed if he is not that of their tyrant; evidently, it is necessary to choose to sacrifice the one who is an enemy of man; but the fact is that one finds himself forced to treat certain men as things in order to win the freedom of all. (1948b, 97)

This seems a fatalistic acceptance of a dynamic of violence resulting from freedom's failure. It is based in a drive to overcome a problem that Beauvoir's desire to lead everyone to freedom (and then make them partake) cannot address. The only means that Beauvoir has to change the world is to change the way that people see the world, and their own place in it. This was her vocation. One that she claimed even as she insisted, during the Algerian war, that she "is not a woman of action," asserting instead "my reason for living is writing" (1992b, 183). When she wrote, however, her goal was to confront her readers with situations and ask them to imagine the world she had created. Beauvoir offered her narratives and essays not simply a means of literary or philosophical escape from one's situation, but as an invitation to criticize that situation from the perspective of one's lived experience. Beauvoir mentioned drawing

a map of the future world. It is an apt analogy, as her cartography of critique is also a "cartography of struggle," a term Chandra Mohanty uses to describe, "a world which is definable only in *relational* terms, a world traversed with intersecting lines of power and resistance, a world which can be understood only in terms of its destructive divisions of gender, color, class, sexuality, and nation.... But it is also a world with powerful histories of resistance and revolution in daily life and as organized liberation movements" (1991, 2). Although Beauvoir was disheartened by the divisions she experienced during the Algerian War, she also offered an example of one woman's drive to mobilize her fellow citizens, using the means available to her, her words. She describes her drive toward the "activity" of writing, and in her disenchantment, the search for:

> Words without doubt, universal, eternal, presence of all in each, are the only transcendent power I recognize and am affected by; they vibrate in my mouth, and with them I can communicate with humanity. They wrench tears, night, death itself from the moment, from contingency, and then transfigure them. Perhaps the most profound desire I entertain today is that people should repeat in silence certain words that I have been the first to link together. (1992b, 372)

This is not an egocentric assertion of the self-aggrandizing and manipulative ability of Beauvoir's prose. Instead, Beauvoir is claiming an ability to call others, and the desire for a response, through her writing. It was a call to others in the midst of a crisis of self and community engendered by the Algerian War, a call to freedom.

The End of the Story?

As a result of the efforts on her behalf, Djamila Boupacha's case was moved to France. Scrupulous attention was given to fairness in the conduct of Boupacha's case

by the judge who heard it in the French city of Caen. He repeatedly requested information and pictures of officers from the two prisons for the purposes of identification of her torturers. Military officials repeatedly refused to release such pictures. The persistence of both was taken by Boupacha's advocates as an acknowledgment of the validity of her claims. The judge's requests were consistently denied by the military commanders in France and Algeria on the basis that it might diminish the morale of the soldiers in question, and would interfere with their right to confront their accusers (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962a, 171-73). Boupacha was released from prison in May of 1962, shortly after the Evian Accords that ended the war were signed. An amnesty law made it impossible to bring her torturers to justice, or even to determine their identities (Beauvoir and Halimi 1962a, 7).

Boupacha's freedom from the threat of imprisonment by the French for her wartime activities was also secured by the end of the war and the amnesty. At the same time, it is an open question whether Boupacha's freedom was achieved. Despite Boupacha's desire to remain in France for further education after the end of the conflict, she was tricked into a meeting with members of the FLN, who had ordered her to return to Algeria, and who then forcibly removed her from France (Halimi 1988, 319-22, ctd. in Kruks 2004, 27-28). When Gisèle Halimi tried to rouse Beauvoir to action on Boupacha's behalf, Beauvoir refused, on the grounds that "personal concern and compassion did not justify over-riding the boundaries of their appropriate sphere of action. Beauvoir would not speak out for Boupacha against the FLN. She would speak out for another against her own government, but not against a third world independence movement which she supported" (Kruks 2004, 28). For Beauvoir, as

opposed to Halimi, this situation called for a choice between action in support of Djamila Boupacha's individual choice, and action in support of the Algerian independence movement, or in this case inaction regarding Boupacha's situation as support of the FLN.

Choosing the movement over the desires of an individual is certainly not antithetical to Beauvoir's understanding of freedom. It does highlight the difficulty of both the situations that force each of us to choose, and the difficulty of facing the consequences of the choices made. Beauvoir's understanding of freedom does not offer a system for dealing with such situations, except to say that there must be one, i.e. a set of principles put into practice, and informed by the desire to expand the range of human freedom. As Iris Young's mapping of oppression shows, there are many ways that oppression works, and therefore multiples axes upon which to work. In this case, Beauvoir chose one axis to address, while Halimi privileged another. The justification for the choices, and the resonance of the call that can be made, particularly in times of crisis, depend on the balance between political possibility and ethical ideals when weighing choices of which actions to undertake.

Whose freedom has historically been privileged or denied, and the consequences of such a historical 'bias' were explored in many of Beauvoir's writings, including *The Second Sex*. Understanding freedom as mastery or domination of an other was rejected by Beauvoir as not sufficient to realize the possibility of mutuality and reciprocity that could counter the pernicious effects of dynamics of domination and subordination in society. Beauvoir then developed an understanding of freedom as based in the particular lived experience or situation of humans in the

world, and as based in action. Confronting freedom's possibility meant for Beauvoir that strategic choices would have to be made in situations of constraint. And as contemporary arguments within feminist theory make clear (for example, Cornell 1998; Hirschman 2003), we are still struggling with how to live the difficult choices that comprise human freedom.

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