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Experimentation, Authority and Situation in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*

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Abstract

In this thesis I read Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* through the lens of her early (and only recently published) writing on Claude Bernard's experimental approach. In the 1924 essay "Analysis of Claude Bernard's *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*," Beauvoir endorses Bernard's critique of "theoretical authority" and certain elements of his experimental approach. *The Second Sex* redeploys this early criticism of theoretical authority and valorisation of experimentation to produce a critique of patriarchal authority. Throughout *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir develops distinct experimental literary-philosophical strategies, namely a "proliferation" and "reintroduction" of perspectives, ideas and sources. She uses these strategies to expose the ways in which patriarchal traditions construct and maintain essentialist definitions of women. For Beauvoir, these traditions transmit oppressive definitions of women through two distinct though interrelated levels: (1) through "mythic" inscriptions of femininity in literary and philosophical canons; and (2) through essentialist determinations of women's social role (women's "situation"). In tracing this trajectory, this thesis contributes to contemporary scholarly attempts to excavate the distinctness of Beauvoir's philosophical enterprise.

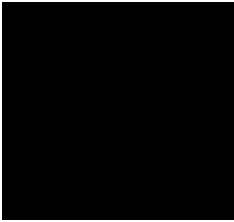
Declaration

I declare that this thesis contains no material which has previously been submitted or accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Contents

Introduction	8
Chapter 1. Theoretical Authority and Experimental Strategies	15
1.1 Existence and Essence	17
1.2 The “Theoretical” in “Analysis”	24
1.3 Experimental Approach in “Analysis”	27
1.4 Experimental Approach in “Literature and Metaphysics”	30
1.5 Theoretical authority in <i>When Things of the Spirit Come First</i>	36
Chapter 2. Patriarchal Authority and Myth	43
2.1 Existence and Essence, Sex and Gender	45
2.2 Experimental Approach in <i>The Second Sex</i>	60
2.3 Reintroduction:	
Beauvoir’s critical treatment of philosophical authority	63
i. Reintroducing Hegel’s master-slave dialectic	64
Chapter 3. Situation: the Lived Experience of Patriarchal Authority	78
3.1 Definitional work: what is “Situation?”	79
3.2 Sartre: Freedom and Facticity	82
3.3 Beauvoir against Sartre	85
3.4 Beauvoir: Facticity and Freedom, Immanence and Transcendence	88
i. Marriage	90
ii. Abortion	97
Conclusion	101
Bibliography	103

Introduction

Since Beauvoir's death in 1986, scholars have paid increasing attention to her specifically philosophical work, and the way in which she repurposes material from the Western philosophical canon for the purposes of her own philosophical project. After years of being read merely as Sartre's "disciple," Michele Le Doeuff argued in *Hipparchia's Choice* in 1991 that Beauvoir in fact critically re-works and subtly undermines Sartrean philosophy throughout *The Second Sex*.¹ Beauvoir's passing, in conjunction with Le Doeuff's work, encouraged a new wave of feminist philosophers to pay attention to the subversive and critical treatment of the work of (male) philosophers within Beauvoir's writing. Edward and Kate Fullbrook's work in the early '90s, for example, claimed that Beauvoir's 1943 novel *She Came to Stay* was the central influence on Sartre's 1943 *Being and Nothingness*.² A number of scholars in the last two decades have further examined Beauvoir's feminist dialogue with figures in the Western philosophical canon.³ Alongside this scholarly trend, the assembling and translating of previously disparate pieces of her writings into English as part of *The Beauvoir Series* provides

¹ Michele Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, etc.*, trans. Trista Selous (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). The text was published in 1989 in French and 1991 in English.

² Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook, *Remaking of a Twentieth-Century Myth*, (New York: Basic Books, 1994) and "The Absence of Beauvoir", in *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Julien S. Murphy (The Pennsylvania State University, 1999) 45-63. Jean-Paul Sartre *Being and Nothingness* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (Abingdon, Oxon Routledge 2003). Simone de Beauvoir *She Came To Stay* trans. Roger Senhouse and Yvonne Moyse (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999). Elizabeth Fallaize's study of Beauvoir's novels and Toril Moi's work on Beauvoir's biography, philosophy and literature in the period immediately subsequent to Beauvoir's death similarly contributed to this reappraisal of Beauvoir's philosophical thought. Elizabeth Fallaize *The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir* (London: Routledge, 1988). Toril Moi. *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) and *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

³ Eva Lundgren-Gothlin works on the relationship between Beauvoir, Marx and Hegel, and we look at Gothlin's arguments regarding Beauvoir's unique reappropriation of Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic in Chapter 2. See *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's "Second Sex"* (London, Athlone, 1996). Nancy Bauer's contention that *The Second Sex* transforms Hegel's philosophy is also relevant in this regard, and will be treated in Chapter 2. See Nancy Bauer *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, & Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). Debra Bergoffen works on the relations between Beauvoir, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997). Sonia Kruks' pioneering study of Beauvoir's political thought considers Beauvoir in relation to Marxist and Hegelian traditions, again important for the treatment of Beauvoir's critical relation to Hegelian philosophy in Chapter 2. Sonia Kruks, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Penelope Deutscher's work explores the potential of the contradictions in Beauvoir's methodological approach. In *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction, and the History of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). Sara Heinamaa works on Beauvoir's interaction with Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. See Sara Heinamaa "Simone de Beauvoir's phenomenology of sexual difference" in *Hypatia* 14 (4): 114-132 (1999). Finally, Jonathon Webber's work, currently awaiting publication, reads Beauvoir as Sartre's chief influence. Jonathan Webber. Forthcoming. *Rethinking Existentialism*. (Oxford, Oxford University Press). Draft chapters at <http://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/rethinkingexistentialism/> Last accessed 12 August 2016.

new material for the ongoing excavation of her unique philosophical contributions – and indeed provides the point of departure for this study.⁴ Moreover, a number of excellent introductions to her thought have been published in the last few years, setting the standard for studies of Beauvoir that acknowledge her philosophical independence.⁵

This thesis seeks to contribute to the process of excavating Beauvoir's philosophy, in particular by documenting some of her independent and innovative work on methodological questions. In the recent studies of Beauvoir's relation to philosophical figures cited above, the *way* or approach by which she appropriates canonical philosophy is clearly crucial. However, her experimental approach has not been properly situated in the context of her early interest in specifically scientific approaches, only recently come to light as part of the *Beauvoir Series*.⁶ By reading *The Second Sex* through the lens of her early work on Claude Bernard's experimental approach, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that Beauvoir's concern with an approach that could illuminate and undermine the oppressive effects of illegitimate authority (scientific, philosophical and otherwise) remains a constant throughout her work.

That Beauvoir's philosophy and relation to the Western philosophical canon stands in need of "excavating" suggests that it has been covered over, or even buried. She did some of the burying herself, repeatedly discouraging any focus on the philosophical nature of her work. She diverted attention to her life

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir *Feminist Writings* edit. Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield, University of Illinois Press 2015); *Political Writings* edit. Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield, University of Illinois Press 2012); *"The Useless Mouths" and Other Literary Writings* edit. Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield, University of Illinois Press 2011); *Wartime Diary* trans. Anne Deing Cordero, edit. Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press 2008); *Diary of a Philosophy Student: Volume 1, 1926-27* trans. Barbara Klaw, edit. Barbara Klaw, Sylvie Le bon de Beauvoir, Margaret A. Simons (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press,); *Philosophical Writings* (2004) edit. Margaret A. Simons (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2004).

⁵ Stella Sandford's 2010 *How to Read Beauvoir* is a useful overview of Beauvoir's key concepts (Stella Sandford *How to read Beauvoir* (London: Granta, 2010)). Ursula Tidd's 2009 *Simone de Beauvoir* is an excellent introduction to Beauvoir's key philosophical ideas, introducing them biographically (Ursula Tidd *Simone de Beauvoir* (London: Reaktion, 2009)). Introducing Beauvoir's central ideas alongside the trajectory of Beauvoir's life renders the trajectory of Beauvoir's thought particularly lucid. Tidd's 2004 *Simone de Beauvoir* is also a fine study of Beauvoir's central concepts (and *Simone de Beauvoir* (New York: Routledge, 2004).) Tidd and Sandford's texts do not focus on the question of Beauvoir's method and accordingly are not intimately connected with the argument I advance in this thesis, they are comprehensive accounts of Beauvoir's interaction and autonomy from her philosophical colleagues. Arguably, the quality of these texts has been made possible by the twenty-five years of scholarship preceding it. Studies of Beauvoir no longer doggedly pursue the claim that Beauvoir's thought is independent to Sartre's, or feel the need to stress her philosophical originality. Tidd and Sandford's studies presuppose Beauvoir's philosophical independence while acknowledging the necessary points of interrelation with other thinkers, including Sartre.

⁶ *Diary of a Philosophy Student: Volume 1, 1926-27* trans. Barbara Klaw, edit. Barbara Klaw, Sylvie Le bon de Beauvoir, Margaret A. Simons (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press,). Abigail Klassen works on Beauvoir's scientific method. However, her work is not entirely relevant to the work of my thesis. See: Abigail Klassen "Beauvoir, the Scandal of Science, and Skepticism as Method" in *Hypatia* 28 (4) (2013) 835-851.

partner, Jean-Paul Sartre, insisting that he was a “philosopher,” and that she was exclusively a “writer.”⁷ At first glance, her deferral to Sartre seems plausible on the basis of her body of work, only a small part of which is obviously philosophical. She wrote an extensive four-part autobiography, novels, short stories, theatre, reviews, articles, travel journals, political pamphlets and essays. Though her fiction clearly treats philosophical ideas (she characterised her fiction as “metaphysical”), she rarely explored philosophical ideas in recognisably “philosophical” form, with the notable exceptions of the 1944 dialogue *Phyrrus and Cineas* and the 1947 essay, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

Philosophical elements in Beauvoir’s thought have not been obscured purely by her explicit rejection of the title of “philosopher.” Up until the late ’80s, her writing had been subject almost solely to biographical readings. The prominence of the biographical approach is understandable given the obvious centrality of her own life as a resource for her writing in all genres. The biographical emphasis is here inseparable from her iconic status within popular culture. With her pseudo-autobiographical fiction serving to publicise her romantic liaisons and eschewal of monogamy, she achieved something of a “cult” status as the model of a sexually liberated woman. The interest she displayed in relaying her personal life within her textual practice has however proved a significant impediment in the acknowledgement of her philosophical acumen. An appraisal of Beauvoir’s relation to the philosophical canon has been overshadowed by enquiries concerned, for example, with the accuracy of her portrayal of her relationship with other French intellectuals in *The Mandarins*.⁸ Along with this, of course, comes the scholarly over-emphasis on her relationship with Sartre, and the relegation of her to “disciple” mentioned above.

However, this above narrative opposing biographical to philosophical readings is not intended as an argument for their absolute distinctness. As we will see in different ways throughout this thesis, lived experience is the central focus of Beauvoir’s philosophical practice. Just as she made her life, and the lives of others, her central literary resource, so is it central to her philosophical thinking. In *and* against philosophy, she consistently displays a commitment to the capacity for lived experience to undermine and expose the oppressive effects of authority – in *The Second Sex*, specifically *patriarchal* authority. Furthermore, as we will see,

⁷ In a letter to (the Beauvoir biographer and scholar) Deidre Bair, September 16th 1980, Beauvoir wrote “I am a writer”. In a conversation with Deidre Bair, on January 9th 1981, Beauvoir relayed orally to Bair “I have written novels, philosophy, social criticism, a play - and yet all people know about me is ‘The Second Sex.’ Granted, I am pleased that that book has had such an impact, but I want people to remember that I am a writer! A feminist certainly, and I do not deny the importance of feminism in my life, but first of all I am a writer!” See Deidre Bair *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography*, (New York: Touchstone, 1990) 543.

⁸ These readings are pale in comparison to mention expressly sexist responses to the text. Following the publication of *The Second Sex*, Francois Mauriac famously wrote to a contributor to *Les Temps Modernes* ‘Your employer’s vagina has no secrets from me.’

lived experience, as well as her commitment to the concept of situation, bespeak her knowledge of Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology.

For Beauvoir, patriarchy refers to a world organised, controlled and designed by men. Accordingly, patriarchal authority refers to the means of this control, which she identifies as legislative, mythical and intellectual authority. According to Beauvoir, what makes lived experience a locus for the undermining of patriarchal authority is its plural character. Patriarchy's ostensibly unitary authoritative claims about women's character and behaviour are expressed and experienced differently by different subjects. On the one hand, patriarchy constructs and maintains its authority across a number of disciplines. She is able to play on this plurality, stressing the inconsistencies within and between patriarchal definitions of women. On the other, women live through the inconsistencies of patriarchy's multiple characterisations and normative demands. Attention to women's lived experience shows up patriarchy's inconsistencies as oppressive. To put it quickly, even if our academic institutions are not yet interdisciplinary, *life* is.

As such, this thesis shifts the goal from characterisation of her work as literary, autobiographical, philosophical or otherwise to a concern with the way that she makes *gender oppression* visible, that is, her approach and the experimental strategies that she deploys. This shift in focus is intended to shake the too-easy distinctions between philosophy and its disciplinary others (particularly in this case, literary studies and life-writing) that have tended to organise the reception of her work. This concern with oppression (and gender oppression in particular) is clear in all her writing, early and late, regardless of genre classification. This thesis takes 'Analysis of Claude Bernard's *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*' as its point of departure. This essay was written in December 1924, when she was sixteen years of age at the Cours Désir, a private girls' school where she was educated. This early work marks her burgeoning opposition towards (what at this stage, she refers to as) 'theoretical authority'. As we will see, the young Beauvoir's criticisms of theoretical authority correspond to her mature criticisms of patriarchal authority. This short essay also may be seen to indicate young scholar's interest in dissolving boundaries between the disciplines of philosophy, science and literature.⁹

⁹ Claude Bernard's *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* (first published in 1865) remains a well-known text in scientific circles, namely as Bernard is considered responsible for identifying the notion of homeostasis. Bernard's text has been re-appropriated from this scientific context and used within a literary-philosophical context most notably, by Emile Zola and much later, by Paul Hirst. Between the years of 1878 and 1880, Emile Zola wrote "The Experimental Novel". Here, Zola explicitly drew from Bernard's text, arguing that the literary author should observe an experimental method when writing the novel. Paul Q. Hirst's *Durkheim, Bernard and Epistemology* was published in 1975. In this text, Hirst examines the relation Bernard-Durkheim, despite there being no "manifest historical links between the two thinkers". With innovation and originality, Hirst forges and explores this connection.

Beauvoir's earliest complete work of fiction, an ensemble of short stories entitled *When Things of the Spirit Come First* (1937) details the influence of patriarchal religious authority within the lives of young women.¹⁰ Much later in her life, *The Woman Destroyed* (1967), explores the devastating hold women's ordained social roles have in the lives of maturing women. Most obviously, her best-known work, *The Second Sex* (1949), is a pioneering account of the oppression of women. In this work, distinctions between genre and discipline are overcome in two ways. Firstly, she submits philosophical, literary, scientific, sociological, and religious authority to experimental literary-philosophical approach that shows up the complicity of these disciplines in gender oppression. Secondly, particularly in latter half (the study of "Situation"), *The Second Sex* deploys literary narrativisation in a non-fictional register as crucial means for illuminating oppression. Nancy Bauer's claim that her work "tethers" her philosophy to the everyday is a highly successful account of the reasons why her life, fiction, autobiography, political interests and philosophy interrelate in the way they do, and important to the approach adopted in this thesis.¹¹ Outside of any disciplinary classification, then, she believed that through rendering the operation of oppression visible, she could assist others to understand their lived experience and ultimately to access their own freedom.¹²

So while this thesis departs from and draws on philosophically-sensitive reappraisals of her work, it does not set out to argue, against her own statements, that she is in fact a philosopher. Her repeated disavowals of the term indicate that she saw no immediate value in such an appellation, and this is consistent with her approach as a whole. Disciplinary inclusion or exclusion is of final irrelevance when appraising an *oeuvre* that self-consciously straddles disciplines and genres, and makes this straddling a methodological credo. Answering the question "Is Beauvoir a philosopher?" in the affirmative would only render her work more intelligible for those who would accept the disciplinary unity of philosophy itself. As we will see, she repeatedly undermines

¹⁰ *When Things of the Spirit Come First* was written in 1937, but was originally rejected for publication and finally was published in 1979. The dates I have included for the texts in the same paragraph indicate the year it was written, for the purposes of detailing it in terms of the chronology of Beauvoir's life.

¹¹ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophy and Feminism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) 14-16, 40-60.

Bauer's argument in this regard will be treated in Chapter 3 in approaching Beauvoir's narrative account of women's situation. Bauer explains: "Beauvoir's model for philosophizing about sex difference serves the interests of third-wave feminists insofar as she insists on the rock-bottom importance of the expression of particular voices. And from the point of view of philosophy, her model offers a way to tether one's thought to its motivating origins—to keep it from straying away from its own interests." See Nancy Bauer "Beauvoir's First Philosophy, The Second Sex, and the Third Wave" in *Labyrinth*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter 1999.

¹² In Karen Vintges' 1996 book *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir*, Vintges contends Beauvoir's ethics centres on a rejection of oppression.

the self-identity of philosophical writing by playing the philosophical canon off against itself, and off against its others. Rather than decide for or against her philosophical value, this thesis instead sets out to answer the question: What approaches does she take, and what experimental strategies does she use, in repurposing textual authority (philosophy included) in order to make gender oppression visible, and to make visible the complicity of such authority in that oppression?

Her early writing on Bernard's scientific approach is key to answering this question. The first chapter of the thesis centres on a reading of her 1924 essay on the philosopher of science, Claude Bernard.¹³ In this early work – even juvenilia – we find a binary valorisation that can be viewed as the foundation for her mature literary-philosophical approach. In this essay, she is concerned to criticise the abstractions of “theory” and illegitimate “theoretical authority” *via* Bernard's “experimental method.” I then trace the development and maturation of these themes into her reflections on her literary-philosophical approach in the 1946 essay, “Literature and Metaphysics.”¹⁴ In this lecture, she outlines a critique of “systematic” philosophy on the grounds of its atemporality and lack of relation with “concrete reality.” She outlines an approach for writing metaphysical fiction (as a “process of discovery”) traceable to her early writing on Bernard's scientific approach. She claims that this metaphysical fiction enables a process of discovery for reader and author alike, a process that honours both reader and author's “freedom”. I then examine the idea that for Beauvoir, metaphysical fiction involves a process of discovery, through an exploration into the ensemble of short stories entitled *When Things of the Spirit Come First*.¹⁵ In these stories, she can be seen to use her experimental literary-philosophical approach to illuminate her own lived experience, as well as the lived experience of others.

Chapter two of this thesis examines the way the early valorisation sketched in “Analysis” operates in *The Second Sex*.¹⁶ The Introduction to *The Second Sex* is itself a complex and highly contested text in feminist theory (both historical and contemporary). I suggest that reading it through the lens of her early critique of theoretical authority clarifies its scope and purpose, and by extension sheds new light on *The Second Sex* as a

¹³ Simone de Beauvoir “Analysis of Claude Bernard's Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine [1924]” trans. Marybeth Timmermann and edit. Margaret A. Simons in *Philosophical Writings* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics” in *Philosophical Writings* edit. Margaret A. Simons, trans. Marybeth Timmermann (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2004) 261-278.

¹⁵ Simone de Beauvoir *When Things of the Spirit Come First: Five Early Tales* trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Knopf, 1983).

¹⁶ Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London, Random House, 2009). I understand that there has been some controversy regarding the quality of this particular translation. I nevertheless deemed it better to work with than H.M. Parshley's translation, given the fact that Parshley excised large portions of Beauvoir's text in his translation.

whole. Beauvoir's earlier critique of "theoretical" authority is now deployed as a critique of specifically *patriarchal* authority. The Introduction thus marks her intention to critique patriarchal attempts to fix an immutable "feminine essence" by "experimental" attention to the lived experience of women. *The Second Sex* deploys experimental literary-philosophical strategies to render the operation of oppression visible. After working through her knotty and programmatic Introduction, we will provide a concrete example of her literary-philosophical experimentation from the body of *The Second Sex*: the critique of "mythic" (literary and cultural) forms of patriarchal authority. Looking closely at her study of oppressive myths of femininity allows us to isolate particular literary-philosophical approaches at work, namely "reintroduction" and "proliferation," both traceable to her early celebration of Bernard's experimental strategies.¹⁷ Following the work of Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, I argue that she critically reintroduces Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic in order to articulate the claim that women are figured as the "Absolute other" with no recourse to reciprocity.¹⁸

In the third and final chapter of this thesis I examine her account of women's lived experience in her study of women's situation. I focus my study on the chapter "Situation", which is from the second volume of *The Second Sex*, entitled "Lived Experience".¹⁹ For Beauvoir, situation is the term that describes how facticity and freedom interrelate for a female subject. Here I draw a comparison between Beauvoir and Sartre's presentation of facticity. I contend that she critically reintroduces Sartre's notion of facticity, stressing the role facticity plays in women's lives as well as illuminating the sexism of Sartre's account.

¹⁷ Michele Le Doeuff identified elements of Beauvoir's philosophical originality with precision in her nuanced reading of Beauvoir in the 1991 text *Hipparchia's Choice*. In this section I mobilise Le Doeuff's idea of "Reintroduction" to advance the thesis that Beauvoir simultaneously deploys and undermines the material of her philosophical colleagues. Michele Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, etc.*, trans. Trista Selous (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) 106-108.

¹⁸ Eva Lundgren-Gothlin *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's "Second Sex"* (London, Athlone, 1996) 121-139.

¹⁹ Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London, Random House, 2009) 17.

Chapter One

Theoretical Authority and Experimental Approach

In this chapter I draw thematic connections between Beauvoir's early essay "Analysis of Claude Bernard's *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*" and the introduction to *The Second Sex*. Margaret Simons dates "Analysis" to December 1924, when Beauvoir was sixteen years of age.²⁰ "Analysis" is thus juvenilia. The text is largely exegetical, at times consisting entirely of passages directly transcribed from Bernard, and is only perhaps a thousand words overall. Nevertheless, she demonstrates a distinct enthusiasm for particular elements of Bernard's arguments. Most importantly for this thesis, "Analysis" instates a valorisation of "experience" over and against the abstractions of the "theoretical" that will be further explored in "Literature and Metaphysics" and continued into the existentialist language of *The Second Sex*. "Analysis" thus helps to establish the continuity of her philosophical preoccupations *prior* to the existentialist vocabulary of her mature work. While philosophy as such is a marginal presence in "Analysis," her early preoccupations with "theoretical" authority and "experience" are philosophical insofar as we find that they shape the substantive content and formal approach of her mature work. As such, beginning from "Analysis" opens the possibility, pursued in Chapters 2 and 3, of acknowledging the methodological ingenuity of *The Second Sex*.

In "Analysis," she follows Bernard's characterization and criticism of a "theoretical" approach in science (and the "theoretical authority" that is its corollary), reiterating Bernard's desire to "abolish all philosophical and theological yoke."²¹ As we will see, she shares Bernard's criticisms of theoretical bias toward already existing explanations for newly discovered phenomena, as well as his suspicions regarding excessive systematization. These critical themes are carried into her mature critique of patriarchal authority. Her early castigation of theoretical authority in "Analysis" remains legible in her critical work on the pernicious patriarchal "quest" for an "essence" of woman in *The Second Sex*.

Over against the "theoretical," she professes her preference for Bernard's "experimental approach." For Beauvoir, the experimental approach avoids the pitfalls of bias and systematicity, specifically by prioritising doubt – not only of received theoretical authority, but doubt regarding one's own theoretical

²⁰ See Margaret A. Simons, *Philosophical Writings* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 15-22. Bernard's *Introduction* was a staple text in French schools at the time, and so the fact of Beauvoir's writing an essay on Bernard is in itself not unusual. Ursula Tidd provides a good summary of Beauvoir's philosophical education in *Simone de Beauvoir*, 2009, 48-49.

²¹ Beauvoir "Analysis", 14.

inheritance and immediate conclusions. As a result of the methodological inscription of doubt, she ascribes to Bernard's approach the ability to render truths "visible," even claiming that this experimental approach can produce (not merely reveal) truths.²² As such, her interest in an "experimental" approach draws attention to the ingenuity of *The Second Sex*: both the young and mature Beauvoir articulate an interest in pursuing more experimental strategies of uncovering (rendering "visible") social experience. In this thesis we will see her attachment to experimentation result ultimately in the concept and practice of "Situation." Situational analysis marks for Beauvoir a position that is not burdened by what she understands by the "philosophical," an understanding strikingly similar to her early Bernardian criticisms of the "theoretical." Situational analysis, however, does not disregard or reduce the "theoretical" entirely to the experiential. As we will see, its aim is to account for the pernicious impact of "theoretical" positions on lived experience itself.

This chapter begins by working through her conceptions of "essence" and "existence" (section 1.1). Although this takes us immediately beyond "Analysis," some understanding of her later existentialist language is required in order to elucidate the similar conceptual and value structures operating in the early piece on Bernard. We then examine her endorsement of Bernard's critique of the theoretical (the correlative term for "essence") in "Analysis" (1.2). Then, we look at the implications of her early understanding of the implications of an "experimental approach" in relation to *The Second Sex* (1.3). In 1.4 we look at her 1946 lecture (and later, essay) "Literature and Metaphysics" where she outlines an experimental approach to writing fiction. Section 1.5 briefly considers her first complete body of fiction, the collection of short stories *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, as an early application of her literary-philosophical approach.

²² Aside from Margaret A. Simons and Helene N. Peters' Introduction to "Analysis," there appears to be no work done on Bernard's influence on Beauvoir at present. Simone de Beauvoir, "Analysis of Claude-Bernard's Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine," *Philosophical Writings*, eds. Margaret A. Simons with Marybeth Timmermann and Mary Beth Mader (University of Illinois Press, 2004), 13-30.

1.1. Existence and Essence

Beauvoir does not define the terms “existence,” “essence” or “existentialism” very clearly in her work. Following the Second World War, the term was used by third parties to describe both Beauvoir and Sartre’s work. Eventually, they felt compelled to embrace the term, and subsequently to explain and define it.²³ The definitions both offered are however somewhat obscure. In his 1946 lecture “Existentialism Is A Humanism,” Sartre made the claim that it did not matter to existentialists whether God existed or not; perhaps odd given the atheism both Sartre and Beauvoir otherwise decreed central to their philosophical position.²⁴ Nonetheless, the lecture is an important point of contrast in understanding what “existence” meant for Beauvoir. In this lecture, Sartre defines existentialism as “a doctrine of action” and explains that:

the fundamental meaning [of existentialist humanism] is this: Man is all the time outside of himself: it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist; and, on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist.²⁵

For Sartre, existence implies “projecting” and “losing oneself beyond himself.” We will later see that this “projecting” is synonymous with “transcendence” in Sartre’s (and also Beauvoir’s) vocabulary. According to Sartre’s formulation in this lecture, it is in transcending oneself that one is “able to exist” – to exist properly, to be free. Sartre’s philosophical subject here is tacitly male (as is also evidenced by his usage of male pronouns). When we take into account that Beauvoir’s philosophical subject in *The Second Sex* is a woman, as well as the fact that her thematic is the elucidation of the operation of women’s oppression, we start to see how Sartre’s conception of “existence” is problematic within her project.

If we look to Beauvoir’s early work, such as *Ethics of Ambiguity*, we find her instate a distinction between existence (as transcendence and freedom) and “being”:

... man’s project toward freedom is embodied for him in definite acts of behaviour. To will freedom and to will to disclose being are one and the same choice; hence, freedom takes a positive and constructive step which causes being to pass to existence in a movement which

²³ In Beauvoir’s autobiography *Force of Circumstance*, she recalls that Sartre explained “My philosophy is a philosophy of existence. I do not even know what Existentialism is.” Beauvoir herself reflected “I shared his irritation. I had written my novel [*She Came to Stay*] before I had even encountered the term Existentialist. My inspiration had come from my own experience, not from a system. But our protests were in vain. In the end we took the epithet that everyone used for us and used it for our own purpose.” Simone de Beauvoir *Force of Circumstance*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper Colophon, 1977), 37-56.

²⁴ Jean Paul Sartre *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Trans. Carol Macomber. New Haven: Yale University Press, (2007) 27-30, 20, 53-4. However in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre uses the term ‘atheism’ in a unique way. Indeed, Sartre does make the remark that a religious existentialism can exist. This is explored in Glenn Braddock’s essay “Sartre on Atheism, Freedom, and Morality in *The Humanism of Existentialism*” in Christine Daigle’s *Existentialist Thinkers and Ethics*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006.

²⁵ Jean Paul Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism” in *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings* (London Routledge 2001) 45.

is constantly surpassed.²⁶ Science, technics, art, and philosophy are indefinite conquests of existence over being; it is by assuming themselves as such that they take on their genuine aspect;²⁷

“Being” is that which is overcome by “existence” in our decision to “will freedom.” I want to draw our attention to two things in this passage. Firstly, willing freedom and disclosing being are here “one and the same choice.” In both “Analysis” and *The Second Sex*, she links truth to a process of discovery that, following the language of “Analysis,” we will term “experimental.” *The Second Sex*, from this perspective, wills freedom for Beauvoir and for her (female) readers by disclosing the patriarchal oppression that systematically undermines that freedom. Secondly, it is important to note that she does not continue to deploy the term “being” in this way throughout her mature project. However, we can perhaps find an analogous distinction operative in *The Second Sex*, specifically through her use of the terms “experience” and “existence.” In her studies of oppression, the term “experience” does the work of “being” in the passage above. A key section in the latter half of *The Second Sex* is titled “Lived Experience.” In this section, she focuses precisely on the way women’s freedom is frustrated. I think this titling is consistent with the passage from *Ethics of Ambiguity* above (it is *not* a study of “Lived Existence,” which is a free activity systematically denied or minimised for women). In this instance, “experience” is used carefully in lieu of “existence,” in order to avoid conception of existence as freedom.

For Beauvoir, experience refers to *how* an individual lives in the world. As Ursula Tidd defines it, experience is their “lived experience of consciousness in the world with other people.”²⁸ Thus, lived experience is to be conscious, to live in relation to other people, and to be situated (which, as we will discover later in Chapter 3 means that the subject is engaged by elements of facticity and freedom). She is committed

²⁶ Beauvoir uses the term “disclose” here, which indicates the influence of Martin Heidegger’s thought. Heidegger’s “disclosure” (Erschlossenheit). This thesis explores Beauvoir’s mature experimental approach through a set of orientations established in her early essay “Analysis”. There is insufficient scope in this project to explore the phenomenological character of Beauvoir’s experimental approach, or “method” as we may characterise it in relation to the tradition of phenomenology. Eva Gothlin situates Beauvoir’s thought in Heidegger’s in her essay “Reading Simone de Beauvoir with Martin Heidegger” in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir* edited by Claudia Card, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 45-65.

²⁷ Beauvoir *Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1948) 7.

²⁸ In her 2009 biography on Beauvoir, Ursula Tidd explains that existentialist phenomenology “Centred on the ‘existing individual’ whose ‘existence precedes essence’...” and “focused on the lived experience of consciousness in the world with other people.” Tidd *Simone de Beauvoir* 74-75.

In Walter Kaufman’s 1956 anthology, Kaufman remarks existentialism is “not a philosophy but a label for a set of widely different revolts against traditional philosophy” and that it is “not a school of thought nor reducible to any set of tenets” Kaufman *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* 11. “Existentialism is a Humanism” in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* edit. Walter Kaufman (New York: Meridian Books, 1956). Thanks to Jonathon Webber for directing me to this particular anthology.

to the exploration of lived experience, including – if not with a focus on – experience that does not technically qualify as “existence.” This is not to say that oppression was not a thematic in Sartre’s own work.²⁹ I merely intend, at this early juncture, to signal the distinctness of her philosophical work in its emphasis on that which hampers or undermines freedom. She describes and explores lived experience – in particular, the lived experience of oppressed people – to enable, or assist, oppressed subjects to access their own freedom (with the goal of enabling them one day to ‘exist’). She believed that through rendering the operation of oppression visible and lucid, she could assist others to understand their lived experience and ultimately to access their own freedom.³⁰ The link between freedom and the disclosure of lived experience indicated in *Ethics of Ambiguity* is a constant feature of her work. Beauvoir was committed to presenting and archiving lived experience in the name of freedom – her own, her mother’s life and death, the final chapters of Sartre’s life, the oppression of the ageing and of course the oppression of women.³¹

Beauvoir does not straightforwardly define essence. In the Introduction to *The Second Sex*, essence seems to refer to the possibility that the identity of a given set of things (such as a women) is definable in advance of and in abstraction from any empirical manifestation or alteration of such things. She deploys the terms “essence” disapprovingly, raising Plato and Aquinas’ conceptions of essence only as she abandons them:

Is [femininity] enshrined in a Platonic heaven? Although some women zealously strive to embody it, the model has never been patented.³²

Most importantly these essences operative normatively (“women zealously strive to embody it”) at the same time as they ultimately remain undefined (“the model has never been patented”). The lack of distinctness in this purported essential reality frustrates women’s efforts to satisfy its normative criteria. She also deserts St. Thomas Aquinas’ essentialism. Beauvoir would have been exposed to Aquinas’ Catholic doctrine at high school. In her autobiographies, she makes her disdain for Aquinas apparent. Her reference here at this juncture is loaded, in particular given the interrelation between Catholicism and sexism that emerges later at later junctures of *The Second Sex*:

²⁹ See Sartre’s text *The Anti-Semite and The Jew*, Sartre, Jean-Paul. *The Anti-Semite and the Jew*. New York: Schocken, 1948.

³⁰ In Karen Vintges’ 1996 book *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir*, Vintges contends Beauvoir’s ethics centres on a rejection of oppression.

³¹ *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*. Translated by Patrick O’Brian. New York: Knopf, 1984.

³² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 3.

In Saint Thomas's time it [femininity] was an essence defined with as much certainty as the sedative quality of a poppy.³³

Again, essence is attacked on the basis of its vagueness. Despite being poorly defined, femininity can nevertheless operate seductively, like an opiate. In an interview with Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler (although discussing the work of Luce Irigaray), provides a useful definition of "essence" that operates in the history of feminist philosophy:

the notion of essence is used in the history of philosophy is that if something is essential, it is that without which we cannot do - it is essential, it is a precondition, it's a necessary precondition, that without which one cannot move³⁴

The final clause here - "that without which one cannot move" - will reappear in the young Beauvoir's presentation of the theoretical pole in "Analysis". According to Butler, one takes the "essence" of a subject matter or domain as the precondition of one's examination of that subject matter or domain. On this model, one cannot move forward in one's treatment or observation of a given domain without first "fixing" its definition. However, if one cannot move forward without this originary definitional gesture, one cannot really move forward *with* it: as we will see, the young Beauvoir will contend that reliance on pre-existing theoretical authority blinds one to that which emerges in the "real" under consideration. As theoretical authority blinds the scientist in "Analysis," "essence" blinds experts to existence.

Both Beauvoir and Sartre agreed that there is no fixed human character. In "Existentialism Is A Humanism," Sartre explains that "it is impossible to find in each and every man a universal essence that can be called human nature."³⁵ Her belief that human nature has no fixed characteristics is central to her refutation of the possibility that *women* have an eternal feminine, maternal instinct, or that "woman" itself as a concept refers to any immutable set of properties. Jonathon Webber contends that the 'essence' in the famous existentialist maxim (existence precedes essence) refers to Aristotelian essences:

Aristotle used this term to refer to the unifying aspect of a thing that explains its organisation... [this type of essence] explains the organisation of the thing by explaining why it does what it does. A house is essentially a shelter for living in, which is why it has walls and

³³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 3.

³⁴ Judith Butler in "The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell," *Diacritics* 28 (1998): 22.

³⁵ Sartre *Existentialism is a Humanism* 11.

a roof that fit together to keep the wind and rain out. A human being is essentially a rational animal, which is why humans plan their activities and organise their societies.³⁶

In her depiction of patriarchal society, she will insist that men have planned and organised society to maintain their own powerful status. However, she certainly does not attribute this behaviour to their possession of an innate essence, such as a natural superiority, or natural drive for power. Rather, she will claim that in planning and organising patriarchal society, and for the purposes of maintaining patriarchal society, men have generated essentialist claims about women. Indeed, in her hands, the maxim implies the operation of phallogocentric construction. Existence precedes essence insofar as men have achieved “existence,” that is, he has projected and moved beyond himself through projects that have entailed the articulation of female “essences.”

Importantly, for Beauvoir, that existence precedes essence does not discount the importance of essences. She conducts an ongoing investigation of the role “essences” play in a person’s lived experience. In the second volume of *The Second Sex*, “Lived Experience”, studies how women exist amongst patriarchal codes and values. As Ursula Tidd explains, “According to its Kierkegaardian roots, [Beauvoir’s] task was to develop a concrete understanding of the abstract.”³⁷ In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard defines the existentialist task as follows:

Instead of having the task of understanding the concrete abstractly, as abstract thinking has, the subjective thinker has the opposite task of understanding the abstract concretely... the subjective thinker understands the abstract concept to be the concrete human being, to be this individual existing human being....³⁸

As we will see, the value of our early examination of “Analysis” enables us to make the important clarification within her work on women: she does not adhere to a strict conception of essence; all manner of theoretical/religious/philosophical authority is treated similarly in her thought.

We can further our understanding of Beauvoir’s sense of essence via a comparison with a *phenomenological* sense of essence. Sartre identified his philosophy as a “special phenomenological method” and

³⁶ Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism*, 4.

³⁷ Tidd, *Simone de Beauvoir* (2009), 75. In this original passage, Tidd uses the term ‘existentialism’. I’ve replaced the term with “Beauvoir”, to provide the necessary specificity to the quote, while it is taken out of context.

³⁸ Søren Kierkegaard *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments I* 352. The citation acknowledges Kierkegaard as the author, but not necessarily as wholly endorsing the sentiment. Kierkegaard wrote this text under the pseudonym Climacus and it is problematic to presume that the sentiment is wholly consistent with his own beliefs and/or position, particularly as he disavows sentiment at the conclusion of the text.

“existential psychoanalysis”. Both Sartre and Beauvoir’s work has at times been identified as “existential phenomenology”.³⁹ Mark A. Wrathall provides a useful list of examples of existential phenomenologies:

...Existential phenomenologies have included descriptions of the meaning of being (Heidegger), the role of the lived-body in perception (Merleau-Ponty), and skillful coping (Hubert Dreyfus). One can also see Arendt's account of the public domain, Sartre's account of bad faith and our concrete relations with others, de Beauvoir's descriptions of sex and aging, Levinas's reflections on our encounter with the other, and Marion's work on the “saturated phenomenon” of divine transcendence, as works in existential phenomenology.⁴⁰

It might be useful for us to consider that existential phenomenology can be characterised as a transition away from an essentialist enquiry that instead focuses on description of an experience. Beauvoir’s sense of essence and a phenomenological sense of essence are unified, in that they are distinct from an essentialist enquiry. As we saw, Beauvoir conceived of “essentialist enquiry” as the pursuit of a set of specific characteristics that could be used to define that specific thing or object. Stephen Crowell explains in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, Husserl’s phenomenology is an *eidetic* inquiry:

... Phenomenology is an eidetic and not a factual inquiry; it is not concerned to describe all the properties of some particular thing but to uncover what belongs to it essentially as a thing of that kind.⁴¹

Indeed, the phenomenological conception of essence *and* Beauvoir’s sense of essence both reject the possibility that a thing has properties that can be described. However, Crowell states that (although a thing does not have properties that can be described), it can nevertheless be construed as “a thing of that kind”. Husserl believed that the object gives its object “in person”, which means that an object’s nature can be identified, through an examination of *how* it is perceived.

Phenomenological descriptions neither employ nor provide causal laws that explain the existence of things; instead, they mark those distinctions - such as those between memory and perception, or between depictions and signs - that allow us to understand what it is to be a thing of this or that sort.⁴²

³⁹ Eva Gothlin “Simone de Beauvoir’s Existential Phenomenology and Philosophy of History in *The Second Sex*” in *Contributions to Phenomenology* v43, Springer Netherlands, 41-51.

⁴⁰ Mark A. Wrathall in “Existential Phenomenology” in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell) edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 31.

⁴¹ Stephen Crowell “Husserlian Phenomenology” in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell) edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 10.

⁴² Stephen Crowell “Husserlian Phenomenology” in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell) edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 10.

Phenomenologists believe that the act of perceiving the object (for example), is how the object can be understood. The focus is redirected unto the “individual’s experience of entities”:

...Phenomenology studies some concrete act of perception only as an example for uncovering what belongs necessarily to perception as such ... phenomenology is a *reflective* inquiry; it is not concerned directly with entities, as are the natural sciences, but with our *experience* of entities. It is committed to the view that descriptive clarification of the essential conditions for being X cannot be achieved by *abstracting* from our experience of X but only by attending to how X is *given in* that experience. Of the four features just mentioned, this reflective character is most distinctive of phenomenology, and richest in implications. For it challenges entrenched philosophical theories about “mind” and “world” and demands that we attend to how “the things themselves,” as Husserl put it, show themselves.⁴³

Husserlian phenomenology has it that the essential conditions for being X can, in fact, be given (but through “attending to how X is given in that experience”). In *The Second Sex*, she examines how women’s lived experience relates to the essentialist conceptions of femininity. Indeed, in the latter half of *The Second Sex*, “Lived Experience”, she prioritises the experiential over the essential: she examines what it is to live amongst essentialist conceptions of woman. Her approach at least partially implies that the experience of being woman are attributable to these essentialist conceptions. Beauvoir does not believe that woman can be reduced to a set of parts or discrete characteristics. However, while considering essentialist conceptions or definitions of woman erroneous, she does not deny that they exist. In fact, she credits essentialist conceptions of woman a role of great influence in woman’s lived experience. Merleau-Ponty’s formulation that “phenomenology... puts essences back into existence” enables us to clarify the specific nature of Beauvoir’s existential phenomenology.⁴⁴

“phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity’ [i.e., their actual, definite ways of being]”⁴⁵

The bedrock claim of *The Second Sex* is that that essentialist conceptions of woman are significant factors in women’s lived experience, and frustrate their abilities to access ‘existence’ (as transcendence) proper. That is,

⁴³ Stephen Crowell “Husserlian Phenomenology” in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell) edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 10-11.

⁴⁴ In *The Bonds of Freedom* Kristana Arp looks at the way Beauvoir’s ideas are rooted in the phenomenological tradition. In particular, Arp examines Merleau-Ponty’s influence on Beauvoir. Arp provides: “Merleau-Ponty also exerted a significant influence on Beauvoir. Beauvoir wrote a review of his *Phenomenology of Perception* for the fledgling issue of *Les Temps Modernes* in October 1945. In it she endorsed his views about the central role of the body in perception, while acknowledging the way that his approach diverges from Sartre.” Kristana Arp *The Bonds of Freedom* (Illinois, Carus Publishing Company, 2001) 11.

⁴⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty The preface to *The Phenomenology of Perception*, in *the Continental Philosophy Reader*, edit. Richard Kearney and Mara Rainwater (New York: Routledge, 1996) 79.

while ‘woman’ is not reducible to an essentialist framework, Beauvoir believes that essentialist conceptions of women not only exist, but are pernicious and destructive facets of their experience.

1.2 Beauvoir’s presentation of the “theoretical” in “Analysis”

Essence and existence are not terms used in “Analysis.” However, I contend that in “Analysis,” Beauvoir deploys criticisms of a “theoretical” domain (and scientific practice undertaken in a “theoretical” manner) that are echoed in her later treatment of “essence” in *The Second Sex*. The young student shows a distinct enthusiasm for Bernard’s experimental approach that I contend underpins her later formal approach and experimental strategies. As we looked at earlier, “existence” is an irrelevant term within the purposes and focus of *The Second Sex*. In “Analysis”, we find the young Beauvoir valorise a critical approach that challenges and unfixes the theoretical (later, the “essential”) pole. As will see throughout this thesis, she ultimately ascribes experimental literary-philosophical production the ability to engender the freedom of author and reader alike by revealing the operations of oppressions. In other words, she ascribes literary-production the ability to assist author and reader to “exist,” according to the conception of existence-as-freedom we encountered in *Ethics of Ambiguity*.

In “Analysis” the young Beauvoir follows Bernard in professing distrust for all theoretical authority:

Just as [Bernard] rejects any scientific authority as pure superstition, the experimenter also rejects every philosophical and theological yoke. Only under these conditions can science make real and certain progress without engaging itself down false paths.⁴⁶

She follows Bernard in advocating the total abolition of “every philosophical and theological yoke.”⁴⁷ We may question the possibility of an experimenter rejecting *all* philosophical and theological presuppositions. Indeed, to characterise “any scientific authority as pure superstition” and to advocate instead for its full “rejection” seems ambitious (and rather drastic, perhaps).⁴⁸ However, there are obvious affinities between her early (enthusiastic) rejection of epistemic authority and both canonical modern philosophy as well as critical feminist literary practices that precede *The Second Sex*. Nancy Bauer argues that in *The Second Sex* her work bears myriad parallels to Descartes’ *Meditations*, specifically in the will to demolish or eradicate all existing

⁴⁶ Beauvoir, “Analysis”, 26-27.

⁴⁷ Beauvoir, “Analysis”, 27.

⁴⁸ Beauvoir, “Analysis”, 26.

philosophical preconceptions.⁴⁹ Bauer presents a convincing argument for the necessity to demolish philosophical preconceptions in order to institute the field of feminist philosophy.⁵⁰

The Second Sex does not reject all philosophical and theological principles (it is hard to imagine a text successfully rejecting *everything*). Her aims are nonetheless certainly ambitious in scope: her goal in *The Second Sex* is to demonstrate the world she knows is patriarchal. For Beauvoir, patriarchy means a world that is organised, controlled and designed by men: legislatively, “mythically” and intellectually.⁵¹ In order to evidence this claim, she consults a vast range of texts from a vast number of different disciplines and genres. On one hand, it is possible to suggest that she *does* in fact reject all philosophical and theological claims *about* women. As we will see in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3, she exposes the way that philosophical and theological *principles* support and maintain the patriarchal status quo, operating as or supporting essentialist definitions of women. On the other hand, it can be argued that she develops her own philosophical claims about what it is to be a woman. This is convincingly argued in Nancy Bauer’s unique and innovative 2001 text *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy and Feminism*.

In “Analysis,” Beauvoir maintains a criticism of experimenters who translate their own experiences and dress them up as absolute: “The greatest error of the experimenter would be to take truths that are merely relative as absolutes.”⁵² In “Analysis,” she expresses skepticism regarding absolute claims, she seeks to relativize them – or assumes that they can be relativized. The concept of the “absolute” remains a target in her mature thought.⁵³ In the 1946 lecture “Literature and Metaphysics,” she criticizes moments where the theoretician presents experience ossified as theory, without acknowledging their role or presence in the

⁴⁹ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 46-77.

⁵⁰ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 40.

⁵¹ Beauvoir’s argument is global in scope. We often find in technical definitions of patriarchy the idea that a ‘society’ is legislatively controlled by men. I’ve deployed the term ‘world’ in lieu of ‘society’ and I’ve added ‘mythically’ and ‘intellectually’ to ‘legislatively’.

⁵² Beauvoir, “Analysis”, 27.

⁵³ To a large extent, the ‘absolute’ remains a target in her thought as evidenced in the following statements from *Ethics of Ambiguity*:

“... there exists no absolute value before the passion of man, outside of it, in relation to which one might distinguish the useless from the useful... the genuine man will not agree to recognize any foreign absolute... man is abandoned on the earth, because his acts are definitive, absolute engagements... The child’s situation is characterized by his finding himself cast into a universe which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit.” Beauvoir *Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1948) 17.

However, at times, Beauvoir construes freedom as an absolute value. For example, in the conclusion of *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir declares “... we are absolutely free today if we choose to will our existence in its finiteness, a finiteness which is open on the infinite.”

process of theoretical development.⁵⁴ This theme is also expressed in “Analysis” as an opposition to systematicity: she writes “One also appreciates this breadth of ideas that rejects biases and systems, and this consciousness that wants to base everything on facts...”⁵⁵ The “facts” here are those that are yielded in a genuinely experimental approach, which we will discuss under 1.3 immediately below. Here however we should note two things. Firstly, her criticisms of the systematizer and systematicity also endure in her mature work. Later in life the mature thinker will define philosophy as it is traditionally practiced precisely as “system,” and it is perhaps on the grounds of this definition that she will insistently refuse to be classified as a “philosopher.”⁵⁶ Systematicity in “Analysis” essay is linked to a “fixity” and lack of auto-critical awareness that undermines the potential discovery of new knowledge. As such, the young student describes a practice whereby experimenters operating under unquestioned theoretical authority “fix” theory at one stationary starting point. She proposes the alternative “experimental” approach that involves doubting and modifying the starting point, specifically arguing that the experimental approach involves the multiplication of the one starting point into many. Secondly, this reference to “multiplication” is already present in the fragment in question (“one appreciates this breadth of ideas that rejects biases and systems...”). Certainly, *The Second Sex* can be characterised by its breadth of reference. As such, her mature literary-philosophical strategies for uncovering oppression – what we will identify in Chapter 2 as the proliferation and multiplication of perspectives, ideas and sources – can be seen as a life-long preoccupation.

At this early stage in her philosophical development, her thinking is organised by the articulation of two distinct domains: the abstract or “theoretical” realm (where theory and theoretical authority reside) and the “real” world (where authentically experimental results emerge).

Arbitrary distinctions between [Observation and Experimentation] have been established... But Claude Bernard shows by examples that this separation, which is so clear in theory, is difficult or

⁵⁴ Beauvoir, “Literature and Metaphysics”, 272. Karen Vintges’ *Philosophy as Passion* provides a number of reasons for Beauvoir’s rejection of moral abstract or universal moral principles.

⁵⁵ Beauvoir, “Analysis”, 27.

⁵⁶ In her memoir *Prime of Life* Beauvoir reflects “I went on reading Hegel, and was now beginning to understand him better. His amplitude of detail dazzled me and his system as a whole made me feel giddy. It was, indeed, tempting to abolish one’s own life in the perspective of Historical Necessity, with a detachment that also carried implications concerning one’s attitude to death. How ludicrous did this brief instance of time then appear, viewed against the world’s long history, and how small a speck was this individual, myself! ... this ‘flight into the Universal’ merely formed one further episode in my private development. I turned back to Kierkegaard, and began to read him with a passionate interest. The type of ‘truth’ that he postulated defied doubt no less triumphantly than Descartes’ use of ‘evidence.’ Neither History nor the Hegelian System could, any more than the Devil in person, upset the living certainty of ‘I am, I exist, here and now, I am myself.’” *Prime of Life*, intro. Toril Moi, trans. Peter Green (New York: Paragon, 1992), 272-73. Thank you to Rebecca Jeyes for directing me to this passage from *Prime of Life*.

impossible in practice... taken in this general sense, observation and experience are practically inseparable...⁵⁷

“The greatest scientific truths,” says Claude Bernard, “are rooted in details of experimental investigation, which form, as it were, the soil in which these truths develop.”⁵⁸

As we have seen, the “theoretical” for Beauvoir is inflexible or obstinate. It tends in some sense to preserve its form regardless of counter-evidence encountered in the “real.” She speaks of the “real” as the site of “temptations” for the “theoretical” approach intent only on its own undisturbed self-reproduction. For Beauvoir, the “real world” is a site from which new ideas and facts can emerge. She points to examples where the real world is able to trace the limits of the abstract. She remarks that distinctions can exist in theory (a difference can be “clear in theory”) that are nonetheless impossible to entertain as distinctions in the real world (are “difficult or impossible in practice”). She asserts a distinction (between theory and practice) where one pole of that distinction is privileged because it undoes the fixity of distinctions.

For the young student, the illegitimate privileging of the theoretical over and against the real is expressed in terms of an acceptance of “theoretical authority.” She has not yet, as she will as a mature scholar, in *The Second Sex*, identified the gendered structure of this acceptance as the *assumption* of a position of (patriarchal) authority. Nevertheless, at this early stage of her philosophical development, we start to see the conceptual groundwork for *The Second Sex* emerge in two key particulars: the will to illuminate the operative bias in dominant theoretical bodies; and an opposition to methodological practice that involves commencing at one starting point. The structure of the *Second Sex* involves “recommencing” the starting point multiple times (seeking to avoid one single point of departure and promulgating the single point of departure). Indeed, the critical strategies she deploys in *The Second Sex* do not involve her rejection, or rendering absent of these critical points. She acknowledges, or works through, these counterpoints, to establish her critical claims.

1.3. Experimental Approach in “Analysis”

Beauvoir’s proposed methodological antidote to the limitations she associates with the theoretical approach is characterised by doubt. Doubt puts existing theoretical authority into question, and allows access to truths otherwise obscured by that theory. It is doubt as a starting point for enquiry that allows the “real” world of the experiment to trouble the wilful serenity of theoretical authority. She professes that genuine experimentation has doubt as its point of departure:

⁵⁷ Beauvoir, “Analysis”, 24.

⁵⁸ Beauvoir, “Analysis”, 24.

here the starting point is always doubtful, and consequently reasoning guides us but does not impose its consequences upon us. If we discover a new fact, we must never reject it under the pretext that it contradicts an accepted theory. "Theories are but relative principles to which only a temporary value must be accorded."⁵⁹

She argues that the experimenter cannot cling to existing canons of reason. Doubt leads the experimenter to revise their starting point, and ultimately to modify it. In other words, doubt transforms the theoretically given starting point into a network of multiple beginnings (and it is precisely for this reason it is productive). Of particular interest is her extension of Bernard's natural-scientific approach to philosophy: "Claude Bernard then reviews the importance of philosophic doubt: the conclusion of our reasoning must always remain dubitable, he says, whenever the starting point is not an absolute truth."⁶⁰ This is certainly not to say that Bernard did not consider his own work as "philosophical" or that other readers of Bernard - such as Emile Zola and Paul Hirst - have not been astute to the philosophical and literary character of Bernard's text. This reading of philosophy through science (and vice-versa) is indicative of the neo-Kantian positivism of French philosophy in the 1920s. However, the desire to transpose Bernard's work outside the context of natural science is also suggested by her admiration for both the content and formal style of his prose:

with an admirable clarity, Claude Bernard defines the role of scientific geniuses, to whom he pays the highest homage without according any personal authority...⁶¹

there is really something very noble in this humility of the scientist...⁶²

the soundness and depth of Claude Bernard's theories [are self-evident and] eloquently [and do not warrant] any critique or praise.⁶³

Claude Bernard thoroughly develops this very fertile idea in pages so rich that they lend themselves more to an exposition than an analysis and in my opinion are the most interesting part of his interesting work... with an admirable clarity, Claude Bernard defines the role of scientific geniuses⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Beauvoir, "Analysis", 24. The quotation marks signal the fact that in the original paper, Beauvoir is (closely) paraphrasing Bernard's original *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*. Green translates this as "theories which are only relative principles to which we should assign but temporary value in the search for truth" Bernard, *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, 39.

⁶⁰ Beauvoir, "Analysis", 24.

⁶¹ Beauvoir, "Analysis", 24.

⁶² Beauvoir, "Analysis", 27.

⁶³ Beauvoir, "Analysis", 28.

⁶⁴ Beauvoir, "Analysis", 26.

To say that Bernard's work 'develops "fertile" ideas' is perhaps odd – she knows that it has already born fruit, so to speak, in the scientific domain. The claim that his writing is "fertile" in my reading tacitly expresses its as yet unrealised value for contexts *outside* of natural science. This expansion only becomes fully apparent in *Literature and Metaphysics*, where she explicitly aligns "theoretical authority" with a tacit Platonism in and outside of philosophy, and opposes to it a literary-philosophical approach.⁶⁵ That she is extending Bernard's approach beyond natural science and into philosophy (and doing so in a neo-positivist academic environment) is further suggested by her introduction of Kantian language. She describes the difference between "theoretical" and "real" as between "a priori" (knowledge with a non-experiential source) and "a posteriori" (knowledge traceable to experience). She suggests that "[Bernard's] method... transforms this a priori conception into an a posteriori interpretation founded on the study of the phenomena."⁶⁶ Maintaining an "a priori conception" is taken to be characteristic of "theory," which is transformed by "study of the phenomena" (a study opened by doubt).

It is, on one level, hard to take her position as a critique of existing natural science – such sciences are by nature empirical (a posteriori). Beauvoir however is, I think, targeting two related phenomena, which have been indicated above. Firstly, her comments speak to the potential to "reify" or render static existing empirical laws of nature, such that exceptions are overlooked. Secondly, as *Literature and Metaphysics* will make clear, she takes her distinction between theoretical/experimental in science to also function as a critique of what she terms "Platonic" tendencies in philosophy, such as rationalist or "a priori" modes of thought. We will deal with the limitations in her early paper in a moment, before moving onto the mature existentialist register.

Limitations of Beauvoir's position in "Analysis"

The young student argues that the development of knowledge is possible if the "theoretical" is altered in relation to or results ascertained through, or in, the "real." At a high level of abstraction, the "theoretical" is characterised by fixity and stasis while 'reality' is characterised by a processual movement: doubt and checking. This opposition will be traced into her mature critical project, specifically the investigation of the relation between theoretical authority and the lived experience of women. However, given her age at the time of writing, in "Analysis" these domains and their relations are not properly explained. As such, there is seemingly an ambiguity in her early opposition of theory and reality: on the one hand, theory is presented as fixed inflexibility; on the other, theory is *made* stationary by a failure to doubt theoretical authority. The possibility

⁶⁵ Beauvoir, "Literature and Metaphysics", 274.

⁶⁶ Beauvoir, "Analysis", 25.

of a “theoretical” body of knowledge that could not be fully characterised by fixity or stasis is implied, but not fully worked through. Indeed, some “theory” seems irreducible – natural science is a “theoretical” enterprise; the question is simply its degree of reflectivity. It is certainly hard to imagine a practicing scientist or philosopher of science *not* agreeing to some degree with Bernard’s account of experimentation. To this extent, the teenager may simply be pushing against an open door.

But her early paper can be rescued to some degree from the evidence of its naivety. Firstly, there is her concern (however tacit) to lift Bernard’s thought from a natural scientific to a literary and philosophical register. Secondly, the fact that scientific practitioners would deny any kind of slavish adherence to an extant body of theory does not guarantee that their practice actually is free of such adherence. An assertion of theoretical freedom is just an assertion. It must be born out in practice. Her mature writing puts experimental literary-philosophical strategies into practice in order to articulate a critical position (namely to gender theoretical authority). This is not to say that she achieves a theoretical freedom (whatever that could be). Her late work deploys unique literary-philosophical strategies to *uncover* the social power of theoretical authority, where - even especially where - those bearing and reproducing such power deny or are unaware of its real social function. This often takes the form of an anti-essentialism, which means that she eschews any ‘one’ definition or account of ‘woman’ and instead pursues the prospect of multiple sites of meaning accounting for an existential conception of woman.

1.4 Experimental Approach in “Literature and Metaphysics”

Beauvoir’s essay “Literature and Metaphysics” extends the set of valorisations we found in “Analysis.”⁶⁷ Scholars have treated the essay as a key explication of her literary-philosophical approach.⁶⁸ At this stage of her life she was writing prolifically. This writing focused primarily on the Hegelian problem of the other and the idea of moral responsibility. She had written *She Came To Stay* which had been met favourably by critics and public. The epigraph to *She Came To Stay* is taken from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, specifically Hegel’s

⁶⁷ The material was first delivered as a lecture, on December 11, 1945 under the title “The Novel and Metaphysics”. Beauvoir later adapted this lecture into an essay, publishing it under the title of “Literature and Metaphysics” in April 1946. Margaret Simons provides an excellent overview of the confusion surrounding the lecture in biographies of Beauvoir in the notes to the Introduction to “Literature and Metaphysics” See: Simone de Beauvoir *Philosophical Writings* edit. Margaret A. Simons (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004) 267.

⁶⁸ See Eleanore Holveck *Simone de Beauvoir’s Philosophy of Lived Experience* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002); Often the essay “Literature and Metaphysics” is connected chronologically to Beauvoir’s novel *She Came to Stay*, became the subject of Merleau-Ponty’s 1945 essay “*Metaphysics and the Novel*”.

study of Lordship and Bondage: “Each consciousness seeks the death of the other.” She had also written the philosophical dialogue *Phyrrhus and Cineas* in 1944, the novel *Blood of Others* (dealing with the themes of responsibility) a play *The Useless Mouths*.⁶⁹ She would soon begin *The Second Sex*.

Aside from the literary-philosophical approach explicated in “Literature and Metaphysics”, scholars also seek to isolate and decipher her methodological approach via her relationship to phenomenology (as Anne Van Leeuwen, Kristana Arp and Sara Heinämaa have done).⁷⁰ These works stress the concept of the situated subject in Beauvoir’s work. Kristana Arp, for example, argues that her concept of the situated subject is rooted in Husserl and Heidegger’s phenomenology. This thesis focuses on the concept of the Situation (and the situated subject) in the final chapter of the thesis.

In one significant passage of “Literature and Metaphysics”, Beauvoir describes the creation of the novel as an experimental literary operation, clearly drawing from Bernard’s *Introduction*. Beauvoir is explicit about the scientific model for her discussion of novelistic process:

Just as a scientific truth finds its worth in the totality of the experiments that found it and are summed up by it, so the work of art comprises the singular experiment of which it is the fruit.⁷¹

“Literature and Metaphysics” echoes “Analysis” in claiming that the work of art, like the scientific experiment, “comprises” “truths.” Beauvoir explains that the work of art is the result of and in some sense includes the temporal process of investigation that led to it, recalling her earlier claims that art reveals the truth of which it is productive. The work is constituted by the sequence of events that led to its creation, echoing Bernard’s claim that scientific truth is the result of the totality of the experimental process (and even perhaps echoing Bernard’s own metaphor of ground and fruit). Bernard’s presence is also traceable via Emile Zola’s influence on her thought. In 1880, Emile Zola had also made use of Bernard’s text extensively in *The Experimental Novel*, where he articulated his theory of literary naturalism.⁷² Beauvoir was certainly familiar with Zola’s work, a vast number of novels in which he put his theory of literary naturalism into practice.⁷³ Accordingly, this seminal

⁶⁹ Simons, *Philosophical Writings*, 263-264.

⁷⁰ Sara Heinämaa “Simone de Beauvoir’s phenomenology of sexual difference” in *Hypatia* 14 (4): 114-132 (1999); Kristana Arp *The Bonds of Freedom* (Illinois, Carus Publishing Company, 2001).

⁷¹ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 272.

⁷² Emile Zola, *The Experimental Novel: And Other Essays* Trans. Belle M. Sherman (New York: Haskell House, 1964).

⁷³ Beauvoir *The Second Sex*, 323, 625, 629, 630-1, 453-4. Zola wrote extensively on the Alfred Dreyfus case between 1894 and 1897 and has, at times, been construed as a pioneer of the sort of intellectual-political activism for which Sartre and Beauvoir became known for in the subsequent century. Ursula Tidd argues “Zola paved the way for subsequent twentieth-century intellectual activists such as Sartre and Beauvoir” (Tidd, *Simone de Beauvoir* 15). In addition, Zola’s novels were considered raunchy and

passage in “Literature and Metaphysics” may also mark traces of Zola’s ongoing influence over Beauvoir – further reinforcing the presence of Bernard’s thought in her project.

In “Literature and Metaphysics” it is claimed that the literary medium can exhibit truths about the world in a way pure metaphysics cannot. Thus the opposition between metaphysics and literary experimentation maps on to the earlier distinction between theory and the reality portrayed, or made visible, by experimental scientific strategies. Beauvoir applies Bernard’s description of the investigator in “Analysis” to the literary author, though without explicit reference to Bernard or Emile Zola. The literary author:

sees truths appear that were previously unknown to him, questions whose solutions he does not possess. He questions himself, takes sides, and runs risks; and, at the end of his creation, he will consider the work he has accomplished with astonishment.⁷⁴

In this short passage we can see Her reading of Bernard in “Analysis” repeated in all its essential particulars: the appearance of novel truths, organized around a visual metaphor (“sees truths”); self-questioning as a form of doubt and risk-taking; self-questioning as constitutive of the unique temporality of the experimental process (“he questions himself... and runs risks”); and finally the “astonishment” that marks both the novelty of the truth and the necessity of new, reflective methodological articulation in light of that astonishment. Tellingly, Beauvoir describes writing *The Second Sex* as the “sudden discovery” of “an aspect of the world that is staring you in the face and that you did not see.”⁷⁵

I will discuss the persistence of these elements in “Literature and Metaphysics” in a little more detail, before examining the way that it enables Beauvoir to make certain critical claims about the status of philosophical truth (as “static” and falsely “eternal”). In keeping with the model of a singular investigation, she explains that the literary author must relinquish their control over the writing process and embark on “the process of discovery.”⁷⁶ As in the scientific experiment, the author consciously initiates a process in which conscious intentionality is upset as unforeseen developments emerge.⁷⁷ As such, she claims that the author’s

disregarded the moral values and codes of his time – much as Beauvoir’s. Perhaps most indicatively, In the “Lived Experience” study of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir seeks to demystify essentialist accounts of marriage and maternity, exposing their oppressive status in the “real” of women’s lived experience. In so doing she draws on some passages from Zola’s frank and candid portrayals of these same themes.

⁷⁴ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 272.

⁷⁵ Simone de Beauvoir *Force of Circumstance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963) 258. In the original text, Bernard describes how a scientist can suddenly see a familiar fact in a new light, which shows that “the discovery inheres in a feeling about things which is not only individual, but which is even connected with a transient condition of the mind” Bernard, *ISEM*, 34.

⁷⁶ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 271.

⁷⁷ In *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir compares her method of describing ethics with artistic and scientific method. Beauvoir writes “We don’t ask the physicist, “Which hypotheses are true?” Nor the artist, “By what procedures does one produce a work whose

equivocation and self-reflection is an essential component of the process of discovery. However – and here the specificity of the literary emerges – will stress that it is not merely the construction of the work of art that is process-driven, but the completed work itself will enter into a processual relationship with the reader as it is read. As such, she stresses the need for author and reader alike to endure the process of discovery: “The novel is endowed with value and dignity only if it constitutes a living discovery for the author as for the reader.”⁷⁸ As Beauvoir transposes the investigative approach into the literary domain, she claims that it is imperative that a dynamic of reciprocity exists: both author and reader must live out the “process of lived discovery.”⁷⁹

In order for this reciprocal participation in the experimental process constitutive of literature, she stresses the need for a dynamic of “genuine communication” with the reader:

If the metaphysical novel were reduced to imitating this living process from the outside, if instead of establishing a genuine communication with the reader, it cheated him by leading him on a quest that the author had conducted for himself, then most certainly, it should be condemned.⁸⁰

For Beauvoir, “genuine communication” is the moment that author and reader alike are both able to embark on a process of lived discovery – the insistence on the “genuine” character of this communication here reflects her earlier appreciation of and insistence on Bernardian doubt and methodological reflection, which combine to present a transparent account of the investigative process. The notion that the author can “cheat” the reader by “leading him on a quest that the author had conducted for himself” suggests that the author has not fully sacrificed authorial control, and sought to lead the reader along a path already traversed or saturated by the author.⁸¹ The continuity with the earlier critique of theoretical authority is clearly legible here, and further reinforced in the following:

This expectation demands that the novelist himself participate in the same search he has invited his readers on; if in advance he predicts the conclusion to which his readers must come, if he indiscreetly pressures the reader into adhering to preestablished

beauty is guaranteed?” Ethics does not furnish recipes any more than do science and art. One can merely propose methods. Thus, in science the fundamental problem is to make the idea adequate to its content and the law adequate to the facts; the logician finds that in the case where the pressure of the given fact bursts the concept which serves to comprehend it, one is obliged to invent another concept; but he cannot define a priori the moment of invention, still less foresee it.” Beauvoir *Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1948) 101.

⁷⁸ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 271.

⁷⁹ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 271.

⁸⁰ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 272.

⁸¹ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 272.

theses, if he allows him only an illusion of freedom, then the work of fiction is only an incongruous mystification.⁸²

In other words, a lack of “genuine” author-reader relationship means an attempt to reiterate, rather than expose or challenge, a “pre-established” thesis. The necessity of the interruption of authorial control in a genuinely investigative process informs Beauvoir’s typology of philosophical authority in “Literature and Metaphysics,” organized along the stasis-movement axis developed in the earlier piece on Bernard. “Literature and Metaphysics” recalls her earlier language of “theory,” arguing that the “theoretician” renders “subjectivity and historicity as negligible” in seeking to “describe their experience” and “systematize it in its essential character.”⁸³ This statement clarifies and reinforces her position in “Analysis,” the claim that the theoretician systematizes and packages experience, rendering it “static.” The systematic articulation of experience in relation to its presumed essence serves to “crystallize” experience, rendering its temporal or processual aspect negligible, blocking the movement that conditions genuine discovery.

Beauvoir proceeds: “the theoretician wants to compel us to adhere to the ideas that the thing and the event suggested to him.”⁸⁴ For Beauvoir, the theoretician seeks to convert or disguise an account of personal experience as “theory,” compelling the reader to adhere to the ideas that the thing and event suggested to him. Beauvoir’s criticisms seem to reside in the theoretician’s purported and feigned anonymity: This stands in stark contrast to Beauvoir’s commitment to a philosophy of process as outlined above: truth is the result of experimental process, and process necessitates the (scientific or literary) experimenter’s transparent avowal of their own role in that process.

“Literature and Metaphysics” describes the theoretician as legislating from “eternity.” Beauvoir’s commitment to the necessarily temporal production of truth’s visibility is elucidated in her open criticisms of the nontemporal (philosophical) system. She argues that these systems “make no allowance for temporal truth.”⁸⁵ Not only is the “nontemporal” philosopher or theoretician disingenuously disguising the processual character of their own experience, and falsely attempting to erase the trace of the process proper to its development, her suggestion is that the theoretician suffers from a remoteness from, or partial blindness to, the affairs of the terrestrial sphere – the sphere to which this theory is supposedly relevant.

⁸² Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 271.

⁸³ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 276.

⁸⁴ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 276.

⁸⁵ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 274.

Interestingly, her diagnosis of the limitations of philosophy as “theory” – the static denial of the investigative process – leads her to valorise those moments within the Western philosophical canon in which traces of a process-driven approach are legible or explicitly avowed. As such, her emphasis on the temporal dimension of experimentation – extended from science to literary art – is in turn extended to certain “poetic” forms of philosophy in her defence of Plato and Hegel’s respective attempts to capture dialectical movement. Beauvoir finds that both Plato and Hegel revert to “poetry” in seeking to represent or articulate the “movement” that characterizes the production of knowledge:

As long as Plato asserts the supreme reality of the Forms, which this world only mirrors in a deceptive, debased way, he has no use for poets; he banishes them from his republic. But, when he describes the dialectical movement that carries man toward the Forms, when he integrates man and the sensible world into reality, then Plato feels the need to make himself a poet... Likewise when spirit has not accomplished itself but is only in the process of accomplishing itself, Hegel must confer on it a certain carnal thickness in order to recount adequately its adventures.⁸⁶

In this instance, Beauvoir celebrates the attempt to capture, in a “poetic” moment within philosophy, the temporality of philosophical conceptuality itself – a moment legible in Plato and Hegel but running against the explicit commitments (to static “Forms” and a fully “accomplished” “Spirit”) of those thinkers themselves. “Literature and Metaphysics” also clearly links the experimental process of discovery with freedom:

The freedom one admires in Dostoevsky’s characters, for example, is the freedom that the novelist himself has with regard to his own projects; and the opacity of the events he relates shows the resistance that he encounters during the creative act itself.⁸⁷

As outlined in 1.1, for Beauvoir as for Sartre, freedom is associated with a transcendence of a given state (of “being,” and later, “experience”). In this particular passage, freedom operates in two different ways. There is the novelist’s freedom – “the freedom [a novelist] has with regard to his own projects.” The author exercises their own freedom through the production of writing the book, as an “overcoming” of resistance. This is consistent with the general existentialist conception of freedom. However, a new element is also implied here, specific to literary fiction. In this instance, Beauvoir recognises the freedom of Dostoyevsky’s characters, and claims that the freedom of the characters is dependent on the freedom of the author. This formulation implies

⁸⁶ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 274.

⁸⁷ Beauvoir “Literature and Metaphysics”, 275.

that if Dostoyevsky were not free, he would be unable to conceive of “free” characters. This recalls her statement in the *Ethics of Ambiguity*, that “To will oneself free is also to will others free.”⁸⁸

Beauvoir’s theory of literary production and freedom reveals another facet of her conception of freedom, the concept of the “appeal.” The author/reader formulation is analogous to her position that one person’s freedom is wholly dependent on *another’s* freedom (Beauvoir’s sexual and romantic relationships were of course famously predicated on this idea). The message of her essay *Pyrrhus and Cineas* Beauvoir posits: “We need others so that our existence can become grounded and necessary.”⁸⁹ As Ursula Tidd explains, in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, Beauvoir argues that “one’s individual freedom is always enmeshed with another’s freedom, so that we reciprocally constitute the parameters of each other’s freedom.”⁹⁰ This forms the basis for her concept of the “appeal,” appealing to others to be free, in order to be free one self. The appeal means “an authentic mode of connection between transcendent human beings which respects their individual subjectivity.”⁹¹ Her call for a reciprocal dynamic between reader and author is relevant here. In order for a reader to derive any or some semblance of freedom from reading Dostoyevsky’s novels, Dostoyevsky’s literary praxis must itself be furthering his own freedom (his writing practice must be a genuine “project” in the existentialist sense).

Later in her life, Beauvoir does indeed profess that writing *The Second Sex* was only made possible given her access to education. The revelation that Beauvoir understands the appeal to operate within a mode of literary production underpins her literary project. Beauvoir believed that her own freedom entailed an obligation to assist other women to access their own. Accordingly, we look to her first full work of fiction, in which Beauvoir details her “escape” from the rigid institutions and expectations of bourgeois Catholic life.

1.5 Theoretical authority in *When Things of the Spirit Come First*

Beauvoir’s collection of short stories *When Things of the Spirit Come First* can be read as an example of the binary valorisation sketched in “Analysis” and extended in the literary-philosophical practice outlined in “Literature

⁸⁸ Beauvoir *Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1948) 101

⁸⁹ Beauvoir “Pyrrhus and Cineas” “Pyrrhus and Cineas (1944).” Transl. Marybeth Timmermann in *Philosophical Writings*, edited by Margaret A. Simons, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2005) 77-150.

⁹⁰ Ursula Tidd *Simone de Beauvoir*, 75-76.

⁹¹ Eva Gothlin, ‘Simone de Beauvoir’s notion of Appeal, Desire and Ambiguity, and their Relationship to Jean-Paul Sartre’s Notions of Appeal and Desire’ *Hypatia* (special issue on ‘The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir’, xiv/4 (1999)), 90. I would like to thank Ursula Tidd for directing me to this article.

and Metaphysics.” The five short stories were written between the years of 1935 and 1937, when Beauvoir was 28 years old. The collection was initially rejected for publication and remained unpublished for forty years. The stories are her first complete work of fiction and years after Beauvoir had achieved fame and literary success, their significance was acknowledged in the publication of the collection in 1979.⁹²

This text puts her experimental-literary approach into practice – or rather, because it precedes the articulation of that approach in “Literature and Metaphysics,” the later essay can be seen to formalise the earlier novel’s principles of composition. *Things of the Spirit* marks her commitment to the making visible of women’s lived experience. It explicitly draws from her own life and the lives of those around her, retelling the (generally tragic) stories of five young women. In the 1979 Introduction to the stories (written to accompany its belated publication), Beauvoir explains the relation of the five main characters to figures in her own life. Most crucially, each of the five stories centres on the pernicious impact that the Church’s positions on women’s ideal character and behaviour have on young women’s actual lives. This theme – contrasting a static, doctrinal, essentialist, normative authority with real experience – reflects the criticisms of the theoretical we found in her early thought.⁹³

The goal of the stories is to illustrate the extent to which young women’s self-conception and conception of the world is shaped by “dangerous religiosity.” As Beauvoir explains in the preface, rather than fabricate material for her fiction,

⁹² Ursula Tidd suggests some reasons this text was not published until the 1970s in her Reaktion biography of Beauvoir. See: Tidd *Simone de Beauvoir*, 56-57.

⁹³ We should also note at this point that the text reflects the narrative Beauvoir constructed around her own life, which she archives in her four-part autobiography. In these autobiographies, Beauvoir details her transition from the expectations of the Catholic French bourgeoisie and towards financial, intellectual and sexual autonomy and freedom. The first instalment of Beauvoir’s autobiography, the sardonically entitled *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, details Beauvoir’s significant struggles and hostile experience of the pressures of Parisian middle-class bourgeois values and stifling Catholic education. In the second instalment of her autobiography, *The Prime of Life*, Beauvoir identifies a new phase of her life - by this time she was writing *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, she had broken away from these expectations (marriage, motherhood, Catholicism, the ‘trappings’ of mythical or religious thinking). By her late 20s, Beauvoir was educated, financially self-sufficient and involved with Sartre in their famous (non-monogamous and unmarried) arrangement. The biographer Deidre Bair explains: “[Beauvoir] wrote [*When Things of the Spirit Come First*] when she was already involved with Sartre and was teaching in the provinces, away from Paris, her family and friends, at a time when her own life was undergoing the extreme changes so eloquently recorded in the second volume of her memoirs, *The Prime of Life*.” She had already decided that fiction should be her means of expression and to this end began experimenting with short texts that fictionalized her own experiences as well as those of other women. In the five stories that each bear the name of a single woman, she wrote about five different approaches along as many different paths toward the discovery of the same personal truths.” Deidre Bair *Simone de Beauvoir A Biography* However, the narrative of *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* also archives the tragic death of Beauvoir’s close adolescent friend, Zaza, whom Beauvoir depicts as metaphorically crushed to death by the pressures of Catholic bourgeois society. Simone de Beauvoir *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* trans. Andre Deutsch (London: Penguin, 1959). Beauvoir concludes the text with the note “We had fought together against the revolting fate that had lain ahead of us, and for a long time I believed that I had paid for my own freedom with her death”. See: Beauvoir *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 360. Beauvoir’s childhood friend Zaza emerges fictionalised as the character Anne in this collection of stories.

this time I should speak about the world I knew, and I should expose some of its defects. A few years before this I had discovered the harm done by the religiosity that was in the air I breathed during my childhood and early youth. Several of my friends had never broken away from it: willingly or unwillingly they had undergone the dangerous influence of that kind of spiritual life. I decided to tell their stories and also to deal with my own conversion to the real world.⁹⁴

This preface - specifically in devoting the text to friends who had “never broken away from” these pressures - expresses her understanding of the novel as in some way opposed to the oppression suffered by these women, even if not able to actively promote their freedom. As we saw in “Literature and Metaphysics,” Beauvoir understood the project of writing as both confirmation, expression and development of her own freedom. We should also recall her emphasis on the “appeal” as an operative element in her conception of literary production, namely the imbrication of one’s own freedom with the freedom of others – of the characters perhaps, and certainly one’s readers. Most earnestly, Beauvoir intended the collection (and presumably her literary project more broadly) to educate female readers with a sense of the dangers of Catholic bourgeois moral authority. The goal would have been for stories such as these to have raised their awareness of these pernicious operations and ultimately to help lead them towards seizing their own freedom.

Beauvoir illuminates the pernicious operation of the church over these young women’s lives by proliferating the viewpoint, or focalisation, in the collection. In her 2006 biography of Beauvoir, Ursula Tidd draws our attention to her use of the device of focalisation. *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, comprises five individual stories, divided into five discrete chapters. Each new chapter presents a new protagonist and perspective. The influence of the church is digested slightly differently by each character, or leads to unique pathologies. Rather than dissipate her critique, the multiplication of perspective reinforces her claim for the Church’s unequivocally damaging role in these young women’s lives. The ideal, unitary social role the Church envisages for women is disrupted by the multiple ways in which individual women experience the Church’s normative expectations. The form of her text – the novel - is important to understanding Beauvoir’s task. Were Beauvoir to write a pamphlet, for example, that detailed the pernicious effects of religiosity over young minds, she would be unable to portray to this same extent how each woman’s consciousness is differently engaged by religiosity. Moreover, the multiplication enabled by the literary strategy of focalisation is in keeping with the experiential model we found earlier in “Analysis” – Beauvoir beings again in each story from a different starting point, building up evidence for her critical claim from multiple perspectives. The multiplicity

⁹⁴ Beauvoir *When Things of the Spirit Come First* 7.

of these perspectives in turn undermine the Church's assumption that there is only *one* authoritative perspective on women and their social role.

To take one example from *Things of the Spirit*. The character Marcelle's Catholic religious devotion directly correlates to negative character traits. After her unfaithful and abusive husband leaves her, she feels resigned to her fate like a good Catholic martyr:

Yet it was not happiness that had been granted to her: it was suffering. But perhaps it was only suffering that could satisfy her heart at last. 'Higher than happiness,' she whispered. This great bitter thing was her lot on earth and she would know how to receive it.⁹⁵

Marcelle's masochism runs deep: Beauvoir portrays Marcelle's masochism as constituting passive and obsequious traits, directly correlating to her subordination. Beauvoir has some irreverent fun transposing Marcelle's Catholic martyrdom into the bedroom. Having sex for the first time on her wedding night, Marcelle relishes the ignominy of her new husband asking her to sit like a dog:

Abruptly he turned her on her belly and made her kneel. 'Stay like that,' he whispered. 'It's more fun.' She trembled: a man, a being endowed with a conscience, wanted her to join him in an unclean act. He was bending her into this ridiculous position and relishing its ignominy. 'On all fours, like animals,' she thought: the idea made her head spin and he had to tense all his muscles to keep her in this degrading posture - she was like one of those victims the executioners force to dance under the whip. 'He's enjoying me, he's enjoying me,' she said to herself in a paroxysm of sensual delight. When Denis drew away she fell gasping on the bed, almost fainting.⁹⁶

The modesty and shyness of another character named Lisa is another point of focus. Lisa's extreme insulation has led to a level of embarrassment and shyness where she can barely operate in her daily life:

Lisa undressed: with a modesty learnt in her childhood she put on her pyjama trousers before she took off her slip, and when she put on the flowered jacket she averted her eyes from her breasts.⁹⁷

As Lisa masturbates, her religious education mediates and organises her fantasies. Forbidden a flesh and blood lover, she sublimates the reality of her own hand, she imagines the archangel's hand draws her to orgasm. With a "fiery sword in his chaste hands", he is able to melt her "pure crystal" –

she no longer felt her arm - her hand was no longer hers and it was under the caress of these stranger's fingers that the soft moist inner tissues thrilled and quivered... An archangel dressed in

⁹⁵ Beauvoir *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, 43.

⁹⁶ Beauvoir *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, 32.

⁹⁷ Beauvoir *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, 109.

shining white with a fiery sword in his chaste hands: sweet breath. The warm breeze melting the pure crystal. Warm hands, lily-soft hands still damp with moss. You are the rain of light caresses, the shower of snow-flakes on a tender body where the dark flower shines, the velvety flower of passion. Pascal's hands stroking hair and neck, the lovely crystal melting away, warm breath, hands moving over the secret flesh, archangel's hands gliding slowly down a tender victim, your hand quivering flesh, your dear archangel's hand beloved: beloved, beloved.⁹⁸

It is through proliferating these viewpoints, and demonstrating how in each instance, a woman is touched differently – but equally damaged – by the church, that fiction enables Beauvoir to advance her thesis. The proliferation of these viewpoints also highlights the pathetic modesty of their pursuits. By no means are they literary heroines (or the literary heroines Beauvoir idolised in her youth). Their lives are strictly controlled by matronly figures – either nuns, teachers and/or mothers. They have no privacy, their letters are read, their suitors and future husband are selected and they must request permission to leave the house. Their stories are devastatingly meek in scope. Marcel chooses between two suitors. Lisa (after wrangling permission from her headmistress) spends an afternoon in Paris. The clever Marcelle's dreams reach their limit at the prospect of being inspiration for a man:

[Marcelle] alone could save him: she had never dreamt of a finer destiny than being the inspiration of a brilliant man, brilliant but weak. ⁹⁹

Lisa traipses around Paris for an afternoon, terrified of the city and its inhabitants.

“If [I] were to fall under [other citizens'] feet, how heavily they would trample on [my] body!”¹⁰⁰

Sexually immature and sheltered, she spends her afternoon awkwardly posturing as a laissez-faire, poetic, mistress-type figure:

With considerable difficulty, she pinned the fragile, dripping stems, wound about with greyish wire, to her lapel. ‘Spending one's last sous to buy violets,’ she whispered in a dreamy tone: but who would care about such a moving gesture? The world was filled with coarse, vulgar beings.¹⁰¹

She pins flowers to her lapel in order to attract the attention of her friend's older brother, Pascal. Marguerite (Beauvoir's autobiographical figure) asserts independence (and most unconvincingly, ultimately achieves her ‘freedom’) by breaking out of the family home at night and haunting saloons. Indeed, the multiple insights

⁹⁸ Beauvoir *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, 109.

⁹⁹ Beauvoir *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, 28.

¹⁰⁰ Beauvoir *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, 99.

¹⁰¹ Beauvoir *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, 99.

into their thoughts and feelings exposes the extent to which their lives are controlled, mediated and insulated by the church and bourgeois values more broadly.

Conclusion to Chapter One

As we saw in “Analysis”, for Beauvoir, doubt necessitated the revision and revisitation of the starting point, possibly even the transformation of one starting point into many. Doubt transformed one theoretical principle into a network of multiplicity (and for this reason was characterised as productive). In *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, we’ve found Beauvoir proliferate viewpoints, to ultimately respect the freedom of all the different shareholders implied in her literary model (author, reader, character). It could be argued that Beauvoir is putting her *own* doubt to test – she is seeking to isolate what precisely made these women’s lives subordinate to the lives lived by their male counterparts, and the amalgamation of these different relations to this material helped clarify her resolve. Perhaps she also sought to assail the reader’s doubt. In the late 1930s in France, Catholic morality remained a dominant and persuasive doctrine. Perhaps Beauvoir felt that in inviting her reader to revisit the claim, at least five times over, that the traditions of arranged marriage, and the expectations of virginity, and generally insulating women’s lives, was dangerous, she could placate their doubt and render that which was largely construed as invisible, visible.

Beauvoir’s early reading of Bernard can be seen to provide Beauvoir with a binary valorisation that continues into her mature existentialist language and reflections on literary and philosophical practice. Key here is that, for Beauvoir, production of the previously unseen takes its point of departure from a radical doubt vis-à-vis theoretical authority. This orients us towards acknowledging the *nature* of her resources. The young Beauvoir’s conceptual resources (scientific, philosophical, literary) were largely part of phallogentric traditions. The phallogentric backdrop and context of this material in *The Second Sex* will become itself the object of her critique. We have also found that Beauvoir insists that the author and reader communicate in a reciprocal relation. In the next chapter of this thesis, we investigate her appropriation of Hegelian alterity in *The Second Sex*’s Introduction and Myth chapters. In my reading of these chapters I contend that Beauvoir claims that the textual treatment of women under patriarchy blocks women’s recourse to reciprocal relations with men. Beauvoir will eventually call for the establishment of authentic “reciprocity” between genders.¹⁰² In

¹⁰² Many contemporary Beauvoir scholars contend that Beauvoir’s key ethical concept is “reciprocity” See Debra B. Bergoffen’s *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities* and Eva Lundgren-Gothlin’s *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex*, and Karen Vintges’ *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir*. [include publication details here]

other words, we begin to investigate the claim as to whether Beauvoir proposes that reciprocity is a necessary precondition for her conception of freedom.

Chapter Two

Patriarchal Authority and Myth

The introductory essay that opens the *The Second Sex* has engaged feminists and feminist philosophy since the 1949 publication of the text.¹⁰³ The question Beauvoir famously poses here - “What is a woman?” – shaped the landscape for contemporary gender studies and women’s studies.¹⁰⁴ Judith Butler, whose influence on women’s studies and gender studies cannot be overstated, takes this text as the point of departure in her landmark 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, as well as in her essays immediately preceding it.¹⁰⁵ Other scholars, such as Nancy Bauer, whose projects and approach are quite distinct from Butler’s, focus on the anti-metaphysical statement on offer in the Introduction. The Introduction’s intricate configuration and differentiation between the terms “woman,” “female” and “femininity” has been assessed by a number of scholars, and will be reconsidered again below.¹⁰⁶ The Introduction also includes passages that have been viewed unfavourably, such as her assertion that some women are better positioned to “seek truth” than others.

In this chapter I suggest that interpretive challenges surrounding the Introduction to *The Second Sex* can be made simpler by approaching it through the binary valorisation first opened in “Analysis” and elaborated in “Literature and Metaphysics.” As we saw in Chapter 1, in these texts Beauvoir is concerned to expose illegitimate theoretical authority via an opposed experimental approach. In this chapter I argue that *The Second Sex* mobilises the critique of theoretical authority against specifically patriarchal authority, and utilises experimental strategies in order to articulate some preliminary critiques of that authority.

The central achievement of the Introduction essay is the way in which Beauvoir reframes the question “what *is* woman?” Beauvoir challenges the question through deploying a number of experimental literary-

¹⁰³ See Kate Millet *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970); Shulamith Firestone *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970); Germaine Greer *The Female Eunuch* (London: MacGibbon & Kee Ltd, 1970); Judith Butler *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Toril Moi, *What is a woman? And Other essays* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁴ Beauvoir acknowledges feminist enquiries predating her own study, including the work of American feminist Dorothy Parker (renouncing Parker’s version of nominalism as a possibly useful resource), Poulián de la Barre, Diderot and John Stuart Mill. She identifies Aristotle’s sexism, Following a tradition carried forward predominantly by contemporary feminist philosopher Michele le Doueff.

¹⁰⁵ Butler *Gender Trouble*, Butler “Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault (1987)” *The Judith Butler Reader* edit. Sara Salih (Oxford: Blackwell 2004).

¹⁰⁶ Butler *Gender Trouble*.

philosophical strategies. Ultimately, Beauvoir transforms this general question with its essentialist overtones into the more specific: “what is it *to exist* as a woman?” The former question can be considered, using the language of “Analysis,” an example of the “theoretical” approach (it attempts to “fix” its object), while the latter opens onto an “experimental” study, namely one attentive to lived experience. In her mature existentialist vocabulary, the former question is “essentialist” and the latter “existentialist.” We will return to this existentialist vocabulary and its relation to her earlier concerns in a moment. At this point I am suggesting that the Introduction is difficult because it stages an alteration and adaptation of her thinking on two levels – it transfers her early critique of theoretical authority to a new object (patriarchy), and in order to do this, Beauvoir adopts a new language (an explicitly existentialist one). As we will see, in an added complexity, Beauvoir also subtly submits existentialist language itself to critique, as itself an ambiguous instance of theoretical-patriarchal authority.

Once the Introduction to *The Second Sex* has been read through the lens of “Analysis,” the latter half of this chapter demonstrates the value of this approach in a reading of a key section of the body of *The Second Sex*. In the section on “Myth,” Beauvoir analyses the ways in which pernicious myths of femininity are constructed. In her words: “I shall try to show exactly how the concept of the ‘truly feminine’ has been fashioned – why woman has been defined as the Other – and what have been the consequences from man’s point of view.”¹⁰⁷ In my reading, Beauvoir examines how men, within literature (and textual traditions more generally), have presented women as the “absolute Other.” Beauvoir’s category of “absolute Other” constitutes a critical repurposing of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, which will be treated in greater detail below. Beauvoir shows, the ways in which men have represented women as objects of discourse (as the privileged “other” of patriarchal discourse). As object, women have no recourse to autonomy (and therefore remain “absolutely” other to male autonomy). Following the experimental approach first outlined in the early essay “Analysis,” I contend that Beauvoir in fact *proliferates* various ways women are represented, “unfixing” their very possibility for static representation. In doing so, Beauvoir depicts a sense of the dynamic complexity of the actual lived experience of women and also produces (textually) a persuasive claim for women’s right to reciprocal relations. In lieu of the absence of women’s reciprocal claim in the literature she studies, her critical work in this chapter itself constitutes the slave’s reciprocal claim.

¹⁰⁷ Beauvoir *The Second Sex*, 17.

2.1. Existence and Essence, Sex and Gender

Beauvoir's early critique of "theoretical" scientific approach (and concomitant "theoretical authority") is legible in her representation of the (specifically *male*) expert's "quest" for women's "essence" in the Introduction to *The Second Sex*. There are three main differences between the early and mature work in this regard. Firstly, the existentialist terminology of "essence" has been superimposed on the scientific register of the early work (referred to in *Analysis* as the "theoretical"), a shift already evident in "Literature and Metaphysics." The second major shift from "Analysis" to *The Second Sex* is that the naive (and theoretically beholden) scientists castigated by Bernard have been replaced by the broad category of "expert." In the Introduction, Beauvoir calls all experts who purport to define woman into question, challenging the legitimacy of conceptions of 'woman' that emerge within every day and academic discourse. I will argue in this chapter that the critique of theoretical authority in the Introduction to *The Second Sex* draws on the framework identified first in "Analysis" and uses it to undermine all knowledge about "women".

The third shift is that Beauvoir decisively *genders* the expert; the negatively valorised pole of her early essay (the "theoretical") is now *male*. It is male experts that seek women's essence – or more deeply, expertise *itself* is gendered as masculine, regardless of the gender of any given practitioner. The sardonic term "expert" is attached to any producer/reproducer of a given body of institutionally recognised knowledge. Importantly, in all three points here, a constant is her broad construal of her subject matter – essentialist definitions propagated by male experts are operative in everyday language practices, in magazines, in discussions in cafes, in biologist, Marxist, and Freudian theoretical discourse, and in literary and cultural production.

In my opinion, her use of the terms female-femininity-woman in the Introductory essay precludes reading *The Second Sex* as: (i) a tacitly essentialist text (defining women biologically); (ii) a constructivist text, rejecting biological factors as relevant to lived experience and identity; and (iii) as maintaining a simple sex/gender distinction at all. Here it is necessary to look at other critical responses to her conceptual work in the Introductory essay to *The Second Sex*. The particularly famous passage - where Beauvoir deploys the terms 'female' and 'femininity' (in relation to the master term 'woman') - has played an extremely important role in contemporary feminist philosophy, gender studies and women's studies. This passage has been extracted and treated as the centrepiece of the essay, if not the text itself. This extract is often accompanied by, or replaced with the isolated (and very famous) maxim that opens the second volume to *The Second Sex*, "Lived Experience": "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman."

There persists a temptation to read Beauvoir as if she here encourages a social constructivist position. However, theorists who read Beauvoir as a constructivist subsequently encounter issues (particularly in the “Biology” chapter) where Beauvoir seems to articulate claims that would in fact characterise a biological essentialist position. In other words, a certain emphasis on her famous maxim regarding “becoming” of woman institutes a constructivist reading of Beauvoir: biology is not determinative of “woman,” it is rather a socially constructed or mediated “performance” of gender.¹⁰⁸ On the basis of this reading, however, it is hard to square later moments in her analysis – particularly in the “Situation” chapter – in which she seems to reduce aspects of, or moments in, women’s lived experience to the bodily. For example, Sandford criticises her “insidious reliance” on the bodily aspects of woman’s existence, after bodily sex has been officially excluded from an understanding of woman-as-gender.¹⁰⁹

The most prominent reading of her account of gender as constructivist is led by Judith Butler’s 1987 essay “Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault.” In this essay, Butler argues that Beauvoir’s “woman” has nothing to do with biological components.¹¹⁰ Butler famously proposes that sex is already gender, but that we only know (biological) sex *through* (socialised) gender. This thesis is advanced across a number of passages:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” – Beauvoir’s now-famous formulation asserts the noncoincidence of natural and gendered identity. Because what we become is not what we already are, gender is dislodged from sex; the cultural interpretation of sexual attributes is distinguished from the facticity or simple existence of these attributes.¹¹¹

If it is true that we “become” our genders through some kind of volitional and appropriative set of acts, then she must mean something other than an unsituated Cartesian act... it is our genders that we become, and not our bodies.¹¹²

The movement from sex to gender is internal to embodied life, a sculpting of the original body into a cultural form.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Butler *Gender Trouble* 12.

¹⁰⁹ Sandford, Stella (1999) “Contingent ontologies: sex, gender and ‘woman’ in Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler” in *Radical Philosophy*, 97, 18-29.

¹¹⁰ Butler “Variations on Sex and Gender”, 21-39.

¹¹¹ Butler “Variations on Sex and Gender”, 25.

¹¹² Butler “Variations on Sex and Gender”, 23.

¹¹³ Butler “Variations on Sex and Gender”, 25.

values that appear natural can be reduced to their contingent cultural origins.¹¹⁴

we can argue that women have a more inclusive essence, or we can return to that promising suggestion of Simone de Beauvoir, namely that women have no essence at all, and hence, no natural necessity, and that, indeed, what we call an essence or a material fact is simply an enforced cultural option which has disguised itself as natural truth.¹¹⁵

Butler reads Beauvoir as advocating an account of gender identity in which the body is “sculpted” *into* a “cultural form”. Accordingly, for Butler, the “woman” subject need not be biologically female. This is a clear example of a constructivist reading of her work on woman. On the other hand, Moira Gatens does not pursue a constructivist reading of Beauvoir.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Gatens concedes that various aspects of her argument encourage a constructivist framework. Gatens directs our attention to the following fragments from her Biology chapter:

Facts cannot be denied - ... in themselves they have no significance. Once we adopt the human perspective, interpreting the body on the basis of existence, biology becomes an abstract science; whenever the physiological fact... takes on meaning, this meaning is at once seen as dependent on a whole context.¹¹⁷

It is not upon physiology that values can be based, rather, the facts of biology take on the values that the existent bestows upon them.¹¹⁸

The problem with the constructivist framework emerges when considered in relation to her references to the (specifically) female form, operating as an active site of meaning for women. Indeed, there is ample evidence later in the text of Beauvoir professing adherence to a (seemingly) biological essentialist position. Many scholars draw attention to her inconsistencies or “vague” articulation of ideas in this department; that

¹¹⁴ Butler “Variations on Sex and Gender”, 37.

¹¹⁵ Butler “Variations on Sex and Gender”, 38.

¹¹⁶ Moira Gatens “Beauvoir and biology: a second look” in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Claudia Card, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 266 – 285.

¹¹⁷ Beauvoir *The Second Sex*, 66-67.

¹¹⁸ Beauvoir *The Second Sex*, 68-69.

is, the way she seems a constructivist at times, a biological essentialist at other moments.¹¹⁹ Gatens chooses some examples that suggest Beauvoir's own biological essentialism:

From birth, the species seems to have taken possession of woman and tends to tighten its grasp.¹²⁰

The individuality of the female is opposed by the interests of the species...¹²¹

Given that Beauvoir espouses what may be taken as essentialist and constructivist positions, the goal for readers of Beauvoir is evidently not to hide or highlight one in favour of the other. Rather, the task of the Beauvoir reader is to explore the interrelation of her statements, which certainly seem inconsistent from the perspective of contemporary (Butlerian) gender studies. In this chapter, using Bernard's framework, I read her "woman" as an existential term, which is to say she uses it to ask: what it is to exist as a woman. We find that on the question of what a woman "is" Beauvoir is deliberately obscure, refusing to identify any one factor or framework that could provide a simple – that is, simplistic – answer to the question, as if "woman" is biological sex to the exclusion of socialised gender (or vice-versa). Gatens elucidates:

It is not easy to know how to balance the two kinds of statement [made by Beauvoir]. They stress one set of statements at the expense of the other. This has often been the tendency in feminist scholarship on Beauvoir and biology... The unclarity of Beauvoir's thought invites unsatisfactory "either/or" feminist readings. Such interpretations either insist on Beauvoir's social constructionism, because the ambiguity appears to be removed if one argues for value "all the way down" ... or they interpret Beauvoir's negative comments on female embodiment as embarrassing evidence of her "essentialism" and her inability to escape misogynistic evaluations of the female body.¹²²

By paying particular attention to her strategy of proliferation, we see Beauvoir invite the reader to identify multiple (and perhaps previously unstated) factors in women's existence. Beauvoir proliferates terms synonymous with, related to, and that could possibly play a role in the assemblage of what it is to exist as a woman. As we see, while doing so, Beauvoir clearly abjures the prospect of isolating any one framework that

¹¹⁹ Julie. K Ward "Beauvoir's Two Sense of "Body" in *The Second Sex*" in *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir* edit. Margaret A. Simons (Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 223-242; Nancy Bauer *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy & Feminism*, Moira Gatens "Beauvoir and biology: a second look";

¹²⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. (London: Vintage, 1949), 22-23. Gatens references Parshley's translation. Accordingly, it seems fair to attribute these quotations I am using, via Gatens, to his translation.

¹²¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 53. Again, this refers to the page in Parshley's translation.

¹²² Moira Gatens "Beauvoir and biology: a second look", *The Cambridge Companion To Simone de Beauvoir*, 272-275; see also, Penelope Deutscher *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction and the history of philosophy* (London, Routledge, 1997) 181-183.

could account for women's lived existence, challenging the very feasibility of identifying any component that could, on its own, comprise what woman *is*. In other words, if we pay attention to her literary-philosophical approach (in this case, the specific strategy of "proliferation") in the Introduction we find that Beauvoir problematizes any one framework for gender enquiry. Any approach that insists on the veracity of one theoretical position – such as a gender/sex distinction – proves an inadequate approach to decipher the lived experience of women. I contend that Beauvoir "opens" the concept of woman via the strategies of proliferation and multiplicity

In this regard, I follow the work of Natalie Stoljar, who argues for a wholly different treatment – a "cluster concept" treatment – of the concept "woman," that seeks to overcome, or remain outside of, a constructivist/essentialist framework.¹²³ One advantage of this approach is that it "explains both why female sex is centrally important to the notion of woman and how individuals can be women without being of the female sex."¹²⁴ In this alternative framework, Stoljar refuses to read "woman" through biological factors, acculturated factors, or exclusively either. She does not consider biological sex a necessary precondition to being a woman: it is included as one of some possible components an individual can have in order to be considered, or to consider oneself, a woman. Stoljar instead identifies a number of factors that can operate to construct "woman". These include: (i) female sex (which *can* include "XX chromosome, sex characteristics, general morphology... and having other characteristics such as gait or voice quality"); (ii) "a range of phenomenological features" ("physical feelings, like menstrual cramps"); (iii) more psychological "aspects of what it feels like to be a woman" such as the fear of rape; (iv) "wearing typical female dress" and following other social norms for "feminine" physical comportment; and finally (v) self-identifying as woman, or receiving another's recognition as a woman, "calling oneself a woman and being called a woman."¹²⁵

Gatens contends that the foremost advantages of Stoljar's approach is her recognition of the role that situation plays in Beauvoir's concept of woman:

[Stoljar's innovative treatment of woman] pays full due to the notion of "situation" and so lends coherence to the concept "woman" without denying the variety of situations within which individual

123 Stoljar Natalie "Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman," *Philosophical Topics*, 23, 3 [fall 1995]: 261-94. My thanks to Moira Gatens for bringing this article to my attention to here. r numbering system here, your 2.4 type of thing. k me that you don't mal sentence.? If the former, leave the note as it

124 Stoljar Natalie "Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman," 285.

125 Stoljar Natalie "Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman" 283-84.

women assert their freedoms. [Stoljar's] treatment of "woman" includes biological facts, but does so not in a reductive fashion.¹²⁶

The next chapter of this thesis explores her study of "Situation," in which Beauvoir explores the lived experience of women. In this chapter I will argue that "situation" is more than an isolated chapter in *The Second Sex*, but is in fact a framework that Beauvoir proposes in Introduction to explicate the lived existence of women, a "third way" between constructivism and essentialism (again, along the lines of the early Bernadine emphasis on multiplicity and proliferation). As such, it is possible finally to commence our reading of the Introduction to *The Second Sex*.

The first male expert to appear in the Introduction is the "everyman." The first text that Beauvoir "cites" concerning what women *are* is not a philosophical or academic text, but a recent "Ephemeral magazine." Beauvoir transcribes squabbles and everyday conversation about women that could be conducted anywhere, a non-institutional type of expertise:

the theory of the eternal feminine still has its adherents who will whisper in your ear: 'Even in Russia women still are women'; and other erudite persons – sometimes the very same – say with a sigh: 'Woman is losing her way, woman is lost.' One wonders if women still exist, if they will always exist, whether or not it is desirable that they should, what place they occupy in this world, what their place should be. 'What has become of women?' was asked recently in an ephemeral magazine...¹²⁷

Beauvoir's tacit claim is that on the topic of women, anyone is immediately an expert (or, by virtue of being a "man," men in particular may consider themselves to be). *All* men ("everyman") can share expertise on the particular topic of what a woman "is." Knowledge on *this* topic need not be institutionally sanctioned (although institutionally valid discourse will also be the object of critique). This first appearance of the expert as an everyman prepares the ground for the later chapter "Myths," in which Beauvoir acknowledges that literary "myths" have a particular ability to disseminate and reach audiences that an academic truth cannot. Were Beauvoir to identify claims made exclusively within institutional discourses (such as biology, or psychoanalysis), the claim would be insulated by the walls of that institution, pertaining only to an elitist few. Rather, Beauvoir seeks to illuminate a ubiquitous social practice that *includes* academic practice.

Beauvoir's point of departure, however, is not the certainty of everyman's knowledge of woman's essence, but its acknowledged *uncertainty*. The everyman expert on woman has lost confidence in his own

¹²⁶ Gatens "Beauvoir and biology: a second look", 281.

¹²⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 3.

definitions – or the cultural norms surrounding appropriately feminine behaviour are no longer clear. The everyman feels that the essence of woman is *now* (in their particular time and location) a problem:

Enough ink has been spilled in quarrelling ... perhaps we should say no more about it. It is still talked about, however, for the voluminous nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have done little to illuminate the problem.... Are there women, really? Most assuredly the theory of the eternal feminine still has its adherents who will whisper in your ear: 'Even in Russia women still are women'; and other erudite persons – sometimes the very same – say with a sigh: 'Woman is losing her way, woman is lost.' One wonders if women still exist, if they will always exist...¹²⁸

The everyman's loss of confidence may signal two different things. First, the quarrelling may be specific to the historical moment of her writing. Perhaps Beauvoir is claiming that the worrying over "woman" has been made possible by social antagonism that preceded it, such as the Suffragette's efforts in the early 20th century. Indeed, it is possible that citizens are quarrelling *more* than ever (on the "woman problem") at this historical juncture as a result of the social changes that have occurred in the early twentieth-century. In some cases (men's), this political activity inspires a lament for lost ideals of femininity; in her case, it leads to the systematic appraisal of women's identity (the writing of *The Second Sex* itself). From this perspective, Beauvoir tacitly draws attention to her feminist predecessors. As her burgeoning Marxism would have led her to believe, Marx could only write a theory of capital once the proletariat were struggling (and thus putting capitalism into question), just as Kant could only re-write metaphysics after the successes of Newtonian science put that metaphysics into crisis.

However, Beauvoir also points to the fact that this "quarrelling" and lamentations/search for the "real woman" has *always* occurred. Maybe the everyman always yearned for the "ideal" of woman, because the ideal itself is unstable, and so has never (and can never) be met by a flesh and blood person. To declare that "woman is losing her way, woman is lost," signals an attempt to align the lived experiences of actual women against a reinforced, revitalized essentialist conception of woman: Beauvoir explains that flesh and blood women have never and will never approximate the (sardonically entitled) "eternal feminine."¹²⁹ Beauvoir remarks "If there is no such thing today as femininity, it is because there never was."¹³⁰ As Nancy Bauer puts it, "the trouble comes when we find ourselves making claims into which we import ideas about the essence of women."¹³¹

¹²⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 3.

¹²⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 3.

¹³⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 4.

¹³¹ Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy & Feminism*, 212.

Beauvoir suggests that a discussion of the essence of woman quickly becomes a normative discussion regarding what a woman *should* be. Femininity can indeed be construed as the normative form essentialist definitions take – when someone discusses what a woman is (say, “maternal”), this definition legislates that “women should be good mothers, or be mothers in x and y way.” This claim is central to *The Second Sex*. As we will see, in “Myths” and “Situation”, Beauvoir claims that essentialist determinations of women’s identity have normative authority over, and are damaging to, the everyday lives of women.

Although Beauvoir portrays the act of seeking women’s essence as presumptuous and problematic, Beauvoir does not deny that individuals can be meaningfully grouped under more general categories. Ordinary concept use retains legitimacy for Beauvoir. “Rejecting the notions of the eternal feminine, the black soul or the Jewish character is not to deny that there are today Jews, blacks or women...”¹³² Without making it clear, the sentence holds out the possibility that individuals that can be described as, say, “Jewish” without this claim necessarily functioning within a situation as oppressive. Beauvoir’s observation suggests there is a distinction to be drawn between the common sense claim that “women exist” (seemingly “merely” descriptive) and the essentialist-normative claim that “the eternal feminine exists,” without which a given woman “cannot move” as a woman.

It can be difficult to detect the distinction between these two claims. Firstly, in making a descriptive claim, some traits have to be abstracted from particulars: to say that “women exist” means to say, certain individuals with some common traits (biological, cultural or otherwise) exist. Do such common traits operate normatively, as the essence of the “eternal feminine” is understood to? Secondly, both the descriptive and normative modes claim existence: in the first, a category or class of people really exist (“women”), in the latter, an “essence” has seemingly at least some reality (there is an “eternal feminine”).

Beauvoir’s Introduction answers these concerns via a methodological orientation in line with the general thrust of “Analysis.” In short, Beauvoir understands that the distinction between common sense-descriptive and essentialist-normative-oppressive claims cannot be made in advance. This would be, ironically, to be essentialist about what constitutes “essence,” and to disarm the critique of essentialism from the start; it would be, to use the language of “Analysis,” to proceed from a fixed starting point and undermine discovery. It is obvious that in experience, seemingly “neutral” common sense categories can operate oppressively - and equally that what is oppressive in one situation may be anodyne (or perhaps even emancipatory) in another. As such, Beauvoir is properly an existentialist about essentialism: the way definitions actually function in a

¹³² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 4.

given (as merely descriptive or oppressive, or somewhere in between) can only be discovered in the course of investigation. The “existence” of essentialist definitions - the claim that there is an eternal feminine - is similarly shifted: what an essentialist definition really is - how it actually functions - cannot be given in advance, but uncovered within the work of disclosure. That is, we cannot rely on the theoretical authority of an essentialist project to understand the lived reality of that definition; we cannot take essentialism at its word. As such, and in keeping with her early equation of genuine experimentation with doubt, *The Second Sex* begins by putting all definitions of women - from the seemingly innocuous to more obscure - into question. We will treat this point of departure in the Introduction in detail now.

If we pay proper attention to her experimental strategy in the following key passage, we find Beauvoir *proliferating* various terms, considering and establishing their possible relation to the master term. “Woman” refers to an existential difference to men (men and women *exist*) and is deployed strategically as a term for the purposes of her investigation, and should be construed as the master term. Firmly anti-essentialist, Beauvoir eschews any one definition or term as a site of meaning. If we acknowledge the technique of proliferation, we see Beauvoir look at a range of elements and refuse to commit to the idea that any in particular, or in isolated combination, comprise woman’s lived existence. To be a woman *might* (or might not) involve elements of the biological (the ‘female’) and the cultural (the ‘feminine’) in a state of interplay along with many other elements.

And the truth is that anyone can clearly see that humanity is split into two categories of individuals with manifestly different clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, movements, interests and occupations; these difference are perhaps superficial; perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain is that for the moment they exist in a strikingly obvious way.¹³³

It is important to note that Beauvoir concedes that “humanity is split into two categories of individuals.”¹³⁴ There is an existential difference between “man” and “woman”, meaning that lived experience is different for a man and for a woman. Beauvoir affirms “Clearly, no woman can claim without bad faith to be situated beyond her sex.”¹³⁵ Beauvoir is satisfied to (tentatively and critically) use the terms ‘man’ and ‘woman’ to designate this existential difference: “What is certain is that for the moment they exist in a strikingly obvious way.”¹³⁶ In fact, this existential difference necessitates her very project. Beauvoir explains:

¹³³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 4.

¹³⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 4.

¹³⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 4.

¹³⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 4.

It would never occur to a man to write a book on the singular situation of males in humanity. If I want to define myself, I first have to say, “I am a woman”; all other assertions will arise from this basic truth. A man never begins by positing himself as an individual of a certain sex: that he is a man is obvious...¹³⁷

Later in her life, she will explain that the original impulse behind *The Second Sex* was autobiographical. Expressing her commitment to disclosing her own lived experience (an operation she refers to here as “defining herself”), Beauvoir construed her point of departure as the fact of her being “woman.” We do not know if Beauvoir construes the *task* of “defin[ing]” oneself as masculinist or feminist. We also do not know if Beauvoir is proud of the importance of this “being woman” in her life. In fact, she even seems to begrudgingly recognise it as the central defining component to her existence. Beauvoir connects her existing as a woman first and foremost with memories of injustice. Within a conversation, Beauvoir knows that her being ‘woman’ constitutes grounds to disregard her contributions:

I used to get annoyed in abstract discussions to hear men tell me: “You think such and such a thing because you’re a woman.” But I know my only defense is to answer, “I think it because it is true” thereby eliminating my subjectivity; it was out of the question to answer, “And you think the contrary because you are a man,” because it is understood that being a man is not a particularity;¹³⁸

Beauvoir explains that she understands her “being woman” is what Butler would refer to as “a necessary precondition, that without which one cannot move.” This is the case because existentially, that is, in living her life (Beauvoir immediately draws upon the form of an anecdote), her being woman is *the* prominent fact, while for man it is not. Accordingly, for the purposes of her investigation, it is “that without which one cannot move.” Beauvoir asserts that asymmetry is central to understanding her existence. Beauvoir does not yet account for this existential asymmetry. However, she does point to the fact that the designation was not her own. She draws the reader’s attention to a practice or operation of defining and stipulation, done by men: “for the ancients there was an absolute vertical that defined the oblique, there is an absolute human type that is masculine.”¹³⁹ In this patriarchal world, definitions and categorisations are generated by one “absolute” party. A subject-object relation is immediately implied. From the vantage point of the vertical, the “absolute” party execute a practice whereby they “define” the “oblique”. In doing so, they institute the parameters by which the secondary party exist. The secondary party inherit the proclamations and have with no recourse to

¹³⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 5.

¹³⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 5.

¹³⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 5.

challenge (having been passively defined, they have no recourse to define themselves). In order to define her existence, Beauvoir acknowledges the a priori production of her identity within (what today we would explain via cliché as) *a man's world*, by the men within it.

Beauvoir views this asymmetry as formative to her existence. Accordingly, this justifies her enquiry and tacitly forgives her choice to deploy the term “woman” for the purposes of the investigation: “If I want to define myself, I first have to say, “I am a woman”; all other assertions will arise from this basic truth.”¹⁴⁰ Perhaps in making this concession, Beauvoir pre-empts the criticism she will later face. This moment clarifies her position with regard to later debates within feminism as to whether usage of the term “woman” to describe political agents warrants total eradication, or is a necessary component of effective political activity. Anticipating the criticism that she over-relies on patriarchal resources, Beauvoir concedes that she exists in a man's world, and that their categorisations, resources, and language are her available material. Yet this manoeuvre is not passive submission. Beauvoir asserts that while woman (the oblique) was a namesake she procured from within a patriarchal world, it signifies an existential state of affairs that necessitates (and justifies) her project. Indeed, even in this very moment Beauvoir achieves a proliferation of the term. Although tacitly deploying the term in a patriarchal sense, as soon as it becomes clear that she has chosen to use it in order to describe this state of affairs. She uses the term volitionally as a term that signifies and diagnoses a political injustice, and in doing so, she ascribes the term a new valence or meaning. Woman emerges reclaimed, perhaps.

Beauvoir's subsequent elaboration of this existential asymmetry signifies her continued reliance on proliferation. Beauvoir certainly does not deny the *existence* of gender difference:

And the truth is that anyone can clearly see that humanity is split into two categories of individuals with manifestly different clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, movements, interests and occupations; these difference are perhaps superficial; perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain is that for the moment they exist in a strikingly obvious way.¹⁴¹

Humanity is divided into two classes. However, immediately after this assertion, follows a strange list in which gender is manifested, not in binary terms, but as lived experience. Beauvoir lists behaviours, interests, traits, hobbies alongside one another. . The items constitute an eclectic ensemble: it is difficult to find the appropriate term to unify and describe all the items listed: “behaviour” does not catch all listed items, neither do the terms “characteristic” or “trait” (“trait” in particular evokes a genetic or biological association, which excludes items

¹⁴⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 6.

¹⁴¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 4.

such as clothes and occupations). Although the term “characteristic” does not effectively capture all the elements of her list, I’ll use this term because Beauvoir uses it in an earlier passage, where she states “scientists now understand these as secondary characteristics to a situation.”¹⁴²

Beauvoir does not stipulate how these characteristics are appropriated differently by either gender and deliberately *obscures* the origin of these gendered characteristics. The listed items themselves seem like a snapshot; it does not strike one as exhaustive of the space. This I suggest is intentional: the starting point of her account is the *appearance* of gender, not an “idea” or essence of a given gender. “They exist in a strikingly obvious way,” which is to say, manifest in appearance. In appearance, occupations and interests - characteristics that seem likely to signal a “cultural” aspect - appear alongside examples such as walking and smiling (which could be “biological” in origin). If we examine, for example, the characteristic of “smiling,” we again find the (potential) coexistence of multiple factors - a smile can signal genetic features, a person’s economic status, or essentialist-normative gender expectations. And neither biological nor cultural reductive explanations take into account whether a subject freely chooses whether to smile or not.¹⁴³

Importantly, Beauvoir is not identifying how these characteristics are taken up by either gender - what clothes men wear, how women and men move their bodies, for example. If we look to the list with an essentialist question in mind such as “what is a woman?” or “what is a man?” the list is unsatisfying. Rather a difference is opened up between the mutually exclusionary binary woman/man and a series of plural characteristics in which gender is shown or appears in lived experience. Beauvoir concedes that while an existential asymmetry exists, she does not purport to explain (at least at this juncture) *why* this is the case. This listing, in other words, is an element of her attempt to shift the question from “what *is* a woman?” to “what is it to *exist* as a woman?” As such, the difficulty we face in conceptually categorizing the items listed is not, in my reading, the result of carelessness on her part. Quite the opposite. If the list is “literary” it is literary not in the pejorative sense (as “vague” or “un-philosophical”) but literary in the sense that it exceeds an essentialist approach to the subject matter, following the explicitly *experimental* model outlined in “Literature and Metaphysics.” It is thus left unclear - and I suggest intentionally so - whether each characteristic can be neatly categorized as belonging to either men or women, biological sex or cultured performance. In other words:

¹⁴² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 4.

¹⁴³ In the late 1940s, differences in the way men and women used their bodies was still attributed to biologic difference. See Iris Marion Young’s *On Female Bodily Experience: “Throwing like a Girl” and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

any number or combination of different causes (biological, cultural or otherwise) may underpin each characteristic. The list implies that the way men and women comport themselves express a complex web of identity irreducible to either biological sex or acculturated gender.

If we then pay attention to the way that Beauvoir proliferates understandings of ‘woman’ by playing with and proliferating terms such as ‘female’, ‘femininity’ and ‘woman’, we see that Beauvoir refuses to commit to any particular element as *solely* constitutive of women’s lived experience. Beauvoir announces the topic of her investigation as “what is a woman?” but the question is wholly misleading; Beauvoir certainly does not profess to account for what a woman “is.” Maintaining an anti-essentialist approach, Beauvoir immediately highlights the difficulties in trying to further define such a subject as the “female” or “femininity.” One definitional framework we could attempt is to read “woman” as a “female” – where she is biologically defined as “womb”:

Tota mulier in utero: she is a womb, some say. Yet speaking of certain women, the experts proclaim, “They are not women,” even though they have a uterus like the others.... Not every female being is necessarily a woman.¹⁴⁴

But merely having a womb is not sufficient grounds for someone to be bestowed the title “woman,” or to *exist* as a woman. She immediately problematizes the biological essentialist account – some subjects have uteruses but are not viewed as “women.” A presumption that Beauvoir is hereby in straightforward agreement with constructivism is not warranted, despite a prevailing reading of this passage (discussed above) that Beauvoir here institutes a sharp distinction between the two terms “female” (sex) and “woman” (gender).¹⁴⁵

On my reading, in contrast, Beauvoir does not assert a distinction between the terms as much as she claims that a biological or pseudo-biological *conception* of woman (as womb) can comprise a *part* of a woman’s lived experience - in the sense that both womb-having and the identification of woman with womb will be elements in a complex situation. “Woman” is thus an existential concept. It is critical to recognise that Beauvoir opens up the category, to describe all manner of women, those whom have wombs and those who do not, those who are feminine and those who are not, in order to encourage a critical understanding of *all* of those who have found themselves occupying the status of the oblique.

Next Beauvoir considers the relation between “woman” and “femininity,” immediately problematizing any simple association of femininity with either biology or culture:

¹⁴⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 11.

She must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity. Is femininity secreted by the ovaries? Is it enshrined in a Platonic heaven? Is a frilly petticoat enough to bring it down to earth?¹⁴⁶

The clearest meaning Beauvoir can extract from “the feminine” (though with obvious irony) is a reference to the wearing of petticoats. As such, wearing a petticoat (enacting or performing femininity) has some relation to the “woman”, but Beauvoir clearly does not regard the wearing of the skirt (or any related ‘feminine’ acts, if they can be pinned down), taken on its own, as a constituting the subject as a woman. Femininity here is sometimes construed as the normative element that binds one’s possession of female anatomy with the social, enabling the subject to graduate as woman. In other words, “femininity” might be the form that the normative essentialist claim assumes. But far more importantly, we see her focus, as soon as she raises “femininity,” is the fact that it cannot be defined. Any given norm of “femininity” can be dismissed as contingent or arbitrary. Indeed, femininity can barely stand up as an idea. Beauvoir focuses on the negligible articulation of femininity as a concept: remarking that it is “encased” in “vague” and “shimmering” language.¹⁴⁷ How could an undefinable element comprise sufficient grounds for one to graduate as a woman?

Beauvoir’s efforts to stress the vagueness of the concept can mean a few different things: it can refer to the contradictory expectations and instructions women receive in their acculturation, and can refer to the fact that women are destined to aspire for the impossible. It does not, however, mean that having a womb has nothing to do with the feminine, and vice versa. “Woman” is irreducible to either a biological *or* cultural conception of woman. Someone can have a womb, but experts can always remark “that they’re not much of a woman.” Or, as Beauvoir points out, a man can wear a petticoat and be effeminate, but it does not make him a woman (unless other plural factors intervene). But can a subject have had a hysterectomy and be considered “very much” a woman?

Stella Sandford has pointed out that that the terms ‘woman’ and ‘female’ here do not map directly unto the terms of a sex-gender divide. Sandford writes:

The notion of ‘woman’ in *The Second Sex* is not simply translatable into the category of ‘gender’, indeed ... it cuts across or problematizes the traditional sex/gender distinction.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 3.

¹⁴⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 3.

¹⁴⁸ Sandford Stella “Contingent Ontologies: Sex, Gender and ‘Woman’ in Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler,” *Radical Philosophy*, 97 (Sept./Oct. 1999), 21.

Gatens concurs: Beauvoir does not understand “woman” to be a gender category at all.¹⁴⁹ In my reading, in these moments, rather than instituting an essentialist account of gender or a constructivist account, Beauvoir seeks to illuminate the inadequacy of any one of these terms to account for the reality of women’s existence. I accordingly argue that a sex/gender reading of the Introduction misses her unique methodological approach. It is a simplistic reading of this passage to view the womb and feminine as the two (central, or only) components of ‘woman’. I have argued that ‘Woman’ as we know it, is an existential concept for Beauvoir, one that refers to an existential asymmetry. Beauvoir does not claim that either the biological or cultural (the ‘feminine’) elements constitute ‘woman’, whether independent from one another or banded together. Beauvoir raises the prospect that a woman can, or may, have ‘something to do’ with biological or cultural conceptions. However, she certainly does not propose that having a womb or wearing a petticoat, or having a womb and wearing a petticoat, gets you the whole way there.

Karen Vintges elucidates some of the positive consequences of her anti-essentialism. Vintges also mobilises what we in this chapter have identified as the strategy of proliferation and describes it as operating as a “pluralistic agency of feminism”:

From Beauvoir’s philosophy, we see that it is not necessary to do away with any thinking in terms of identity if we want to avoid the fixed identity of the deep self. Thus, we can maintain a pluralistic agency of feminism. By criticizing all ideas, practices and institutions that essentialize women, we can assert positive ideals when we present them as contingent choices, or rather as concrete and diverse elaborated arts of living. Beauvoir’s own life and work amount to the creation of such an art of living.¹⁵⁰

With proper attention to Beauvoir’s strategies of proliferation here, we see that her most effective strategy is to institute or open up the field of feminist philosophical enquiry. Were Beauvoir to identify any one definition of woman, or the origin of woman, feminist philosophy as it stands would not exist. Instead, Beauvoir calls for examination not of the origin of ‘woman’ or the definition of ‘woman’, rather to the *lived experience* of women. Given our examination of Beauvoir’s earlier conception of the literary, and its relation to freedom, we can assume that here Beauvoir hopes for future feminist philosophers to question their own experience,

¹⁴⁹ Gatens Moira “Beauvoir and biology: a second look,” 276-277.

¹⁵⁰ Karen Vintges writes: *She created a new ethos as a woman without speaking in the name of woman as an essential subject, and without a strong articulation of gender. She advocated the creation of identity as a project of positive moral commitment, whereas at the same time she criticised universal moral truth. Through the description and construction of her own life, she wanted to give other women guidelines for organising their own lives. But, true to her conception of the singularity of positive ethics, she kept her distance from statements concerning who or what a good woman is, or what real femininity is.* See Karen Vintges *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir* trans. Anne Lavelle (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996)

along with the experience of those around them (and, as we know, she was successful in this regard). Perhaps her approach intends to call for woman readers to question their own lived experience *outside* the frameworks of viewing themselves as a womb, a petticoat and outside the frameworks of biological essentialism and constructivism. Indeed, the very complexity of being a woman seems implied in this methodological mess. It is particularly important that Beauvoir believes her task must commence at the point of (and subsequently work through) that which she wishes to criticise. In the earlier discussion of “Analysis”, we found that young Beauvoir criticised systematicity on the grounds that it involves commencing investigation at ‘one’ starting point. Instead, the young Beauvoir expressed a commitment to multiplying these starting points. Furthermore, she did not advocate their full abolition. Instead, she felt it necessary to work with and through them. In this section we have found that Beauvoir does not directly abolish her critical counterpoints (such as, but not limited to, biological essentialism and cultural essentialism). Instead, Beauvoir introduced, acknowledged and proliferated them. Beauvoir invites her counterpoints into the mix, precisely in order to generate possibilities beyond their scope.

In the next section (2.2), we look at how Beauvoir establishes the claim that an absolute ‘vertical’ party defines the ‘oblique’ – how men have figured woman as the Absolute Other.

2.2. Experimental Approach in *The Second Sex*

In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir appropriates a vast body of source material in numerous unique ways, and this can make sustained engagement with the text challenging. Nancy Bauer acknowledges the “sheer difficulty of getting through *The Second Sex*,” suggesting that “What makes *The Second Sex* hard has to do particularly with both what Beauvoir has to write and how she writes it.”¹⁵¹ While the breadth and diversity of sources operative within *The Second Sex* is a challenge in itself, *how* Beauvoir treats this material is a further complication. In this section I want to explore the ways in which her engagement with other texts is often critical, but not explicitly so. This tacitly critical mode of appropriation of existing textual authority is, I will contend, a key element of her experimental strategy, a *discovering* of the operations of textual authority for both reader and author.

¹⁵¹ Bauer argues that “It is a long book - so long, in fact, that its American publisher... insisted that the translator cut what turned out to be more than 10 percent of its original one-thousand-plus pages. But lots of books are long...Elizabeth Hardwick, in an early - and thoroughly mixed - review, had this to say about the experience of getting through what she called (in a virtuoso display of back-handed praise) “this madly sensible and brilliantly obscure tome on women...” *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy & Feminism*, 11-12.

Penelope Deutscher summarises Beauvoir's research approach as an "attempt to work through everything that had been written about women," an "extravagant approach" drawing on "biology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, economics, sociology, politics, history, and the history of literature..." Deutscher goes on:

Beauvoir's drawing on plural disciplines has generally been considered more of an oddity than a strength, particularly where the discussion of data or approaches from one context seems to have the potential to call into question another. She refers to biological facts in *The Second Sex* and also claims, from a different perspective, that there can be no pure biological facts. She presents economically minded solutions to inequality but considers such solutions reductive. With respect to the number of disciplinary approaches she puts into play, she does not make a case for their compatibility, nor does she stress possible incompatibilities.¹⁵²

The value of Deutscher's remark here is to draw attention to the uniqueness of Beauvoir's "extravagant" traversing of multiple disciplines, and to the contradictions seemingly generated by it. As we have seen above, Stella Sandford also addresses a supposed tension between Beauvoir's claim that there are "no pure biological facts" and the text's ongoing "insidious reliance" on biological facts – and indeed criticizes the text on that basis. But Deutscher's claim above that Beauvoir does not make a case for the compatibility *or* incompatibility of different positions suggests that compatibility between the material considered is not Beauvoir's prime concern. Rather, Beauvoir is, following her literary-philosophical critical approach, attempting to *show* the reader that the lived experience of women (or an examination into women's lived experience) can accommodate seemingly incompatible claims about what it *is* to be a woman. These positions are only incompatible from a theoretical perspective that does not take into account lived experience. From her perspective, theoretically incompatible positions are in fact "compatible" in a broader sense, insofar as multiple claims about women's essence are simultaneously present in women's lived experience. The lived experience of women is in fact the site of *multiple* essentialist claims about what a woman *is*. As we will see in Chapter 3, "Situation" shows the ways in which a woman lives out the compatible incompatibility of various essentialist claims about woman. At this point, however, we are trying to isolate how the proliferation of multiple perspectives, disciplines, and theoretical positions functions as a *formal technique*, part of her "experimental" opposition to and uncovering of patriarchal authority.

¹⁵² Penelope Deutscher *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5. Karen Vintges construes Beauvoir as an "intellectual practitioner" "whose writing purposefully dissolves the boundaries of genre". Karen Vintges *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir* and "Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Thinker for Our Times" in *Hypatia* Vol. 14, No. 4. (Autumn 1999), pp. 136.

Michele Le Dœuff's work is helpful in uncovering Beauvoir's experimental literary-philosophical strategies. Le Dœuff describes Beauvoir's approach to writing *The Second Sex* using the Greek word "metis," a "cobbling" together of available sources:

The term [metis] refers to an art of indirect means, quite close to that of 'cobbling things together with whatever comes to hand' and also to that of seizing the opportunity. The Greeks thought that this was the kind of intelligence that enabled one to move in an unknown world.¹⁵³

Le Dœuff's imagery of Beauvoir cobbling "whatever was to hand" is useful for the purposes of understanding Beauvoir's technique. Firstly, Le Dœuff's claim that "cobbling" enables Beauvoir to "move in an unknown world," recalls the metaphors of darkness and light we encountered in "Analysis" and "Literature and Metaphysics." Cobbling as technique is thus linkable to Beauvoir's early characterisation of literary-philosophical writing as a rendering visible of a previously "unknown world." Secondly, cobbling works with *whatever* is available regardless of classificatory scheme. The fact that Beauvoir did not exclusively use material from the philosophical, literary or scientific canons enables her to construct a criticism of a social operation cutting across and making use of various textual resources, rather than presenting a criticism organised in advance by academic-institutional discipline. Such a "discipline-specific" criticism would be a *partial* perspective on or reconstruction of patriarchal oppression.

The image of metis as cobbling "whatever is at hand" also draws our attention to the limitations of her approach. The "cobbling hand," so to speak, is always attached to a particular person, in a particular time and space. Beauvoir, culturally and historically situated, sought to construct a text that diagnosed patriarchal authority as operative within that cultural and historical situation. As such, her opening up of (or disregard for) disciplinary boundaries cannot render her reconstruction entirely *impartial*. Beauvoir has received abundant criticism on the basis that *The Second Sex* does not take the experience of other women and other cultural texts into consideration, and that it is overtly written from the perspective of European middle-class values.¹⁵⁴ From this perspective, Beauvoir falsely universalises *modern European* patriarchy. This critique, while understandable, fails to read the consistent thematisation of "situation" – Beauvoir's own included – throughout *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir placed herself, and her own situatedness, front and centre of the text. This was not a fact that Beauvoir sought to conceal.

¹⁵³ Michelle Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*. 106-108.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Spelman *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press) 1988. In chapter 3 argues that Beauvoir's text "lacks sensitivity towards variations in women's experience such as race and class" 159.

i) Reintroduction: Beauvoir's critical treatment of philosophical authority

The success of Beauvoir's transposition of canonical philosophical material into an investigation of gender relations is debated by readers of Beauvoir. Some scholars contend that Beauvoir's resources are contaminated and her arguments compromised by the phallogentric resources she deploys. Against this, Michele Le Dœuff argues that Beauvoir introduces and utilises a "doctrinal" philosophy – canonical philosophical authority – in order to render visible the oppression of women, while simultaneously revealing the complicity of philosophical and patriarchal authority. Le Dœuff entitles this strategy "Reintroduction":

We can clearly see Simone de Beauvoir's technique, her metis, her craftiness with and towards the doctrinal philosophy she has accepted. It is a technique of reintroduction which undermines the structure... it could be said that Beauvoir, constantly faced with the closure produced by phenomenology, challenges it just as constantly, rediscovering questions that the pure phenomenologists left out: that of the concrete means necessary to establish oneself as a subject or, here, that of reciprocity.¹⁵⁵

In the remainder of this chapter I will follow the implications of Le Dœuff's position. Firstly, I will consider an aspect of what Le Dœuff calls Beauvoir's "challenge" to the "closure" of phenomenological discourse in the name of "concrete means necessary to establish oneself as a subject." This will turn on the contemporary debate among Beauvoir scholars concerning her appropriation of the master-slave dialectic famously elaborated in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The debate here turns on the "reciprocity" of recognition enabled by Hegel's account of the confrontation of master and slave and Beauvoir's re-purposing of Hegel's argument in order to explicate modern gender relations. For Beauvoir, Hegel's account of recognition is complicit with patriarchal authority insofar as it fails to extend recognition to female subjects, who remain in a relation of non-reciprocity with men (and are thus "absolute others"). Secondly, I will highlight some key moments of the Myth chapter of *The Second Sex*, reading it as an extended treatment of patriarchal authority's attempt to arrest the dialectic of mutual recognition via literary figurations of women's absolute alterity. This thematic will be continued into Chapter 3, in looking at the operation of patriarchal authority at the level of women's lived experience.

¹⁵⁵ Michelle Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*. 106-108. Le Dœuff's reading of Beauvoir reading Sartre is very significant in the history of Beauvoir studies. Contemporary Beauvoir scholars continue to examine Le Dœuff's work, and the interrelation between Le Doeuff and Beauvoir's works. See Michelle Boulous Walker "Love, ethics, and authenticity: Beauvoir's lesson in what it means to read," *Hypatia*, 25 2 (2010): 334-356.

i) Reintroducing Hegel's Master-Slave slave

In my reading of Beauvoir's "Myths" chapter I contend that Beauvoir claims that the textual treatment of women under patriarchy severely impedes the possibility of relations of reciprocity between genders. Beauvoir will contend that real lived relations between men and women reflect this theoretical state of affairs. Beauvoir will ultimately call for the establishment of authentic "reciprocity" between genders.

Hegel's dialectic of lordship and bondage, which is better known as 'master-slave' is a central reference for twentieth-Century French philosophy. It is believed that Beauvoir was exposed to Hegel's dialectic in the 1930s, via Alexandre Kojève's own reinterpretation of Hegelianism in a series of well-attended Paris lectures.¹⁵⁶ Beauvoir draws on the language and terminology from Hegel's master-slave dialectic at various junctures throughout *The Second Sex*, including in the Introductory essay, the History chapter and the Myths chapter. I contend that we can consider her appropriation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic as one of reintroduction. Beauvoir repurposes Hegel's dialectic for her own ends. She offers a partial reading of the dialectic, using one moment only from the dialectic, in order to articulate the thesis that gender relations can be non-reciprocal. By reintroducing Hegel's thesis in this particular way, Beauvoir simultaneously effects a criticism of Hegel's dialectic.

For Beauvoir, and for readers of Beauvoir, the question is whether and how Hegel's master-slave dialectic is adequate as an account of the operations of gender oppression. To begin to answer that question here we will need to give a very brief reconstruction of the role of the master-slave dialectic within Hegel's *Phenomenology*. As is well-known, Hegel's *Phenomenology* tells a historical narrative of "Spirit" coming to consciousness of its own nature, which consists in freedom. "Spirit" is Hegel's word for human subjectivity and its necessary sociality, "the unity of different, independent self-consciousness" in a given social formation.¹⁵⁷ So, putting things as simply as possible, the *Phenomenology* tells the story of an idealised subject coming across the course of Western cultural history to recognise the freedom proper to it. The story relates how the socio-political conditions for the realisation of this freedom are in place in Western modernity. This recognition and realisation is achieved for Hegel in the historical overcoming of the partial realisations of freedom in each prior stage of consciousness' understanding of itself and the society in which it functions.

¹⁵⁶ Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

¹⁵⁷ Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Section 177.

Within this narrative, the encounter between master and slave is a particularly primitive and foundational experience for consciousness, not localisable in any specific moment of Western cultural history. Most importantly, the relation between master and slave is for Hegel a deficient one, a stage on the way to the appropriately reciprocal relation between self-conscious subjects as (ostensibly) achieved in the modern state. The deficiency of the master-slave relation vis-à-vis freedom is legible in its instability and self-contradiction. The origins of the master-slave relation are presented in Hegel's account of the "life and death struggle", in which two self-consciously independent subjects attempt to prove their independence and freedom by subduing the other, by making the other recognise their freedom and, in so doing, deny their own.¹⁵⁸ The "winner" of this contest is the master, and the "loser" the slave. I put these terms in scare quotes: as the master's position is ultimately self-undermining or self-contradictory, "winning" is a dubious honour. The key to understanding the self-undermining nature of mastery is the differing relations of master and slave to the objective world. For the master, the slave makes any engagement with that world unnecessary – the slave is the only "tool" or instrument the master needs to satisfy his biological needs. But of course, the master's self-understanding is that he *does not need* the slave, that he is fully independent, that the slave is dependent on him, and not the other way around. Stephen Houlgate's summary of the issues is helpful to cite here:

"Mastery takes itself to be unlimited, unfettered, wholly independent freedom. Yet it is mediated by the work of the slave, who prepares things for the master's consumption, and by the recognition that the slave accords to the master... the very presence of the slave is thus a constant reminder to the master of the dependent character of mastery itself. As the master becomes more conscious of this dependence, his sense of ambiguous mastery is undermined and his understanding of himself thereby transformed."¹⁵⁹

The slave, on the other hand, is directly engaged in the world of objects, using tools to shape given objects into objects appropriate for the master's enjoyment. In so doing, he comes to get a sense of his own freedom and independence, his ability to bestow new form on the world. As Houlgate puts it: "In the very work that the slave is forced to do, he comes to see his freedom objectified in a way that is denied to the master".¹⁶⁰ The instability in the one-sided idea of both mastery and slavery leads, for Hegel, toward an understanding of necessity of mutual recognition between self-conscious subjects – to claim independence from others is self-undermining, and even pure servitude shows itself up as containing a moment of freedom. However, this is

¹⁵⁸ Hegel *Phenomenology* Section 186-189.

¹⁵⁹ Stephen Houlgate (editor) *The Hegel Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 97.

¹⁶⁰ Stephen Houlgate *The Hegel Reader* 100.

not achieved in the transformation of the master and slave's respective self-understandings directly, but much later in the *Phenomenology's* narrative, in the reciprocal recognition afforded by specifically modern subjects in post-Reformation Western social organisations (the modern State).

Beauvoir's critical appropriation of Hegel's dialectic is two-sided. On the one hand, Hegel's ethical horizon for Beauvoir remains valid. Beauvoir will ultimately call for the establishment of authentic "reciprocity" between genders:

It is possible to overcome this conflict if each individual freely recognizes the other, each regarding himself and the other simultaneously as object and as subject in a reciprocal manner.¹⁶¹

Beauvoir's use of "Subject" and "object" here are broadly consistent with Hegel's text (with the possible exception of a complication raised by Nancy Bauer we will treat in a moment). In mutual recognition, one subject takes the other as its object, while understanding that it itself is taken as an object by that subject in turn. The problem, in terms of gender relations, is that patriarchal authority operates to make women the object or "other" of men's gaze, while undoing or blocking the validity of women's taking men as an object in turn.

On the other hand, Hegel's dialectic itself is insufficient to account for gender oppression, it is unable to explain *why* recognition between genders remains to be achieved. Eva Lundgren-Gothlin contends that woman is unable under patriarchy even to assume the status of the slave, and accordingly that the master-slave dialectic is not able to be successfully mapped onto Beauvoir's account of gender relations. On this reading, Hegel's text cannot in itself account for patriarchal oppression because women are *outside* its operation – they are not a term in the master-slave dialectic; they are not in patriarchal society allowed even to assume the status of slaves. Were they to do so, the logic of Hegel's dialectic would lead to feminine or feminised subjects coming to an understanding of their own freedom, and, ultimately, demanding mutual recognition from men. As Lundgren-Gothlin contends:

I am therefore claiming, in contrast to other scholars, that while Beauvoir uses the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to explain the origins of oppression, she does not locate man as master and woman as slave in this dialectic. Instead, woman is seen as not participating in the process of recognition, a fact that explains the unique nature of her oppression. Although the man is the master, the essential consciousness in relation to woman, the woman is not a slave in relation to him. This makes their relationship more absolute, and non-dialectical, and it explains why woman is the absolute Other.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 160.

¹⁶² Eva Lundgren-Gothlin *Sex and Existence*, 69.

This reading has been maintained by a number of Beauvoir scholars.¹⁶³ Nancy Bauer concurs, claiming that, for Beauvoir, women are determined as non-reciprocal or “absolute” Other:

... to be an “Other” in Beauvoir’s idiom... implies the impossibility of this sort of reciprocity with the “One”; it is to be perceived as absolutely metaphysically inferior – as, for example, fundamentally an object as opposed to a subject.¹⁶⁴

Bauer’s reading emphasises Beauvoir’s understanding of reciprocity as the parties viewing one another as object *and* subject – this is indeed supported by her lines, iterated above, which characterises reciprocity in terms of “simultaneous” as subject and object statuses for participants. Bauer however takes this further, claiming that her emphasis on simultaneity pushes her dialectic of gender beyond Hegel *altogether* – Lundgren-Gothlin is right to argue that women cannot be identified with the slave in Hegel’s narrative, but Bauer argues that men cannot be identified with the master either.¹⁶⁵ On Bauer’s reading, Hegel’s master need never regard himself as an object as a component of his newly developing self-understanding as mutually dependent on the slave – this marks a unique Beauvoirean twist. “But Beauvoir is to my knowledge completely original in figuring reciprocal recognition as requiring one’s own and the other’s essential nature as objects as well as subjects.”¹⁶⁶ We are unfortunately not in the position to adjudicate on Bauer’s claim here; it would require a close and ultimately off-topic engagement with Hegel’s text and surrounding scholarship.

The goal here rather is to show how the critical appropriation of Hegelianism is deployed by Beauvoir in order to illuminate oppression, and to connect that appropriation with the binary valorisation we uncovered in her earlier writings. Beauvoir’s own way of putting this extra-dialectical status for women is to say that the dialectic between genders is artificially arrested or “frozen” by patriarchal authority:

But what singularly defines the situation of women is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as an Other: an attempt is made to freeze her as an object¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ K Fullbrook and E Fullbrook, provide “Woman must be seen as outside the classic Hegelian master-slave dialectic because she is defined as an inessential Other, and therefore located outside the dialectic altogether as an Absolute Other.” K Fullbrook and E Fullbrook *Hyphatia* (Vol. 13. No. 3), *Border Crossings: multicultural and postcolonial feminist challenges to philosophy* (part 2) (Summer, 1998), 183.

¹⁶⁴ Nancy Bauer *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy*, 198 - 207.

¹⁶⁵ Eva Lundgren-Gothlin *Sex and Existence*, 207.

¹⁶⁶ Eva Lundgren-Gothlin *Sex and Existence*, 212.

¹⁶⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 17.

For Hegel, as we saw above, the slave is initially an “other” (not “Other”) to the free autonomy of the master that can dialectically come to assume its own autonomy via meaningful labour. The slave, in other words, comes to see himself not as “other than” the master, but a subject in (at least minimally) free relation to the objective world. In contrast, women in her account do not (or are not enabled to) participate in the slave’s overcoming of his “other” status. The “freezing” that Beauvoir draws attention to is consistent with her earlier characterisation of “theoretical” authority – now gendered as we have seen in 2.1. above – in terms of “stasis” and “atemporality.”

Interestingly, critical feminist literary practice after Beauvoir’s time (in the mid to late 20th century) at times encounters a similar problematic of static representation: feminist literary scholars have sought to demonstrate that women have been figured in *particular* ways, and/or within representative binaries (such as mother-whore, virgin-whore, and so forth). Such frameworks prove immediately problematic when the representative claim is confronted with alternative representations of women. In our examination of Beauvoir’s “Myths” chapter, we see that she overcomes this problem in a philosophically innovative and interesting way.

Beauvoir does not merely pay lip service to the *different* ways women are depicted by male authors. Beauvoir proliferates the different representations. Stressing the inconsistency of the representations – presenting them as an ultimately incoherent ensemble of depictions - Beauvoir stresses the machination of representation itself. In evacuating the form of the representation, she strips it down to its bare bones and exposes male authors to be fashioning women as Other. In other words, within this framework, Beauvoir cannot be stumped by any particularly wild or outlandish representation of women. She can use any evidence where women are represented, to illuminate the male authorial tendency to depict depending on their specific needs. Women’s instrumentalisation is important to Beauvoir, not necessarily *how* they are instrumentalised. This becomes particularly interesting when Beauvoir works on the valorisation of women. In her view, exaltation and valorisation are equally pernicious to misogynistic or degrading representations.

Beauvoir’s use of the absolute Other, as a partial interpretation of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, expressly positions women as occupying both poles of, or outside, any binary representations:

Delilah and Judith, Aspasia and Lucretia, Pandora and Athena, woman is both Eve and the Virgin Mary.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 166.

Beauvoir concedes that “the object fluctuates so much and is so contradictory that its unity is not at first discerned”. In the absence of a unity of representation, Beauvoir chooses to make a claim for the audacity of the representation itself:

And this is why woman embodies no set concept; through her the passage from hope to failure, hatred to love, good to bad, bad to good takes places ceaselessly. However she is considered, it is this ambivalence that is most striking.¹⁶⁹

It is always difficult to describe a myth; it does not lend itself to being grasped or defined; it haunts consciousnesses without ever being posited opposite them as a fixed object¹⁷⁰

Males have always and everywhere paraded their satisfaction of feeling they are kings of creation.¹⁷¹

Beauvoir unfixes the prospect that woman is represented in any one way. In one moment she is exalted as idol, the next a servant, and Beauvoir proliferates these representations. She draws attention specifically to the way these representations chop and change at rapid speed. At one moment she is truth, the next artifice and lies. In one moment a healer, the next an executor of the dark forces:

She is an idol, a servant, source of life, power of darkness; she is the elementary silence of truth, she is artifice, gossip and lies; she is the medicine woman and witch; ... she is everything he is not and wants to have, his negation and his *raison d'être*.¹⁷²

Woman is not considered “as she is for herself”, rather “as she appears to man”:

This comes from being considered not positively, as she is for herself: but negatively, such as she appears to man. Because if there are other Others than the woman, she is still always defined as Other.

Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being. “Woman, the relative being,” writes Michelet.¹⁷³

Beauvoir demonstrates through the careful study of a large variety of writing that male authors have created a state of affairs whereby they designate, design, configure, and create ‘women’ as the passive receptacles or instrument of male needs. The chapter refers to a vast quantity of religious and mythic texts, and comprises

¹⁶⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 167.

¹⁷⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 166.

¹⁷¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 11.

¹⁷² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 166.

¹⁷³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 5.

five more detailed case studies. Beauvoir's central task is to illuminate the *dynamic* of representation. The proliferation of different representations of women work together to illuminate the dynamic, rather than any consistent way women are presented. This is supported by the 'fact' of patriarchal textual traditions: Beauvoir maintains that men have written the world as it is known, and that women's voices are excluded. Men are the true creators:

Aeschylus, Aristotle and Hippocrates proclaimed that on earth as on Mount Olympus it is the male principle that is the true creator: form, number and movement come from him; Demeter makes corn multiply but the origin of corn and its truth are in Zeus; woman's fertility is considered merely a passive virtue. She is earth and man seed, she is water and he is fire... the still earth, furrowed by the labourer's toil, receives the seeds in its rows... But its role is necessary: it is the soil that nourishes the seed, shelters it and provides its substance.¹⁷⁴

Beauvoir is able to demonstrate that on a textual level, the relation between genders is absolute and non-dialectical. In the Introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir makes the significant claim that while alterity is always found in early examples of mythic thought, a presentation of a feminine element is not. In other words, alterity does not necessarily involve a representation of a feminine pole. Beauvoir finds in the Genesis legend, for example, the idea that women are the "inessential".

In couples such as Varuna-Mitra, Uranos-Zeus, Sun-Moon, Day-Night, no feminine element is involved at the outset; neither in Good-Evil, auspicious and inauspicious, left and right, God and Lucifer; alterity is the fundamental category of human thought.¹⁷⁵

While she is 'inessential', she is useful to the man. Beauvoir stresses that she is not autonomous, but wholly instrumentalised. Beauvoir claims that "man hopes to realise himself by finding himself through her."

She appears as the privileged Other through whom the subject accomplishes himself: one of the measures of man, his balance, his salvation, his adventure and his happiness. But these myths are orchestrated differently for each individual. The other is singularly defined according to the singular way the One chooses to posit himself.¹⁷⁶

Women's world is bereft of the symbolic resources that enable them to "dream": women dream through men's dreams, and in doing so, support and consolidate male power. Her 'privileged' status as the

¹⁷⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 167.

¹⁷⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 6.

¹⁷⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 270.

Other constitutes her disempowerment. She is “one of the measures of man, his balance, his salvation, his adventure and his happiness.”¹⁷⁷

Beauvoir claims that men exert power to “arrest” recognition and reciprocity, rendering women the absolute other. Absolute alterity is an inconsistent understanding of reciprocal recognition between self and other. Beauvoir’s study of the representation of women thus raises a new problem for the settings of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic: given that the dialectical process of encounter between two subjects tends towards mutual recognition, how does patriarchal authority “freeze” women in the place of non-reciprocal (or “Absolute”) alterity?

Woman thus emerged as the inessential who never returned to the essential, as the absolute Other, without reciprocity. All the creation myths express this conviction that is precious to the male, for example, the Genesis legend, which, through Christianity, has spanned Western civilisation.¹⁷⁸

The five (more detailed) case studies commence with a study of Henry de Montherlant. Born in 1895, Montherlant wrote a sequence of well-known plays and novels between the years of 1934 and 1965. His tetralogy *The Young Girls*, detailing a young male writer’s efforts to avoid marriage, has solidified his reputation as a quintessential misogynistic author (Beauvoir’s treatment of him in *The Second Sex* certainly contributed to this). In “Myths”, Beauvoir refers to both Montherlant’s life and novels to support the claim that he is disgusted by women, and accordingly “refuse[s women] any autonomy”.¹⁷⁹

The desires to see woman as a domestic animal, the refusal to grant her any autonomy, even that of urinating.... he is disgusted by a woman bathed in sweat and body odour, he abolishes all his own secretions: he is a pure spirit served by muscles and a sex organ of steel.¹⁸⁰

Beauvoir’s claims pertain both to the Montherlant’s practice as flesh and blood person/ author, and to the world he creates in his texts (the inter subjective relations between characters). In one register, Beauvoir illuminates a dynamic whereby Montherlant-as-author refuses woman subjectivity (whether flesh

¹⁷⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 270.

¹⁷⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 164.

¹⁷⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 229.

¹⁸⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 229.

and blood or in the female characters he writes). She also illuminates a dynamic in his texts whereby the male protagonist refuses female characters agency and autonomy. She writes:

He [Montherlant] systematically avoids granting them a consciousness... there is never question of setting up an intersubjective relationship with woman: she has to be a simple animated object in man's kingdom: she can never be envisaged as subject; her point of view can never be taken into account.¹⁸¹

Stephen Houlgate explains that in the master-slave dialectic, eventually “the master’s sense of ambiguous mastery is undermined” (by his increasing consciousness of the dependent nature of his mastery) and “his understanding of himself thereby transformed”.¹⁸² If we are to read Beauvoir’s above analysis of Montherlant via Hegelian terminology, the female character’s capacity to establish or draw a reciprocal claim for recognition has been arrested by Montherlant. Woman is configured as a “simple animated object”.¹⁸³ She “can never be envisaged as subject; her point of view can never be taken into account”.¹⁸⁴ The term “never” signifies the vulnerability of the master’s position in the dialectic. Were he to envisage her (or *recognise* her) as subject, or take her point of view into account, his “understanding of himself would be transformed”. Indeed, Montherlant *forbids* the male character to conduct an “intersubjective relationship” with the woman. On the page, within the world of Montherlant’s fiction, woman *is* the absolute Other.

Beauvoir’s criticism is not confined to the domain of Montherlant’s fiction. The male character refuses an intersubjective relationship with the female character and Beauvoir also claims that Montherlant is frustrated by women’s attempts to traverse their status of “simple animated animal”. She uses evidence from his life to support the claim that he himself more or less wills this state of affairs in his own life. Beauvoir attributes passages from his texts to Montherlant himself. In *The Little Infanta of Castile* Montherlant remarks: “what is irritating in women is their claim to reason.”¹⁸⁵

Beauvoir doubles Montherlant. Her focus is initially his fiction. Yet, the man himself also becomes the object of her critique. The boundaries between Montherlant as author and the male protagonist are intentionally blurred. Both in his life and in his fiction, Montherlant freezes women’s capacity for

¹⁸¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 226.

¹⁸² Stephen Houlgate *The Hegel Reader*, 100.

¹⁸³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 226.

¹⁸⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 226.

¹⁸⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 225.

reciprocity. By dissolving these boundaries, Beauvoir points to the contributory role texts can play in making the world patriarchal and oppressive. Beauvoir's claim starts to move beyond the pages of the text and have ramifications for the 'real world'.

In Beauvoir's study of the Catholic poet Paul Claudel she advances the ambitious thesis that his mythic-religious configurations of women constitute her concrete subordination. Beauvoir read Claudel from a very young age, as is detailed in her autobiography *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*.¹⁸⁶ In her *Student Diaries*, written between the years of 1926 to 1927, Beauvoir transcribes lengthy passages of Claudel's poetry.¹⁸⁷ Her *Student Diaries* maintains a particular interest in the themes of female servitude and sacrifice in Claudel's poetry (it is possible to evidence the claim that Claudel is significant in Beauvoir's plans and ways of seeing her future). Twenty years later, writing *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir's position on Claudel has changed drastically. Beauvoir reflects that she was duped by Claudel's encouragement of the traits of virtue, chastity, modesty and servitude.¹⁸⁸ In the first chapter of this thesis, we looked at *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, which was written ten years between the diaries and *The Second Sex*. Already by that point in time, as we saw, Beauvoir depicted religiosity as confounding women's ability to conduct their lives freely.

In her study of Claudel's "Myths", Beauvoir claims that Claudel endorses women passively accept her subordination. Beauvoir claims that Claudel does not simply endorse a state of affairs whereby women are instrumentalised and exploited for the needs of men, but by sanctifying this order in the divine, Claudel expects that women happily accept and pursue this role. Claudel invokes the divine not merely to demand women remain subordinate to men, but with the expectation that they happily embrace their subjugation. Claudel's conceptions of woman – as instrument, mother, domestic operator - operate normatively. When women then absorb these instructions and observe these expectations, their capacity for freedom is curtailed. She claims that woman's concrete subordination is hidden by religious veneration:

¹⁸⁶ Beauvoir *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. At the conclusion of this autobiography, Beauvoir renounces Catholicism altogether. Beauvoir writes "I had had enough of 'Catholic complications', spiritual dead-ends, miraculous make-believes; I felt it was time for me to get my feet back on the ground. That is why, when I got to know Herbaud, I had the feeling of finding myself: he was the shadow thrown by my future." Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, 314.

¹⁸⁷ See Beauvoir's *Student Diaries*. On Sunday July 10th, 1927 Beauvoir writes "... Claudel's Catholicism, for which Jacques has not completely lost his liking, how it has marked me and what a place remains in me for it!" Beauvoir, *Student Diaries*, 279. Other references to Claudel are found on pages 53-54, 56, 64-65, 70-71, 73-75, 79, 85, 91-92, 108, 119, 144, 160, 178, 227, 235, 246-47, 268, 279, 317, 323.

¹⁸⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 254.

If the woman is venerated in God, she will be treated like a servant in this world¹⁸⁹

Beauvoir claims that women's subordination is concealed by illusions of her greatness. She is celebrated in subordination.

... on the human level she is seen as drawing her greatness from her very subordination.¹⁹⁰

Claudel refers to the divine in order to justify this subordination:

The fact that for man existence surpasses itself while for woman it maintains itself only establishes a difference between them on earth: in any case, transcendence is accomplished not on earth but in God.¹⁹¹

Men have access to interesting projects and their existence on earth can "surpass itself". Meanwhile, women are relegated to the domain of the immanent and are forbidden access to means of bettering their lives and situations. Beauvoir claims that the reality of this division of experience – that men have recourse to transcendence, women remain bound to the immanent – is obscured by Claudel's religiosity. Claudel disguises this existential asymmetry, promising "real" transcendence outside of the earthly affairs. In Beauvoir's view, Claudel pretends that the heavens promise men and women equal recourse to freedom, while obscuring the concrete inequality of their relations. Man has activity (access to transcendence) and woman, confined within the home, sacrifices her person:

... man gives activity, woman her person; to sanctify this hierarchy in the name of divine will does not modify it in the least, but on the contrary attempts to fix it in the eternal.¹⁹²

Beauvoir draws attention to way women are instrumentalised in this argument. Woman is ideal when she is best able to "reveal him to himself":

... the ideal woman will be she who embodies the most exactly the Other able to reveal him to himself... Claudel defines her as a soul sister;... the only earthly destiny reserved to the woman equal, child-woman, soul sister, woman-sex and female animal is always man.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 254.

¹⁹⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 254.

¹⁹¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 254.

¹⁹² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 254.

¹⁹³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 254.

Beauvoir draws attention to the way the author exploits agency. Claudel, as subject, defines woman. Beauvoir claims that upon the earthly domain, in religious households at least, women is made instrument for man. Her labour and servitude are disguised under the rubric of religion, but she is instrumentalised to assist man to achieve his ends. For Beauvoir, religion does not simply obscure concrete subordination but “fixes it in the eternal”.¹⁹⁴ Woman herself is fixed, rendered immobile, her capacity for movement and transcendence is frozen via religious texts and religious doctrine. In this instance, Beauvoir argues that woman’s reciprocal claim for recognition is frozen, and this is endorsed and perpetuated by religion.

Conclusion to Chapter Two:

Beauvoir’s presentation of woman as the absolute Other can be explicated with regard to her early theoretical critiques. In her essay “Analysis”, the young Beauvoir sought to criticise stationary and static forms of representation. In “Myths”, Beauvoir redeploys the language of ‘fixedness’ and the notion of static representation, contending that women are figured by men (at least on the page), with no recourse to making a reciprocal claim. Women were frozen, or fixed, in their status as absolute other. Men have placed religion, myth, literature in the service of silencing women. At least on the page, women are unable to constitute a reciprocal claim. Nancy Bauer concurs, claiming that Beauvoir uses myths of Woman “as evidence for the depiction of the change in women’s status from other to Other.”¹⁹⁵

Recalling her work in “Analysis”, Beauvoir critiques the stationary pole via strategies of multiplicity and proliferation. On one hand, she stresses that women have been figured as the absolute Other, with no recourse to reciprocity. She uses religion to support this claim. On the other hand, she seeks to unfix these very representations. By focusing on the infinite (eminently contradictory, and non-binary) configurations of woman, Beauvoir makes a claim for the absolute static representation:

In concrete reality, women manifest themselves in many different ways; but each of the myths built around woman tries to summarise her as a whole; each is supposed to be unique; the consequence of this is a multiplicity of incompatible myths, and men are perplexed before the strange inconsistencies of the idea of Femininity;¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 254.

¹⁹⁵ Nancy Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy and Feminism*, 199.

¹⁹⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 276.

Beauvoir evacuates the form of the representation and instead illuminates the dynamic in order to claim that the mere configuration itself is the act of fixing. Fed through Hegelian language (subject and object, self and other) this binary valorisation structures the Myth chapter of *The Second Sex*. While Beauvoir has successfully illuminated that women are (within religious, mythic, literary texts) configured in a dynamic of absolute alterity, she has not yet resolved why in everyday experience, women's claim to freedom is arrested. She has not yet properly resolved exactly why women do not make a reciprocal claim in their everyday life. This question motivates the proceeding chapter of this thesis.

In the "Myths" chapter, her proliferation of the way women have been configured ultimately stands in direct relief with any flesh and blood woman. In each discrete studies of each individual author, Beauvoir demonstrates how even within one text, or one author's *oeuvre*, how an author often refers to inconsistent representations of woman. Then, in studying five authors in succession, she is able to contrast each writer against one another. Montherlant's claims that woman is irrational, carnal and animalistic stands in direct relief with Claudel's claims that woman is mother, virtuous and chaste. Beauvoir certainly makes it impossible for the reader to derive a conception of woman's immutable essence or nature. She illuminates not merely the audacity underpinning these claims, but the inaccuracy of the claims. In proliferating these representations, Beauvoir illuminates the very impossibility of representing women. Beauvoir proliferates representations in order to generate a claim for the inability for women to be 'fixed'. Woman cannot have any one nature.

Beauvoir *reintroduces* Hegel's master slave dialectic in order to illuminate the fact that men fix claims about women, arresting women's claims to freedom. Beauvoir uses the strategy of proliferation to undermine and critique this practice. In "*Literature and Metaphysics*", Beauvoir portrayed Hegel's dialectic as *processual* – or, the master-slave dialectic is something that is *lived through*, that leads both master and slave to discover truths about themselves and each other through that process. The binary valorisation of the early work is thus maintained in her treatment of Hegel's master and slave in the "Myths" chapter. Her analysis stresses the discrepancy between the representations and flesh and blood woman, particularly the innovative critical strategies as shown by Beauvoir herself. Beauvoir's critical stratagem asserts a claim for reciprocity. On behalf of Montherlant's muted women or Claudel's dutiful handmaidens, Beauvoir makes a demand for reciprocity.

Chapter Three

Situation: the Lived Experience of Patriarchal Authority

... she decided to explore the larger universal question of what it meant to be a woman in patriarchal society.¹⁹⁷

From the start of this thesis we have traced the consistent valorisation of lived experience in Beauvoir's work, and the way in which this valorisation motivates her literary-philosophical approach. However, given her particular commitment to a philosophy of lived experience, it is not enough for her study to stop here. For Beauvoir, it is not enough to reveal the patriarchal bias operative in theoretical definitions of woman – as she does at a very abstract level in the triad of woman, female, and femininity. It is not enough to unfix stationary authority, via experimental literary approaches. Nor is it enough to expose the literary myths through which patriarchal authority exerts itself at a cultural level. Rather, her consistent valorisation of lived experience necessitates an exploration of what it means to *exist* as a woman under conditions of patriarchal authority. Beauvoir believes the critique of patriarchal authority presented in her Introduction and in the Myths chapter of *The Second Sex* is ultimately insufficient for disclosing the oppression of women. A way of studying patriarchal oppression that explicates its mechanisms and depletes its hold is required.

Beauvoir institutes a form of situational analysis in order to explicate her nuanced account of the operation of oppression. Here, we look to her study of women in “Situation”, which is the second chapter in “Lived Experience”, the second volume to *The Second Sex*. “Lived Experience” comprises four studies, “Formative Years”, “Situation”, “Justifications” and “Toward Liberation”. As I will explain, the term “situation” has a specific meaning in existentialism. It is in her chapter “Situation” that Beauvoir explains *why* women do not make a reciprocal claim for freedom (answering the question we encountered during the previous chapter). Crucially, her explanation of this point draws substantially on the terms of her early wariness of theoretical authority. My claim is that this early critique of authority is now refined and developed as a critique of patriarchal authority.

¹⁹⁷ Tidd, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 8.

3.1 Definitional Work: What is “Situation?”

The concept of situation is not explicitly defined in her work and is used with some elasticity. It is consistent with her style to deploy philosophical terminology without pausing to define or clarify the meaning (many scholars have commented on the “breathless” quality of *The Second Sex*; some (less-generously perhaps) have described it as “unedited”). Before considering the concrete analyses of women’s lived experiences in the Situation chapter, we need to clarify the meaning of “situation.” As such, we will first consider Beauvoir’s use of the term in the Introduction to the *Second Sex*, then turn to Sartre’s 1943 *Being and Nothingness*, which involves a more detailed conceptual parsing of the term. Very simply, for Sartre, situation is composed of an opposition between “freedom” and “facticity,” with the latter being those inert givens that impinge on our capacity to freely self-determine. With this background, we then turn to contemporary scholarly debate on the issue. As we will see, while Sartre’s definition is useful for understanding Beauvoir’s study of situated women, she makes some important revisions to Sartre’s position. Stella Sandford argues that Beauvoir’s work on situation in *The Second Sex* seems to break from Sartre’s, namely in Beauvoir’s tacit suggestion that women are unable to grasp freedom in all contexts.¹⁹⁸ After this definitional work, the primary task of this chapter will be to examine her treatment of women’s lived experience in *The Second Sex* in relation to the concept of situation.

Beauvoir’s first use of the term “situation” in *The Second Sex* appears in the Introduction.¹⁹⁹ She claims that women’s existence cannot be reducible to their physiology or conceptions of feminine essence, rather to their situation:

conceptualism has lost ground: biological and social sciences no longer believe there are immutably determined entities that define given characteristics like those of the woman, the Jew or the black; science considers characteristics as secondary reactions to a situation.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ In the wake of Le Dœuff’s groundbreaking reading of Beauvoir reading Sartre, many Beauvoir scholars today continue to examine the way that Beauvoir appropriates Sartrean existentialism. Michelle Boulous Walker summarises Le Dœuff’s argument here very clearly “Le Dœuff’s point is that Beauvoir uses Sartrean existentialism as an operative viewpoint for exposing the character and detail of women’s oppression. But how exactly does Beauvoir do this? Given the real problems with both the excessive individualism and misogyny of Sartre’s early work, the question of how Beauvoir manages to use his existentialism as the basis for a feminist philosophical analysis is indeed an interesting one. If her work remains (as some would claim) a too faithful account of Sartre’s philosophy, then how is it that she is able to develop her feminist critique?” See Michelle Boulous Walker “Love, ethics, and authenticity: Beauvoir’s lesson in what it means to read,” *Hypatia*, 25 2 (2010): 334-356.

¹⁹⁹ This is to say that this is the first usage in *The Second Sex*, not within her oeuvre as a whole. Beauvoir uses the term in her 1943 essay *Phyrrus and Cineas*.

²⁰⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 5.

Beauvoir does not clarify the scientific source she refers to here, nor defines the “conceptualism” that has supposedly “lost ground.” She nonetheless calls for the abandonment of modes of explicating women’s existence through the lenses of biological or cultural essentialism. Just a few lines before the above statement, Beauvoir gives a brief example of what an essentialist explanatory position would look like: if a person of colour were to present traits of friendliness or kindness, they would be said to be expressing their essential “carefree, childlike, merry soul”.²⁰¹ Beauvoir proposes that situation replaces essentialism as a mode of explanation. For example, to take a subject’s situation into account here involves the claim that were a person of colour to present with the personality traits of friendliness and kindness, it would refer to the way they have absorbed the social expectation that they *should* be friendly. Were a person of colour not to be friendly, given her preliminary anti-essentialism here, it certainly would not suggest that they were not “properly” a person of colour (or were refusing or acting against their “true” nature), as an essentialist argument would have it.

The fact that her first reference to situation in the text is that it opposes essentialism is significant to the concerns of this project. Moreover, that *science* is again positively valorised as a means to undermine illegitimate explanatory authority links this point with our earlier treatment of “Analysis” (“biological and social sciences” no longer look to “immutable” essences but regard “given characteristics” as “secondary reactions to a situation.”) Situation is thus not a term that replaces another (essentialist) term, or can be included (like “myth”) as an expression of essentialist thinking. As we have seen, Beauvoir is critical of essentialism as a method of enquiry; in the above formulation she suggests that an adequate or appropriate enquiry into social behaviour should instead go to situation. This formulation should, in other words, be viewed as introducing the possibility of situational *analysis*.

We can understand what Beauvoir meant here with reference to the specific existentialist heritage of the term. Although Beauvoir does not define the term in relation to its history, her appropriation of the term is structured by this inheritance (and at the conclusion of the Introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir does indeed announce “existentialist ethics” as her central “methodological perspective”). Ursula Tidd offers us a comprehensive definition of the term in her work:

²⁰¹ Beauvoir writes: “The ‘eternal feminine’ corresponds to ‘the black soul’ or ‘the Jewish character’... the former master caste wants to keep them ‘in their place’, that is, the place chosen for them; in both cases, they praise, more or less sincerely, the virtues of the ‘good black’, the carefree, childlike, merry soul of the resigned black, and the woman who is a ‘true’ woman – frivolous, infantile, irresponsible, the woman subjugated to man. In both cases, the ruling caste bases its argument on the state of affairs it created itself.” Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 12.

situation refers to how a human being as an individual consciousness is engaged in the world with regard to other people, to time, to space and to other products of his/her facticity... 'Facticity' refers to the necessary connection between consciousness and the world of inert matter and the past. Aspects of my facticity are aspects of my situation which I have not chosen - for example, the facts of my birth, my body, the existence of other people, my death - and that I cannot choose not to accept as part of my situation. A non-situated consciousness is, by definition, impossible.²⁰²

According to this formulation, each individual consciousness is engaged in the world, we could say each individual consciousness is in a particular situation. However, the way that each consciousness is engaged with regard to people, time, space, and products of facticity, is presumably difficult for another party to read or see. Beauvoir believes that in order to explore how a *particular* consciousness is engaged in the world, one must turn to the literary form. The epigraph to "Lived Experience" (volume II of *The Second Sex*) announces the pivotal role of literary description for situational analysis:

What I will try to describe is how woman is taught to assume her condition, how she experiences this, what universe she finds herself enclosed in and what escape mechanisms are permitted her...²⁰³

Beauvoir concedes that she will "try" to "describe" how woman is taught to assume her condition. Woman fill (be described to) have "[f]ound] herself enclosed in" a universe. The vivid rhetorical flourish Beauvoir uses to describe woman's "trapped-ness" in this universe will in fact later constitute the grounds for significant criticism in scholarly work, as many commentators will contend Beauvoir paints it as though women are "condemned" and can never escape their relegation to the world of "Immanence" (I will analyse the meaning of the term immanent, and its partner term transcendent, below).

Later in life, Beauvoir explains that she regrets this situational approach in *The Second Sex*. As Debra Bergoffen explains: "[Beauvoir explained that] Were [she] to write it [*The Second Sex*] again [she] would pay less attention to the abstract issue of consciousness and more attention to the material conditions of scarcity."²⁰⁴ Beauvoir's lamentations regarding the centrality of the "abstract issue of consciousness" in the text points to the central axis of situational analysis: the description of a female subject, and specifically how

²⁰² Tidd *Simone de Beauvoir* (2004), 30.

²⁰³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 289.

²⁰⁴ Debra Bergoffen *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir* 187. Bergoffen refers here to Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age* but does not provide a page number.

their consciousness engages aspects of freedom and facticity (terms to be defined through Sartre in a moment). Her claim that her approach did not pay attention to the “material conditions of scarcity” points to the literary character of her situational analysis. Beauvoir examines how the woman’s world shapes their consciousness and this involves a portrayal or characterisation of a “woman’s world,” it is certainly not via a statistical analysis.

As we will see, the women’s world is explicated in (what I’ll call) a “literary” register. In our analysis of marriage, we will see that Beauvoir stresses the way that women are acculturated in ways that complicate the idea that they *can* consent. To make this point, Beauvoir uses concrete descriptions of their everyday life. Furthermore, Beauvoir references canonical literary works to find evidence for the claim that women’s concrete situation shapes their consciousness (again, suggesting that it is necessary to “return” to the literary to communicate the thesis of situation). In our analysis of suicide, we find that Beauvoir deploys a rhetorical and hyperbolic tone to advance the thesis that women’s situation means that they do not have ‘real’ consent. Finally, we look at her depiction of abortion in *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir’s examination of abortion culminates the main themes of this thesis. Abortion is used as “the” quintessential example whereby elements of facticity are clearly more pronounced for woman than man. Beauvoir describes the concrete experience of abortion to advance the thesis that in that moment, women are confronted with all manner of injustice. In her exposition of abortion, Beauvoir expects the reader to carefully extricate her description in order to discover the various forces with which the woman is confronted during this experience.

3.2 Sartre: Facticity and Freedom

“Enclosed-ness” and “escape” in the above formulation suggest the two poles that organise the existentialist understanding of situation: facticity and freedom. As Ursula Tidd writes:

My ‘situation’ is not something outside or around me, but the glue which binds my freedom and my facticity together. ‘Facticity’ refers to the necessary connection between consciousness and the world of inert matter and the past.²⁰⁵

Beauvoir does not define the term facticity in her own work, so we will need to proceed through Sartre’s. Sartre’s work in the chapter from *Being and Nothingness* entitled “Freedom and Facticity: The Situation” presents situation as constituted by a tendency between “freedom” and “facticity,” those aspects of our life that remain beyond our control. Sartre defines freedom here as “only the autonomy of choice.” Sartre

²⁰⁵ Tidd *Simone de Beauvoir* (2004), 30.

illustrates his concept of freedom-as-choice with the following anecdote, which renders explicit the prisoner metaphor operative in her above remark:

... we shall not say that a prisoner is always free to go out of prison, which would be absurd, nor that he is always free to long for release, which would be an irrelevant truism, but that he is always free to try to escape... that whatever his condition may be, he can project his escape and learn the value of his project by undertaking some action.²⁰⁶

If, therefore, freedom is defined as the escape from the given, from fact, then there is a fact of escape from fact. This is the facticity of freedom.²⁰⁷

In other words, for Sartre, freedom is a fact, but its fact is that it is defined against the facts that it seeks to escape. As he puts it elsewhere: “The facticity of freedom is the fact that freedom is not able to be free.” Facticity thus refers to the actuality of freedom in our lives as well as to the obstacles faced in the pursuit of freedom. As obstacle, facticity refers to factors beyond that person’s control. For Sartre, the person does and cannot choose the elements of their facticity (as Tidd remarked earlier, “Aspects of my facticity are aspects of my situation which I have not chosen”).²⁰⁸

Human-reality everywhere encounters resistance and obstacles which it has not created, but these resistances and obstacles have meaning only in and through the free choice which human-reality is.²⁰⁹

For Sartre, situation seems to mean the specific place where freedom is pursued (and therefore, where the obstacle to that freedom is encountered). Situation is the space where the struggle between facticity and freedom occurs. Sartre refers to situation as “the common product of the contingency of the in-itself and of freedom.”²¹⁰ Sartre identifies a “paradox of freedom” - which is the dynamic of mutual reliance between freedom and situation – “there is freedom only in a situation, and there is a situation only through freedom.”²¹¹ Stella Sandford’s definition is useful here:

[situation] refers to the context of individual human existence within and against which freedom asserts itself. One’s situation includes all those aspects of one’s existence that one did not choose... the concepts of situation and freedom are ultimately inseparable... human freedom, as distinct from

²⁰⁶ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 505.

²⁰⁷ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 506.

²⁰⁸ Tidd *Simone de Beauvoir* (2004), 30.

²⁰⁹ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 511.

²¹⁰ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 509.

²¹¹ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 511.

the omnipotence of a god, is only realized in its relation to situation. The situation is like the resistance of the air that allows the bird to fly. Conversely, it is only meaningful to speak of a situation for a free being, or a situation is only revealed as such in its relation to freedom.²¹²

Sartre's analysis includes that humans find themselves in worlds with meaning, which seems to involve the claim that a situation is laden with cultural meaning:

... each man finds himself in the presence of meanings which do not come into the world through him. He arises in a world which is given to him as already looked-at, furrowed, explored, worked over in all its meanings, and whose very contexture is already defined by these investigations...²¹³

... I am not only thrown face to face with the brute existent. I am thrown into a worker's world, a French world, a world of Lorraine or the South, which offers me its meanings without my having done anything to disclose them.²¹⁴

For Sartre, the presence of meanings in this world does not equate to a limitation on the person's freedom. This is precisely the site where their freedom becomes possible. Sartre writes:

... we are not dealing here with a limit of freedom; rather it is in this world that the for-itself must be free; that is, it must choose itself by taking into account these circumstances and not ad libitum.²¹⁵

The Second Sex in its chapter on Situation specifically depicts *women* "as thrown into a world, which offers [her] its meanings without [her] having done anything to disclose them" (to use Sartre's words).²¹⁶ In this transposition, however, Sartre's account of situation loses its innocence and optimism. For Sartre, this meaning-laden world does not constitute a "limit of freedom". Beauvoir decisively genders these meanings, arguing that woman is thrust into a world with meanings designed by (male) Kings of Creation. Beauvoir turns Sartre's work on situation in the abstract into a study of *women's* situation, which alters the relationship of freedom and facticity in Sartre's account. The facticity of already given meanings in Sartre's account do not limit but furnish the material for freedom; in Beauvoir's those already given meanings, in being normative patriarchal definitions of woman's essence, are *oppressive*, constituting a limit to women's freedom that Sartre fails to recognize.

²¹² Sandford *How to read Beauvoir*, 57.

²¹³ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 541.

²¹⁴ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 535.

²¹⁵ Sartre *Being and Nothingness* 543.

²¹⁶ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 535.

3.3 Beauvoir against Sartre

To demonstrate how Beauvoir critically appropriates Sartre's account of situation, we must consider Sartre's conception of the limits to freedom. Sartre considers one (and only one) genuine limitation in this regard: the existence of another person's freedom. Indeed, "the only limits which a freedom can encounter are found in freedom."²¹⁷ He argues that the limit of one person's situation is the point where another person's commences, arguing "by the fact of the Other's existence, I exist in a situation which has an outside and which ... I can in no way remove from the situation any more than I can act directly upon it."²¹⁸ However, Sartre does not connect these limitations of freedom with the theme of oppression, or claim that they can constitute a subject's subordination. He concedes that while we can be watched and turned in this way into an "object" for another's gaze, we can return the gaze and regain consciousness of our freedom. Using the example of anti-Semitism, Sartre proposes that a Jewish person can look back at the anti-Semite as a "pure object," and this will enable the Jewish person's "being-a-Jew" to "disappear immediately." Given the violence met by the Jewish community in France in 1943 at the hands of anti-Semites, this analogy seems startlingly optimistic:

By the free assumption of this being-alienated which I experience, I suddenly make the Other's transcendence exist for me as such. It is only by my recognizing the freedom of anti-Semites (whatever use they may make of it) and by my assuming this being-a-Jew that I am a Jew for them; it is only thus that being-a-Jew will appear as the external objective limit of the situation. If, on the contrary, it pleases me to consider the anti-Semites as pure objects, then my being-a-Jew disappears immediately to give place to the simple consciousness (of) being a free, unqualifiable transcendence.²¹⁹

It seems difficult to convincingly argue at the historical juncture of Sartre's writing that once a person has been designated as "being-a-Jew" by an anti-Semite, that "looking back" would alleviate or undo the consequences of that designation. Sartre seems to think that freedom is ultimately a matter of the subject's own self-regard, regardless of the concrete status afforded that subject within the situation (as free or unfree, equal or unequal). Stella Sandford argues that Beauvoir disagreed with this context-free understanding of

²¹⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 546.

²¹⁸ Sartre writes "...the true limit of [his] freedom lies purely and simply in the very fact that an Other apprehends me as the Other-as-object and in that second corollary fact that my situation ceases for the Other to be a situation and becomes an objective form in which I exist as an objective structure. It is this alienating process of making an object of my situation which is the constant and specific limit of my situation, just as the making an object of my being-for-itself in being-for-others is the limit of my being. And it is precisely these two characteristic limits which represent the boundaries of my freedom." See: Sartre *Being and Nothingness*, 546.

²¹⁹ Sartre *Being and Nothingness*. 547.

freedom. For Sandford, Sartre's conception of ontological freedom is challenged by Beauvoir's emphasis on situational analysis, by a close attention to the constraint of freedom in particular situations:

For Sartre, no situation could ever make any difference to the absolute nature of human freedom. No matter how constrained one's physical or social freedoms were, in the worst situations imaginable, the ontological freedom that is human being could never be compromised. Although Beauvoir did not go so far as to argue that ontological freedom could be annihilated or completely suppressed... she disagreed with Sartre in placing much more emphasis on the weight of the situation in existentialist analysis.²²⁰

For Sartre, one can choose to be free regardless of one's situation – one can always “step back” from facticity as obstacle and access one's freedom. For Beauvoir, this fails to take into account those situations in which this “stepping back” or this choice is either unavailable or severely limited. Although the cited examples from Sartre focus on religious and ethnic determinations, we can readily see the implications of Sartre's analysis for Beauvoir's account of gender relations. Whereas Sartre presupposes a masculine subject already materially liberated from facticity, her situational analysis is committed to delineating those elements of facticity that undermines women's access to freedom.

However, Beauvoir does not make her disagreement fully explicit, so a reading of some key passages is required to bear this claim out. In the Introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir introduces a similar subject-object dialectic, however we can find here (in a passage written between 1946 and 1949) some significant revisions to Sartre's passage (written during or prior to 1943):

... if, following Hegel, a fundamental hostility to any other consciousness is found in consciousness itself; the subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object. But the other consciousness has an opposing reciprocal claim: travelling, a local is shocked to realize that in neighbouring countries locals view him as a foreigner; between villages, clans, nations, and classes there are wars, potlatches... and struggles that remove the absolute meaning of the Other and bring out its relativity; whether one likes it or not, individuals and groups have no choice but to recognize the reciprocity of their relation.²²¹

At this juncture her argument seems similar to Sartre's: there are two parties, and both have equal recourse to “set[ting] up the other as inessential”. However, she immediately asserts that this reciprocity is not the case in gendered relations:

²²⁰ Sandford *How to read Beauvoir*, 57.

²²¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 7.

How is it, then, that between the sexes this reciprocity has not been put forward, that one of the terms has been asserted as the only essential one, denying any relativity in regard to its correlative, defining the latter as pure alterity? Why do women not contest male sovereignty? No subject posits itself spontaneously and at once as the inessential from the outset... Where does this submission in woman come from?²²²

If one were to follow Sartre, then woman “could look back” and “consider” the man “themselves as a “pure object.” In doing so, like the Jewish person who returns the gaze of the anti-semitic, their being-a-woman “could disappear immediately and give place to the simple consciousness (of) being a free, unqualifiable transcendence.” But if contesting patriarchy were this simple, Beauvoir seems to ask, why is it not practiced? Indeed, she asks: “Where does this submission in woman come from?” her question can be read to imply: is “looking back” in Sartre’s specific sense possible at all? And if so, why do women not do it?

Beauvoir’s question can, in other words, be read as the kernel of her disagreement with Sartre’s conception of the relation of freedom to facticity in situation. Sartre’s conception of the gaze goes only to the subject’s self-understanding (“I look back, and in looking back, recognize myself as free”) and not to mutually recognized social status (“In looking back, the *other* recognizes me as free”). It is thus insufficient to explain *how* the experience of being looked at as a woman signals an oppression that undermines the potential for women to contest that oppression (indeed, the scopical regime or “male gaze” of man looking at woman-ness has a very unique valence here).²²³ In other words, that women *physically* could “look back” at men – and of course literally *do* – is insufficient to explain why women remain in a position of “absolute alterity.” Even if a woman were to look back, the act does not, under the meanings given in a patriarchal situation (the “facticity” of those meanings), express the same freedom as the gaze of men. The woman’s act of looking back is not recognized as an act of mutual recognition. Accordingly, women do not achieve or reclaim a “free, unqualifiable transcendence” by virtue of the act of returning the gaze – and Sartre’s understanding of situation does not take this fact of women’s situation into account. It is thus possible to claim that her central revision to Sartre’s concept of situation is explored in the “Situation” chapter – it may be viewed as an investigation precisely into what it is to be othered, how women’s freedom to look back, or freedom to look back assertively, is constrained by social givens beyond their control, which shapes women’s consciousness of the significance of their own acts.

²²² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 7.

²²³ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema.” *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: 833-44.

Therefore, while Sartre's examples emphasise the ineliminable possibility of asserting one's freedom regardless of the obstacles specific to one's situation, in her study of Situation, facticity is emphasized *over* freedom. Beauvoir focuses on the many aspects of facticity operative in women's situation, those aspects they have not chosen, and the way that these materially impact women's ability to assert their freedom. This ground has been prepared by the analysis of essentialist-normative definitions of women and their literary-mythic reproduction. While the chapter on "Myths" showed the internal instability of essentialist definitions of woman, her situational analysis shows the ways in which patriarchal authority alters women's character and self-understanding such as to put the assertion of freedom beyond their reach. As we will see, Beauvoir argues that women's living through essentialist definitions of women makes their character pliable, anti-critical and prone to complicity; she also contends that the specificity of women's bodily experience hinders their access to freedom.

3.4 Freedom and Facticity, Transcendence and Immanence

In situational analysis, immanence and transcendence are the master terms Beauvoir uses to describe the two different ways women and men inhabit the (patriarchal) world. Although the terms immanence and transcendence are central to Beauvoir's study of women's lived experiences, she does not define them *per se*. Again, we can look to Sartre's *Being and Time* to understand their specific existentialist meaning. Sartre uses the term "Immanence," also the *en-soi* or "in-itself." The "in-itself" refers to a form of existence that is constitutively unable to overcome its current state, it "is what it is," and only alters as the result of causes external to it. Opposed to it is "Transcendence," also the *pour-soi* or "for-itself." Sartre defines the for-itself as that "which is what it is not and which is not what it is."²²⁴ This paradoxical formulation is Sartre's way of marking the potential of the for-itself to become other than what it is simply by being what it is – that is, that it alters or becomes other through itself, and not by external influence. Because it always has the potential to become other than what it is, it cannot be said to ever simply be what it is. Put as simply as possible, transcendence is the property of human subjects; it is a way of describing their freedom; immanence designates the material world of causally constrained objects. Charlene Haddock Siegfried, for example, defines transcendence in Sartre's work as follows:

The free subject, in ordering his life, makes of himself something... While the object is always some definite thing, the subject is nothing insofar as the subject, freed from all

²²⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 103-105.

constraints, unconditionally chooses to choose and thus continuously creates and re-creates his self.²²⁵

In Beauvoir's hands, the terms transcendence and immanence come to refer to a gendered division of experience. This was a pioneering manoeuvre in the history of philosophy, yet not one that all subsequent feminist philosophers endorsed.²²⁶ Beauvoir holds that men have a specific relation of dominance to inert objects in their world, while women are themselves subservient to inert objects, and, in this subservience, women's world becomes "in itself" like those material objects. More generally, in her work, the concepts immanence and transcendence institute a binary that promulgates into two comprehensive sets of possible social experience: one available primarily to men, and one for women. The etymology of the two terms intimates the associated conceptual couplets that follow: "Immanence" carries a sense of "remaining within," and "transcendence" refers to "the beyond," or "surpassing." Put simply, in her analysis, women "remain within", that is, in the home, in domestic life. Men operate beyond and outside these domestic limitations, their territory is the privileged domain of civic life. Immanence and transcendence are thus re-read by Beauvoir as gendered forms of lived experience. From women's consignment to the home comes a series of associations: magic, mystery, the physical, the concrete and the bodily. "Transcendence" – the beyond of the home – means that men have recourse to intellectual and political life, the abstract and the theoretical. In her analysis of immanent activities she associates women's world with the physical over the intellectual, passivity over activity, and ultimately the magical over the logical. This constitutes women's "character", the term Beauvoir uses to refer to the way women see the world. To understand precisely how

As we saw in the "Myths" chapter, Beauvoir portrayed the mere fact (that men wrote on women) as a key original difference between the two sexes. Men's experience in the world is, at least in part, characterized by the fact that they are the Kings of Creation. The world appears to them as overcome-able. Any obstacles they may face, they feel confident to tackle. Correspondingly, patriarchal authority colours the way women experience the world. In particular, as Beauvoir stresses in this chapter, women experience the world as facticity. The overemphasis of elements of facticity in women's lives reflects and consolidates personal character traits such as passivity and obsequiousness. Women experience themselves as outsiders in

²²⁵ Charlene Haddock Seigfried, "Gender Specific Values," *Philosophical Forum* 15 (1984) 426.

²²⁶ Andrea Veltman "The Sisyphean torture of housework: Simone de Beauvoir and inequitable divisions of domestic work in marriage" *Hypatia* 19 (2004) 121-143.

a world written by men, for men. She claims that this experience – of feeling ‘outside’ – is who they are, or come to be.

i) Marriage

Beauvoir’s analysis of marriage is a concrete example of her use of the immanence/transcendence framework in order to render intelligible the lived experience of women. For Beauvoir, the institution of marriage institutes a gendered division of lived experience. Beginning with the master terms immanence and transcendence, she starts to use a host of related binaries such as indoor/outdoor, magic/logic, private/public, to express how the institution impedes women’s access to freedom. Beauvoir here refers to Heidegger’s conception of technology as ‘standing reserve’ and claims that the world of objects appears to man to be ‘standing reserve’ for his instrumental projects. Beauvoir argues that this instrumental re-purposing of what is ‘given’ is gendered:

... the world does not appear to the woman as a ‘set of tools’ halfway between her will and her goals, as Heidegger defines it: on the contrary, it is a stubborn, indomitable resistance; it is dominated by fate and run through with mysterious caprices.²²⁷

Man’s ability to wield tools and instruments to dominate inert matter is, for Beauvoir, the historical condition of men’s “transcendent” accomplishments. Men’s access to instruments forbidden to women, enables men to posit goals and satisfy goals that women cannot (as we will see, these instruments encompass intellectual and emotional resources). While men instrumentalise the inert as an expression of their freedom via the use of tools, women are excluded from this intentional activity. In turn, women themselves become “tools” for men’s freely set ends.²²⁸ This double relegation to immanence – women’s confinement to a world of objects that cannot be re-purposed for free ends, and women themselves becoming objects in the service of men’s free ends – surfaces most clearly in marriage. In marriage, women experience the world as “a stubborn, indomitable resistance,” as an in-itself that does not open onto the for-itself. Her facticity is facticity as *obstacle* and not the facticity of freedom. Women in their domestic marital duties are relegated to a life “steeped in immanence.”

²²⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 654.

²²⁸ In the Situation chapter, Beauvoir’s study “Prostitutes and Hetaeras” explores the way creative industries instrumentalise women. Here, it is not the earth, plough or spear that is used; here woman is instrument. Beauvoir surmises “[h]etaeras, film actresses, etc] generally are not the ones who initiate the projects, they are rather instruments in men’s hands.” 631-632.

This “immanence” is for Beauvoir complex and multi-faceted, and we will step through the key moments here. Firstly, the institution of marriage ensures women are excluded from real societal status, recalling what early liberal feminists referred to as participation in the public domain.²²⁹ Men have the privilege of “building of a better world”, while the woman is bound to the home, “annexed to her husband’s universe” –

She becomes his vassal. He is economically the head of the community, and he thus embodies it in society’s eyes. She takes his name, she joins his religion, integrates into his class, his world; she belongs to his family, she becomes his other ‘half.’²³⁰

Women’s confinement to the domestic realm is not simply the negative of her exclusion from the transcendent world: Beauvoir argues persuasively that the experience of domestic labour has a positive content of its own. The tasks required within the home are predominantly manual and repetitive. Women’s domestic life is in the service of immanence as perpetuation, generality and permanence:

.... The wife has no other task save the one of maintaining and caring for life in its pure and identical generality; she perpetuates the immutable species, she assures the even rhythm of the days and the permanence of the home she guards with locked doors; she is given no direct grasp on the future, nor on the universe; she goes beyond herself towards the group only through her husband as mouthpiece.²³¹

Housework is figured as a quintessentially immanent task. Woman is locked in a perpetual battle with the inert world. She constantly fights with and against it, cleaning it only to find the dirt return again. The relation of the housewife to cleaning is a frustrated version of tool use – the inert is not mobilized or re-purposed for freely set ends (“building a better world”) but a Sisyphean struggle to order and organize the inert for no purpose other than the inert itself:

All doctrines of transcendence and freedom subordinate the defeat of evil to progress towards good. But the wife is not called to build a better world; the house, the bedroom, the dirty laundry, the wooden floors, are fixed things: she can do no more than rout out indefinitely the foul causes that creep in...²³²

²²⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996). Originally published in London: J. Johnson in 1792.

²³⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 454-455.

²³¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 455.

²³² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 455.

As we saw above, situational analysis describes how facticity and freedom interact with an individual's consciousness. The consciousness of the married woman – her “character” – is shaped by her social position. Recalling argumentative manoeuvres we found in the Introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir builds her position with transcriptions of everyday discussions regarding women's character, listing the “faults for which [women] are reproached” – “mediocrity, meanness, shyness, pettiness, laziness, frivolity and servility.” Again, Beauvoir aims to destabilize these so-called reasonable observations and reveal them as prejudice that fails to take into account the lived experience of women. Beauvoir proposes that if a woman does present these traits, it “simply express[es] the fact that the horizon is blocked for them.” She continues:

Woman, it is said, is sensual, she wallows in immanence; but first she was enclosed in it... utility reigns higher than truth... this is the point of view from which she envisages the whole universe; and this is why she adopts the Aristotelian morality of the golden mean, of mediocrity. How could one find daring, ardour, detachment and grandeur here? These qualities appear only where a freedom throws itself across an open future, emerging beyond any given. A woman is shut up in a kitchen or a boudoir and one is surprised her horizon is limited; her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly.²³³

This passage is central in rebutting charges of her condemnation of women to immanence. Beauvoir certainly does not condemn woman to immanence. Beauvoir seeks to establish that women have inferior opportunities to men. In doing so, she begrudgingly admits that as a direct consequence of this, their ensuing talent/education levels/ambitions, are often inferior to men's. The goal of this passage – and the Situation chapter more generally – is to establish the fact that woman's “wings are cut”. Beauvoir does not contend that women never *can* learn to fly. Judith Butler remarks:

For Beauvoir, the subject within the existential analytic of misogyny is always already masculine, conflated with the universal, differentiating itself from a feminine ‘Other’ outside the universalizing norms of personhood, hopelessly ‘particular,’ embodied, condemned to immanence.²³⁴

Sonia Kruks advances a similar claim, that “woman is locked in immanence”.²³⁵ Challenging Kruks' view, Gail Linsenbard argues:

²³³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 660.

²³⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 11.

²³⁵ Sonia Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence: Freedom, Subjectivity, and Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990) 228.

When Kruks imputes to Beauvoir the view that ‘woman is locked in immanence by the situation that man inflicts on her she [unfairly] seems to suggest that woman is effectively cut off from the possibility of transcendence.’²³⁶

The temptation to read Beauvoir as “condemning” or “locking” her female subject in immanence can be resolved with some analysis of her concept of consent. At the outset of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir explains that the perspective she will deploy in the text is that of “existentialist ethics”. Beauvoir and Sartre agree on the fact that ideally, existence should not lapse into immanence. Beauvoir defines this degradation as a “moral fault”:

Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation, of existence into ‘in-itself’, of freedom into facticity; this fall is a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if this fall is inflicted on the subject, it takes the form of frustration and oppression;²³⁷

Beauvoir does indeed describe this “as a moral fault if a subject consents to it”. Technically, Beauvoir claims that *only if* this degradation is inflicted from one party unto another, this constitutes oppression. However, yet again, Beauvoir should be understood as critically introducing a philosophical concept, in this context, ‘consent’. Beauvoir’s situational analysis is committed to depicting *how* a consciousness is engaged with the world around it. Beauvoir claims that a woman’s consciousness is over-engaged with elements of their facticity, to the point where it may appear that they are complicit in their own oppression. Women *ostensibly* consent to marriage, and to maternity; they choose to remain in the kitchen, and most of the time their relegation to all spaces of the immanent *appears* volitional. However, Beauvoir seeks, via her situational analysis, to challenge the possibility that women truly, and freely, consent to such decisions. Her exploration into immanence-transcendence seeks to stress the role of context in women’s decision making. In other words, Beauvoir problematizes consent as a philosophical concept. Throughout this chapter, I argue that Beauvoir’s central achievement in her situational analysis, is to problematize the notion of consent. Beauvoir emphasises the role of facticity in women’s concrete situations. Beauvoir challenges the possibility that women can freely choose to marry. Beauvoir challenges the possibility that women have free choice to abort, against the complex way patriarchal society has constructed women’s personalities, world outlook and control the mechanism of abortion itself.

²³⁶ Gail Linsenbard “Beauvoir, Ontology and Human Rights,” *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 14, 4 (1999): 156.

²³⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 17.

Beauvoir problematises consent through her use of the rational/irrational (or logic/magic) gendered binary.²³⁸ She claims that a gendered binary operates and that it *does* impact women's lives and renders them "irrational." She certainly does not content that this is traceable to any essential limitation in women, rather to the situations in which women live. Beauvoir claims that women's lived experience of marriage and the home makes them particularly vulnerable to "magical" forms of explanation:

Daily cooking teaches her patience and passivity; it is alchemy; one must obey fire, water, 'wait for the sugar to melt', the dough to rise and also the clothes to dry, the fruit to ripen. Housework comes close to a technical activity; but it is too rudimentary, too monotonous to convince the woman of the laws of mechanical causality... magic phenomena are united by secret forces of which a docile consciousness can embrace the continuous becoming - without understanding it.²³⁹

Women remain outside of domains of education, logic and training. Forbidden from accessing understanding the processes by which the world operates, they're inclined to read the world as a spontaneous and magical occurrence. Stuck within the home, and within maternal communities where all parties are uneducated, her situation constitutes and encourages to her gullibility: "she is ready to believe anyone; she welcomes and spreads rumours." Beauvoir plays on the idea that the intellectual tools men require for their world are incompatible with the women's world, and vice versa.

...conversely, the power of male instruments disappears at the borders of the feminine domain. There is a whole region of human experience that the male deliberately chooses to ignore because he fails to think it: this experience the woman lives it.²⁴⁰

Women don't require logic and technology within their world. Beauvoir writes "Women do not have a hold on the world of men because their experience does not teach them to deal with logic and technology." The world comprises a carnal world of immanence and a transcendent world, designed by the Kings of Creation. Woman's lived existence is split between these two:

²³⁸ In *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* Sartre marries the emotional with the magical. For example, Sartre argues "... during an emotion, the consciousness abases itself and abruptly transmutes the determinist world in which we live, into a magical world... consciousness seizes upon the magic as magic, and lives it vividly as such. The categories 'suspicious' and 'disquieting', etc. designate the magical, in so far as it is lived by consciousness or tempting consciousness to live it." Sartre, trans. Philip Mairet, Routledge New York 2014 *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* 56-57.

²³⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 654.

²⁴⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 665-666.

[woman is] this double belonging to the carnal world and to a 'poetic' world defines the metaphysics and wisdom to which the woman more or less explicitly adheres. She tries to combine life and transcendence;²⁴¹

The description of the non-carnal world that women inhabit as 'poetic' is important. The poetic world is the offspring of men's transcendent world. Women inhabit the poetic world by virtue of their relegation to the immanent world. Beauvoir does not merely claim that women repeat immanent tasks day in and day out. Women assume a poetic *perspective* in the face of these immanent tasks. To justify their concrete subordination, they start thinking through narrative and poetry. This poetic world indicates their will to move beyond their immanence, but reinforces that they cannot and do not have the resources to think outside of this. Men can access real freedom while for women, moments of freedom are illusory and fleeting:

The joy that is a surge of freedom is reserved for the man; what the woman knows is an impression of smiling plenitude.²⁴²

Beauvoir turns to female authors to illustrate this tendency:

These are the moments of luminous happiness that Virginia Woolf... Katherine Mansfield, all through her work, grant to their heroines as a supreme recompense.²⁴³

Beauvoir's intertextual references prove excellent support for her thesis. We do not have to look far into Woolf or Mansfield's work to find examples of "luminous happiness" as "recompense". The reader first meets Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway as she indulges in the magic of fresh air and blooming street below her:

... she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet ... looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them...²⁴⁴

Beauvoir clearly does not endorse this outlook, which she describes at times as a disposition of Stoic or Neo Platonic naturalism. First and foremost, the outlook is differentiated from logic and calculation:

this is to say [the woman] rejects Cartesianism and all doctrines connected to it; she is comfortable in a naturalism similar to that of the Stoics or Neoplatonists of the sixteenth

²⁴¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 673.

²⁴² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 674.

²⁴³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 674.

²⁴⁴ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, (Orlando: Harcourt 1925) 3.

century: it is not surprising that women, Margaret of Navarre being the first of them, should be attached to such a philosophy, at once so material and so spiritual.²⁴⁵

The attitude of Stoic naturalism encourages and justifies woman's own subordination in her view. The question of woman's complicity here is murky. Woman's predilection for the disposition of Stoic naturalism emerges (understandably and reasonably) from her own oppression and need for some peace and respite. However, as Beauvoir suggests, this outlook develops, consolidates and extends her subordinated state.

She turns to Mabel Dodge's work, to make the (empathetic) claim that this outlook is wholly explicable when taken in relation to the mundanity of woman's lived experience:

It was a still, autumn day, all yellow and crimson. Frieda and I ... sat on the ground together, with the red apples piled all around us. We were warmed and scented by the sun and the rich earth - and the apples were living tokens of plenitude and peace and rich living; the rich, natural flow of the earth, like the sappy blood in our veins, made us feel gay, indomitable and fruitful like orchards.²⁴⁶

At this moment, the characters are able to experience themselves as virtuous and achieve happiness from an affinity with nature. The volume of apples symbolise a life well-lived; and the characters experience warmth (exemplifying a positive connection between one's physical state and consciousness). The female protagonists derive an illusion of autonomy from nature:

We were united for a moment, Frieda and I, in a mutual assurance of self-sufficiency, made certain, as women are sometimes, of our completeness by the sheer force of our bountiful health.²⁴⁷

While women's appreciation for nature is both constitutive and reflective of her servile perspective, her attitudinal tendencies here are explicable with the most fleeting regard to her situation. The question is most closely answered when we consider the question in relation to her capacity for free choice. If, as Sartre defined, freedom is the capacity to make autonomous decisions, then woman's choice in this instance was fraught from the outset. Women are shown to be complicit in their oppression here to some degree. However, this is not reducible to a free choice (who would freely choose their own oppression)? Beauvoir certainly does not stress women's complicity in order to place blame on them, or to suggest they are

²⁴⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 673.

²⁴⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 674. Beauvoir transcribes Dodge's passage in a footnote on page 674 of *The Second Sex*.

²⁴⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 674.

condemned to this state. She hopes to achieve the opposite effect. Beauvoir intends to demonstrate how 'deep this runs' to foster a new consciousness in the reader and awareness of this operation and mechanism. Beauvoir is not "reproaching [woman] for savouring a beautiful afternoon or the sweetness of an evening." However, she clarifies that the docile consciousness that submits to what is "given", will not further women's emancipation.

... the woman has a deep need to be ontologically optimistic: the moralities of action do not suit her, since it is forbidden for her to act; she submits to the given: so the given must be Good;²⁴⁸

Women submits to the state of affairs because of her subordination, but justifies her subordination (what is "given") in doing so. Woman's attitude reflects and perpetuates their subordination, yet is also explained by it. To view the world as good, or as harmony is in fact to be complicit in one's own subordination. Women cannot access a superior definition of Good:

but a Good recognised by reason like that of Spinoza or by calculation like that of Leibniz cannot touch her. She requires a good that is a living Harmony and within which she situates herself by the mere fact of living.²⁴⁹

The male philosophers in this instance signal the transcendent male domain from which woman is excommunicated. Women cannot be "touched" by a better definition of Good, given her formal exclusion from spaces of knowledge. The passage concedes that women *could* put the instruments of reason and calculation to use. However, the immediate situation of women "requires" different resources. The verb "requires" is rhetorical here. The realm of immanence, motherhood and domesticity has no immediate use for reason and logic. However, the greater agenda of the text is to promote the visibility of the oppressive regimes that stand behind their dispositions. Beauvoir clearly believes women do "require" the instruments of logic and reason. Thus, Beauvoir claims that women are complicit in their own subordination *if* they fully obey the disposition of harmony and servitude.

ii) Abortion

In her examination of abortion, the (unjust) division between male and female experience is at its most pronounced. Beauvoir's depiction here recalls Stoljar's eclectic and innovative reading of her account

²⁴⁸ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 673.

²⁴⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 673.

of what it is to be a woman. We will recall from our analysis in Chapter Two that her first association of being woman was with injustice. In abortion, woman is confronted with patriarchal hypocrisy and contradiction, male's legislative power, normative-essentialist conceptions of what a woman 'is', myths of maternity, and finally, the biological specificity of woman's ability to be impregnated. Abortion finalises a number of important currents in her thought we've traced throughout the project. We started with the adolescent Beauvoir's "hunch" that theoretical authority was pernicious. Abortion most lucidly demonstrates the mature development of this claim: her central thesis is that the experience of abortion is largely (but not entirely) attributable to the experience of the perniciousness of male authority.

Abortion is depicted as an experience where elements of facticity (both social constructivist factors and the body) are great burdens for women. Beauvoir again deploys the binary couplets concrete-abstract, and bodily/physical-theoretical, to enable her to explicate the claim that here patriarchal authority plays out upon the woman's body with vicious and dangerous results. For Beauvoir, abortion is *corrupted* by codes generated by Kings of Creation. Given this aspect of the argument, it *could* be tempting to read it as a statement of her social constructivism (we explore why it is irreducible to this reading later). Her study of abortion elucidates the destructive effects of legislative, religious, ethical and moral codes on the body of the woman. The woman's negative psychological and physical consequences are directly attributable to these codes.

Men tend to take abortion lightly; they consider it one of those numerous accidents to which the malignity of nature has destined women: they do not grasp the values involved in it...Yet when man asks woman to sacrifice her bodily possibilities for the success of his male destiny, he is denouncing the hypocrisy of the male moral code at the same time. Men universally forbid abortion; but they accept it individually as a convenient solution; they can contradict themselves with dizzying cynicism; but woman feels the contradictions in her wounded flesh; she is generally too shy to deliberately revolt against masculine bad faith; while seeing herself as a victim of an injustice that decrees her to be a criminal in spite of herself, she still feels dirtied and humiliated; it is she who embodies man's fault in a concrete and immediate form, in herself; he commits the fault, but unloads it onto her; he just says words in a pleading, threatening, reasonable or furious tone: he forgets them quickly; it is she who translates these phrases into pain and blood.²⁵⁰

In this division of experience, men view the issue from an abstract viewpoint, a privileged spectator's role they can assume, given their inability for a more concrete experience of it. Despite their remoteness from

²⁵⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 545.

the concrete act, they wield legislative and moral power on the issue. By virtue of their distance from the act, Beauvoir submits that men entertain the privilege of equivocation, inconsistency and hypocrisy. Man can “universally forbid abortion” while “accept[ing] it individually as a convenient solution”. While men entertain linguistic, theoretical, legislative, moral authority on the issue, women occupy the carnal and physical. In abortion, women endure and incarnate men’s contradictions.

Prohibition of abortion is an immoral law, since it must be forcibly broken every day, every hour.²⁵¹

With a striking combination of hyperbole/poetic flair and literality, Beauvoir claims that men’s hypocrisy and contradictions are imprinted upon the body of the woman. Women “translate men’s codes into pain and blood”. The outlawing of abortion increases the danger for the woman. Woman endures the contradictions, “in her wounded flesh”, perhaps a more literal remark than it may appear, given the way that the illegality of the procedure is directly proportionate to increased physical danger. Women do not exclusively occupy the physical/carnal pole in this analysis, the experience is also highly mediated by social codes and pressures:

... to deliberately invite another to commit a crime is a situation that most men never know and that the woman experiences with a mixture of fear and shame... she feels ill at ease with the ambiguity of the act she is about to perform.. The woman blames herself for really killing a child... many who feel they have mutilated a part of themselves.²⁵²

Use of terms ‘killing’ and ‘murder’ and replacement of ‘foetus’ with ‘child’ signal the residual presence of maternal mythic constructions in the woman’s mind – suggesting that such myths contribute to women’s grief and guilt. Beauvoir describes the way that essentialist-normative conceptions of woman-as-female and feminine myths of motherhood prey on the woman throughout the procedure:

Her whole moral future is shaken by [abortion]. Indeed, from childhood woman is repeatedly told she is made to bear children, and the praises of motherhood are sung; the disadvantages of her condition - periods, illness, and such ... is justified by this marvellous privilege she holds, that of bringing children into the world.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 546.

²⁵² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 544.

²⁵³ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 545.

Woman's experience of the procedure is heavily mediated by the values and meanings laden in this world, in particular, women at this juncture seem haunted by normative-essentialist conceptions of what a woman 'is'. They construe this act as a fundamental violence against the conceptions of woman-as-mother.

Woman has been thrust into a world laden with values she herself had no right to fashion (what Beauvoir refers to as a patriarchal world). Beauvoir stresses that for the procedure, woman is necessarily alone in her experience of it. Beauvoir recalls the various particulars of being 'woman', one of which can and may be biologically determined (here, the capacity to fall pregnant, and the ability to have that pregnancy terminated). Given the specificity of the fact that only women (but not all women) can fall pregnant and endure this procedure, we cannot reduce her analysis here as socially constructivist.

The notion of abortion as a free choice is compromised here. At one end of the pole, Beauvoir explicitly acknowledges the presence (and prevalence) of male coercion. Yet even in the absence of explicit violent or verbal coercion by a third party, Beauvoir has made a significant effort by this point to demonstrate that woman's character is such that, even in the face of this grave injustice she is most unlikely to come to, or defend, her own decision.²⁵⁴ Even if free choice were here possible, the stakes of that choice remain wholly dependent on patriarchal authority: legislative, religious *and* social. Is the procedure legal in her city? Is it safe? Can she pay for it? Can she physically reach the location? Finally, the very notion of a free act seems compromised by the very description of the procedure. Woman "feels the contradictions in her wounded flesh", which is to say she carries the psychological burden of the act, which the world has worked so hard for so long to morally, religiously and legally outlaw (and it seems fraught and painful at best).

Conclusion for Chapter 3:

Beauvoir instituted a form of situational analysis to explicate her nuanced account of oppression. Oppression was depicted as a complex operation within the life of a woman, one that does not merely change the way women experience the world, but significantly impacts the way that women view the world and their place within it. I compared Sartre and Beauvoir's use of the term situation. Beauvoir disagreed

²⁵⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 545.

with Sartre's conception of the relation of freedom to facticity in situation. Beauvoir studied the concept of situation in relation to women's concrete lives and experiences. She transposed his abstract conception to the domain of women's concrete situation and in doing so, challenged the relationship between freedom and facticity in Sartre's account.

In Beauvoir's account of situation, facticity is indeed emphasised over freedom. Indeed, this culminated in Beauvoir's innovative explication of the unique way women inhabit, and view the world. To make this claim, Beauvoir utilised the philosophical terms immanence and transcendence, claiming that women were not merely relegated to the immanent sphere, yet were in fact experiencing their lives as frustration and limitation. Beauvoir's study of marriage was a visible explication of the difference in a gendered division of experience. Her work on abortion most persuasively demonstrated her claim that within women's situation, facticity triumphs over freedom. Abortion was not merely analysed to demonstrate injustice between the sexes. Rather, Beauvoir's intelligent analysis of women's experience of abortion demonstrated that women experience abortion is one of facticity, particularly psychologically. In the instance of abortion, Beauvoir argued that a strict conception of consent itself cannot properly operate within a situation of such deep injustice. According to her, what may appear to be 'consent', or a 'free choice', was fraught with the situation. The unique fact of pregnancy, and the complex issues surrounding abortion, meant that women are psychologically, materially and physically unable to consent.

In chapter three, we have found that Beauvoir intelligently repurposed stock philosophical concepts including immanence, transcendence, facticity, freedom and situation in order to persuasively claim for women's complex and deep experience of gendered oppression.

Conclusion

I have contended that Beauvoir deploys an innovative literary-philosophical approach for rendering women's oppression visible. This approach is traceable to her valorisation of experimentation and experience in her early essay "Analysis." As we saw, the young Beauvoir ascribed experimental practice the power of illuminating and producing truth. She prioritised doubt as a means of unfixing illegitimate theoretical authority. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir repurposed this material in her analysis of specifically *patriarchal* authority,

illuminating the inconsistency and oppressive function of normative determinations of woman's purported "essence." Beauvoir uses lived experience as a lever against patriarchal essentialism in two main ways. She narrativises women's lived experience (women's "Situation") and she brings the multiplicity that characterises lived experience critically to bear on patriarchal textual traditions via literary-philosophical strategies of "proliferation" and "reintroduction."

This thesis showed that Beauvoir reintroduced the work of Sartre and Hegel in order to demonstrate the complicity of their philosophical positions with patriarchal authority, while at the same time putting them to use *against* that authority. Beauvoir's strategy of critical reintroduction is mandatory in any project that would contest the capacity of existing theoretical authorities to account for lived experience, an accounting whose moral necessity is felt in instances where life is lived as an experience of oppression. I also read proliferation as a key strategy in her work. As we saw, her work undermines the plausibility of any *one* account of woman's lived experience saturating that terrain – whether biological, constructivist, or otherwise – by proliferating treatments of women across otherwise authoritative disciplinary boundaries. This is a principle not only of the form or formal approach taken in writing *The Second Sex*, but of Beauvoir's genre-spanning attempts to render women's oppression visible. Beauvoir's work, in both form and content, thus taps into the interdisciplinary character of our concrete lives – lives in which philosophy, literature, art, sociology, psychoanalysis, economics, et cetera all compete for normative authority over our behaviour – breaking down the claim of any one discourse to account for gendered experience and relations. This critical strategy is particularly important with regard to philosophy, which historically maintains pretensions to final explanatory authority while at the same time housing anti-essentialist conceptual resources. Above all, her literary-philosophical strategy of proliferation is consistent with her early commitment to the necessity of adopting multiple starting points in experimentation, and, more generally, with her appreciation for Bernard's restless, iconoclastic spirit of discovery.

In keeping with her proliferation of disciplinary resources, I want to conclude by claiming that her methodological ingenuity is of contemporary value as a critical perspective on disciplinary practices within academia, as well as postures of authority outside it. Most narrowly, her approach warrants continued close attention within "Beauvoir studies." Contemporary readings of Beauvoir are marked by a sensitivity towards discerning the most appropriate way of reading her writing: notable contemporary examples include Penelope Deutscher's work focusing on the generative contradictions of Beauvoir's work, Ursula Tidd's biographical treatment of her concepts, and Nancy Bauer's post-millennium existentialism. The further study of ways of

understanding her way of *writing* is clearly of importance in this context. The focus here has been on *The Second Sex*, but it would be possible, for example, to extend our understanding of Beauvoir's writing project by reading her study of the treatment of the ageing population, *The Coming of Age*, or specifically autobiographical writing through the early enthusiasm for experimental scientific and literary approaches.

Further afield, Beauvoir's literary-philosophical strategies retain their pertinence for feminist political practice – practices perhaps as necessary within the gendered space of higher education as they are outside of it. To state what should be obvious, essentialist conceptions of gender still exist today; Beauvoir's analysis of the pernicious operation of these essentialist normative conceptions remains strikingly relevant. In many countries, women still cannot access safe abortion; marriage remains in many instances a violent and oppressive practice. In Australia, a major cultural shift is underway regarding the acknowledgement and censure of domestic violence. However, her insightful line – “her wings are cut and she is blamed for not knowing how to fly” – does not yet reflect mainstream values. Victim-blaming after violent assaults, “slut-shaming,” and so on are essentialist-normative practices whose oppressive function calls for the subtle tools of Beauvoirian methodology. What is less obvious, however, is how Beauvoir's strategies relate to a neoliberal context in which at least *some* of her mid-twentieth century patriarchal targets have been dismantled (perhaps merely dissembled), and in which second-wave feminist discourse has to some degree itself been co-opted by oppressive new economic demands on women.²⁵⁵ This complex situation raises anew the question of precisely *how* patriarchy constructs and maintains its authority despite otherwise massive social change. This is a question to which Beauvoir's experimental approach – patiently sifting through theoretical authorities from multiple disciplines, turning the resources of official doctrines against themselves, looking always to the plural character of women's lived experience – is well equipped to contribute some answers.

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