

# **Otherness Matters: Beauvoir, Hegel and the ethics of recognition**

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# **DECLARATION**

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## Abstract

This study critically explores the meaning of *difference* in continental philosophy. Concomitantly, it reflects on the *norm*, with regard to, firstly, the authorities within the philosophical community who take it upon themselves to distinguish, on a “corporate” and/or intellectual level, between the normal and that which is different from the norm; secondly, the apparatus of limitation employed to constitute, legitimate and reinforce this distinction, alongside distinctions between the conventional and the peculiar, the traditional and the marginal, the philosophical and the non-philosophical, the essential and the secondary or supplementary, as well as, the same (or subject) and the other.

The focus on these distinctions is narrowed to the field of phenomenology, more particularly, how the anthropologic readings of *Phenomenology of Spirit* by the exponents of early French phenomenology not only add force to the canonical reception of Hegel as a follower of a philosophical tradition governed by solipsism and individualism, but also perpetuate two traditional concepts; to wit, otherness as something threatening that must be overcome and self-other relationships as inexorably violent. A reinterpretation of the dialectic of recognition reveals not only Hegel’s appreciation of the degree to which subjectivity is indebted to otherness, but also his notion of friendship as the reciprocal preservation of the other’s otherness. This notion of friendship is appropriated by Simone de Beauvoir, whose engagement with Hegel constitutes a radical departure from French phenomenology; by implication, normal practice. Beauvoir, both personally and in her work, confronts the philosophical community with the short-sighted, often destructive, ways in which it delimits the canon, particularly with regard to its “othering” of women and its disregard for the specificity of difference.

In keeping with the anthropological spirit of the respective readings of Hegel, the study itself takes the form of an autobiography. It traces the intellectual journey of a non-Western, non-white, non-male scholar, from her sense of not belonging in the world of continental philosophy, to her critical engagement with Hegel, mediated by Beauvoir. In the process it aims to show that otherness matters and how it matters. Furthermore, it calls for writing and reading differently so as to encourage non-hegemonic philosophy.

## Abstrak

Hierdie studie is 'n kritiese verkenning van die betekenis van *differensie* in die kontinentale filosofie. Gepaardgaande hiermee, word besin oor die *norm*, met betrekking tot, eerstens, diegene wat gesaghebbend binne die filosofiese gemeenskap, d.w.s. met 'n self-opgelede mandaat om te onderskei, op 'n "korporatiewe" en/of intellektuele vlak, tussen die norm en dit wat afwyk van die norm; en tweedens, die begreping bepaal, wat aangewend word om hierdie onderskeid, tesame met onderskeidings tussen die konvensionele en die eie, die tradisionele en die marginale, die filosofiese en die nie-filosofiese, die sentrale en die sekondêre of aanvullende, asook (die)selfde (of subjek) en die ander, te konstitueer, legitimeer en versterk.

Hierdie onderskeidings word ondersoek binne die veld van die fenomenologie; in die besonder, hoe die antropologiese vertolkings van *Phenomenology of Spirit*, deur die verteenwoordigers van die vroeë Franse fenomenologie, die kanonieke beeld van Hegel as aanhanger van 'n filosofiese tradisie, wat deur solipsisme en individualisme aangedryf word, bekragtig en daarmee saam twee tradisionele konsepte bestendig, naamlik, andersheid as 'n bedreiging wat oorkom moet word en self-ander verhoudings as noodwendig gewelddadig. 'n Herinterpretasie van die dialektiek van herkenning openbaar nie net Hegel se waarneming van die mate waartoe subjektiwiteit afhang van andersheid nie, maar ook sy idee van vriendskap as die wedersydse behoud van die ander se andersheid. Hierdie nosie van vriendskap word toe-geëien deur Simone de Beauvoir, wie se inskakeling met Hegel radikaal afwyk van die Franse fenomenologie, dus ook van standaard praktyk. Beauvoir, beide in persoon en in haar werk, konfronteer die filosofiese gemeenskap met die kortsigtige, dikwels afbrekende, wyse waarop hul die kanon begrens, veral met betrekking tot hul "be-andering" van vroue en hul minagting van die spesifisiteit van differensie.

In ooreenstemming met die antropologiese gees van die onderskeie vertolkings van Hegel, neem die studie self die vorm van 'n outobiografie aan. Dit volg die intellektuele verkenning van 'n nie-Westerse, nie-wit, nie-manlike student, aanvanklik vanuit haar gevoel van ontuiswees in die wêreld van die kontinentale filosofie, tot haar kritiese inskakeling met Hegel, bemiddel deur Beauvoir. Hiermee wil die studie wys dat andersheid saak maak en hoe

dit saak maak. Voorts beroep dit op 'n anderse skryf en lees om sodoende nie-hegemoniese filosofie aan te moedig.

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Dedicated to MJ Swartz and SE Sims

## Part 1      The Philosophical and the Personal

... Beauvoir is obscene because she is ‘more’ than what is acceptable, and in being so, spills out of the frame that should contain her.

Fraser (1999: 120)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This study focuses on the crossing of boundaries. It locates Simone de Beauvoir and her work at the margins of philosophy, that is, the disorientating, alienating, uncomfortable space where the “inside” and “outside” of the discipline intersect. Through her resistance of systemisation and her transgression of certain philosophical conventions and through the excess and outrageousness that define her ethics, Beauvoir invites us to reconsider what we mean by *limits* – not least of all, the limits of philosophy – the exclusions that these limits imply, as well as the imperialistic assumptions that have historically informed such exclusions. In the attempt to remain faithful to Beauvoir’s challenge to the philosophical establishment, this work seeks ways, both in content and execution, to draw attention to the marginal. Thus, it highlights the work of a marginalised thinker (Beauvoir), and some marginal aspects of a major philosopher’s (Hegel’s) thought. Furthermore, it employs many – perhaps even an excess – of footnotes: a few, anecdotal; others, polemical; some supplementary; even ones that contain central suppositions, which, if ignored – as is usually the fate of things on the margins – will show the gaps in the “main” arguments. Many of these footnotes will be quite long and some may be inconveniently placed, which will not only disrupt the reading of the text but, in all likelihood, irritate the reader. Such irritation is sometimes a necessary means of shaking off the complacency that enables the discipline of philosophy to operate in a “mode of phantasmagorical hegemony” (Le Dœuff 1991: 1).

The structure of the study also defies more traditional ways of delimiting philosophical essays. Thus, it dispenses with chapters and offers three parts of varying lengths. For the sake of readability, the narrative will be punctuated by the occasional heading and, upon the insistence of my supervisor, I conform to the convention of paragraphing and numbering the pages. *Part 1* takes the place of an introduction. The bulk of it concerns what Derrida (1995: 217) would call the “apparatus of limitation” employed in a recent compilation dedicated to the history of phenomenology. Thus, it introduces the theme of limits, of boundaries, while it interrupts the border-control of the phenomenological movement. For the most part, *Part 2* is a three-way conversation between Hegel, Alexandre Kojève

## a) Inside / Outside

To belong, Zygmunt Bauman submits in *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* (2004), is the prerogative of someone for whom the notion of “having an identity” holds no peculiar meaning. At the start of his text, Bauman (2004: 12) reflects on one of the “peculiarities of [his] biography”, namely, his nationality. For the first forty-three years of his life he had been a Polish national; then, as a result of the purge of Polish Jews in March 1968, he became “a refugee, from a foreign country, an alien” (9); more recently, he had become a naturalised British citizen. Once he had been stripped of his Polish nationality and forced to flee his homeland, it became clear to him that he had believed himself to belong somewhere, that he had assumed his Polishness “matter-of-factly and without any soul-searching or calculating” (12). The experience of being uprooted, dispossessed and estranged from an existence – at least as far as his nationality was concerned – that he had taken for granted, meant that he would no longer *fit in*, he “was – sometimes slightly, at other times blatantly – ‘out of place’” (12).

Bauman (11-12) argues that “as long as ‘belonging’ remains their fate”, people take their identities for granted, they are self-certain. If prompted, they might describe themselves as regular, average, ordinary human beings. Above all, people who belong – who fit in – are *normal*. Contrastingly, the question of his or her identity, more precisely, the extent to which

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and Jean Hyppolite, which may result in a more than usually dense, even unruly, presentation, as their voices become entangled with one another. *Part 3* is the most transgressive section of the study: it focuses on the work of someone, Simone de Beauvoir, whose philosophical credentials have always been in doubt; it deals with a subject matter – woman – that philosophers have traditionally either ignored or disdained; it includes some of the “non-philosophical” genres in which Beauvoir writes; it underscores certain philosophical insights by way of actual events in her life; it reinforces Beauvoir’s habit of including many, often disparate, influences into the narrative, it mixes the often confounding vernacular of phenomenology with a more down-to-earth language that reflects the everyday experiences of many women; etc. Following Derrida, I (Swartz and Cilliers 2003:14) have previously argued against “complicating things for the pleasure of complicating”. I realise that rendering this work in the manner that I have will complicate things. However, in my opinion, it is philosophically consistent to present a work on transgression and on the importance of being different, differently.

he or she differs from the norm, is a constant, sometimes upsetting and often irksome, preoccupation of one who does not belong. One who is always in some way or another out of place, who “sticks out” or whose presence (or absence) needs to be remarked upon – qualified – cannot *but* be preoccupied by his or her identity, for there “is always something to explain, to apologise for, to hide or on the contrary to boldly display, to negotiate, to bid for and to bargain for; there are differences to be smoothed or glossed over, or to be on the contrary made more salient and legible” (13).

Taking her cue from Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1997), Rosi Braidotti (1994: 147) asserts: “In the European history of philosophy ... “difference” has been predicated on relations of domination and exclusion, to be “different-from” came to mean to be “less than”, to be worth less than.” Thus, it comes as no surprise that many of the newcomers to the community of continental philosophy, myself included, who have previously been excluded from a great number of interesting places and things based on peculiarities like our sex, skin colour, nationality, class, mother tongue, etc., seem fixated on our differences and anxious about our place – in the broadest sense of the word – in philosophy.

On the surface, those within the philosophical community who take it upon themselves to organise and safeguard the canon<sup>2</sup> – the authorities “entitled to set apart the ‘inside’ from the ‘outside’, those who belong from those who don’t” (Bauman: 10) – no longer prevent me from studying and producing philosophical works. Yet, notwithstanding doubts regarding the supposed homogeneity of this community, even the most casual observer must concede that its foremost members – the small fraternity that constitutes the canon – are resolutely “Western”, “white” and “male”. Furthermore, I am not alone in finding the continued under-representation at colloquiums, curriculum planning meetings, in classrooms, textbooks, philosophical dictionaries and journals of formerly excluded individuals disquieting.

Reflecting on the engagement with the canon of the previously excluded – “non-Western”, “non-white” and/or “non-male” scholars – Andrea Nye (2004: xi) wonders if “[putting] on the language and manner of philosophy as tradition has defined it, is to lose oneself in the name

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<sup>2</sup> By the *canon* I mean those philosophers whose ideas and works form the corpus of philosophy and thus become the markers from which scholars take their philosophical bearings and by which the curricula of philosophy departments are delineated.

of an uncomfortable borrowed identity.”<sup>3</sup> I believe what Nye means by “tradition” refers precisely to those members of the philosophical community in charge of fixing the limits of philosophy, who have imposed on the canon the kind of “sanctimonious sacredness” (Braidotti: 29) that resists re-interpretation, reconstitution and redress. The discipline of philosophy is in itself not immutable. As Braidotti (24) notes, “the history of ideas is always a nomadic story; ideas are as mortal as human beings and as subjected as we are to the crazy twists and turns of history.” However, those who suffer “the mania of always wanting to be able to state the ‘great difference’ between philosophy and everything else” (Le Dœuff 1991:171) encourage the notion of the canon’s immutability, with the implication that philosophy remains, as it has been since Plato, the prerogative of the privileged few.<sup>4</sup>

In response to my discomfort at this reinforcement of the *status quo*, the proprietors of the canon may exhort me to overcome my *ressentiment* and make proper use of the opportunities that have so generously been bestowed on the formerly excluded. For the very reason that my participation in the discipline of philosophy is now tolerated, that concessions have been

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<sup>3</sup> It could be argued that it is not only the previously excluded who experience a loss or compromise of whatever amounts to their personal sense of identity when they enter the world of philosophy. All non-canonical members of the philosophical community are expected to dress in, change into, simulate or acquire the language and manner of “Plato”, “Descartes”, “Kant” or “Hegel” or any of the other dead (for they are all, from Socrates to Derrida, long gone, yet kept alive by the custodians who will have us read and re-read no other, and only in ways sanctioned by the self-same custodians), white, Western males whose masterworks – those texts from which certain conventions, reading protocols and points of reference are gauged – are the points of departure from which are drawn the lines that enclose the canon. Accommodation in the philosophical community requires members to avoid or suppress that which is individual, specific and peculiar to them in order to become Platonic, Cartesian, Kantian, Hegelian, etc. Hence, Simone de Beauvoir (1984: 154) observes: “But is there not an absolute in the fact of being Descartes or Kant even if, in a certain manner, they are outstripped? They are outstripped, but the outstripper only moves on from what they have already contributed. There is a reference to them that is absolute.”

<sup>4</sup> Another implication of the supposed immutability of the canon is that its representatives, if they were alive, could never reinvent themselves – they could never be anything other than the official portraits proffered by the self-appointed stewards of philosophy. Later in this discussion I show how one of the quintessential canonical figures – Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel – suffers this very fate at the hands of one such steward, Dermot Moran.

made and the rules relaxed, the proprietors may very well have the expectation that I ought not to dwell on “the bunch of problems called ‘my identity’” (Bauman: 12), especially the problem of my difference from the norm, my otherness. They declare: “We will not abide by this idle chatter about *otherness* when we have so generously taken you into our home – we have shown our willingness to tolerate your otherness, but it would be most ungenerous and intolerant of *you* to always be playing this ‘otherness card’.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet, it remains disturbing that, interspersed among, or, more problematically, at the root of many of the noble ideas in canon’s masterworks, are Eurocentric, sexist, racist and classist assumptions too manifold to mention. The proprietors will undoubtedly agree that cultural imperialism, racism and sexism in philosophical texts are problematic; however, they are likely to ignore such attitudes as simply mistaken and separable from the “essential truth” of a philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> I am reminded of what Zygmunt Bauman writes about *tolerance* in his earlier text, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992). Bauman (1992: xxi) avers: “Tolerance requires the acceptance of the subjectivity (i.e. knowledge-producing capacity and motivated nature of action) of the other who is to be ‘tolerated’; but such acceptance is only a necessary, not the sufficient condition of tolerance. By itself, it does nothing to save the ‘tolerated’ from humiliation. What if it takes the following form: ‘you are wrong, and I am right; I agree that not everybody can be like me, not for the time being at any rate, not at once; the fact that I bear with your otherness does not exonerate your error, it only proves my generosity’? Such tolerance would be no more than just another of the many superiority postures; at the best it would come dangerously close to snubbing; given propitious circumstances, it may also prove an overture to a crusade.”

<sup>6</sup> Take, for example, the following assessment of Aristotle in Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue: a study in moral theory* (2000). MacIntyre (2000: 159-160) notes: “What is likely to affront us – and rightly – is Aristotle’s writing off of non-Greeks, barbarians and slaves, as not merely not possessing political relationships, but as incapable of them. With this we may couple his view that only the affluent and those of high status can achieve certain key virtues, ... craftsmen and tradesmen constitute an inferior class, even if they are not slaves. ... This blindness of Aristotle’s was not of course private to Aristotle; it was part of the general ... blindness of his culture. ... Yet it remains true that these limitations in Aristotle’s account of the virtues do not necessarily injure his general scheme for understanding the place of the virtues in human life, let alone deform his multitude of more particular insights.” Now, in his *Politics* (2000), Aristotle depicts the *citizen* as the only fully realised human being; his humanity is constituted by his political engagement in the *polis* and only through

Indeed, as far as proprietors are concerned, the personal is not philosophical.<sup>7</sup> For example, the sexist attitudes in the work of, say, Aristotle, Hegel and Nietzsche may be formally condemned by the philosophical community, yet, in the general failure to connect this sexism to the central tenets of their work, the selfsame community not only condones bad scholarship but conspires with the proprietors of the canon to trivialise the disquiet felt by the targets of sexism.<sup>8</sup>

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these public activities can he attain *eudaimonia*. Given that women, slaves, tradespeople, agriculturalists, minors and non-Greeks [ironic, since Aristotle himself was Macedonian rather than Greek] are excluded from the *polis* – based on his assumption of their inferior or lack of reasoning abilities and the presumed absence of certain key virtues (see Aristotle 2000: 25-53) – Aristotle’s philosophical analysis of politics, which is to him the culmination of ethics, narrows the definition of “citizen” to include only aristocratic, adult males: by implication no others are fully human. MacIntyre challenges Aristotle’s account of the virtues, but, crucially, not what he means by *human life*. In addition, with a relativistic flourish Aristotle’s particular imperialism is removed from his thought and assimilated into that which is outside [his] philosophy.

<sup>7</sup> Another example of the personal being seemingly disconnected from the philosophical is found in the fact that, notwithstanding Martin Heidegger’s Nazism, French scholars of the 1940s embraced *Being and Time* (1978) during and after the Occupation and appropriated it for their own brand of phenomenology. It is inconceivable to review the history of French phenomenology, from the early years of Levinas, Kojève, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty to Derrida’s deconstruction, without reference to Heidegger; indeed, it is no exaggeration to suggest that *Being and Time* remains one of the most celebrated texts in continental philosophy. I find it impossible to come to terms with the knowledge that I am carrying on a tradition of honouring the work of someone who was a member of the Nazi party for more than ten years.

<sup>8</sup> In these opening paragraphs, most examples of philosophy’s hegemony relate to sexist attitudes towards women. Let it not be supposed that I believe other instances of hegemony are less problematic; that women’s historical exclusion from and subjugation by the philosophical community ranks as the “worst” form of imperialism. With Simone de Beauvoir as my point of reference, it is inevitable that the discussion will underscore one peculiarity, namely sex, possibly at the cost of others. Given my own biography, it could be supposed that I have some kind of responsibility to write about particularly race and class differences. Perhaps I could have written a different study, if I had read, say, Frantz Fanon or Karl Marx before Beauvoir. I had not. To write about the meaning of otherness in the work of Beauvoir is to investigate a highly specific kind of othering based on sex difference.

The exclusion of the personal from the discipline of philosophy accounts for the scrupulous avoidance of personal pronouns; it also justifies the exclusion of types of discourse, such as what is commonly referred to as *feminist theory*, that reveal a proclivity for autobiographical narratives and personal anecdotes. To be sure, the canon is crowded with philosophers who have concerned themselves with the meaning of *human being*, but they have done so presuming to speak for and about all men (and occasionally also women) through the standard designation of Man. Certainly, we have had in philosophical thought, since at least the Heideggerian positing of a *Dasein* with *Jemeinigkeit*,<sup>9</sup> a notion of an individual subject who is particular and factual; yet, despite the attention to history, the concrete, minutiae, specificity, etc., *where*, or more precisely, *who* is this personal *I* to be found in *Being and Time*, in *Being and Nothingness: a phenomenological study on ontology* (1956)<sup>10</sup> or *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002)? This *I* is not “Heidegger”, “Sartre” or “Merleau-Ponty”; he is not a flesh-and-blood subject with a peculiar history, particular habits, quirks, superstitions, dreams, etc. Instead, it is a cipher with hypothetical facticity in equally hypothetical situations.

An effect of the marginalisation of the personal is that even those strands of philosophy fixated on the *self* – and I would venture that early French phenomenology, which will be the specific focus of this study, serves as a microcosm for a general self-absorption, more recently manifested by the relentless self-parody and self-reference in so-called postmodernist theory, that has permeated the canon of philosophy since Descartes posited his self-certain *cogito* – tend to invoke the *self* or the *I* as an assertion of sameness.

Suffice it to say for now that early French phenomenology is premised on the assumption of an *I* that, if not self-positing (as is the case in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*), is driven by the desire to rid itself of self-externality. Following Alexandre Kojève’s reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), I will show in *Part 2* how this *I* supposedly attains freedom when it negates its *being-other*, when it absorbs or assimilates every other thing, including all other *I*s. However, the conceit of an *I* who can will his own alienation, who can make himself a lack, who endows himself with the ability to humanise, or rather, as it is supposed, individualise the world, does not find its incarnation in a flesh and bone, historical, world-conquering hero; instead, this *I* describes only the movement that makes everything and

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<sup>9</sup> See Heidegger (1978: 68).

<sup>10</sup> Henceforth abbreviated to *Being and Nothingness*.

everyone the same. Thus, rather than slating French phenomenology and its descendents for “monotonously intoning ‘me’, ‘me’, ‘me’” (Russon 2004: 62), it would be more exact to describe its self-absorption as the monotonous intonation of sameness.

One reaction to this movement towards sameness has been a championing of Otherness that goes back at least as far as Levinas’ *Time and the Other* (1987)<sup>11</sup> and endures in the writings of “postphilosophers”, i.e. those who proclaim the end of philosophy, or hold the conviction that philosophy inhabits the realm of the *postmetaphysical* and the *posthuman*. Levinas’ valorisation of the sex-neutral “feminine” as the counter to the absolute subject of idealism would reverberate in the late twentieth century appeal to the “becoming-woman” of philosophy, to multiplicity and the triumph of (non-specific) difference over identity.

Those members of the philosophical community whose subjectivities have, at least historically speaking, never been in doubt, those who have been able to assume their place in the community *matter-of-factly and without any soul-searching or calculating*, are the very authorities who declare that all “grand narratives of legitimation, both epistemic and political” (Fraser and Nicholson in Nicholson 1990: 22) are passé. With staggering insouciance they declare that any interest in “identity politics” must be either wilfully anachronistic (although, of course, it is equally unfashionable to presume human will) or a sad nostalgia for “the Subject” that has been displaced, decentred, disowned, dead for at least forty years.<sup>12</sup> To ask,

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<sup>11</sup> In *Part 3*, I show Simone de Beauvoir’s (1997: 16) interpretation of “the feminine” in *Time and the Other* as an expression of male privilege or, more precisely, a male philosopher’s position of privilege. The gist of Beauvoir’s argument is that Levinas’ postulation of the absolute alterity of “the feminine” has both nothing to do with flesh and blood women and everything to do with the concrete subjugation of women.

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the death of the subject, Judith Butler (in Butler and Scott 1992: 14) rightly asks, *which* subject’s death has been announced? To this crucial question, I would add the following concerns: Are we to infer that there has only ever been *one* subject in philosophy, that this philosophical subject has always been, or rather, used to be – prior to its demise – comfortably housed at the centre of its own existence, self-certain and complacent? Can one, with absolute rigour, pinpoint the moment of this philosophical subject’s death – if it is in fact dead, given its constant resuscitation by those who remind us of its passing? To what extent does the philosophical subject resemble other subjects, particularly flesh-and-blood ones, each with his or her own peculiarities? Moreover, on whose authority is this death confirmed? In *Patterns of Dissonance*, Rosi Braidotti (1991: 122) submits: “In

“Who am I?” to concern oneself with the matter of not belonging, misses the point of our always already fractured, ruptured, displaced, multiple, differing, contingent and indeterminate selves. Indeed, Bauman (2004: 83) contends that the “provisional nature of all and any identity” and the notion “that nothing in the human condition is given once and for all” have been features of modernity from the outset. Bauman’s argument shows that perhaps the biggest irony of so-called postmodernist theory is the conceit that the postulation of fragmentation, of rupture and displacement is, both intellectually and ethically, an *advance* over such notions as “progress” and “linearity”!

At any rate, since *Being and Time*, it has been rather fashionable to feel *unruhig* and *unheimlich*. Moreover, it is debatable whether *anyone* in this increasingly globalised world *belongs* anywhere; more likely the experience of not belonging is “nowadays quite common and on the way to becoming almost universal” (Bauman 2004: 12). Thus, if any and all “identity” is marked by rupture, contingency, multiplicity and indeterminacy and if disquiet and not-at-homeness is the default disposition of any and all *posthumans*, “what is the point ... in going over and over an outdated question and talking about what happened the day before yesterday?” (Le Dœuff 1991: 5)<sup>13</sup>

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order to announce the death of the subject one must first have gained the right to speak as one; in order to demystify meta-discourse one must first gain access to a place of enunciation ... the truth of the matter is, as I have argued elsewhere: one cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never been fully granted.” An almost verbatim argument appears in Braidotti’s *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994). She welcomes the supposed death of the philosophical subject and the concomitant “crisis of philosophy” (Braidotti 1994: 29) in order to distance herself from the philosophical community, yet remain committed to the notion of subjectivity, specifically the enunciation of female subjectivity.

<sup>13</sup> In *Hipparchia’s Choice: an essay concerning women, philosophy, etc.* (1991), Michèle le Dœuff suggests that the question of women within the philosophical community elicits a certain kind of irritation among both male and female members. Le Dœuff (1991: 3-4) argues: “Many women feel resentful whenever any question related to the ‘position of women’ is raised in their presence, as though they suspected they were being dragged down again. Might not this reopening of a problem which no longer exists be an attempt to put them back in the psychological position of inferiority suffered by earlier generations of women? At the very least might there not be an unintended risk that they will be weighed down by a past which should not be theirs and loaded with the mental blocks of a now outdated situation? And decent men (the others hardly count) also feel attacked, thinking they are

Indeed, one may very well ask if the problem of exclusion is still relevant in these postmetaphysical times.

As Bauman (77) cautions, the bunch of problems that relate to the experience of not belonging “can perhaps be *wished away* (and commonly is, by philosophers striving for logical elegance), but it cannot be *thought away*, and even less can it be *done away* with in human practice.” Those who have formerly been excluded from the philosophical community precisely because of the *specificity* of our otherness cannot through some force of counter-reasoning undo those aspects of ourselves that *stick out* – our sex, colour of skin, scars of poverty and oppression. The call for multiplicity that overlooks the fundamental asymmetry in the relationships between the sexes, between races and nations, between classes, etc., signals the continued, albeit more subtle, discrimination of the formerly excluded. We can pretend that everyone belongs or that no-one belongs only if we deny this discrimination.

Thus, for instance, Rosi Braidotti (1991: 121) finds that “only a man would idealise sexual neutrality, for he has by right – belonging as he does to the masculine gender – the prerogative of expressing his sexuality, the syntax of his desire; he has his own place of enunciation as the subject”. The “feminisation” of philosophy, the call for every and all members of the postphilosophical community to *become-woman*, is beset with “the worst prejudices of the patriarchal system and perpetuates some of its most ancient and theoretical habits” (Braidotti: 108), particularly, the inability “to resist the temptation, transformed into habit by thousands of years of patriarchy, of speaking women’s place” (142), “instead of accepting women’s right to speak in their own name” (122).

Is it, therefore, any wonder to be perturbed by the double standard of otherness in these postphilosophical times? We are all urged to embrace our “irreducible alterity”, which means that we must adopt a notion of otherness beyond our specific differences; at the same time these specificities are the very things by which the formerly excluded are defined in the philosophical community – we are *women* philosophers or *black* philosophers or *previously*

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reproached with the sins of their grandfathers.” Like Le Dœuff, I do not believe that the so-called *woman question*, especially as it pertains to philosophy, is a “question-which-has-already-obviously-been-settled” (3).

*disadvantaged* scholars, etc. We ourselves must not express our specific differences but they are routinely used to keep us in our place: the margins of philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

Now, I have been referring to the proprietors of the canon who take it upon themselves to determine philosophy's borders, to set apart those who belong from those who do not, but *who* and *where* are they?

Generally, one would expect to find them among the editors of philosophical journals, the authors of philosophical curricula, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, study guides, etc. In this study, I focus on commentators who suffer the delusion that they understand “better than the author what the meaning of the latter's work is” (Le Dœuff: 171), those who resort to name-calling, *ad hominem* arguments and indifference – that “formidable form of resistance” (42) – to exclude those who fail, in their estimation, to conform to *the language and manner of philosophy as tradition has defined it*, those who perpetuate philosophy's hegemony by clinging to tired oppositions, by not re-reading canonical texts but merely rehashing conventional interpretations, even when these demand a reconsideration of contexts, concepts, methods, etc., and by ignoring or taking a facile approach to the history of philosophy.

Next, I turn to one such commentator, Dermot Moran, whose *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000)<sup>15</sup> rather fortuitously captures on various levels the twin problems of identity and

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<sup>14</sup> In these postphilosophical times, it has become *de rigueur* to position oneself “on the margins” of philosophy, as if the margins are somehow a “better” place from which to do whatever it is that postphilosophers do. In the same way that “otherness” is not something that one claims for oneself, but something that is conferred upon one, one cannot claim the margin for oneself; it is merely the place where those deemed not to “fit in” have been placed. As I have already suggested, those on the margins are usually treated with indifference by the proprietors of the canon. I am deeply mistrustful of anyone who professes to write from the margins if he or she has never been marginalised. By romanticising the margins, postphilosophers lose sight of the violence that begets such margins.

<sup>15</sup> Published by *Routledge*, Moran's text is widely read by scholars of phenomenology and existentialism. It is bloated by the hyperbolic endorsements on its back-cover, e.g., “a clear, engaging, accurate introduction to phenomenology” and “the most accessible, the most scholarly, and philosophically the most interesting account of the phenomenological movement yet written.” Moran's follow-up text, *The Phenomenology Reader* (2002), cites *Inquiry's* estimation of *Introduction to Phenomenology* as “comprehensive”, “with attention to fine details” and, most especially, having the

belonging. It introduces, firstly, the particular philosophical context from which this study emerges, namely, early French phenomenology, with its retelling of the spiritual journey that leads to self-certainty and its emphasis on the often violent relationship between the existential subject and others. It demonstrates, secondly, some of the mechanisms by which the limits of philosophy are fixed, by way of Moran's presentation of the history of phenomenology solely as the history of Edmund Husserl's influence.<sup>16</sup> It repeats, thirdly, the canonical estimations of two figures, Beauvoir and Hegel. In Beauvoir's case, Moran contrives her exclusion through a rejection of the personal; in Hegel's case, Moran assures his marginalisation by emphasising his canonical identity as philosopher of the Absolute. It renders, fourthly, the opportunity to think differently about the history of French phenomenology: to recognise other contributors; to reconsider key concepts such as freedom, transcendence, subjectivity and reciprocity and the dialectic of recognition; most crucially, to think differently about difference.

## **b) Philosophy's hegemony: a case study**

In his *Preface*, Dermot Moran (2000: xiv) says of phenomenology that "in its historical form it is primarily a set of people, not just Husserl and his personal assistants ... but more broadly his students... and many others ... who developed phenomenological insights in contact and in parallel with the work of Husserl." In effect, Moran is suggesting that "Husserl" – "the father of phenomenology" – is, historically speaking, a composite of multiple individuals, among others, Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein, Martin Heidegger, Eugene Fink, Hedwig

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quality of being comprehensible from "cover to cover without any prior knowledge of phenomenology or the history of twentieth-century European philosophy."

<sup>16</sup> Now, it must be conceded that Moran somewhat compensates for the conceit of providing scholars with an introduction to phenomenology based solely on the phenomenologies or engagement with phenomenological texts of "in [his] opinion, the key figures in European thought" (3) by admitting from the outset, and frequently thereafter, the shortcomings of his project. Given such humility, one would have hoped for a more modest title to his text.

Conrad-Martius and Max Scheler. Historically speaking, suggests Moran, the phenomenology of “Husserl” is not “his” story.

Suspending for a moment my suspicions about what “Husserl” and the other “key figures in European thought” – Franz Brentano, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Derrida – signify, let us consider the composition of contributors of Moran’s analysis. Moran (3) offers the following caveat: “It is important not to exaggerate, as some interpreters have done, the extent to which phenomenology coheres into an agreed *method*, or accepts one theoretical outlook, or one set of philosophical theses about consciousness, knowledge, and the world.” Since the place of a philosopher in the philosophical canon is undoubtedly linked to the particular pigeon-hole to which his or her work is assigned, and since, with the exception of Edmund Husserl, none of the contributors to *Introduction to Phenomenology* is specifically labelled within the canon as *phenomenologists* but, instead, fall under such headings as “scientific experimental psychology” (Brentano), “existentialism” (Sartre), “deconstruction” (Derrida) and “hermeneutics” (Gadamer), by which norms are they included in Moran’s study?

The answer lies possibly in the great pains to which Moran goes in order to assert one commonality among his chosen contributors; to wit, their connection, however tenuous in certain instances, to Husserl. Thus, we encounter Husserl’s “immediate inspiration” (Brentano), his personal assistant (Heidegger), occasional attendees of his classes (Gadamer and Arendt), those who wrote studies on Husserl (Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Derrida) and his translator into French (Levinas). If the pre-requisite for inclusion is to be, in one way or another, engaged with the work of Husserl, why does Moran (18) merely mention in passing, for example, Ricoeur, Deleuze, Kristeva, Horkheimer and Adorno? What about Karl Weierstrass, Carl Stumpf, Karl Jaspers, Alfred Schutz, Raymond Aron and so many others? *Introduction to Phenomenology* creates the impression that the place of phenomenology in the philosophical canon will only ever be occupied by “Husserl” and certain “key” exponents identified by scholars like Moran, which reasserts philosophy’s hegemony. Such hegemony is particularly noticeable in Moran’s treatment of, respectively, Hegel and Beauvoir.

## **b.1) Moran's disregard for Hegel's contribution to French phenomenology**

Moran (6) indicates that although the phenomenological movement is founded by "Husserl", *phenomenology* had been in use in philosophy since at least the eighteenth century. Recall that, notwithstanding his acknowledged debt to Husserl in *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962: 50) locates the term *phenomenology* even further back to the Ancient Greeks.<sup>17</sup> Now, in his own introduction to phenomenology, Herbert Spiegelberg (1984: 12) goes so far to suggest that, with *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel "certainly succeeded in elevating phenomenology to the rank of full philosophical discipline which made a lasting impression." Not so, according to Moran (7), who submits that Hegel's work "had little influence" and was eclipsed by the more "immediate" influence of Franz Brentano.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that Moran must be referring to the lack of acknowledgement of Hegel's phenomenology in Husserl's work;<sup>19</sup> however, he must concede at various points in his text,<sup>20</sup> that French phenomenology is imbued with the spirit of Hegel<sup>21</sup>; indeed that it is founded on "the unquestioning ease with which it takes for granted that Husserl's phenomenology belongs together with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and even originated from it" (Spiegelberg: 440-441). While half of Moran's text focuses on key contributors to French phenomenology – including one who famously said: "We will never be finished with the reading or rereading of Hegel, and, in a

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<sup>17</sup> See also Moran (2000: 228).

<sup>18</sup> Moran's statement is unintentionally ironic, given that Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit* maintains a position of immediacy as the furthest removed from the actual!

<sup>19</sup> See Spiegelberg (1984: 13).

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Moran (2000: 7, 409-410, 444-445, 468).

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, I would venture a more ambitious claim, the substantiation of which falls outside the scope of this essay, that the portrayal by Kojève of Hegel as a Heideggerian Marxist is possible *only* because *Being and Time* appropriates some of the themes already anticipated by Hegel, including, the return to Aristotle, the nature of the subject as being-in-the-world-with-others, the subject as always going "beyond itself" and death anxiety.

certain way, I do nothing other than attempt to explain myself in this point” (Derrida 1972: 77) – Hegel merits only the most cursory reference.<sup>22</sup>

Moran’s disregard echoes the canonical estimation of Hegel. To be sure, in most respects, Hegel is the *quintessential* canonical figure – he is one of a small band of philosophers whose very *name* extends to his enduring influence, although, as the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (1994) points out, *Hegelianism* has become synonymous only with absolute idealism. “There will apparently, be no end to Hegel” (Barnett 1998: 2); however, only to the extent that *Hegel* remains what the canon has made of him; to wit, a philosopher traditionally situated within German idealism, and, as such, an heir to a Cartesian-Kantian transcendental philosophy governed by solipsism and individualism;<sup>23</sup> moreover, an apologist for Prussian militarism and “one of the fathers of modern totalitarianism” (Thody 1992: 166, footnote 52). Hegel’s entire philosophical output has been routinely reduced to his dialectic, which, in turn, has been simplified to a three-step formula involving a thesis, an antithesis and a synthesis.

Ironically, the emergence of French phenomenology in the late 1930s and early 1940s reveals an appropriation of Hegel that *deviates* in some ways from the “canonical Hegel”. Initiated by Alexandre Kojève’s lectures on Hegel and Jean Hyppolite’s translation of and extensive

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<sup>22</sup> In Moran’s following text, *The Phenomenology Reader* (2002), the tendency to simultaneously acknowledge and dismiss Hegel’s contribution to phenomenology is repeated. Here, Moran and Mooney (2002: 10) note, without further discussion: “Although it has become usual to trace the origins of phenomenology back to Hegel, in fact the Hegelian version of phenomenology only came to be recognised by Husserl’s followers after the important lectures of Alexandre Kojève on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* given in Paris in the 1930s.”

<sup>23</sup> I acknowledge that this essay reiterates an equally reductionist approach to, particularly Kant, Marx and Descartes, whose place in the canon is reduced to “I think therefore I am”. I claim no kind of moral high-ground within the hegemony of philosophy. This point needs to be stressed. Following Kristana Arp’s (2001: 119) description of “a type of faulty moral arithmetic”, I submit that the philosophical community’s loss of moral standing as well as intellectual integrity, through its discrimination and violence towards others (non-male, non-white, non-academic, non-affluent, etc.), do not accrue to the moral standing and intellectual integrity of such others. Baldly stated, my status as a “female”, “person of colour” from a “working-class” background and a “previously disadvantaged” school does not automatically make my participation in the discipline of philosophy less discriminatory or violent. Within a hegemony, everyone is compromised.

commentary on *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the “French Hegel” is “shorn of the Absolute” (Heckman in Hyppolite 1974: xxiii) and portrayed in opposition to Kantian transcendentalism and Cartesian solipsism. This other “Hegel” is re-imagined as a Marxist anthropologist with Husserlian and, more prominently, Heideggerian ties.

The architects of the “French Hegel” appropriate *Phenomenology of Spirit* in ways that fixate on the supposedly inexorable violence of the self-other relationships. In *Part 2*, I show that this pre-occupation with conflict and domination discloses a residual Cartesianism: it is betrayed by Kojève’s over-estimation of the master-slave dialectical movement, implied by Hyppolite’s pre-occupation with the unhappy consciousness and, in addition, explicitly acknowledged by Jean-Paul Sartre in his critique of Hegel. At its core, therefore, the “French Hegel” does not offer a radical departure from the “canonical Hegel” – Hegel remains the philosopher of the Subject.

Irrespective of his canonical reputation and what early French phenomenology makes of him, my own reading of the initial dialectical movements of consciousness’ journey to Absolute Spirit yields the discovery that, for Hegel, otherness matters.<sup>24</sup> Contrary to the usual formulation of difference as the opposite of identity, which, I will show, is also assumed in the early French interpretation of the dialectic of recognition, Hegel posits difference as the *precondition* for identity. In this regard, his interest lies with the safeguarding rather than assimilation of difference. Moreover, for Hegel, the meeting of the subject and the other can, indeed, if one could extrapolate an ethics from Hegel’s texts, ought to be, a joyous occasion.

I have identified three versions of “Hegel” – “Moran’s Hegel”, which is also the “canonical Hegel”, the “French Hegel” and another Hegel who highlights the importance of otherness, which I support. In *Part 3*, I explore a fourth incarnation of Hegel – “Simone de Beauvoir’s

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<sup>24</sup> Another kind of violence of which I am guilty pertains to my limited reading of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Aside from some references to Hegel’s postulation of the family as the foreshadowing of the Absolute, I focus only on the first few dialectical movements of consciousness, up to the moment where Hegel indicates a glimpse of Spirit. Not all of the violence can be attributed to the scope of this study: the glimpse serves my purpose of extracting Hegel from his canonical reputation and French incarnation, but, as Beauvoir shows, it excludes some crucial insights regarding his concept of the universal individual.

Hegel” – for whom self-other relationships are not necessarily violent but can also take the form of friendship, of generosity and reciprocity, of solicitude in the fullest sense of the word. *Part 3* demonstrates how Beauvoir’s Hegel avoids reductionism and endeavours to uphold the importance of being other; however, he ignores what is individual, personal and idiosyncratic about the concrete. In her analysis of the meaning of otherness, Beauvoir shows that, for all his concern with otherness, Hegel’s dialectic does not take into account a more peculiar other: woman.

Now, in *Part 2* it will become apparent that Hegel suggests three possible outcomes in the confrontation between two consciousnesses engaged in the dialectic of recognition; namely, death, the enslavement of one party or, ideally, reciprocity and mutuality. The “French Hegel” centres on the possibility of enslavement; concomitantly, the term *reciprocity* is inflected with violence: regarding the dialectic of recognition, *reciprocity* is synonymous with *reactionary* – the meeting between subjects is described as the action of the One followed by the counter-action of an Other. I explain that, in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, this meeting is a *double movement*; thus, reciprocity means a mutual relinquishing of the original, delusional, solipsistic stance.

However, in *Part 3* I show how, for Beauvoir, Hegel’s call for reciprocity is based on the prior assumption of equality. Her study highlights the fact that, whatever the outcome, the precondition for participation in the struggle for self-recognition is that consciousnesses enter the dialectic as independent equals. Beauvoir contends that women do not meet this requirement; thus, their status as the “absolute other” comes without having participated in the dialectic. If the subjects too readily recognise themselves in the other and the other in them, if Hegel seems overly optimistic about the possibility of friendship between subjects, it is because they are not specifically different and also because of the male privilege at the heart of the dialectic of recognition.

It is precisely the unconcern for flesh and blood difference that Beauvoir ties to the concept of oppression. As with the notion of freedom that will emerge from her analysis, which counters the desire to establish the ascendancy of the individual over the collective – it is *others* that liberate or oppress an individual – Beauvoir’s definition of oppression hinges on the assumption of intersubjectivity. However, her version of *intersubjectivity* deviates from both

the specificity-denying universal individual of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as well as the French Hegel's depiction of the social as the hell of other people, as the battle-ground for competing self-interest. For Beauvoir, the relationship between existents is defined by a permanent state of tension, and it is the *differences* between subjects that sustain this tension.

In the final part of my study, I show Beauvoir's elaboration of this necessary tension in her description of the erotic encounter between a man and woman. Here, Beauvoir re-imagines the notion of limit. Furthermore, in the erotic encounter the specificity of a self and an other is literally laid bare, which invites us to reconsider what is meant by reciprocity. Beauvoir offsets the sexist "Hegel" of *Philosophy of Right* (1967) and *Philosophy of Nature* (1970) with the other "Hegel", who calls for reciprocity and generosity in the meeting between existents and perceives of mastery as destructive and self-subverting. She imagines a carnal situation between the couple that could embody the friendship between self and other suggested in the early parts of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but without the compromise of specificity.

To what extent does Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who was born on August 27, 1770, in Stuttgart, and died at the age of 61, in Berlin, resemble any or all of these incarnations of "Hegel"? To what extent is the writer of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in addition to being "Hegel from Stuttgart", also "Aristotle", "Anselm", "Goethe", "Kant", "Spinoza", "Frege", "Schelling", German society on the brink of annihilation by Napoleon's army, the "Hegel" of *Philosophy of Nature* and the "Hegel" of *Philosophy of Right*, etc.? What purpose is served by the partial identity endorsed by the canon? On whose authority does "Hegel: Idealist" become the official portrait of Hegel? Certainly, Moran presumes such authority. In the process he presents the history of French phenomenology, not as the emergence of a Hegel-Husserl-Heidegger triad, alongside a varying commitment to Marxist theory, but as an elaboration of the influence of "Husserl".

## **b.2 Moran's dismissal of Beauvoir**

Consider the following passage at the start of Moran's chapter on Hannah Arendt, who is, arguably, the boldest inclusion in the text, given her relative obscurity within the canon<sup>25</sup> in general and her indifference to Husserlian phenomenology in particular:<sup>26</sup>

[The] best-known woman associated with phenomenology is undoubtedly Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), who studied philosophy at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, and developed her philosophical outlook in close dialogue with Jean-Paul Sartre. Though de Beauvoir does have interesting things to say about the relation of self and other, she is now primarily known, not as a phenomenologist, but on account of her ground-breaking book, *The Second Sex*, which is a social and economic history of women, and a classic of feminist studies.

(Moran 2000: 287)

According to Moran, it is certain that Beauvoir is the "best-known woman associated with phenomenology". She is not (necessarily) best-known for being a phenomenologist, but she is, compared to other women "associated with" phenomenology, the most famous or most instantly recognisable. Now, inasmuch as Simone de Beauvoir never referred to herself as a *phenomenologist* and only reluctantly as an *existentialist*,<sup>27</sup> inasmuch as she never wrote any studies on Husserl,<sup>28</sup> inasmuch as she never once refers to Husserl by name in her most

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<sup>25</sup> In "How Feminism is Re-writing the Philosophical Canon," Charlotte Witt, (at [www.uh.edu/~cfreelan/SWIP/Witt.htm](http://www.uh.edu/~cfreelan/SWIP/Witt.htm) accessed 6 October 1999), explores the problem of women's exclusion from the philosophical canon. The traditional assumption is that there are no women philosophers or, if there are any, they are unimportant. Witt points out, for instance, that *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (1967) contains articles on over 900 philosophers but none on even the most easily recognisable woman philosophers like Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir and Mary Wollstonecraft. Incidentally, in the few lines devoted to Arendt in the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (1996), she is described as a "political philosopher", which is ironic, given her own rejection of the term *political philosophy* inasmuch as it implies "the valorisation of 'philosophy' over the political realm" (Moran 2000: 290). Not a single one of Arendt's ideas, not even her notion of "the banality of evil", is mentioned in the entry – indeed, it seems her name is used for little else than a pointer to Jaspers and Heidegger.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Moran (2000: 289, 301).

<sup>27</sup> For evidence of such reluctance, see Beauvoir (1963: 547) and Beauvoir (1968: 44-46).

<sup>28</sup> In *The Phenomenology Reader*, Moran, in collaboration with Timothy Mooney, expands his list of "key figures in European thought" to include Adolf Reinach, Max Scheler, Edith Stein, Ricoeur and –

famous text, *The Second Sex*, it would be quite logical for Moran, who seems to demand a Husserlian connection when assessing a contribution to phenomenology, not to rate Beauvoir as a phenomenologist.<sup>29</sup>

What does Moran mean by “associated with phenomenology”, or, more specifically, what is the nature of such an “association”? Is it the “close dialogue with Jean-Paul Sartre”, one of the chosen representatives in *Introduction to Phenomenology*? It will not be the first time that Beauvoir’s work in philosophy is conflated with the insights of Sartre. Indeed, the canonical

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yes – Simone de Beauvoir. They do not seem entirely convinced that Beauvoir should be included in their compilation. Thus, Moran and Mooney (2002: 464) offer: “In her writings de Beauvoir rarely discusses phenomenology or invokes its terminology or techniques. Nevertheless, her existential descriptions do show some phenomenological tendencies. Her initial interest in Husserl was awoken by Raymond Aron, and she began reading Heidegger in 1939 and Hegel in the 1940s. She even translated part of Husserl’s lectures on time consciousness for Sartre. She was an early critic of Levinas, and reviewed Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*.” As with his previous text, Moran implies throughout *The Phenomenology Reader* that there is only one way to “do” phenomenology: via “Husserl”. Even if they trivialise every single aspect of her engagement with French phenomenology, one would expect Moran and Mooney (given Moran’s labelling of *The Second Sex* as “a classic of feminist studies”) to acknowledge the significance of Beauvoir’s critique of androcentrism in philosophy. They do not; thus, one wonders *why* they go to the trouble of including two long extracts from *The Second Sex*. In passing, see Heinämaa (in Card 2003: 66-86) for a discussion of Beauvoir’s debt to Husserl’s phenomenology. See also Bergoffen (1997, e.g. 75-110) who insists on a Husserlian influence, particularly in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) and *The Second Sex*, but, in my opinion overlooks and/or misinterprets Hegel’s influence on Beauvoir’s thought.

<sup>29</sup> Given that both Gadamer and Arendt were, phenomenologically speaking, much closer to the work of Heidegger, one could consider Beauvoir’s phenomenological credentials on the basis of a Heideggerian influence in her work. However, there is scant evidence of such an influence, though Gothlin (in Card 2003: 45-65) conjectures Beauvoir’s connection to Heidegger. Gothlin supposes that Beauvoir’s reluctance to admit her interest in Heidegger’s work stems from his Nazism as well as his criticism (in *Letter on Humanism*) of Sartre’s interpretation of *Being and Time*. My own research shows that Beauvoir’s explicit references to Heidegger in both *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex* are few and far between and, in the case of the latter text, she tends to group together Heidegger and Sartre (e.g. Beauvoir 1997: 39, 66).

assessment of Beauvoir is, at best, as a “derivative thinker, a kind of footnote to Sartre” (Kruks in Fallaize 1998: 46) but, more commonly, as “the girlfriend of Jean-Paul Sartre”.<sup>30</sup>

In recent years, Beauvoir scholars like Eva Lundgren (1996), Debra Bergoffen (1997), Kristana Arp (2001) and a few others have gone to great lengths to accurately situate Beauvoir within the philosophical canon, to show that Beauvoir was “a philosopher in her own right – on her own” (Bergoffen: 2).<sup>31</sup> Part of this process of challenging the canon’s

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<sup>30</sup> Moran and Mooney (2002: 463) claim that Beauvoir and Sartre were married (unsurprisingly, this fiction is not mentioned in the section on Sartre)! Margaret Simons (1990: 487-504) provides an inventory of commentators who offer the interpretation of Beauvoir as merely Sartre’s ‘girlfriend/disciple’, including Walter Kaufmann, whose *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956), is one of the most widely read introductions to existentialism. Feminist writers who have understood *The Second Sex* primarily within the framework of Sartre’s existentialism include those mentioned by Lundgren-Gothlin (in Fallaize 1998: 106-107, footnote 2) as well as Judith Okely (1986) and Mary Evans (1985). In the passage from *Introduction to Phenomenology* under discussion, Moran erroneously asserts that Beauvoir studied at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, the prestigious training college that prepared Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Hyppolite for their *agrégation* in philosophy. As a student at the Sorbonne, Beauvoir was allowed to attend a few of the lectures at the training college, but it emerges from an interview with Simons (in Fraser and Bartky 1992: 35-36) that she was *not allowed* to enrol at this prestigious institution because she was a woman. For a detailed account, see Moi (1999: 308), Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 26) and Bair (1990: 269). I do not believe Moran’s biographical misrepresentations are inconsequential – they avert our attention from Beauvoir’s achievements – e.g., she was the youngest person to achieve an *agrégation* in philosophy and even obtained second place in the stringent oral examination, ahead of, among others, Jean Hyppolite – by overstating the romantic relationship with Sartre and belittling the fact that, since her earliest days at the *Cours Désir* girls’ school, Beauvoir’s formal education “was in every way inferior” (Lundgren-Gothlin: 26) to that of her more celebrated male colleagues.

<sup>31</sup> It should be clear from my discussion that I do not share the opinion that someone can be a philosopher in his/her own right or on his/her own; besides, we are told at the onset of our schooling in the discipline of philosophy that it is a *conversation* that has been taking place over millennia. Debra Bergoffen’s concern that a preoccupation with Beauvoir’s philosophical influences will only lead to her further marginalisation within the canon is somewhat misplaced. If we are to gauge Beauvoir’s contribution to the conversation, we must identify those with whom she is conversing as well as decipher the philosophical language in which this discourse takes place. Such a method is entirely in line with Beauvoir’s own belief that one’s identity is irrevocably tied to the bond with others.

indifference to Beauvoir has been the project of releasing Beauvoir from the perceived weight of *Being and Nothingness*.<sup>32</sup> Perversely, fixating on the ways in which Beauvoir is *not* influenced by Sartre only ensures that he gets his foot in the door; that Beauvoir continues to be assessed with reference to Sartre.

On the other hand, the canon does not usually assess Sartre on the basis of his relationship with Beauvoir. The entry for Beauvoir in the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* is uncommonly thoughtful insofar as it points to Beauvoir's development of "a non-solipsistic, social existentialism, in which an individual's freedom is achieved in communication with others equally free." However, this insight is immediately followed by: "De Beauvoir's long association with Sartre is not usually regarded as an example of this equality." Not only is Beauvoir disparaged for having an unequal relationship with Sartre, but, since nothing further is said about her philosophical pursuits, it seems that the perceived inequality of the relationship is enough to summarily dismiss her contribution. Predictably, Sartre's entry makes no reference to his romantic connection to Beauvoir.

Notwithstanding the "interesting things" that Beauvoir had to say, which formerly, that is, before *The Second Sex*, connected her to phenomenology, she now warrants no more than a throw-away appraisal within that genre because *The Second Sex* is "a social and economic history of women, and a classic of feminist studies". Let us ignore the fact that Beauvoir considered herself a "feminist" only some twenty years *after* its publication.<sup>33</sup> Let us ignore the fact that *The Second Sex* is the culmination of what Beauvoir (1963: 433) calls the "moral

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<sup>32</sup> A difficult task given Beauvoir's own insistence, as recounted by Simon (in Fraser and Bartky 1992: 27), that the only important influence on *The Second Sex* was *Being and Nothingness*. See also Bair (1990: 269-271, 381, 514-518).

<sup>33</sup> See Beauvoir's interview with John Gerassi, originally published in *Society* (1976), at [www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/1976/interview.html](http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/1976/interview.html) (accessed 21 June 2006), for an overview of her turn to feminism. See also Tidd (2004: 5), Simons (in Simons 1995: 247) and Bair (1990: 543-547). From all these sources it becomes apparent that, for Beauvoir, feminism is primarily a form of activism; thus, although she sets out in *The Second Sex* to understand the origin and perpetuation of and justification for women's oppression, what made her a *feminist* were her activities in aid of oppressed women.

period” of her career, that it is a concrete elaboration of the ethics proposed in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948), the little-known text that immediately preceded *The Second Sex*.<sup>34</sup>

At bottom, regardless of anything worthwhile that Beauvoir might have said before, in and after *The Second Sex*, she is relegated to the gutter of the phenomenological movement because a “social and economic history of women” – suspending for a moment any doubts about the accuracy of this description of *The Second Sex* – does not properly *belong* within this genre, its rightful place is “feminist studies”. We can include “hermeneutics”, “deconstruction”, “Levinasian ethics”, even Arendt’s “political philosophy”, but we have reached phenomenology’s limit with Beauvoir’s text. *The Second Sex* is a book by a woman – and Moran takes care to remind us that Beauvoir is the best-known *woman* associated with phenomenology, a case upon whose sex needs to be remarked,<sup>35</sup> lest we women forget that “we have no legitimate place there, that we got in by accident, by mistake, by smashing the door down, thanks to patronage or as supernumeraries, in brief that we are not really there” (Le Dœuff 1991: 6) – who sets off her most famous text with the question: “What is a woman?”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In the *Introduction* to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (1997: 28) proposes that “existentialist ethics” is the point of departure for her analysis of the relationship between man and woman. Now, it is possible that Beauvoir could be referring to Sartre’s early attempt at developing an existentialist ethics, published as *Existentialism and Humanism* (1966). Possible, but unlikely, given that Sartre merely restates his support of Cartesian rationalism in this text, given that he is not really concerned with the question of what one ought to do, since his primary concern remains the intentionality of the solipsistic consciousness. In *Part 3*, I show the extent to which Beauvoir distances herself from such preoccupation with the internal life of the subject. See also Gatens (in Card 2003: 269) and Arp (2001).

<sup>35</sup> Whatever is written in, say, *Logical Investigations* or *Being and Time* or *Phenomenology of Perception*, Moran does not relate what he reads in them to the fact that these texts bear the signatures of men. Moreover, male scholars of Husserl, Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty are not usually accused of “denying or repressing their masculinity” – the matter of their sex is not considered to have any particular bearing on the way they interpret texts – since “men can be self-evidently male and self-evidently intellectual at the same time” (Moi 1999: 205) within sexist ideology.

<sup>36</sup> In *Part 3*, I show that Beauvoir’s interest in the question of woman serves a more fundamental concern: What does it mean to be other? Thus, in this study relating to “being other” in the philosophical community, I focus on someone who, both in her personal capacity and within the

The topic of *woman* is “irritating” (Beauvoir 1997: 13). Indeed, in the wider context of the philosophical canon, “any raising of ‘the woman question’” begets irritation, “especially because it is so particular” (Le Dœuff 1991: 3), and, as I have argued above, those who organise the canon avoid the particular at all cost. Hence, when a woman asks: “What is a woman?”, every aspect of her inquiry must be “sectioned off under a special heading (by women, about women, for women)” (Le Dœuff: 16).

Hannah Arendt *can* be contained, without causing Moran irritation, in *Introduction to Phenomenology*. After all, contends Moran (317-318), for whom it is necessary to reveal Arendt’s “anti-feminist” stance, “she never contributed much to the analysis of gender”, “she has never been fully accepted by feminist critics” and she had “absolutely no time for superficial ideologies which wanted to claim a certain thinking as male and another kind as female [since] thinking as such was genderless.” I am not suggesting that Moran is *wrong* to acknowledge Arendt’s contribution to phenomenology, far from it. I am disturbed; however, that he includes Arendt’s perceived lack of raising “the woman question” under the heading of “Arendt’s contribution”. The subtext is, in my opinion: “Here is a woman philosopher, who had interesting things to say, but unlike other woman philosophers who also had interesting things to say, she at least had the good sense not to broach the topic of ‘woman’, and so I can tolerate her inclusion to the fraternity of phenomenology.”

Since *The Second Sex* is “a classic of feminist studies”, one must by Moran’s reckoning presume that it contributes much to the analysis of gender, that Beauvoir has always been accepted by feminist critics and that she had all the time in the world for superficial ideologies which wanted to claim a certain thinking as male and another kind as female. Let us reflect on these presumptions.

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particular framework from which she explores the question of alterity, is considered by one of the border-controllers of the canon as philosophy’s “other”.

### b.3 Counterpoints

Firstly, the term *gender* was coined in the 1960s, by feminists from the English-speaking world (Moi 1999: 3) who wanted to distinguish between a person's anatomically distinct characteristics (sex) and the series of cultural constructions ascribed to one's sex.<sup>37</sup> The sex/gender distinction has been useful insofar as it highlights the culture/nature dichotomy underlying biological determinism, to wit: the justification for male dominance based on, for example, greater physical strength, is challenged on the basis that the existence of anatomical differences between male and female is a simple, descriptive "fact" that attains the meaning of dominator/dominated only within a value system delineated by a particular cultural framework. The challenge of the nature/culture dichotomy allows feminists to point out that the "natural fact" of being born with a vagina does not explain female oppression, any more than being born with a penis accounts for male domination. Instead, subordination materialises when these biological givens are interpreted by the normative (patriarchal) order in terms of gender constructs: "masculinity" and "femininity" are, respectively, culturally defined positions of domination and marginality.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> In a discussion of what constitutes "feminist theory", assuming that we can, without equivocation, define such a term and thus know its limit; suspending any fears concerning the wisdom of using an umbrella term to signify a vast array of different, often disparate, theories, Dermot Moran is not alone in giving precedence to the issue of gender. Consider, for instance, Sondra Farganis' (1994: 15-16) assertion of the primacy of gender in feminist theory. Farganis' argument is an example of *petitio principii*; to wit, she holds that gender is the constitutive element of feminist theory because a theory would not be feminist theory without the central element of gender. Furthermore, Farganis executes a pre-emptive ad hominem strike against those feminists that consider gender to be one category among a number of variants, including sex, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, age, etc., used in discourse on women's oppression. Apart from these fallacies, those who privilege gender as the site of oppression are susceptible to essentialising women's bodies and invoking a mind/body dualism. For elaboration, see Moi (1999: 4), Probyn (in Rakow 1992: 88) and Flax (in Nicholson 1990: 39-62).

<sup>38</sup>I take my cue from John Thompson's (1990: 59) description of *domination*; to wit, "when particular agents or groups are endowed with power in a durable way that excludes, and to some significant degree remains inaccessible to, other agents or groups of agents". Thompson describes *power* as "a

Now, given that *The Second Sex* was published some fifteen years *before* the emergence of the term *gender*, given that Beauvoir's language does not differentiate between sex and gender, that even in recent times such a distinction has not been operative in French (Moi 5-6, footnote 7),<sup>39</sup> given that *The Second Sex* explicitly portrays the female body *directly* as a site of oppression, that, for Beauvoir, woman's oppression takes place in but is not confined to the cultural sphere, given her postulation of the female body as always already subjected to taboos, laws and man-made mythology, given her critique of essentialising thought, biological reductionism and determinism, given the lack of agreement among feminist scholars regarding Beauvoir's supposed contribution to the analysis of gender:<sup>40</sup> given all these considerations, it is possible to argue, without contradiction, that Beauvoir anticipates *the need for a sex-gender distinction* and pre-empts *the pitfalls of such a strategy*.

A second question pertaining to Moran's evaluation is whether or not Simone de Beauvoir, the author of the "feminist classic", *The Second Sex*, has always "been fully accepted by feminist critics". Such a consideration too readily homogenises "feminists" and too easily conflates "feminism" and "feminist theory": since people who call themselves *feminists* rarely agree on the definition, *raison d'être*, contents, use of concepts, and many other aspects of feminism, including its relationship to feminist theory, no individual will ever be "fully accepted" in "feminist theory" or by the "feminist movement". Moreover, can it be taken for granted that when someone raises questions about the concept *woman* that it becomes the prerogative *solely* of "feminists" to study and criticise her or his work?

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socially or institutionally endowed capacity which enables or empowers some individuals to make decisions, pursue ends or realise interests".

<sup>39</sup> Moi (1999: 5) knows very well that the absence of the word *gender* does not preclude one from conveying in any language, for instance, "one's opposition to the idea that people in possession of ovaries are naturally unsuited to sports, intellectual work, or public careers". In the case of Beauvoir, I am of the opinion that the absence of a sex/gender distinction is not merely based on semantics, but is instead, based on her rejection of essentialism in general as well as her preoccupation with ambiguity as a constituting feature of human existence, which includes a denunciation of dualistic thinking.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Young (2005: 25), Andrew (in Card 2003: 29-44), Gatens (in Card 2003: 273), Moi (1999: 3-120), Simons (in Simons 1995: 254) and Braidotti (1994: 261-263).

To be sure, quite a few feminist theorists have, since the start of the second wave, forged academic careers on the seemingly endless topic of the shortcomings of *The Second Sex*.<sup>41</sup> As shown in her memoirs, Beauvoir herself was not oblivious to the criticism levelled at her.<sup>42</sup> Among Beauvoir's harshest critics is the generation of French feminists that emerged in the 1970s, including, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. In their early writings these intellectuals poured scorn on *The Second Sex* and referred to Beauvoir as their "sacred monster" (Bair 1990: 439), a relic from the first wave revived through the liberal feminism of particularly Betty Friedan, which they rejected.

Thirdly, let us reflect on Moran's insinuation that Beauvoir would submit to any "superficial ideologies which wanted to claim a certain thinking as male and another kind as female". One must assume that Moran considers the distinction, made by Levinas and Derrida, between the phallogocentric, rational Subject of philosophy and the mysterious, unknowable, feminine Other to be of an order that is neither superficial nor ideological. Be that as it may, Beauvoir is not interested in putting forward such oppositions – it is, she would argue, precisely *oppositional* thinking that legitimises various practices of exclusion – therefore, she argues against the kind of thinking that reveals male privilege,<sup>43</sup> but also against the concept of *l'écriture féminine* or "feminine writing".

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<sup>41</sup> See Pilardi (in Simons 1995: 29-43) for a compact discussion of the feminist reception to *The Second Sex*, particularly her excellent notes (39-43). See also Moi (1999: 106, 385), Fallaize (in Fallaize 1998: 7-13) and Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 219).

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance Beauvoir (1968: 199).

<sup>43</sup> Following Jean-François Lyotard, I could even suggest that Moran's dismissal of the opposition between "male thinking" and "female thinking" is in itself an expression of masculine privilege. Lyotard (1989: 111) observes: "It is said that the femininity of writing depends on content. Writing is feminine, for example, if it operates by seduction rather than conviction. But the opposition of these two efficacies is itself probably masculine. To avoid such alternatives, you claim no assignable difference between feminine and masculine, in writing or elsewhere: but this neutralisation of the question is also very suspect (as when someone says that he's not political, neither on the right nor the left; everyone knows he is on the right). It is a philosopher who is speaking here about relations between men and women. He is trying to escape what is masculine in the very posing of such a question. However, his flight and his strategies probably remain masculine. He knows that the so-called question of a masculine/feminine opposition, and probably the opposition itself, will only disappear as he stops philosophising: for it exists as opposition only by philosophical (and political)

While the younger generation of French feminists who initiated *l'écriture féminine* – the same ones who disparaged Beauvoir and her work – “located women’s emancipatory potential outside the laws of the state, beyond the male-dominated systems of discourse and knowledge” (Brison in Card 2003: 205), Beauvoir challenges what she perceives to be the reinforcement of such oppositions as inside/outside, sameness/difference, philosophical/non-philosophical, etc., since these effectively support hegemonic structures. In other words, the conceit of distancing itself from the phallogocentric language of philosophy through a celebration of “the feminine” – usually referred to as *gynocentrism* – renders *l'écriture féminine* vulnerable to an imperialism similar to that at work in the border-control of the philosophical canon.

Beauvoir’s questioning of oppositional thinking must not be confused with the desire to be rid of difference; her disavowal of *feminine* writing does not signal a rejection of *feminist* writing. In her interview with Susan J. Brison, Beauvoir (cited by Brison in Card 2003: 193) asserts that women “certainly have new things to say, unique things, and that they must say them” and that “they should write feminist books, books that reveal women’s condition, that revolt against it and lead others to revolt.” To be sure, “every woman has the right to shout, but the cry must be heard and listened to” (193); however, *l'écriture féminine* speaks only to *those in the know*, that is, other highly qualified feminist theorists, whose “relentless theorising” (Brison in Card: 206), aimed at challenging the phallogocentrism within philosophical discourse, has a tendency towards self-enclosure. When Beauvoir dismisses the exaltation – to the point of being used as a basis for a different kind of writing – of menstruation, maternity, lactation, etc., it points not to a disavowal of female corporeality; instead, it signifies a rejection of “falling once more into the masculine trap of wishing to enclose ourselves in our differences” (Beauvoir cited in Bair 1990: 551).<sup>44</sup>

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method, that is, by the male way of thinking.” Lyotard is suggesting that oppositional thinking is always already the language tool of the “masculine imperialist”.

<sup>44</sup> Such self-enclosure is particularly evident in the inscrutability of a great deal of feminine writing, particularly, according to Beauvoir, the work of Hélène Cixous. Nonetheless, I believe Beauvoir would strongly agree with Cixous’ (cited in Braidotti 1991: 215) argument: “What is the ‘Other’? If it is truly the ‘other’, there is nothing to say; it cannot be theorised. The ‘other’ escapes me. It is elsewhere, outside: absolutely other. It doesn’t settle down. But in History, of course, what is called

At best, the creation of neologisms through *l'écriture féminine* creates a new feminist vernacular, but, as such, it remains enclosed, localised, secondary in relation to the *lingua franca* of the philosophical canon. Thus, *l'écriture féminine* may even *advance* the agenda of those who depict philosophy “as a conversation among men”, who consider feminism to be “a thinking that happens outside the philosophical scene” (Bergoffen 1997: 33), that can be relegated to the “impotent fringes of ‘alternative’ thought, unable to effect changes in mainstream attitudes and beliefs” (Nye 2004: xi). Even a vociferous supporter of *l'écriture féminine* like Rosi Braidotti (1991: 176) warns that “non-participation, in theory as in other fields, is politically dangerous, to the extent that it only confirms the patriarchal myth which associates women with the anti-social, the irrational, the immoral, the passive, the powerless, and reinforces one of the most enduring forms of women’s oppression.”

I have in the preceding paragraphs considered Dermot Moran’s expulsion of Beauvoir from French phenomenology. Now, Rosi Braidotti takes for granted Beauvoir’s place in philosophy’s canon. However, it soon transpires that the price for this inclusion of Beauvoir is even worse than the obscurity to which she is condemned in Moran’s assessment. Not only does Braidotti erroneously dismiss her work as “humanism” and “Cartesianism”, she unjustly extends the charges of corruption and misogyny, by which she brands the discipline of philosophy, to Beauvoir’s work. As I show next, her disavowal of Beauvoir, as well as those who show a “stubborn fidelity to Beauvoir’s thought” (Braidotti 1991: 246), brings to the fore a question regarding the problem of not belonging in the philosophical community; to wit: why participate in philosophy *at all*?

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‘other’ is an alterity that does settle down, that falls into the dialectical circle. It is the other in a hierarchically organised relationship in which the same rules, names, defines and assigns ‘its’ other.” I will not in this study pursue the matter of the similarities or differences between Beauvoir and the adherents of *l'écriture féminine* – see, for instance, Bergoffen (1997: 206-215) for some insight regarding the affinities between Beauvoir and Irigaray, and Moi (1999: 384-389) for an account of the differences between them.

### c) Negotiating boundaries

Philosophy is, for Rosi Braidotti, an unrepentantly male-orientated enterprise. Braidotti (1994: 217) declares: “No amount of inclusion of women into theory, politics, and society could palliate the effects of and compensate for the centuries of exclusion”. She exhorts feminists to reject these institutions, particularly the philosophical canon, in favour of an alternative discourse that is entirely woman-centred. Braidotti (29-30) accuses those who continue to work within the field of philosophy of colluding with a corrupt system: they reveal “a corporatist attachment to the discipline and a strong identification with its masters; many feminists work to preserve or even rescue the very idea that philosophy actually *matters*.”

In particular, she identifies Simone de Beauvoir and those who are influenced by her as philosophy’s *dutiful daughters* and *devoted mistresses*. In her earlier text, Braidotti (1991: 167) submits that “it is an incontestable historical reality that Beauvoir is the symbolic mother of the second wave of feminism, which in turn is American in both origin and style.” What is considered by Braidotti to be *American* about Beauvoir’s perceived brand of feminism is that its approach to imperialistic traditions supposedly calls for reform and reconciliation rather than fissure and radical separation. Thus, Braidotti (1994: 180) associates Beauvoir with a “benevolent liberalism which authorises us to believe that the female condition can possibly be ameliorated within the social and political structures that are in force; that all that is needed is a little collective good will<sup>45</sup> ... [which] is moreover a classical attitude, for it was already that of the feminists of the nineteenth century and early twentieth, who claimed the right to sexual equality and condemned the oppression of women in the name of all Humanity”.

Tellingly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (1994) explains that “humanism is sometimes used as a pejorative term by postmodernist and especially feminist writers, applied to

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<sup>45</sup> Braidotti is not the only critic to interpret Beauvoir’s philosophy as a form of “ameliorism”. See, for example, Max Deutscher (2003: 182), who construes Beauvoir’s position as “yes, things are bad, but with a little good will on both sides a great deal can be achieved”. In *Part 3*, I show that, although Beauvoir’s philosophy is one of hope, these charges of ameliorism are unjust.

philosophies such as that of Sartre, that rely on the possibility of the autonomous, self-conscious, rational, single self, and that are supposedly insensitive to the inevitable fragmentary, splintered, historically conditioned nature of personality and motivation.” Like Dermot Moran, Braidotti simply conflates the perspectives of Beauvoir and Sartre.<sup>46</sup> Regarding Simone de Beauvoir and Michèle le Dœuff, whose sympathetic reading of Beauvoir is dismissed as “neo-humanism” (169), Braidotti resorts to the kind of ill-considered name-calling of which I have accused Moran.

I do not agree with Braidotti’s interpretation of Beauvoir.<sup>47</sup> I show in *Part 3* that Beauvoir’s point of departure in *The Second Sex* is a denunciation of humanism. Indeed, I advance an interpretation of Beauvoir’s work as a sustained interrogation and rejection of the androcentric presumptions – and more generally, the hostility towards difference – that inform most philosophical accounts of what it means to be human. At no point in her text does Beauvoir explicitly state that both men and women should enjoy the same legal and political rights, but if she had, her argument would not be based, as is the case with equality feminism, on abstract humanism; it certainly would not be an affirmation of the “sameness” between men and women. At any rate, Beauvoir (1997: 26-27) asserts:

People have tirelessly sought to prove that woman is superior, inferior, or equal to man. ... If we are to gain understanding, we must get out of these ruts; we must discard the vague notions of superiority, inferiority, equality which have hitherto corrupted every discussion of the subject and start afresh.

Throughout *Part 3*, it will become clear that Beauvoir’s perspective is far from the “classical attitude” described by Braidotti; indeed, as this citation suggests, Beauvoir’s concern is with a re-evaluation of values, including the value of equality.

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example Braidotti’s (1991: 267) uncritical fusion of their stances regarding Hegel’s dialectic of recognition.

<sup>47</sup> Braidotti (1991: 170) herself acknowledges that “Beauvoir’s thought needs to be reassessed”. Additionally, Braidotti (1994: 219) reconsiders: “The reformist work accomplished by women ... is a reality that cannot be ignored today. In many subtle ways this type of promotion of women within the *status quo* is changing the structure of our society and its discursive practices.” Correspondingly, her stance on Beauvoir is more measured, even softened (e.g. 232-233).

Notwithstanding her misreading of Beauvoir, it does not follow that I can summarily dismiss Braidotti's arguments regarding philosophy's hegemony.<sup>48</sup> Braidotti (1994: 33) submits:

Philosophy creates itself through what it excludes as much as through what it asserts. High theory, especially philosophy, posits its values through the exclusion of many – non-men, nonwhites, nonlearned, etc. The structural necessity of these pejorative figurations of otherness, makes me doubt the theoretical capacity, let alone the moral and political willingness, of theoretical discourse to act in a nonhegemonic, nonexclusionary manner.

None of this contradicts what I have said at the start of this discussion. Indeed, Braidotti's line of reasoning agrees with my own interpretation of Beauvoir's ideas regarding the "othering" of women in various institutions, including philosophy.<sup>49</sup> Although her general view of self-other relationships may be that we are not irredeemably doomed to violence and oppression, Beauvoir remains clear-sighted, both in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*, about the tendency of the powerful to accrue rather than relinquish power, which is echoed in Braidotti's scepticism regarding the possibility for reform.

Significantly, Beauvoir herself refused the label of philosopher.<sup>50</sup> She distanced herself from the life of the philosopher-academic to become a writer-activist. Beauvoir (cited by Gerassi in [www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/1976/interview.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/1976/interview.htm) accessed 21 June 2006) reflects:

I had the luck to come from a sector of society, the bourgeoisie, which could ... allow me to play leisurely with ideas. Because of that I managed to enter the man's world without

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<sup>48</sup> For further analysis of feminist responses to the philosophical canon, all with specific reference to Beauvoir, read Gatens (1991, particularly 85-99), Farganis (1994: 14-99) and Langton (in Fricker and Hornsby 2000: 127-145).

<sup>49</sup> Braidotti (1994: 236) even attributes to Beauvoir the notion of the structural necessity of woman's otherness to "uphold the prestige of the "one" of the male sex as the sole possessor of subjectivity".

<sup>50</sup> Beauvoir studied, taught and wrote philosophy but insisted that she was a writer, not a philosopher. It must be said of her writing that it is neither "purely philosophical", nor "purely literary". Her self-imposed status as non-philosopher can be traced to her belief that philosophers developed and wrote "systems" (e.g. Beauvoir 1963: 548 and Beauvoir 1968: 12), whereas Beauvoir's texts resist systematisation. Thus, submits Le Dœuff (1991: 138), if Beauvoir "managed to produce a philosophical work, she did so indirectly, without explicitly occupying the position of philosopher. Discreetly."

too much difficulty. ... I kept whatever was particular to womanhood to myself. I was reinforced by my success to continue. ... I tended to scorn the kind of woman who felt incapable, financially or spiritually, to show her independence from men. In effect I was thinking, without even saying it to myself, “if I can, so can they.” In researching and writing *The Second Sex* I did come to realise that my privileges were the result of having abdicated, in some crucial respects at least, my womanhood. If we put it in class economic terms, you would understand it easily: I had become a class collaborationist. Well, I was sort of the equivalent in terms of the sex struggle. Through *The Second Sex* I became aware of the struggle needed. I understood that the vast majority of women simply did not have the choices that I had had, that women are, in fact, defined and treated as a second sex by a male-oriented society whose structure would totally collapse if that orientation was genuinely destroyed.

This self-assessment is at the same time an indictment of the institutions at which Beauvoir wrote and taught philosophy. A life of academia afforded her the luxury and leisure of *playing with ideas*, but at the cost of being assimilated into the world of philosophy, which, for its pretensions “that it was the truth-seeker *par excellence*” (Kolakowski 2001: 121), still insisted on the fiction of women’s inferiority. Beauvoir argues that the measure of her success was the extent to which she managed to suppress her difference and partake of philosophy’s unconcern for the general status of women. Note also how she expresses that success in relation to men – success equals independence from men – thus confirming the traditional notion of men as the norm.

Beauvoir describes the process of producing *The Second Sex* as the awakening of her feminist identity. She indicates two of the central aspects of this burgeoning identity: a confrontation with the particularity of being a woman and the recognition of her relationship with other women. Yet, in her text she conveys these “non-philosophical” concerns in the language and style of phenomenology. Beauvoir’s astuteness is in the realisation that *only* her philosophical credentials – for example, her critical engagement with Hegel and early French phenomenology – and precisely *not* her status as woman would allow her the attempt “to reach a reality beyond the dreams of philosophy, that of the concrete existence of women” (Le Dœuff 1991:170). Writing from this space that straddles both philosophical convention and dissidence reinforces her belief in the permeability of the boundaries between self and others. However, as we have seen, the “failure” to align herself with one at the exclusion of the other,

renders Beauvoir vulnerable to attacks on both sides of the divide – she is either too philosophical or not philosophical enough or too feminist or not feminist enough.

One could view the example of Beauvoir as confirmation of the suspicion that, as far as the philosophical community is concerned, the previously excluded can never really belong – they remain perpetual newcomers who must justify their place by adhering to the norms of the canon. If they insist on challenging these norms, that is, in ways that are not always already indulged by the proprietors of the canon, they are relegated to the margins – if they are allowed to be there at all. One could also see the example as confirmation that philosophy and feminist theory are two mutually exclusive, even opposing, enterprises. From both perspectives, it becomes easier to abandon *the very idea that philosophy actually matters*, as Braidotti suggests; thus, easier to simply disengage from the discipline.<sup>51</sup>

For Braidotti (1994: 242), change beyond mere ameliorism in institutions such as philosophy requires for “the newcomers to be able and to be *entitled* to redefine the rules of the game as to *make a difference* and make that difference felt concretely.” Undoubtedly because she rejects the notion of *different-from* as *less than*, Braidotti has a tendency to define *different-from* as *better than*. From such a stance it makes sense to argue for the entitlement of newcomers and to suppose that “making a difference” amounts to the betterment of the institution of philosophy.

What Beauvoir seeks, however, is precisely to get beyond the notion of entitlement, since it represents the language and manner of mastership. As such, it signifies a disregard for the bond between the subject and the other (thing, nature, existent); it discloses the logic of possession and clings to the habit of amassing power for oneself. In the interview with Brison

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<sup>51</sup> Philosophy matters to Michèle le Dœuff (1991: 8-9): “[The] desire to philosophise imposed itself on me with unfailing clarity, without bringing promises of salvation; it has withstood all difficulties, and indeed sometimes in the form of a disappointed love, for disappointment arises all the time.” For Le Dœuff, the challenge is always to temper her love with the sobering need to “think ill” of philosophy (1). I would also venture that, by the sheer volume of vitriol aimed at the canon, by the recurrent invocation of various philosophers and by her acknowledged debt to Gilles Deleuze, philosophy matters also to Rosi Braidotti. Despite their different stances, Braidotti and Le Dœuff have forged careers that are, to some extent, based on expressing their objections to the discipline. To find philosophy objectionable is not yet to disengage from it.

(in Card 2003: 190-191), Beauvoir argues that “the point is not for women simply to take power out of men’s hands, since that wouldn’t change anything about the world ... [instead] it’s a question precisely of destroying the notion of power.” Her concern is not so much with empowering the subjugated; rather, to disarm the powers that be.<sup>52</sup>

In the place of power, Beauvoir calls for collaboration, which Braidotti not only mistakes for ameliorism but also dismisses in favour of “violence” and “ruthlessness” (25). When Braidotti contends that we need “to redefine the rules of the game”, she does not dismiss the “game” – suggesting, thereby, that philosophy is an enterprise of winners and losers – only the rules, so that we can have new winners with different agendas.

Regarding those of us already made vulnerable by the way we have been portrayed and treated by the philosophical community, how do we collaborate in a way that does not merely amount to “a compromise in which the other (as is always the case) in this or that way loses his or her singularity, identity, desire, and so on” (Derrida cited in Manoussakis 2004: 4)? If we disregard our own or others’ differences, we compromise ourselves, but we also compromise the discipline of philosophy inasmuch as the compromise of difference advances hegemonic thinking. How do we safeguard our differences, without recycling the power relations? How do we disarm the proprietors of the canon in order to render the borders of philosophy more permeable?

Moreover, why would philosophy’s proprietors relinquish their authority to set apart those who belong from those who do not? Indeed, as I show in the discussion of Beauvoir’s *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, humans tend to increase rather than relinquish their power. We must heed also Nietzsche’s (1989: 72) observation: “As its power increases, a community ceases to take the individual’s transgressions so seriously.” From this perspective, those intent on disrupting the forces that maintain philosophy’s hegemony can never lose sight of the possibility that their resistance is nothing more than “a symbolic agitation” (Beauvoir 1997: 19) *sanctioned* by the border-controllers.

Following Kolakowski (2001: 105), who likens philosophy to *Peter Pan* – an arrogant, perpetual child, who nonchalantly takes to the air on happy thoughts and refuses to deal with

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<sup>52</sup> See *Part 3* for a discussion of the concept of *power* in Beauvoir’s ethics.

change – one must ask if collaboration is even feasible. Certainly, in the apparent immutability of the canon, the posturing of proprietors such as Dermot Moran, the unchecked sexism, racism and other forms of imperialism of some of its central texts and the tendency to detach from the flesh and blood world, the world of philosophy does not seem ready to engage in acts of collaboration.

The call for collaboration carries with it the risks of further exploitation, indifference, compromise and marginalisation. It seems that Rosi Braidotti seeks to avoid these risks by her insistence that philosophy does not matter, that the previously excluded are better off disengaging ourselves from such a hostile environment. However, cautioning against the disengagement that prevailed among French academics in the midst of the Nazi Occupation, Beauvoir (1948: 76) argues that “to put oneself “outside” is still a way of living the inescapable fact that one is inside”; is a way of “playing the occupier’s game”. Analogously, for women – or any of philosophy’s “others” – to take up a position of disidentifying ourselves from philosophy, is at once a *confirmation* of our place inside philosophy, as well as a tacit *support* of those who seek to purge philosophy of otherness, which is precisely what Beauvoir passionately opposes.

Unlike Moran and Braidotti who operate on the conceit of clearly-defined boundaries between the philosophical and the non-philosophical, such boundaries are, for Beauvoir, always already permeable, which is precisely why she believes in the possibility of collaboration. I show in *Part 3* how, following Hegel, Beauvoir’s emphasis on the bond between the self and the world shatters through the illusion of self-certainty of the Cartesian hero. The start of Beauvoir’s so-called moral period coincides with her initial reading of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which, in turn, falls together with her awareness of the bond between herself and others. I cite from *The Prime of Life* (1963), in which Beauvoir describes this awareness as a “dissolvment”, a “fragmentation” and a “scattering” of her hitherto solipsistic self.

Beauvoir’s appeal to collaboration is premised on the conviction that we cannot avoid each other; that our very humanity depends on our reciprocal recognition of one another. Her appeal to collaboration is also an expression of hope, specifically, the hope that self-other relationships need not be violent or hostile. Although she draws on Hegel’s postulation of friendship as the opposing consciousnesses’ reciprocal and generous *giving back* of the

other's otherness, I show in the final part of this study how Beauvoir, through her depiction of an authentic erotic relationship between a man and woman, uniquely stresses self-abandonment, which alone allows the subject to also generously *receive* his or her otherness.

Beauvoir's perspectives on collaboration and friendship can be made relevant to the problem of one's place in the philosophical community. In the interest of collaborating with others, those who have historically never had cause to wonder about their inclusion in philosophy must question the preconditions and cost of their certitude. What, or who, entitles one to *matter-of-factly and without any soul-searching or calculating* participate in philosophy? If such entitlement is conferred by certain authorities or is guaranteed through one's adherence to certain philosophical traditions, the assumption of self-assurance amounts to little more than bravado. Given that philosophy is, by definition, a conversation, given that it is not produced in isolation, only the naïvely solipsistic individual believes that she somehow entitles herself to address the philosophical community. In short, one can be certain of one's place in philosophy only if one ignores the people and traditions to which one is beholden. To write philosophy is an appeal to be read by others. To write philosophy with self-confidence is to assume that one's readers will either see things in the same light as oneself or will be brought to the same perspective through the force of one's argumentation. The key concept here is sameness: the illusion of self-certainty can only be achieved and maintained if everyone thinks the same, if one avoids engaging with other perspectives.

Since we start from the precarious position of having been "othered" by the canon, those of us who cannot assume our place in the philosophical community self-confidently and straightforwardly, are perhaps better able to collaborate with others, precisely because of our vulnerability and lack of self-confidence. This line of reasoning echoes Beauvoir's (cited by Brison in Card 2003: 191) proposition that those without authority tend to escape its trappings – like self-importance and complacency. Since we have no authority, we have none to impose on others. This lack of authority will only be experienced as a *crisis* if we desire the same entitlement to which those who do philosophy self-confidently lay claim. When we overcome such desires, when we abandon the pretence of wanting to be philosophers "in our own right" or "on our own", we no longer have to experience the world of philosophy as a hostile environment and our engagement with others in the philosophical community as a threat to our "singularity, identity, desire and so on".

Indeed, we may come to realise, as Beauvoir (1948: 70-71) does, via Hegel, that:

[At] every moment others are stealing the whole world away from me. The first movement is to hate them. But this hatred is naïve, and the desire immediately struggles against itself. If I were really everything there would be nothing beside me; the world would be empty. There would be nothing to possess, and I myself would be nothing. If he is reasonable, the young man immediately understands that by taking the world away from me, others also give it to me, since a thing is given to me only by the movement which snatches it from me.

As I show at various points in *Part 3*, Beauvoir's philosophy underscores the non-centrality of the "I": singularity, identity, desire and otherness exist only in the fundamental relationship with others. Thus, the world of philosophy that threatens to assimilate my otherness is the very same one that confers this otherness onto me. The upshot is that my participation in the discipline of philosophy does not bring about the loss of "myself in the name of an uncomfortable borrowed identity", as we have seen Andrea Nye supposes, because there is no "self" outside the bond: my singularity is actualised only in relation to the community.

What is it then that *does* get lost through the stringent border-control of the philosophical canon? To my mind, it is philosophy itself that suffers a loss. In the movement by which philosophy encloses itself, refuses to recognise its underlying relationship to others (other disciplines, other ways of thinking, etc.), it turns against itself as well. By renouncing the "non-philosophical", it renounces itself. Even adherents to the Aristotelian tradition of interdisciplinarity cannot quite abandon the idea of philosophy as the Virgin Mother of all other thinking disciplines – the thinking behind; therefore, prior to, all thinking. However, in the same way as the "pure I" must dialectically overcome its solipsism in order to continue as an *aufgehobene* self, the survival of philosophy calls for an overcoming of complacency and a commitment to others beyond self-interest, conceit and rigidity. In the same way that the "pure I" needs the other in order to outdo himself, the discipline of philosophy needs to not only engage with others but, perhaps more importantly, engage *differently* with others.

One such "other" is Simone de Beauvoir, who does indeed, as Dermot Moran concedes, have "interesting things to say about the relation of self and other", as this study sets out to reveal. However, when Moran adds "she is now primarily known, not as a phenomenologist, but on

account of her ground-breaking book, *The Second Sex*, which is a social and economic history of women, and a classic of feminist studies”, I am neither moved to prove or disprove Beauvoir’s status as phenomenologist, nor am I moved to confirm or deny the status of *The Second Sex* as a feminist classic. I have discussed Dermot Moran’s treatment of Hegel and Beauvoir specifically to show the apparatus of limitation at work. This study is a sustained questioning of the apparatus of limitation. It certainly does not propose to have Hegel and Beauvoir re-classified as phenomenologists, since it seeks to challenge such conventions as classifying, labeling, enclosing, etc. The fact that I *do* relate Hegel’s and Beauvoir’s perspectives to early French phenomenology does not signify a call for their assimilation to the phenomenological tradition. At most, the study is an appeal to go back to the text themselves: to reread Hegel and, perhaps for the first time, to read Beauvoir.

If we are to generously receive the unique perspective that is disclosed in Beauvoir’s work, we cannot start by labelling or systematising it. Let us first ask: What interesting things does Beauvoir have to say? In other words, let us simply read her work. As I have mentioned, her compatriots discuss the topic of self-other relationships from the framework of what I shall refer to as the *conventional* French interpretation of Hegel’s dialectic of recognition. This conventional approach is marked by a preoccupation with intersubjectivity based on violence and domination, a failure to grasp the significance of Hegel’s attempt to break through the dualistic thinking that typifies German idealism, and ultimately, a reinforcement of the subject-object duality that Hegel seeks to overcome. My contention is this: if she has “interesting”, i.e., not conventional – different – things to say about the relationship between existential subjects, we will lose sight of the difference if we insist on categorising what she has to say.

If we are to recognise the *difference* of Beauvoir’s perspective, we need to read her *differently*. We have to abandon the tired oppositions between philosophy and everything else, including literature, writing on the topic of woman, politics, etc. We have to anticipate that she will use the language of philosophy differently, that she will inflect clichés like “intersubjectivity”, “freedom” and “otherness” with different meanings. Crucially, if we are to read Beauvoir generously, let us read with abandon: that is, without self-interest, without domination, without the apparatus of limitation.

## Postscript

Among other things, *Phenomenology of Spirit* describes the intellectual journey that Hegel undertakes to come to a new understanding of knowledge. As I point out in *Part 2*, Hegel believes that the experience of the philosopher en route to the Absolute is as important as the results yielded by his investigation. The exponents of early French phenomenology extend Hegel's notion of absolute knowledge as self-knowledge by interpreting his multi-faceted text exclusively as a discourse on self-identity. From this point of departure, their interest in Hegel is confined to the relationship between the self and the other.

The texts that Simone de Beauvoir produced during the 1940s reveal a similar preoccupation with the self-other relationship. One of the crucial differences between her exploration of this theme and those of her contemporaries is that she inserts her concrete self into the conversation. Thus, when Beauvoir (1997: 13) begins *The Second Sex*: "For a long time I have hesitated to write a book on woman", she alerts her reader to the fact that her study of the problem of woman's otherness has a distinctly personal spirit. The status of the "I" in Beauvoir's opening statement is not the *Cartesian I* who stands apart from the concrete and the social; it is not an *I* stripped of facticity and peculiarity. Instead, it is a flesh-and-blood *I* with a particular history and a distinct relationship with the world from and about which she writes. In accordance with the respective readings of *Phenomenology of Spirit* considered in this study, I read Hegel's text predominantly as anthropology. Following Beauvoir, I make "the bunch of problems called 'my identity'" part of the investigation. It must be said, however, that during the course of this study, this *I* who is personally involved in the retelling of Hegel's dialectic of recognition undergoes its own sublation.

Recall in her interview with Gerassi, how Simone de Beauvoir sanctions herself for having been a sex-class collaborationist. I have often feared that my interest in continental philosophy compromises me as an intellectual-class collaborationist; that my own *playing with ideas* comes at the price of forgetting where I have come from and those I have left behind: those who could not obtain university scholarships, who did not complete their schooling because they lived the mantra that rang in my childhood ears – *freedom now*,

*education later* – those who did not survive the detention cells, who could not or would not escape the ghettos. They are absent from the philosophical canon. Perhaps they are implied in the term *Other*, although Beauvoir’s analysis of otherness in the phenomenological tradition belies such a possibility. She shows that the fundamental hostility towards otherness or difference, initially posed by Hegel and then appropriated by early French phenomenology, is not sensitive to particular differences, most specifically in her account, sex difference, although there is nothing in her analysis that precludes us from expanding the particularity of otherness. The canon has not been set up to speak about me or to me although it presumes to speak for me by co-opting my specificity into the vague concept of *the Other* and by insisting that I take up the language and manner of the philosophical fraternity.

Nonetheless, it is precisely in Beauvoir’s critical engagement with phenomenology that I find a key to my own relationship to the discipline of philosophy. To critically engage with the canon must not be confused with, for instance, Kojève’s masterly re-reading of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. To master a text is to act in self-interest, to take possession of it – “to make the text one’s own” – or assume the status of authority on the work. To critically engage with a text is, among other things, to remain open to, rather than delimit, its possibilities; to yield to, rather than reduce, the complexity and nuances of its arguments; to not mistake ambiguity for contradiction, difference for opposition or agreement for assimilation. In the ways that she creatively adopts phenomenology’s vernacular, its arguments and critical tools, Beauvoir uncovers a means to understand and enunciate, generally, the exclusion of difference and, from a personal perspective, my experience of not belonging. Crucially, Beauvoir demonstrates a constructive way of engaging with the canon’s masters – particularly in the way her emphasis on reciprocity and friendship in the dialectic of recognition releases Hegel, to some extent, from the constraints of his canonical reputation – that does not involve the compromise of her individuality.

Beauvoir (1997: 171) believes that “true wisdom” demands an abandonment of possession, signified in *Part 3* by Sartre’s rendering of appropriation as the deflowering of the female body,<sup>53</sup> and an embrace of the constant tension that marks relationships. Thus, to adapt her

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<sup>53</sup> Towards the end of *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre (1956: 738-765) links *appropriation* to possession. To possess is to strip the object of possession – in his account, the virgin-woman – of her independence, her otherness; that is, to assimilate the object into the world of the possessor. The

famous declaration, Beauvoir shows that one is not born, but rather becomes, a lover of wisdom. Whether one is the celebrated German writer of *Phenomenology of Spirit* or a novice from the Cape Flats, one's recognition in the world of philosophy is a constantly negotiated matter. Recognition is an ongoing process of interacting – sometimes in amity and sometimes in enmity – with others. The experience of belonging (or not belonging) in the philosophical community comes down to one's relationships with others in the community, not one's sex, or skin colour or any other facticity. Of course, others can, and inevitably do, confer certain values to these facticities, which will influence how one is received. However, as Beauvoir proposes, values can and frequently must be re-evaluated. Recognition cannot be demanded. To belong, I have to open myself to others, in the full knowledge of the risks involved, rather than shut myself off from others. Instead of pre-empting or reacting to others' violence through my own violent actions, I can adopt Beauvoir's cautious hopefulness in our potential to outdo ourselves, to lose what is arrogant and selfish about us in our relationships with others. Only a life of critical engagement can begin to fulfil the promises of such hope.

The three parts of this study represent my crossing from hostility to hope.

As in the dialectic of recognition, the *I* that is initially revealed in *Part 1*, is the solipsistic subject who finds herself in an environment – here, the world of philosophy – not of her own making. My initial reaction is, following the first movement of the dialectic, and also my own violent past, to defend myself, to experience a certain hostility towards this foreign world.

In *Part 2*, I take on the identity of one of the combatants in the struggle for recognition, who faces the choice between being assimilated by others into their personal vision or gaining mastery over them. I choose the path of mastery through disruption. We find different interlocutors – Kojève, Hyppolite and another version of Hegel – being made to converse at the same time.<sup>54</sup> They constantly interrupt each other, sometimes to show their agreement and

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appropriator recreates the object, moulds it to become an extension of himself, to the extent that the thing ceases to exist beyond its *being-possessed* by the appropriator.

<sup>54</sup> As I point out in *Part 2, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* is structured as a translation of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, with Kojève's additional commentary in brackets. Kojève follows Hegel's text very closely; to signify this, I allow their voices to blend together. While Hyppolite's text, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (1974), systematically probes the

other times to radically differ with each other. The self-interest that drives this disorientating account is my desire to challenge an entire sub-genre, namely, early French phenomenology and, by implication, the canonical identity of Hegel. The conceit of *Part 2* is that my version of the dialectic, which is limited to only the first few movements of Spirit, is a more faithful rendering of “Hegel”.

However, I also contrive my own failure at mastery. On the one hand, the deliberate strategy of disorientating my reader through the mix-up of voices aims to show that there is not one easily identifiable “Hegel” – certainly as far as French phenomenology is concerned: “Hegel” is a conflation of the author of *Phenomenology of Spirit* and those who appropriate him. On the other hand, by getting entangled in complex arguments without, for instance, asserting my authority through paraphrasing and by drawing no discernable distinction between myself and the “Hegel” whom I frequently cite, I disappear from my own text, I am disseminated among these different voices.

The beginning of this study depicts the self-centred individual concerned about her place in the philosophical community, while *Part 2* portrays the extent to which the scholar becomes implicated in the violence of philosophical discourse that is based on the presumption of mastery (mastery over other texts, over the personal, over the marginal, over the flow of arguments, and so on). The person in *Part 3* undergoes another transformation. Inspired by Simone de Beauvoir’s postulation of friendship, which seeks to disarm rather than contest the logic of domination – indicated by Hegel’s privileging of the universal over the particular and

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dialectical movements that lead up to the Absolute, it presents itself as straightforward commentary rather than Kojève’s blend of translation and commentary. Given that certain aspects of Hyppolite’s interpretation of Hegel – crucially, his observations regarding the importance of otherness in the earlier movements of the dialectic – coincide with the voice of the “Hegel” that my own reading of *Phenomenology of Spirit* uncovers, I appropriate some Hyppolite’s commentary in support of my reading. However, I am always explicit about Kojève’s and Hyppolite’s departures from “my Hegel”. In defence of my seemingly confusing or arbitrary treatment of particularly Hyppolite’s perspective – it serves as both complement to my reading and object of critique, alongside the views held by Kojève – I show in *Part 2* that there are internal tensions in Hyppolite’s commentary that would account for the ambiguity.

early French phenomenology's over-emphasis of the master-slave dialectic – the *I* of *Part 3* forgoes the convention of mastering texts.

I do not affix Beauvoir to the conversation among French phenomenology's brothers in *Part 2*. Instead, in *Part 3*, I relate Beauvoir's ideas regarding self-other relationships in a very different sort of space. *Part 3* is open to the multiple genres in which Beauvoir worked, including novels, memoirs, interviews and essays. It shows her critical engagement with various, often disparate, voices – Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Kojève and many others, including those from disciplines other than philosophy. It connects certain aspects of her personal history to her perspectives. It does not try to overcome apparent internal tensions in her work – for instance, to not reject the appeal to fraternity at the end of *The Second Sex*, but, instead, to off-set this appeal with her portrayal of an authentic erotic experience. It refrains from labelling her work, for instance, as “feminist theory” or “phenomenology” or “Sartrean” or “Hegelian”; firstly, in keeping with her wishes to not be systematised or assimilated; secondly, to remain open to interpretive possibilities that might otherwise be excluded. It does not try to order the different strands of Beauvoir's outlook into some kind of final conclusion.

The avoidance of the philosophical convention of pulling together the main themes of the study with a forceful summary is arguably the biggest risk to take in a format that is precisely set up to exhibit one's mastery over texts. Recall Nancy Fraser's observation at the start of this study: “Beauvoir is obscene because she is ‘more’ than what is acceptable, and in being so, spills out of the frame that should contain her.” To those who inhabit the world of philosophy in search of the certain, the orderly, the uncontaminated, I offer this disclaimer: This work sets out to preserve the images of fluidity, scattering and fragmentation, which, Beauvoir associates with her turn away from the Cartesian ego towards a life of engagement with others. Thus, whatever observations, deductions or inferences I make during the course of *Part 3* will not come to rest in a final conclusion. Instead, *Part 3* has a “cliff-hanger ending”, with Beauvoir escaping the hermeneut's grasp through a disarming act of textual dexterity.

## Part 2     The “French Hegel”

While there is no monadism in Hegel’s philosophy when he speaks of consciousnesses, nor any real risk of solipsism, the French existentialism of the 1940s seems to have taken shape as a subtle play with this risk, always brushed against, always a bit avoided, always basically caressed.

Le Dœuff (in Simons 1995: 64)<sup>1</sup>

### a)     Genesis of the turn to Hegel

Early French phenomenology can be understood as a reaction of a generation of scholars to a French academic tradition that focused only on the inner life of the private individual, safeguarded from such harsh realities as economic depression and the rise of Fascism after the First World War (Kruks 1981: 3). French philosophy was dominated by “a Cartesian rationalism whose concerns focused on Kant and the philosophy of mathematics” (Barnett 1998: 13). The bourgeois individualism in which their academic formative years were

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<sup>1</sup> In *Part 2*, I consider the contributions of Alexandre Kojève, Jean Hyppolite and Jean-Paul Sartre to the reception of Hegel in early French phenomenology. I posit that each underestimates or undermines Hegel’s efforts to escape the Cartesian-Kantian paradigm of the Subject. Kojève’s lectures, Hyppolite’s commentary and Sartre’s critique reveal a nostalgia for the lone, autonomous hero, for whom others are a hell that must be battled and who sets out to imprint his individuality on the world. I show that, in the dialectical movements on the journey towards the Absolute that Hegel describes in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the subject overcomes his naïve solipsism, a consciousness closed off from the world, and affirms his fundamental bond with others.

steeped, explains Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964: 88-89) in *Sense and Non-Sense*, typically envisioned man as a *cogito* that was isolated from history and treated the social “like a thing”, in other words, “man” as some kind of abstract category outside and prior to society. Taking the *cogito* as the point of departure, freedom would consequently be conceived in ahistorical, abstract and resolutely individualist, even solipsistic, terms. What these young scholars had in common was the need to pursue alternatives to a teaching of philosophy that had become increasingly irrelevant, unable to respond to the world around it. They were seeking a kind of philosophy that could engage in the “concrete” or, to use a term that would gain ground in the early 1940s, *lived experience*. The emergence of this philosophy of lived experience was shaped by two academic events: the introduction of German phenomenology<sup>2</sup> and a revival of interest in the earlier works of G.W.F. Hegel, particularly *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Besides the prominence of Cartesian and Kantian schools of thought, the previous lack of interest in Hegel among French scholars could be attributed to a number of factors, to wit: in the unlikely event that there were French translations of Hegel’s writings available, particularly those earlier Jena texts, they were not part of the mainstream curriculum;<sup>3</sup> perhaps Hegel’s often obscure writing was considered too bewildering;<sup>4</sup> the prevailing opinion of Hegelian philosophy was based almost exclusively on the later works, particularly *The Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, which confirmed to Hegel’s critics his German idealism – understood to be an “egological conception of ontology that reduces the other to the same” (Williams 1997: 38) and “an assertion of the primacy of subjectivity” (47), thus, precisely the kind of philosophy that was rapidly losing ground in French circles. There were no Hegelian schools in France, no mainstream courses devoted to Hegel and, with the exceptions of Jean Wahl’s 1929 text *Le Malheur de la*

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<sup>2</sup> This work will, for the most part, take for granted a prior acquaintance with the central contributions of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.

<sup>3</sup> Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 56) points to the “centralisation of the French educational system in which an elite school such as the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* could determine the point of departure [Descartes and Kant] for an entire generation of philosophers”.

<sup>4</sup> See Solomon (1983: 163-171) for a defense of Hegel’s obscure language, which suggests that Hegel is teaching his readers the “slipperiness” of philosophical language, that “*concepts are always context-bound*” (166).

*conscience dans la Philosophie de Hegel*<sup>5</sup> and a number of articles by Alexandre Koyré that focused on the Jena writings, no serious work on Hegel had been produced. (Heckman in Hyppolite 1974: xxiii; Barnett 1998: 13)

Then, in 1940, the “spirit of the time” – the Nazi occupation of France and another World War – brought about a swift about-turn to the reception of Hegel. Merleau-Ponty (64) captures that reversal: “But if the Hegel of 1827 may be criticised for his idealism, the same cannot be said of the Hegel of 1807.” He is of course alluding to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which Hegel had written amidst the turmoil of his own world at war. Solomon (1983: 29-34) writes that “between the French Revolution and the march of Napoleon across the face of Europe ... Hegel’s world was in a state of chaos” with the impending annihilation of a German society, which would make Hegel in 1806 a “citizen of a non-nation”. Scholars of the 1940s could identify with the sense of loss, fragmentation, impotence and destruction that serves as the setting for *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Furthermore, they could be inspired by the “enthusiastic if also anxious optimism that permeates Hegel’s *Phenomenology* ... [in which] Hegel, anticipating the obliteration of the world he knew, was already celebrating the birth of a new one” (Solomon: 34). Fundamentally, they found in Hegel’s emphasis of the bond between the individual, history and the social an antidote for bourgeois individualism.

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<sup>5</sup> Jean Wahl taught many of the most important thinkers of this chapter in French philosophy, including Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean Hyppolite. Eva Gothlin (in Card 2003: 46) credits Wahl for his part in introducing French philosophy to existentialism. As the name suggests, *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la Philosophie de Hegel* puts into focus the theme of the “unhappy consciousness”, which is the central motif of Jean Hyppolite’s interpretation of Hegel. Wahl rejects Hegel in favour of Kierkegaard. Thus, in *Philosophies of Existence*, Wahl (1969: 8) disagrees with “[some] philosophers of existence [who] would have us also mention the influence of Hegel.” Instead, he pits Hegel against Kierkegaard (e.g. pp. 14, 15, 17, 83) labelling Hegel “the enemy against whom the philosophy of existence rose up in protest” (8). Most of Wahl’s work remains untranslated, thus, this work cannot gauge the exact extent of his influence. Suffice it to say that Wahl is considered to be one of the “right Hegelians” (Heckman in Hyppolite 1974: xxix) who portrayed Hegel as the philosopher of the Absolute and, thus, did not play a prominent role in the subsequent restoration of interest in *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

A passage from *Sense and Non-Sense* portrays the sudden relevance of Hegel during the war years:

The question is no longer limited, as it was in [Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*], to discovering what conditions make scientific experience possible but is one of knowing in a general way how moral, aesthetic, and religious experiences are possible, of describing man's fundamental situation in the face of the world and other men, and of understanding religions, ethics, works of art, economic and legal systems as just so many ways for man to flee or to confront the difficulties of his condition. Experience here no longer simply means our entirely contemplative contact with the sensible world as it did in Kant; the world reassumes the tragic resonance it has in ordinary language when a man speaks of what he has lived through. It is no longer a laboratory test but a trial of life. To be more exact, Hegel's thought is existentialist in that it views man not as being from the start consciousness in full possession of its own clear thoughts but a life which is its own responsibility and which tries to understand itself.

(Merleau-Ponty: 65)

This is the version of Hegel that emerges from the legendary lectures of Alexandre Kojève, or rather, "Alexander Kojevnikoff, Russian *émigré* and sympathizer with the Soviet Russia of Stalin" (Heckman in Hyppolite: xxiii). Kojève taught a course on *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* from 1933 until 1939. (Descombes 1986: 9-10) Jacques Derrida (1994: 72) notes that Kojève's "neo-Marxist and para-Heideggerian reading of *Phenomenology of Spirit* ... played a formative not negligible role, from many standpoints, for a certain generation of French intellectuals, just before or just after the war." Such luminaries as Raymond Aron, Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Levinas, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre reportedly attended Kojève's lectures. (Riley 1981: 15; Barnett 1998: 15; Moran 2000: 393; Lynch 2001: 33)<sup>6</sup> These lectures were anthologised by Raymond Quéneau in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on Phenomenology of Spirit* (1969).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Heckman (in Hyppolite 1974: xxiii) goes so far as to suggest that Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, Levinas and Sartre were the core of a group that would have extended discussions with Kojève after he had formally adjourned his lectures.

<sup>7</sup> Henceforth abbreviated to *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.

Kojève's rendering of *Phenomenology of Spirit* combines Hegel with Marxism<sup>8</sup> and the phenomenological existentialism of Martin Heidegger.<sup>9</sup> It describes the journey of consciousness in a manner that links it to the process of history and to the relationships among consciousnesses, which serves as "an entirely new perspective for those working in a phenomenological tradition still essentially defined by a Cartesian understanding of subjectivity" (Barnett 1998: 17). Such was the influence of Kojève's interpretation of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that it became the conventional approach to Hegel in early French phenomenology. Particular to this approach is the tension between a rejection of Hegel's idealism on the one hand, and on the other, the adoption of his master-slave dialectic on the basis of its reflection of the necessarily conflictual relation of the existent with the "other". (Riley 1981: 20-21)

Kojève's contribution to the "French Hegel" is undisputed. However, it would be remiss to pay no heed to Jean Hyppolite's share in the twentieth century understanding of Hegel. Unlike his contemporaries, Hyppolite studiously avoided Kojève's lectures for fear of being unduly influenced (Heckman in Hyppolite: xxvi), as he was embarking on what would become the first complete and still standard French translation of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. His own lectures on Hegel at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* would inspire another important generation of French philosophers, including Althusser, Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault.

Hyppolite describes human reality in terms of intersubjectivity, thus, challenging the notion that Hegel, like Fichte and Schelling, is a philosopher of the Subject. In this regard, Hyppolite

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<sup>8</sup> Merleau-Ponty was "profoundly influenced" (Aron 1975: iv) by Kojève's interpretation of Hegel. In *Adventures of the Dialectic*, Merleau-Ponty (1973: 81) suggests that "there are other ways to interpret [Hegel]: he could be, and we think he must be, made much more Marxist", which is precisely what *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* offers its scholars. However, it can be argued that Kojève also makes Marx more Hegelian. Thus, Bloom (in Kojève 1969: viii) describes Kojève as "a Marxist who, dissatisfied with the thinness of Marx's account of the human and metaphysical grounds of his teaching, turned to Hegel as the truly philosophic source of that teaching." For Kojève, Hegel's text shows the origin of oppression, which the historical materialist account of Marx and Engels fails to locate: the meeting of consciousnesses that is marked by conflict and domination.

<sup>9</sup> Thus, the individual depicted in the passage from *Sense and Non-Sense*, cited above, is *Dasein*: the existent who concerns himself with the *Seinsfrage*. At least part of the answer to the question of being that Hegel provides, suggests Merleau-Ponty via Kojève, is that man is *Mitsein*.

(1974: 77) argues that, unlike his compatriots, Hegel does not start with the  $I = I$  equation, that “we must begin not with the *cogito* but with the *cogitamus*” (322), in other words, for Hegel, self-consciousness is not presupposed but will emerge through the relationship between consciousnesses.<sup>10</sup> While both Hyppolite and Kojève underscore the significance of the social, Hyppolite does not focus on the master-slave dialectic as the defining stage in consciousness’ journey to self-certainty.

For the sake of expediency, I shall not repeat Hyppolite’s entire analysis in a separate section, but instead integrate his commentary into my comparative analysis of the first few dialectical movements of *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Kojève’s interpretation thereof. I find many points of agreement between Hyppolite’s commentary and my own reading of those dialectical movements, but I also show instances where his analysis tends to converge with Kojève’s emphasis on the need for violence. The one aspect of Hyppolite’s commentary that I do discuss separately is his preoccupation with “unhappy consciousness”, which ultimately confirms his adherence to the conventional interpretation of Hegel.

In addition, I discuss Sartre’s critique of Hegel. Sartre endorses the notion of an unmediated Subject. Most often, he disregards the social dimension and intersubjectivity, but when he does attend to the relationship between consciousnesses, Sartre’s analysis repeats the Kojèvean emphasis on the necessarily conflictual relation of the existential subject with the other.

The largest part of *Part 2* is devoted to an analysis of Kojève’s *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. I will demonstrate the bias in Kojève’s presentation of *Phenomenology of Spirit*: he omits the *Preface*, *Introduction* and the first movement of consciousness on its journey to Absolute Knowledge. Kojève also disregards important passages where Hegel accentuates the mutuality of recognition. Consequently, Kojève casts the dialectic of recognition “as much more confrontational, one-dimensional, and uni-directional than in fact is the case in Hegel’s story” (Lynch 2001: 33-34). Kojève reads Hegel in order to justify his Marxist agenda, resulting in an over-emphasis of “sameness”, which will not only lead to a recycling of the

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<sup>10</sup> See also Solomon (1983: 438-439).

conflict and domination that mark the master-slave dialectic, but once again portray Hegel as a prime example of German idealism with its penchant for “the primacy of subjectivity” (Williams 1997: 47).

Before we turn to Kojève’s lectures, I think it is important to highlight certain themes that emerge from those opening chapters of Hegel’s text not acknowledged in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.

## **b) Lost in translation**

As is customary, Hegel wrote his preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit* upon completion of his text.<sup>11</sup> In this section, Hegel (1977: 1-2) starts on a rather discouraging, even hostile, note:

For what might appropriately be said about philosophy in a preface – say a historical statement of the main drift and the point of view, the general content and results, a string of random assertions and assurances about the truth – none of this can be accepted as the way in which to expound philosophical truth. Also, since philosophy moves essentially in the element of universality, which includes within itself the particular, it might seem that here more than in any of the other sciences the subject-matter itself, and even in its complete nature, were expressed in the aim and final results, the execution being by contrast really the unessential factor. ... Furthermore, the very attempt to define how a philosophical work is supposed to be connected with other efforts to deal with the same subject-matter drags in extraneous concern, and what is really important for the cognition of the truth is obscured. The more conventional opinion gets fixated on the antithesis of truth and falsity, the more it tends to expect a given philosophical system to be either accepted or contradicted; and hence it finds only acceptance or rejection. It does not

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<sup>11</sup> See Hyppolite (1974: 51-56) for a contextualisation of how the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was conceived.

comprehend the diversity of philosophical systems as the progressive unfolding of truth, but rather sees in it simple disagreements.

From the outset, he dispels any expectation that the *Preface* will introduce his book, stating its aims and locating its relationship to other texts that have studied the same subject-matter. In fact, Hegel implies that, not only is his preface superfluous as an opening to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but it “may even be an obstacle on our way to it” (Solomon 1983: 238).

On one level, Hegel’s defensiveness pre-empts his critics’ suggestion that his text does not address what he had originally set out to achieve: since the opening paragraphs challenge the relevance and truth claims of prefaces, there is no reason to believe that *Phenomenology of Spirit* will abide by the goals<sup>12</sup> of introducing Hegel’s philosophical system and serving as the first part of his *Wissenschaft*. On another level, Hegel already demonstrates the workings of his Science, the goal of which is to “lay aside the title ‘love of knowing’ and be *actual* knowing” (Hegel: 3). Philosophical Truth – Absolute Knowledge – can only emerge from a comprehensive system because the “Absolute” or “Spirit” is “essentially a *result*, that only in the end is what it truly is” (11). Philosophy moves in the “element of universality” – it deals with general principles – however, encapsulated in the universal is every single particularity. A comprehensive approach to truth is beyond a simple opposition between “truth” and “falsity”; indeed, particular points of philosophical views cannot be said to be “false”.

To be sure, argues Hegel (22-23), it is possible to “know something falsely”, which “means that there is a disparity between knowledge and its Substance”. This disparity is not, however, some kind of failure; indeed, “this very disparity is the process of distinguishing in general, which is an essential moment [in knowing].” In turn, this distinguishing makes identity possible, “and this resultant identity is the truth”. Crucially, “it is not truth as if the disparity had been thrown away, like dross from pure metal, not even like the tool which remains separate from the finished vessel”. For Hegel, the True is the substance, and, as I discuss below, the substance is the subject. In turn, the subject is negativity; thus, if the false is “the negative of the substance” (22), the false is negative negativity, or the Other. The disparity or “distance” between knowledge and its Substance, i.e. the subject, is the Other. Put differently, self-knowledge is mediated by an other. Hegel (23) continues:

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<sup>12</sup> For elaboration, see Hegel (1997: 43-45).

Yet we cannot therefore say that the false is a moment of the True, let alone a component part of it. To say that in every falsehood there is a grain of truth is to treat the two like oil and water, which cannot be mixed and are only externally combined. It is precisely on account of the importance of designating the moment of *complete otherness* that the terms ‘true’ and ‘false’ must no longer be used ... to talk of the *unity* of the subject and object, of finite and infinite, of being and thought, etc. is inept, since object and subject, etc. signify what they are *outside* of their unity ...

To use a more contemporary formulation, the subject is always already other: the positing of an ‘I’ is simultaneously the positing of a ‘not-I’; equally, a ‘not –I’ designates both itself as well as an ‘I’.

Truth, writes Hegel (22), is “not a minted coin that can be given and pocketed ready-made”, but rather a progressive enfolding and unfolding of the entire (Western) philosophical tradition. The concept of “progression” or “development” (*Bildung*) may create the impression of a straight line moving ever-closer to the *end of history* where philosophical truth is to be found, akin to a stepladder that traverses our partial truths en route to a heavenly Absolute Form. Hegel’s (2) own metaphor for *Bildung* is quite different:

The bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter; similarly, when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown up in its turn as a false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it instead. These forms are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole.

From this image of the growing plant we gauge Hegel’s teleology, with its acknowledged debt to “Aristotle [who] defines Nature as purposive activity” (12). The transitions from bud to blossom to fruit are teleologically necessary insofar as the purpose of each stage is the actualised plant. The bud cannot be defined as “plant” – definition presupposes actualisation – but is rather a potential-to-be-plant and, as such, a necessary part or moment towards actualisation. So, while it may seem that with every new development, the previous phase is summarily replaced, hence, the stage closest to actualisation is “more important” or “truer” than previous stages, it must be taken into account that all stages have a common purpose and

on this basis an equal value.<sup>13</sup> It is important also to note Hegel's suggestion of a mutuality and lack of conflict between particular forms, since these are central themes that will be discussed in much more detail during the course of this analysis.

Since the "True is the whole" (11), are we to deduce from the above that Philosophical Truth is the end result of a synthesis of all philosophies through the ages, all equal and necessary, none brought into conflict with one another? It would be a mistake to label Hegel a relativist, after all, he posits Absolute Knowledge, unmediated, all-encompassing truth that cannot be transcended, that has no antithesis and is self-certain. Equally, it would be a mistake to equate Hegel's call for the conservation of the philosophical tradition – the very next sentence after the plant metaphor criticises the "new philosopher" who shows his lack of understanding in his rejection of philosophical systems (2) – with an appeal to what one might call a "fusion of horizons". The possibility of a fusion is based on an appeal to consensus and convention, which Culler (1994: 153) correctly associates with "acts of exclusion". Hegel does not want to *exclude* any philosophy since the point of Absolute Knowledge is to be all-inclusive.

Consider the following two passages from the *Preface*

The commonest way in which we deceive either ourselves or others about understanding is by assuming something as familiar, and accepting it on that account; with all its pros and cons, such knowing never gets anywhere, and it knows not why. Subject and object, God, Nature, Understanding, sensibility, and so on, are uncritically taken for granted as familiar, established as valid, and made into fixed points for starting and stopping.

(18)

The study of philosophy is as much hindered by the conceit that will not argue, as it is by the argumentative approach. This conceit relies on truths which are taken for granted and which it sees no need to re-examine; it just lays them down, and believes it is entitled to

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<sup>13</sup> In his *Politics*, Aristotle (2000: 105-106) uses the example of sailors with their varying functions – oarsman, look-out man, pilot, etc. – but common definition based on common purpose: safety in navigation. Throughout his analysis, Solomon (1983: e.g. 24, 174-175 and 178-179) links *Phenomenology of Spirit* to various texts by Aristotle; notably, he excludes the *Politics*, in which Aristotle posits a master and slave. Below, I consider briefly the similarities and differences between Aristotle's slave and the heroic slave of Kojève's master-slave dialectic.

assert them, as well as to judge and pass sentence by appealing to them. In view of this, it is especially necessary that philosophising should again be made a serious business.

(41)

In both of these passages, Hegel asks the philosopher to “make strange” the truth claims and concepts adopted by particular philosophies. He warns against taking for granted that different positions are implicitly joined through an adherence to certain norms and a supposed shared understanding and use of certain key concepts. Hegel’s insistence on strangeness has two unexpected consequences for those who insist that he is the philosopher of the Same: making strange what is considered familiar takes into account *differences* and multiple perspectives; furthermore, making viewpoints “strangers” to one another not only confirms their distinctiveness but also, as *estrangement* suggests, evokes *rupture*.

Recall also that Hegel in his plant metaphor describes the forms as “fluid” – not solid or rigid, but fluctuating, i.e., varying erratically, which signifies change and being or becoming different. We find in this description an appeal to the slipperiness of philosophical concepts and an apparent rejection of dogma. However, Hegel also writes that the fluid forms are “moments of an organic unity”. Would not the fluidity of the forms resist organisation into a harmonious system? How could unstable forms become oneness?

The ambiguity suggested by these questions is one of many in Hegel’s text, but it is, according to Hyppolite (1974: 49-50), “the central problem of Hegelianism”, to wit, “to think universality through particularity and particularity through universality”, in other words, the dialectic of universal individuality.<sup>14</sup> It falls outside the scope and ambition of this work to explain in detail the dialectic of universal individuality. What is important to note is that the “French Hegel” of the 1940s is defined by the manner in which scholars deal or do not deal with Hegel’s ambiguity. Those who dismiss Hegel define him as the absolute idealist; thus, they interpret *Phenomenology of Spirit* as simply a grandiose treatise on the Absolute. Those who appropriate him tend to omit the Absolute, or, at best, argue that another, more “Heraclitan Hegel” is the “true” Hegel of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, only to re-introduce the

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<sup>14</sup> It will become apparent that Hyppolite dismisses the dialectic of universal individuality owing to his preoccupation with “unhappy consciousness”.

theme of his idealism in their criticism. Heraclites, it will be recalled, defines the *arché* as: “Everything changes”. Solomon (1983: 14-16) describes Hegel as “Heraclitan”, inasmuch as Spirit is described by Hegel (6) as “never at rest but always engaged in moving forward.” This, Solomon argues, points to a Hegel that in effect posits an unreachable Absolute and, therefore, no end to philosophy. Of course, Heraclites is also famous for his proclamation that ‘War is the father of all’, that, as Guthrie (1997: 43) explains, “all things live by conflict, which is therefore essential to life ... [and] whatever lives, lives by the destruction of something else.” The implication is that a version of Hegel as a philosopher of change is based on the assumption of the inevitability, even necessity, of violence and conflict, which is precisely, as I will show, the connection between Kojève, Hyppolite and Sartre.

Be that as it may, Hegel warns us in the opening pages about the “impossibility” of introductions, since the stating of aims is already an assertion of the result. He continues that “the result [is not] the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about” (2). Thus, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* describes a journey *en route* to the Absolute: “the prize at the end of a complicated, tortuous path and of just as variegated and strenuous an effort” (7). One cannot begin with Absolute Knowledge, it is acquired gradually. Knowledge in its first phase is sense-consciousness – phenomenal or empirical knowledge – that must, “in order to become genuine knowledge ... travel a long way and work its passage” (15). The point of departure is consciousness.

In the *Introduction*, Hegel outlines the development of consciousness from sense-certainty to Absolute Knowledge. Consider the following extract from this outline:

Consciousness simultaneously *distinguishes* itself from something, and at the same time *relates* itself to it, or, as it is said, this something exists *for* consciousness; and the determinate aspect of this *relating*, or of the *being* of something for a consciousness, is *knowing*. But we distinguish this being-for-another from *being-in-itself*; whatever is related to knowledge or knowing is also distinguished from it, and posited as existing outside of this relationship; this *being-in-itself* is called *truth*. ... Now if we inquire into the truth of knowledge, it seems that we are asking what knowledge is *in itself*. Yet in this inquiry knowledge is *our* object, something that exists *for us*; and the *in-itself* that would supposedly result from it would rather be the being of knowledge *for us*. What we asserted to be its essence would be not so much its truth but rather just our knowledge of

it. ... But the dissociation, or this semblance of dissociation and presupposition, is overcome by the nature of the object we are investigating. Consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself; for the distinction made above falls within it. ... [In] what consciousness affirms from within itself as *being-in-itself* or the *True* we have the standard which consciousness itself sets up by which to measure what it knows. ... If we designate *knowledge* as the Notion, but the essence or the *True* as what exists, or the *object*, then the examination consists in seeing whether the Notion corresponds to the object. ... 'Notion' and 'object', 'being-for-another' and 'being-in-itself', both fall *within* that knowledge which we are investigating. ... [What] consciousness examines is its own self... For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth. Since both are *for* the same consciousness, this consciousness is itself their comparison; it is for this same consciousness to know whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not. The object, it is true, seems only to be for consciousness in the way that consciousness knows it; it seems that consciousness cannot, as it were, get behind the object as it exists for consciousness so as to examine what the object is in itself, and hence, too, cannot test its own knowledge by that standard. But the distinction between the in-itself and knowledge is already present in the very fact that consciousness knows an object at all. ... If the comparison shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its own knowledge to make it conform to the object. But, in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters too ... for it essentially belonged to this knowledge. Hence it comes to pass for consciousness that what it previously took to be the *in-itself* is not an *in-itself*, or that it was only an in-itself *for consciousness*. Since consciousness thus finds that its knowledge does not correspond to its object, the object itself does not stand the test; in other words, the criterion for testing is altered when that for which it was to have been the criterion fails to pass the test; and the testing is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is. *Inasmuch as the new true object issues from it*, this *dialectical* movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called *experience*. ... [Consciousness] will arrive at a point at which it gets rid of its semblance of being burdened with something alien, with what is only for it, and some sort of 'other', at a point where appearance becomes identical with essence ... [which] will signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself.

(Hegel: 52-57)

Consciousness is consciousness *of* something, which signifies “the moment of the distinction between subject and object” (Hyppolite: 84).<sup>15</sup> More precisely, consciousness distinguishes between knowledge, or the “Notion” of something (what the object is for consciousness) and truth (what the object is in itself).

The first phase of knowledge relates to the *immediate*; in other words, the object of knowledge is simply what is given and nothing more. Sense-certainty has the appearance of being absolutely true, since it “has the object before it in its perfect entirety” (Hegel: 58). Consciousness in this phase has the particular form of a “pure I”, since it has not yet started to reflect on the object, or, in Hyppolite’s (85) words, “it does not develop as consciousness which represents objects to itself diversely or compares them among themselves.” Since consciousness’ knowledge does not extend beyond the fact that the object ‘is’, sense-certainty can be considered to be “the most abstract and poorest *truth*” (Hegel: 58). Sensuous certainty cannot know more than “the this, the here, the now” (Hyppolite: 90), for as soon as it classifies these notions, e.g., the chair, my office, this morning, we are no longer within the realm of immediacy. Classification presupposes comparison, which in turn points to a mediated object. Classification also suggests activity; instead of the passive behaviour of this ‘I’ whose knowledge of the object can have no content beyond an affirmation of its existence.

Now, from the passage cited above, it is *consciousness* that posits knowledge and truth and draws a distinction between them. Accordingly, the truth of knowledge (i.e. knowledge in itself), lies in the knowledge (what knowledge is for consciousness) of knowledge. Hyppolite (22) explains: “By designating what for it is the truth, it gives the criterion of its own knowledge.” The entire investigation of the object, knowledge, takes place *within*

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<sup>15</sup> Presumably, then, Hegel may also posit the “unconscious” as a moment “before” the “I” expresses itself as such, that is to say, “before” the I becomes aware of itself in relation to things that are not-I, a moment that is not marked by intentionality. To be sure, Hegel does not expound on this theme, but certainly Kojève makes it impossible to consider this aspect of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, since he collapses “the unconscious” into the first movement of consciousness. I look at the implications of this below. For further discussion of the “unconscious” in Hegel’s philosophy, see John Russon’s (2004: 184-209) defence of the thesis that the “subterranean, the non-reflective, the embodied” is central to the dialectic.

consciousness; therefore, consciousness of knowledge cannot be separated from knowledge itself. Consciousness and the object are simultaneously mediated: “‘I’ have this certainty through something else, viz. the thing; and it is, similarly, in sense-certainty through something else, viz. through the ‘I’” (Hegel: 59). Put simply: Consciousness is held to be consciousness of something, the object. While the object has an independent existence – it is “in-itself” – consciousness *knows* the object only as what it is for consciousness. So, the object is at once separate from and related to consciousness and consciousness distinguishes itself from the object but, since the distinction takes place within consciousness, the object is simultaneously assimilated into consciousness. Two important implications can be deduced from this.

Firstly, consciousness itself is the measure of whether or not its knowledge of the object corresponds to the truth of the object. Since the object is assimilated into consciousness, any changes in the knowledge of the object imply that the object itself has changed. A changed object contradicts the original positing of the True, i.e., the object-in-itself. Hyppolite (23) explains: “In testing out its knowledge of what it took as the in-itself, what is posited as being the absolutely true, consciousness discovers the latter to have been in-itself only for it.” This discovery is based on experience.

Hegel refers to experience as a “dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself”. The dialectical movement consists of “the *negation* of the preceding object and the *appearance* of a new object, which in turn engenders a new knowledge” (Hyppolite: 24). In this regard, the dialectical movement of consciousness refers to Hegel’s central term “*aufheben*” (to “sublate” or “supersede”). Inwood (1992: 283) illustrates three main aspects of the definition of *aufheben*, namely, (1) to raise, lift up; (2) to destroy, cancel; (3) to keep, preserve. Combining Inwood’s (284) suggestion that Hegel uses the term in all three senses, as well as Williams’ (1997: 310) definition of *aufheben*, we may deduce the following: for one to preserve something involves removing it from its immediacy, from its being-in-itself, while at the same time mediating (or reflecting) it, and, by being mediated, it enters into union with one, its opposite. As a union, both the one and its opposite are transformed and preserved on an elevated level.

In our example, consciousness enters into a dialectic with knowledge; it will in other parts of *Phenomenology of Spirit* enter into a dialectic with nature and with other consciousnesses. Knowledge is no longer in-itself; it is for-consciousness, so consciousness and knowledge are related to but also distinct from one another. Through this relationship both consciousness and knowledge become something else. What they were before is negated through their union. However, the negation is not an absolute negation. Instead, the negation is partial, it is a determinate negation: it means to overcome while preserving what is overcome. The changed object, knowledge, is not a new object that has been discovered. Properly speaking, it is no longer an object inasmuch as *object* is something “contraposed” (Hyppolite: 24) to consciousness. Rather, the changed object contains also the dialectical movement in which the annihilation of the “original” object took place – the new True arises from the previous movement.

In this regard, Hyppolite (65) suggests that Hegel’s method of dialectical movement makes his system “truly organic” – recall the plant metaphor, above, in which the developmental phases form an “organic unity” – since every new transition carries also within it the previous phase, enriched with a “more concrete meaning”. The way that Hyppolite uses “concrete” here is precisely not synonymous with “specific” or “particular” but instead means “actual” or “existing”: every new dialectical movement brings us closer to the actual, or fully completed Absolute. The Absolute is no longer a becoming, it is fully actualised potential. Thus, Hegel proposes that the first phase of the “dialectic of experience” (Russon 2004: 21), namely, empirical knowledge, is the most abstract form and Absolute Knowledge is the embodiment of the concrete!

Empirical knowledge is superseded, but not on the basis of Cartesian doubt. For Hegel, there *is* an object, a world or nature. He dismisses the “conceit which understands how to belittle every truth, in order to turn back into itself and gloat over its own understanding, which knows how to dissolve every thought and always find the same barren Ego instead of any content” (Hegel: 52). To be sure, consciousness will learn as each dialectical movement unfolds that what it considers initially to be true, turns out to be illusory. However, as Hyppolite (12-13) shows, Hegel does not take as his point of departure the Cartesian principle of universal doubt. Universal doubt is a function of philosophical thought, which Hegel “contraposes [to] the concrete evolution of a consciousness which progressively learns to

doubt what it previously took to be true”; consciousness’ “road of doubt is the actual route that consciousness follows ... [it] is its own itinerary, not that of the philosopher who resolves to doubt.” The crucial implication of Hegel’s emphasis on the concrete experience of doubt is that it does not start from the general doubt over the existence and independence of things outside of consciousness: to reiterate the point made above, for Hegel, there *is* a world and it exists independently of consciousness.

Hyppolite (67) offers that the consciousness posited by Hegel “is not experienced as an I in the reflection of scientific thought, but in its impulses and their actualisation, in the movement of its desires.” This movement of consciousness’ desires will be discussed at length when we consider Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel. For him, and indeed all the French scholars of that era, this is the central movement because of its focus on the struggle for self-recognition. In the dialectic of experience, this self-consciousness as desire will in its turn be superseded by reason, though reason in itself is also posited, according to Hyppolite, as a “concrete given” (68), “a kind of materialism” (69).<sup>16</sup>

For Hegel (56), the arisen is a “movement and a process of becoming”. The movement continues ceaselessly until “knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself”, in other words, when knowledge is True, and “short of it no satisfaction is to be found at any of the stations on the way” (51). As long as the dialectic of experience continues, consciousness is never at peace, it is constantly compelled to go beyond itself.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, with every transition it must face, annihilate, the shortcomings of its knowledge.

This brings us to the second implication of the union between consciousness and the object of knowledge; namely, the process of being conscious of the object implies that consciousness is also conscious of itself; consequently, scrutinizing the object implies self-scrutiny. Hegel

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<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, it falls outside of the scope of this work to give an account of the subsequent movements and thus to come to grips with the exact nature of Hegel’s assumed absolute idealism. Incidentally, Kojève (1969: 210) also acknowledges the significance of the concrete in Hegel’s text.

<sup>17</sup> The description of consciousness as always going “beyond itself” will be echoed in the postulation of *Dasein* as a “projecting” (Heidegger 1978: 185) or a “*Being-towards-possibilities*” (188), and will feature also in early French phenomenology, including Sartre’s postulation of human reality as “transcendence”.

posits consciousness in relation to an other – whether it signifies the object, or nature or other consciousnesses – and, whatever knowledge is gleaned from this other, is also a self-knowledge. Indeed, as Hegel (9-10) asserts in the *Preface*: “In my view, which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*.” His perspective indicates not only that the subject and object of knowledge cannot be separated, but also that Absolute knowledge is *self-knowledge*.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Hyppolite (20) concludes, “we discover in the various objects of consciousness what consciousness is itself”. Furthermore, the idea of the subject and object constituting one another – the other is for-consciousness as much as consciousness can only be consciousness of an other – resonates with those philosophers of existence who posit *Dasein*, or the existent, as *Mitwelt* and *Mitsein*.

Above, I allude to the violence that accompanies the transitions that consciousness undergoes on its path to the Absolute. During the course of every transition, consciousness dialectically overcomes itself; it never experiences satisfaction or tranquillity. Hegel (51) writes:

When consciousness feels this violence, its anxiety may well make it retreat from the truth, and strive to hold on to what it is in danger of losing. But it can find no peace. If it wishes to remain in a state of inertia, then thought troubles its thoughtlessness, and its own unrest disturbs its inertia.

Hyppolite (149) suggests that the “attributed adjective which recurs most frequently in Hegel’s dialectic is disquiet [*unruhig*]. This disquiet is symptomatic of the unremitting annihilation of what had previously seemed familiar to the subject, “the loss of our familiar foundations and guarantees within experience” (Russon 2004: 21). The journey to the Absolute is hampered by consciousness’ feelings of anxiety and also “despair” (Hegel: 50).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For Hyppolite, the postulation of absolute knowledge as self-knowledge puts Hegel on the path of Husserlian phenomenology. See Hyppolite (9-10) for some interesting observations on this theme.

<sup>19</sup> The influence on Heidegger, and, by association, also French phenomenology, is evident. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1974: 234) submits that “anxiety is *Dasein*’s essential state of Being-in-the-world”; that in anxiety one feels *unheimlich*. What consciousness hopes to hold on to if it remains inert is what Heidegger (233) calls “tranquillised self-assurance”, translated by Sartre as “bad faith”. Of course, in Hegel’s postulation of the journey towards the Absolute, there will be a point where there is no longer a distinction between the Notion and the object, in, other words, where our knowledge of the

Moreover, since *the substance is also the subject*, these feelings point to the breaking down of self-identity. In fact, the dialectic of experience shows that the subject “is” not (yet) of the order of “is”: whatever “self” is recovered at the end of a dialectical movement is an *aufgehobene* self and, thus, related but not identical to its former self and, once again, subjected to the next sublation. The dialectic of experience means that the subject is nothing but perpetual movement and nowhere but in motion.

*Phenomenology of Spirit* can be read simultaneously on three levels. It is a *phenomenology*: a description of the journey of Spirit as it traverses the various developments of consciousness. It is an *epistemology* insofar as it charts “the detailed history of the *education* of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science” (Hegel: 50); in other words, a treatise on philosophical development that follows the progress of the philosopher, having taken into account the history of philosophical thought and then coming to a new, comprehensive understanding of knowledge, including the relationship between knowledge and truth and the relationship between knowledge and experience. On this point, Hyppolite (52) considers *Phenomenology of Spirit* as Hegel’s way of expressing or reiterating the history of his personal philosophical journey. Finally, it is an *anthropology*, a discourse on self-identity, or a “kind of auto-biography” (Solomon: 197) in which the individual comes to understand himself, particularly with regards to his relationship with others.<sup>20</sup> Crucially, this refers not to a single individual, since Hegel considers the particular as “incomplete Spirit” (16), but rather to the “universal individual”.

Let us now turn to the first of the “*anthropologistic* readings of Hegel” (Derrida 1982: 117), namely, Kojève’s *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.

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object and the object itself are one and the same, or Absolute Knowledge. This is exactly the point where early French phenomenology will not follow Hegel.

<sup>20</sup> The male-identified pronouns are deliberate, indeed, one could simply substitute “universal individual” with man – for reasons that will become clear in *Part 3*.

## c) Kojève's lectures on *Phenomenology of Spirit*

### c.1) Desire of Desire

The first noticeable aspect of Kojève's analysis is the title of the opening chapter, *In Place of an Introduction*, witty in its veiled reference to Hegel's assertion in the *Preface* of *Phenomenology of Spirit* of the impossibility of introductions. Secondly, there is an opening quote from Karl Marx; to wit, "Hegel ... erfasst die *Arbeit* als das *Wesen*, als das sich bewährende *Wesen* des Menschen", which foreshadows Kojève's agenda of portraying Hegel's text as the victorious journey of the labouring slave. Thirdly, as I have previously mentioned, Kojève dispenses with the first chapters of Hegel's text.

Kojève reveals from the outset that his reading of Hegel will have an anthropological spirit. Indeed, Kojève's (1969: 3) translation with commentary of Section A (*Independence and dependence of self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage*) of Chapter IV (*The Truth of Self-Certainty*) of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, begins with the following commentary:<sup>21</sup>

Man is Self-Consciousness. He is conscious of himself, conscious of his human reality and dignity; and it is in this that he is essentially different from animals, which do not go beyond the level of simple Sentiment of self.

Kojève (4) contends that self-consciousness is the "very being of man", therefore, whatever comes "before" self-consciousness cannot signify being (hu)man. He is not at all interested in

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<sup>21</sup> Kojève sets out to translate Hegel's text to his class and provide commentary that is indicated by brackets. All my citations from *Phenomenology of Spirit* come from Miller's English translation, the paragraph numbering of which corresponds to the paragraph divisions in Hegel's original German text.

the first dialectical movement; thus, he ignores the “pure I” that is posited in the first stage of consciousness’ development and the transition that must take place before that consciousness becomes self-consciousness. Instead, he bases his analysis on “the why or the how of the birth of the word ‘I’, and consequently of self-consciousness – that is, of the human reality” (Kojève: 3). From this perspective, Kojève downplays the importance of the three subdivisions of consciousness; to wit, sensation, perception and understanding, in order to present a self-consciousness that hinges on what he coins “anthropogenetic desire”.

Kojève commences with the second movement of Hegel’s dialectic – when consciousness is transformed to self-consciousness – and, thus, with an already constituted human subject: to be fully human, Matthews (1996: 113) correctly reads into Kojève’s position, entails being *conscious of oneself* as a human being. Kojève (1969: 37) asserts

To reach [*Self-Consciousness*], one must start from something *other* than *contemplative* knowledge of Being, other than *passive* relation, which leaves Being as it is in itself, independent of the knowledge that reveals it. Indeed, we all know that the man who attentively *contemplates* a thing, who wants to see it as it is without changing anything, is “*absorbed*,” so to speak, by this contemplation – that is, by this thing. He *forgets himself*, he thinks only about the *thing* being contemplated; he thinks neither about his *contemplation*, nor – and even less – about himself, his “I,” his *Selbst*. The more he is conscious of the *thing*, the less he is conscious of *himself*. He may perhaps talk about the thing, but he will never talk about himself; in his discourse, the word “I” will not occur. For this word to appear, something other than purely passive contemplation, which only *reveals* Being, must also be present. And this other thing, according to Hegel, is *Desire*, *Begierde*, of which he speaks in the beginning of Chapter IV.

Here it seems as if Kojève follows Hegel in asserting that consciousness starts when “I” is expressed for the “first time”. Kojève describes the man who contemplates, i.e. sense-certainty, as being “absorbed” by what he contemplates, he “loses himself” in the object. At the level of consciousness, man is merely a “knowing subject” (3): consciousness is directed towards and wholly absorbed in its objects without a sense of having a subjective experience. Man who is “absorbed” by the object that he is contemplating can be “brought back to himself” (3), his “I” can occur, only by a desire. When man desires something he is moved to say “I want ...” Desire is *my* desire. Hence, it is “as ‘his’ Desire that man is formed and is revealed – to himself and to others – as an I ...” (4). To desire something is to be conscious of it as *different* from oneself: as other, as an object, “an external reality ... which is not *he* but a

*non-I*” (37), distinguishable from oneself as subject. Self-consciousness, or being aware of oneself as subject distinct from an object, is attained through desire. The very being of man, writes Kojève (4), meaning, man as self-conscious being, implies and presupposes desire.

However, I must interject. The “I” in Hegel’s first dialectical movement is not absorbed by the object; instead, this *I*’s point of view is that of the pre-Socratic Parmenides. For Parmenides, Guthrie (1997: 49) reminds us, “only the mind can reach the truth, and the mind – so [Parmenides] proclaimed with the simple arrogance of the first of all abstract thinkers – proves incontrovertibly that reality is utterly different.” Consciousness in the first movement posits itself as subject and the object as something alien from or other to it. It is not consciousness that is absorbed in the object, but rather the object that is assimilated by consciousness – more precisely, the “object” is an abstraction of consciousness, it has no bearing on the actual existence of the object but only on what it is *for* consciousness. What the subject loses is his *solipsistic* self when he becomes aware of the fact that both he and the object are mediated. I would submit that, by not drawing a clear distinction between the unconscious and sense-certainty, Kojève’s Hegel loses its sharp criticism of the Cartesian ego, the “pure I” that supposedly comprises our essential identity.

Certainly, Hegel (102) acknowledges at the end of his discussion of the first dialectical movement:

It is true that consciousness of an ‘other’, of an object in general, is itself necessarily *self-consciousness*, a reflectedness-into-self, consciousness of itself in its otherness. The *necessary advance* from the previous shapes of consciousness for which their truth was a Thing, an ‘other’ than themselves, expresses just this, that not only is consciousness of a thing possible only for a self-consciousness, but that self-consciousness alone is the truth of those shapes. But it is only *for us* that this truth exists, not yet for consciousness.

The “us” that Hegel is referring to in this passage signify the philosophers, who embark on a phenomenological investigation of Spirit – they know that consciousness is also self-consciousness; consciousness, however, becomes aware of itself at the end of the dialectical movement with the object, when its naïve solipsism is sublated.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hyppolite (1974: 65) is in agreement with Hegel’s depiction of consciousness and self-consciousness as two separate movements.

Hegel (62) writes: “Sense-certainty thus comes to know by experience that its essence is neither in the object nor in the ‘I...’” Hence, when Kojève refers to the self being “brought back to himself”, it does not carry the same meaning as the *aufgehobene* consciousness in which the subject and object, consciousness and its other, are reconciled, instead, it is the subject who frees himself from the object through an act of negation. By equating being human to self-consciousness and not acknowledging the first dialectical movement, Kojève is in effect positing an unmediated “I”, which is precisely what Hegel does not do.

Early in the chapter entitled, *Self-Consciousness*, Hegel (105) does indeed state that “self-consciousness is *Desire* in general.” Whereas the first shape of knowledge – consciousness – was directed at an other, i.e. the sensuous world, the next shape, self-consciousness, is self-knowledge (104-105). Since it is the form of consciousness that poses itself for itself, in other words, since the *I* is simultaneously the subject and object, self-consciousness is “the motionless tautology of: ‘I am I’” (105).

However, the abstraction  $I = I$  is not the essence of self-consciousness, “it does not have the form of *being*” (105). Otherness *does* have the form of “a being”. Hegel (105) writes that “self-consciousness is the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception, and is essentially a return from *otherness*.” The sensuous world – otherness – is the essence, the starting point for self-consciousness. Hence, the world of consciousness, the first movement of Spirit’s journey, is preserved for self-consciousness. It is preserved, not as a being-in-itself, a givenness that consciousness contemplates, but “as an object that must be negated in order that through this negation of the being-other self-consciousness establishes its own unity with itself” (Hyppolite 1974: 158). In other words, whereas the truth in the first movement lies within the object, the truth in the second movement resides with the *I* of self-consciousness. The phenomenal world no longer exists in-itself, its being is appropriated by the self of consciousness. Thus, what Hegel means by *desire* is “this movement of consciousness which does not respect being but negates it, appropriating it concretely and making it its own” (Hyppolite: 159). It is only at this point that Hegel’s discussion meets up with Kojève’s analysis.

Kojève (38) writes: “The human I must be an I of *Desire* – that is, an *active* I, a *negating* I, an I that *transforms* Being and creates a new being by destroying the given being.” Desire moves man into action; action emanates from desire. All action is “negating”. This is because the gratification of a desire entails the destruction or, at the very least, transformation of the desired object. To sate my hunger, for instance, the food must be destroyed or transformed; thus, an act of negation. This negating act, by destroying the given from what it was to something “other”, destroys an objective reality and brings about in its place a subjective reality. In the example of an I who gratifies my desire to eat, I create my own reality by overcoming or superseding a reality other than my own. I transform or assimilate or internalise an “external” reality into my own reality. Self-certainty, in other words, the gratification of desire, is attained by removing the other, put differently, by destroying the otherness of the other. The object of desire – the food that I want to eat – is not posited in itself, I remove its independence through my consumption.

As self-consciousness, consciousness now has a “double object”: firstly, the immediate object of the first dialectical movement that has for self-consciousness the character of negativity, and secondly, itself, which is “present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object” (Hegel: 105). Now, Hegel suggests that, *in itself*, the object that is for self-consciousness characterised by negativity, has “returned into itself”. This reflection back onto itself means that the object can no longer be defined simply as a sensuous object perceived by consciousness: “the object has become Life”. Put differently, “the object of immediate desire is a living thing” (106). If the given object was the truth of consciousness in the first movement, life is the other or the truth of self-consciousness in the second movement. To desire life is to wish for self-preservation, to wish to live.

At this point, I must interrupt Hegel’s train of thought to show how Kojève interprets self-consciousness’ relationship to the living thing. Kojève makes much more of the notion of “immediate desire”, which he translates as animal desire, than is found in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Animal desire is a necessary but not sufficient condition of self-consciousness. (Kojève: 4, 39) Whether to sate hunger, to quench thirst or provide shelter, animal desire negates a natural given and through this negation, the animal “raises itself above this given” (39). However, by eating the fruit, drinking from the river and nesting in the tree, the animal does not truly surpass the natural given: “the animal raises itself above the Nature that is

negated in its animal Desire only to fall back into it immediately by the satisfaction of this Desire” (39). The *I* that is formed by such satisfaction is a “‘thingish’ *I*, a merely living *I*, an animal *I*” (4). This “animal *I*” attains merely “sentiment of self” but not yet self-consciousness. Kojève continues that an animal “cannot say ‘I...’ ... because [it] does not really transcend itself as *given* – i.e., as body; it does not rise *above* itself in order to *come back* toward itself; it has no *distance* with respect to itself in order to *contemplate* itself” (39).

To desire the “given being”, the sensuous world, is to enslave oneself to it, and, as such, to be thing-like. But to desire *non-being* is to transcend the given, to realise one’s autonomy, to be self-conscious and thus, to be human. The desire for non-being is the desire that is directed “toward another *Desire*, another greedy emptiness, another *I*”: “man must act not for the sake of subjugating a *thing*, but for the sake of subjugating another *Desire* (for the thing)” (40). Kojève counterposes animal desire with what he calls “anthropogenetic” or “humanising” desire.

For Kojève, there are two important implications derived from anthropogenetic desire. Firstly, self-consciousness emerges from a social reality (5-6). What it means to be fully human entails being a member of a society of other human beings. Man, explains Kojève, can appear on earth only within a herd: human reality can only be social. (6) However, for a “herd” to become a society, the desires of each member must be directed toward the desire of the other members. In Matthews’ (1996: 114) words, “these members of society desire each other’s desire *as the desire of another human being*.” Secondly, all anthropogenetic desire, the desire that generates self-consciousness, is a function of the desire for recognition. In point of fact, Kojève expresses the function of human desire in far more malevolent terms than mere acknowledgment of the self. At the end of his introduction to anthropogenetic desire, Kojève (40) states that the purpose of human desire is for man “to make the other recognise his *superiority* over the other.”

Let us return to Hegel’s discussion of life as the object of desire in the second movement of consciousness. In this opposition, self-consciousness is for itself, it claims for itself “the individuality which maintains itself at the expense of the universal” (Hegel: 108), in other words, it severs its relation to universal life and claims to be independent of it. However, the

independence of self-consciousness implicitly affirms the independence of its object. As desire, as the negation of being, self-consciousness will “learn through experience that the object is independent” (Hegel 106). How does this experience unfold? Hyppolite (162) ventures that it emerges from the “continuous reproduction of desire and of the object” in which the specificity of these desires and objects is not as crucial as what their monotonous reproduction reveals: the necessity of the object of desire.

Consider Hegel’s (109) elaboration:

Certain of the nothingness of this other, [self-consciousness] explicitly affirms that this nothingness is *for it* the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a *true* certainty, a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself *in an objective manner*. In this satisfaction, however, experience makes it aware that the object has its own independence. Desire and the self-certainty obtained in its gratification, are conditioned by the object, for self-certainty comes from superseding this other: in order that this supersession can take place, there must be this other.

Since self-certainty comes from superseding the object, there must be an *object* – an other – for this supersession to take place. In the act of negating the object, self-consciousness is, therefore, simultaneously restoring it. Hence, self-consciousness, by producing the object again, is unable to supersede it and the other’s independence is reaffirmed. Since the object is independent, desire can be gratified only if the object *itself* brings about the negation within itself. Hegel (109-110) concludes: “Since the object is in its own self negation, and in being so is at the same time independent, it is consciousness” (109-110). Moreover, this independent object “posits its otherness or difference as a nothingness” and, as such, is a “living self-consciousness” (110). Life is no longer “only the element of substantiveness, the other of the I” (Hyppolite: 163), but becomes for self-consciousness another self-consciousness. Through experience, self-consciousness learns that it attains the satisfaction of its desire only in another self-consciousness. Hegel (110) writes that a “self-consciousness exists *for a self-consciousness*” and, as such, we catch a glimpse of the “Notion of Spirit” encapsulated in the union: ‘*T that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘T*’.

In his translation and exposition of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Kojève omits the first quarter of part A (marked 178-184), except for the first sentence of the paragraph (marked 178). That

first sentence Kojève (9) translates as: “Self-consciousness exists *in* and *for itself* in and by the fact that it exists (in and for itself) for another Self-Consciousness; i.e. it exists only as an entity that is recognised.”<sup>23</sup> What Kojève does not include in his commentary is that this recognition must be viewed as a *mutual* recognition, that neither consciousness can attain complete self-consciousness without the recognition of the other. Regarding the mutuality of recognition, Hegel (111-112) submits:

Now this movement of self-consciousness in relation to another self-consciousness has in this way been represented as the action of one self-consciousness, but this action of the one has itself the double significance of being both its own action and the action of the other as well. For the other is equally independent and self-contained, and there is nothing in it of which it is not itself the origin. The first does not have the object before it merely as it exists primarily for desire, but as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilise for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it. Thus the movement is simply the double movement of two self-consciousnesses.

The movement of superseding the other independent being, in order to become certain of *itself* as an essential being by one self-consciousness, is both its own action as well as the action of the other. Simply put, while the subject sets himself up as the essential, distinct from the other, which he poses as the object, the inessential, the *other consciousness sets up a reciprocal claim*. (111-112) For Hegel, recognition depends on reciprocity, which in turn involves free and independent agents that must renounce coercion. True recognition involves the reciprocal mediation of free and independent self-consciousnesses; thus, self-consciousness gratifies its desire only in another self-consciousness that is equally essential. Hegel (112) concludes the section (that Kojève omits) by pointing out that these two consciousnesses “*recognise themselves as mutually recognising one another.*”

Kojève disregards this notion of the mutual recognition of consciousnesses. He resumes his translation and commentary from the point (marked 185) where Hegel explains how the process of reciprocal recognition appears to self-consciousness. “At first,” writes Hegel (112-113), “it will exhibit the side of inequality of the two, or the splitting-up of the middle term

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<sup>23</sup> In Miller’s translation, Hegel (111) writes: “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.”

into the extremes which, as extremes, are opposed to one another, one being only *recognised*, the other only *recognising*.” Now, this dialectic of self-recognition takes place in the “being [or immediacy] of Life”, thus, the two self-consciousnesses are for one another like ordinary objects. More, precisely, self-consciousness assumes for itself the status of an individual, absolutely certain of its own self through the exclusion of everything else. What this simple being-for-self experiences as “other” is for it “an unessential, negatively characterised object” (113).

However, this other is *also* a self-consciousness. So we have a confrontation between two individuals, for themselves absolute certainty and for each other no more than an ordinary object. While each of the two individuals may be certain of his own self, his self-certainty does not yet have the status of truth, since neither are certain of the other. Kojève’s (11) description of this dilemma is revealing:

The “first” man who meets another man for the first time already attributes an autonomous, absolute value to himself: we can say that he believes himself to be a man, that he has “subjective certainty” of being a man. But this certainty is not yet knowledge. The value that he attaches to himself can be illusory; the idea that he has of himself could be false or mad. For that idea to be truth, it must reveal an objective reality – i.e., an entity that is valid and exists not only for itself, but also for realities other than itself.

The individual, suggests Kojève, must find the private idea that he has of himself, his subjective certainty, objectively recognised. Tellingly, in this citation, Kojève describes the concept of recognition in terms of a single, “first” man desiring self-acknowledgment. In the same vein, Kojève (11) writes: “[For] man to be truly “man”, and to know that he is such, must, therefore, impose the idea that he has of himself on beings other than himself: he must be recognised by the other (in the ideal, extreme case, by all others).”

Hegel (113) argues that the truth of self-certainty is “possible only when each [of the two individual self-consciousnesses] is for the other what the other is for it, only when each in its own self through its own action, and again through the action of the other, achieves this pure abstraction of being-for-self.” Recall the citation where Hegel is explicit about the mutuality that marks the movement of the dialectic for recognition: it is the *double movement* of the two self-consciousnesses, not the action of one of the parties. Hyppolite (166) correctly sums up: “I am a self-consciousness only if I gain for myself recognition from another self-consciousness and if I grant recognition to the other.” Indeed, Hegel (111) is adamant:

“Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both.”

However, having already disregarded Hegel’s call for mutuality in recognition, Kojève’s point of departure in the dialectic of recognition is precisely this action by one side only – the solitary man shaping the world, both natural and human, according to his view of himself. From this perspective, it will become clear that Kojève does not sufficiently appreciate the importance Hegel attaches to otherness. This failure is particularly noticeable in his treatment of the life and death struggle, to which we now turn.

## c.2) Life or Freedom

Since self-consciousness sets out to present itself as the “pure abstraction of being-for-self”, in other words, as the negation of the immediate object, i.e., Life, it needs to demonstrate that it is “not attached to life” (Hegel: 113). Kojève (12) paraphrases: “[To] be for oneself, or to be a man, is not to be bound to any determined existence ... not to be bound to life.” Negating life is the double movement of both self-consciousnesses. For each other, these self-consciousnesses are merely living things. Thus, each seeks the death of the other and, by implication, both stake their own lives. In order to “raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth” (Hegel: 114), these two self-conscious individuals engage in a life-and-death struggle.

What Hegel writes next, if taken out of the context of a dialectical movement, will be for Kojève the *raison d’être* of humanity; to wit:

And it is only through staking one’s life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the *immediate* form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is

nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure *being-for-self*. The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognised as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness. Similarly, just as each stakes his own life, so each must seek the other's death, for it values the other no more than itself, its essential being is present to it in the form of an 'other', it is outside of itself and must rid itself of its self-externality.

Kojève presents this moment of the *Kampf auf Leben und Tod* as the essence of human life. For him, "human reality is created, is constituted, only in the fight for recognition and by the risk of life that it implies", thus, the "truth of man ... presupposes the fight to the death" and "human-individuals are obliged to start this fight" (Kojève: 12). Elsewhere, Kojève (41) asserts that "human, historical, self-conscious existence is possible only where there are, or – at least – where there have been, bloody fights, wars for prestige." Kojève believes that this imperious desire to be recognised, not merely to survive, is what separates man from beast. To be human is based on the willingness to seek acknowledgment of one's humanity at the cost of all else, including self-preservation. Put differently, humanity is founded on the disavowal of animal desire in favour of anthropogenetic desire in order to affirm one's worth as a human being.

Since the self is mediated by an other, freedom is won only by ridding oneself of "self-externality". This means, that man must overcome the situation of self-estrangement, or, as Kojève (13) puts it, being "outside of himself". The life and death struggle is the means by which the self compels the other to "give him back to himself", that is, to recognise him. Kojève argues that true human freedom is acquired by two things: Fighting and Work. It will become clear that both of these imply acts of negation; indeed, at one point, Kojève (209) affirms: "Freedom = Action = Negativity."

Regarding the life and death struggle, man asserts his freedom by, not only seeking the death of the other, but also putting his own life on the line.<sup>24</sup> A number of important interrelated implications arise from these sentiments. Firstly, if the mark of freedom is the self's negation of his "being-other", freedom equals the motionless tautology  $I = I$ . More precisely, if the

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<sup>24</sup> Hyppolite (170) concurs: "Man rises above life ... he is capable of risking his life and thereby freeing himself from the only slavery possible, enslavement to life."

denouement of the life and death struggle is the actual death of the other, the self would be nothing more than an abstraction of the order of self-consciousness casting itself as “self-equal through the exclusion from itself of everything else” (Hegel: 113). Secondly, life – the other – is cast, not simply as the opposite, but rather, as the absence of freedom. Thus, a binary opposition is created: Man is self-consciousness, i.e., being-for-itself, transcendence, freedom and non-man is the in-itself consciousness that does not transcend his immediacy because of his attachment to life. Thirdly, the emergence of man signifies the death of nature, put differently, being truly human “is” to be non-natural, separated from the concrete and the given – in short, to be an idea(1). Thus, we find ourselves returned to the hallowed realm of the Cartesian *cogito*.

Crucially, there are two aspects of Hegel’s analysis that contradict the assumption of the life and death struggle as the true meaning of humanity. Throughout *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel is careful to distinguish between how consciousness experiences the various transitions of Spirit and how the philosopher reads the situation. We have seen that consciousness assumes the truth of something only to be proven wrong through experience. Since the philosopher knows, with the benefit of analysing consciousness’ journey in its *entirety*, that this “first meeting” between two self-consciousnesses does not constitute the Absolute, there is every reason to believe that consciousness is once again mistaken about what is, for it, the truth. Sure enough, consciousness is about to learn that “[this] trial of death, however, does away with the truth which is supposed to issue from it, and so, too, with the certainty of self generally” (114).

Furthermore, Hegel’s analysis has hitherto yielded only one essential feature, albeit in different guises: a self inexorably related to an other. Recall that the self forces the other to engage in the life and death struggle as a means of ridding himself of otherness – to assert himself rather than being mediated by another. Although desire will not explicitly recognise an other, there would be no desire without an other: “its very nature, therefore, is such as it requires an other” (Russon 2004:62). A call to fight is a tacit acknowledgment that the self and other, who is also a self, constitute each other.

Merleau-Ponty (1964: 68) explains:

We cannot be aware of the conflict unless we are aware of our reciprocal relationship and our common humanity. We do not deny each other except by mutual recognition of our consciousnesses. ... [My] consciousness of another as an enemy comprises an affirmation of him as an equal. ... By myself I cannot be free, nor can I be consciousness or a man; and that other whom I first saw as my rival is a rival only because he is myself.<sup>25</sup>

When two self-consciousnesses that have privately assumed for themselves the status of self-certainty face off, their meeting has a double significance. On the one hand, the self has “lost itself, for it finds itself as an other being” (Hegel: 111), put differently, he is for-an-other and an other is for-him. On the other hand, the self has superseded the other insofar as he sees only himself in the other and “does not see the other as an essential being” (111). Thus, “the other appears as the same, as the self, but the self also appears as the other” (Hyppolite: 168).

Consequently, anthropogenetic desire brings about self-negation as well. If all self-consciousnesses in the process of becoming self-certain try to satisfy their anthropogenetic desire through the life and death struggle, the fight would unavoidably end in the death of one or both of the adversaries. While the death of these adversaries would confirm that neither held a life without self-recognition in high regard, death only brings about the negation of consciousness.

Hegel (114) writes that, in the event of the actual death of one or both combatants, “the two do not reciprocally give and receive one another back from each other consciously, but leave each other free only indifferently, like things.” Now, this citation needs to be qualified. The notions of the self “losing itself” or “receiving the self *back* from an other” imply a prior moment when the self was self-equal, when he was unmediated. However, such a reading seems to contradict the earlier suggestion regarding the centrality of otherness in Hegel’s analysis; to wit, the self cannot “be” without an other. If the self is “lost in the other”, he has always been “lost” – there could not have been a moment when the self was free of the other.

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<sup>25</sup> In *Part 3*, I show that this prior assumption of equality, which Merleau-Ponty correctly finds in Hegel’s portrayal of the struggle for recognition, seriously under-estimates how human society is always already organised to treat certain types of otherness as inferior.

The journey to the Absolute is, among other things, about self-knowledge and what the initially narcissistic self will come to know is that the “self” that is “returned” to him in the reciprocal recognition of two selves, is an *aufgehobene* self, the consciousness that he is and has always been this self-other union. Notwithstanding the ambiguity, the fact of the matter is that that “self” and “other” are couched in oppositional terms *before* they are reconciled, or, more precisely in Hegel’s case, the single consciousness comes to understand and embrace the knowledge, gained only after experience, that he was always both self and other. In short, knowledge is (still) the prerogative of the *cogito*.

Is this our cue to tremble at the implied Subjectivity of Hegel’s dialectic? I concur with Merleau-Ponty’s (1964: 79-80) statement: “No man can reject the *cogito* and deny consciousness, on pain of no longer knowing what he is saying and of renouncing all statements, even materialist ones.” Be that as it may, it must be apparent by now that *Phenomenology of Spirit* is written in the language of the philosophy of the Subject precisely in order to subvert that very philosophy. At every turn, Hegel challenges the presumed absolute status of the “I”. Indeed, earlier, Hegel (110) states that a self-consciousness “is just as much ‘I’ as ‘object’ [that is to say, other].” Instead of an “exclusive parochial identity” (Williams 1994: 55), Hegel posits intersubjectivity based on reciprocity and mutuality between self and other.

When he moves from reciprocal recognition to an account of lordship and bondage, which I will discuss below, he specifies that the respective viewpoints of the master and slave are only *opposed extremes*. Thus, I concur with Lynch’s (2001: 38) assessment that Hegel posits the dialectic of master and slave to demonstrate that each represent “one-sided and incomplete, and thus illusory, versions of [the process of mutual recognition].” I believe Hegel turns the discussion to the master-slave dialectic precisely because he needs to show that, even in unequal relationships, the domination of the other is self-subverting. Hegel does not ascribe a higher moral status to either the master or the slave. His point of departure regarding self-other relationships is the senselessness and immorality of both lordship and bondage.

However, when the dialectical movements through which consciousnesses pass are described *unilaterally*, that is, only from the perspective of a single subject who is perpetually yearning

to be only for-itself, the urge to oppress the other seems inevitable. This is precisely what happens in Kojève's analysis. Lynch (43) correctly observes: "As the translation and commentary proceed, Kojève's emphasis moves further and further away from mutual recognition." Having expressed these caveats, let us take up again the matter of the futility of the life and death struggle.

The first moment shows that the two self-consciousnesses can be self-certain only insofar as both remain alive. For both adversaries to die; indeed, for one of the members to die, consciousness would be left without the desired recognition. A struggle to the point of actual death is self-subverting. The man, who has been defeated and killed, argues Kojève (8, 14), does not recognise the victory of the conqueror; thus, the victor's certainty of his being and his value remains subjective and unconfirmed. Kojève (15) suggests that while it is no good for the man to kill his adversary, he needs to "dialectically overcome" – to enslave – him.

To overcome dialectically is Kojève's term for *aufheben*. *Aufheben* is closely related to Hegel's postulation of a negation – not the absolute negation indicative of a self-consciousness' previous guise as a being-for-itself through the exclusion of everything that is, for it, other and, therefore, inessential – but a partial, determinate negation. To overcome dialectically means to overcome while preserving what is overcome. Kojève (180-181) describes the threefold meaning of "overcome dialectically" in the following way: Firstly, to overcome or annul the fragmentary, relative, partial, or one-sided. Secondly, to preserve or safeguard the essential, in other words, those multiple aspects of the absolute revealed in each thesis and antithesis. Thirdly, to sublimate or raise to a higher level of knowledge and actuality, which, in turn, means a step closer to Truth.

Thus, to secure the recognition that would confirm the certainty of one's own being and value, entails a struggle that does not end in death (absolute negation) but one in which both adversaries survive in a biological sense, but one emerges as the victorious master and the other as the vanquished slave. It is to this master-slave dialectic that I now turn.

### c.3) Master and Slave

Kojève (41) describes the transition from the fight to death to the master-slave dialectic thus:

One must suppose that the Fight ends in such a way that *both* adversaries remain alive. Now, if this is to occur, one must suppose that one of the adversaries *gives in* to the other and submits to him, recognising him without being recognised by him. One must suppose that the Fight ends in a victory of the one who is ready to *go all the way* over the one who – faced with death – does not manage to raise himself above his biological instinct of preservation (identity). To use Hegel’s terminology, one must suppose that there is a victor who becomes the *Master* of the vanquished; or, if one prefers, a vanquished who becomes the *Slave* of the victor.

The experience of the life and death struggle teaches consciousness that its life is as essential to it as unmediated self-consciousness. After all, self-recognition is the ultimate prize because of the willingness to pay the ultimate price of sacrificing one’s life. In the first movement, the immediate self-consciousness assimilated life in its positing of itself as “pure I” or “isolated I” (Kojève: 15). The experience of the life and death struggle leads to the “dissolution of that simple unity” (Hegel: 115), so that life as self-consciousness’ other is preserved in its otherness. Through this separation two consciousnesses emerge: a pure, independent self-consciousness – the master or lord – and a thinglike, dependent consciousness – the slave or bondsman.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In the margins of his analysis, Hyppolite (174: footnote 6) suggests a fuzziness attached to Hegel’s depiction of the master: the master believes that he is “*immediately* for-itself” that is to say, unmediated by another. Given that the movement of self-consciousness hinges on mediation, the master would thus have to be God. Perhaps in his *notion* of himself as unmediated being-for-self, this consciousness assumes godlike status, but, as I show, he only concretely becomes a master through the mediation of the slave. The master is master only because the slave recognises him as such. If the master is constituted by the slave, does the inverse follow? Kojève (25) explicitly states that there is no slave without a master; the master is the “catalyst of the historical, anthropogenetic process.” If not for the forced labour carried out by the slave in the service of the master, he too would act in his “immediate interest” (26) (like the master) and forfeit the opportunity of discovering his humanity.

The master is the adversary to whom self-recognition still weighs more than self-preservation, the self “who negates life in its positivity” (Hyppolite: 171). The slave is described, by Kojève (16), as “the defeated adversary who has not adopted the principle of the Masters: to conquer or to die.” Findley (in Hegel 1977: 521) elucidates: “The demotion of another self-consciousness so that it does not really compete with my self-consciousness, now takes the new form of making it thing-like and dependent, the self-consciousness of a slave as opposed to that of a master.” Owing to his fear of death, by remaining alive, he is an object that exists for another. For the sake of self-preservation, the slave lives as a commodity or the property of the master. In his dependent state and servitude, the slave has *life* for his essential reality; his existence is bound up in thinghood in general. For the master, things are objects of consumption – merely a means of satisfying his desire. The slave prepares and arranges these things for the enjoyment of the master; indeed, the slave, by means of his labour, represses his desire to be recognised by the master who objectifies him. The master not only exists for-itself, but, moreover, gains the necessary mediation to set himself up as victorious self-consciousness through the recognition of the slave. In other words, the master is “no longer merely the Notion of such a consciousness [that exists for-itself]” (Hegel: 115), but its actualisation: he is self-certain. Kojève (16) suggests that the slave is an “immediate” and “bestial” being, whereas the master is “already human” insofar as his self-certainty is mediated or “objectivised” by another’s recognition. Thus “being human” means having the necessary mediation between self-consciousness and life, and this is achieved through the slave – an intermediary who is both self-consciousness and given-being.

From the perspective of the master, his desire was to gain recognition and, indeed, both he and his slave consider him to be master. Hence, the master’s human reality and dignity is confirmed and his freedom recognised. His freedom is constituted by two things. Firstly, while he enjoys the slave’s recognition, he does not afford the slave the same recognition.

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Still, it would be incorrect to say that the slave is *mediated* by the master, inasmuch as the slave recognises but is not recognised in return. The whole point of slavery is the absence of independence. As I have already mentioned, Hyppolite suggests that, strictly speaking, the slave is not the slave of the master; rather, he is enslaved to (his) life. This notion of slavery, as it will become apparent, points to the slave’s death anxiety, and, as such, the slave enslaves himself. Ultimately, Kojève’s resolution to the master-slave dialectic makes the same point: the slave is a slave, not because he is subjugated by a master, but because he enslaves himself.

Secondly, since the slave is the intermediary between himself and the living world, he no longer needs to contend with the independence of the thing – as Kojève (17-18) argues, the master need only to enjoy the thing, say, eating the food that the slave prepares for him. The master's negation of the thing is a pure negation; hence, his affirmation of himself is absolute.

However, Hegel shows that in both constituting elements, the self-certainty of the master is entirely reliant on the *slave*. The master is “a being-for-self which is for itself only through another” (Hegel: 115), in other words, he is the master *only* because the slave recognises him as such. The recognition is not, properly speaking, *recognition*, since there is no reciprocity – only a recognition that is “one-sided and unequal” (Hegel: 116). The master has won the recognition of a slave, i.e., he is recognised by a dependent object. The master's self-consciousness is flawed because the consciousness of the slave is so degraded. Since self-consciousness emerges from the reciprocated recognition of two independent consciousnesses, the master-slave relationship does not provide the master with the mediation necessary to bring about his self-consciousness.

Now, Kojève (19) concedes that the relationship between master and slave is “not recognition properly so-called.” He describes the master's perspective as an “existential impasse”: The precondition of mastery is anthropogenetic desire, a desire not directed at a thing but toward another desire. However, as master, his desire is directed at a *thing*, for this is what he has made the slave: he is “recognised” by a thing. The “tragedy” of his situation is that he has “fought and risked his life for a recognition without value to him.” Mastery is self-subverting. To subjugate the other for personal glory is self-subverting. As a means of obtaining self-certainty, coerced recognition is worthless.

Crucially, instead of relating what is tragic about the master's situation to Hegel's precondition of mutuality for genuine recognition, Kojève, as Lynch (2001: 43) correctly points out, “infers that society (as well as self-consciousness) is not founded upon recognition but rather upon force, hierarchy, and slavery.” Thus, consider these passages:

The master, therefore, was on the wrong track. After the fight that made him a Master, he is not what he wanted to be in starting that fight: a man recognised by another man. Therefore: if man can be satisfied only by recognition, the man who behaves as a Master

will never be satisfied. And since – in the beginning – man is either Master or Slave, the satisfied man will necessarily be a Slave; or more exactly, the man who has been a Slave, who has passed through Slavery, who has ‘dialectically overcome’ his slavery.

(Kojève: 19-20)

Man was born and History began with the first Fight that ended in the appearance of a Master *and* a Slave. That is to say that Man – at his origin – is always either Master or Slave; and that true Man can exist only where there is a Master and a Slave.

(43)

According to these citations, man, the social animal, finds his humanity only in the necessarily conflictual interplay among men. Furthermore, for man to be truly human, to have self-consciousness, he must first pass through the phase of servile consciousness. The opposition of master and slave is absolute and, as such, becomes the basis of Kojève’s philosophical anthropology. In this account, the “oppressed and overworked masses become the engine for historical progress” (Lynch 2001: 44). In other words, what is at stake for Kojève is a class struggle from which the slave emerges as victor.

Regarding Hegel’s position *vis-à-vis* the master-slave dialectic, it is doubtful that he affords mastery and bondage more significance than a contingent condition, one that must be transcended if the subjects are going to gain genuine recognition, or perhaps, more precisely, a moment that should be *avoided* since it is, by definition, unequal and one-sided. Furthermore, it must be recalled that the master-slave dialectic emerges in the wake of the struggle for self-recognition, the “bloody wars” for the sake of pure self-affirmation. Perhaps then, the assumption that “the life and death struggle is a universal, necessary stage in the development of mutual recognition and freedom” (Williams: 380) is equally suspect. I would submit that, with every off-shoot of the self-other relationship, Hegel strives to show that self-certainty cannot be gained through acts of violence, exclusion and domination. Thus, he posits a consciousness that must learn this lesson, over and over again. With every dialectical movement, consciousness comes closer to learning this truth because it is demonstrated in increasingly concrete terms. From merely abstracting otherness, consciousness in the life and death struggle, that is, flesh and blood man, is confronted by another living man. The acts of negation are palpable, and, from an anthropocentric point of view, more devastating. We

move from attempts to annihilate the concept of otherness, to savaging nature and, in the incarnation of the life and death struggle, killing human beings. Since, for Hegel, the journey to Absolute Truth is progressively more concrete, there is an imperative to show the failings of this struggle for recognition. For the consciousness that partakes of this voyage of self-discovery, the life and death struggle cannot be *necessary*, since, by definition, this would imply that there is no other way to be.

Even Kojève would have to admit that the slave, i.e., the self-consciousness that makes the conscious decision not to satisfy his desire for desire, in other words, not to engage in the struggle for recognition, disproves the necessity of that struggle. In fact, towards the end of his text, Kojève (224-225) goes one step further:

[Mastery] and Slavery are not *given* or *innate* characteristics. ... Man is not born slave or free, but *creates* himself as one or the other through free and voluntary action. ... Mastery and Slavery have no “cause”; they are not “determined” by any *given*; they can not be “deduced” or foreseen from the past which preceded them: they result from a *free* Act (*Tat*).

In this regard, Kojève distinguishes between Aristotle’s assumption that man is necessarily either master or slave, a claim that we have seen Kojève himself makes, and Hegel’s version of this relationship, which is always off-set by the “dialecticity of human existence”. In the *Politics*, Aristotle distinguishes between “conventional” slaves, i.e., the “spoils” of war and “natural” slaves. A natural slave has many of the characteristics of the slave in Kojève’s master-slave dialectic. A natural slave is one whose body rules over his soul, he is ruled by his instincts or passions and not by reason and intellect. Aristotle (2000: 34) asserts: “For he who can be, and therefore is another’s ... is a slave by nature.” A master, on the other hand, can never be someone else’s possession – he rules because his mind rules. For Aristotle, the slave is an “instrument of action” (31), he is not merely a given possession but one who arranges the master’s world in a way that enables him to engage only in politics and philosophy. Unlike Aristotle, Kojève does not consider the slave’s work as degrading – in fact, as I will show, it is this very activity that will allow Kojève’s slave to overcome his subjugation, whereas Aristotle’s natural slave will always remain a slave.

At any rate, the fact that the slave in the master-slave dialectic decides not to fight for self-recognition indicates that the struggle *is* always a possibility. However, for Kojève, the struggle is not merely a possibility; it is the *essence* of man's being.<sup>27</sup>

Commentators tend to commend Kojève for highlighting the intersubjectivity at play in Hegel's text. I agree with Williams (366) that, for Kojève and his disciples, "the paradigm of intersubjectivity is conflict", with mutual force and domination the only form of "reciprocity" to mark the relationship between men. This is especially apparent in Kojève's depiction of the servile consciousness' rise to freedom. In my opinion, this aspect of Kojève's analysis, with its emphasis on the meaning of labour, is his most significant contribution to the French appropriation of Hegel.

#### **c.4) Fear, Service and Formative Activity**

When Hegel turns his discussion to the servile consciousness, he reminds us that, just like the master, the slave is also a self-consciousness. Initially, the slave has the master for his essential reality. The independent consciousness that is for-itself is for the slave the truth, but he does not find this truth of the master in himself. In himself, the slave is "submerged in animal life ... which for a self-consciousness is always being-other" (Hyppolite: 174). For him, the master has the truth of pure negativity because he did not retreat in the face of death. Hegel (117) continues:

[This servile] consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread. In that experience it has

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<sup>27</sup> Like Kojève, Hyppolite believes that human history is based on the life and death struggle for recognition, that the human world as such starts with the fight to prove to oneself and to everyone else that one is an independent self-consciousness. Hence, Hyppolite (169-170) suggests that all historical conflict is underpinned by the conflict for recognition, that it is essentially the human condition.

been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations.

The slave fears death – the “absolute master” (Kojève: 21, Hyppolite: 175) – and for this reason relinquishes the desire for self-recognition. He experiences his entire existence in anxiety; he is shaken in his core. Through death anxiety, argues Kojève (47-48), the slave “experienced the dread or the Terror (*Furcht*) of Nothingness, of his nothingness, ... [he] grasps the (human) Nothingness that is at the foundation of his (natural) Being”.<sup>28</sup>

The slave is “the man with the most exact awareness of the human situation” (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 68), he grasps better than the master what it means to be “man”. Thus, according to Kojève (47), his fear of death “conditions the slave’s *superiority* to the master.” On the surface, the slave’s fear of death signifies his dependence on the natural and, by implication, his dependence on the master who triumphs over physical life. In actuality, the slave comes to understand that man “is” not a givenness of the order of natural things, but a nothingness that negates or transforms the given. In the service of another, through work, the slave “becomes conscious of what he truly is” (Hegel: 118). Man “is” according to Kojève (38), “negating *Action*, which transforms given Being and, by transforming it, transforms itself”. In short, man “is” what he does.<sup>29</sup>

In this regard, Kojève (24 –25) asserts:

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<sup>28</sup> Williams (64, footnote 33) points out that Kojève deftly shows Hegel’s anticipation of Heidegger’s analysis of being-towards-death. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1978: 241) announces: “Dying is not an event; it is a phenomenon to be understood existentially”. Anxiety in the face of death is not the same thing as “fear in the face of one’s demise” (295); instead, it refers to a disposition that reveals that Dasein is “thrown” into the possibility of death, “the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein” (294). When Dasein is confronted with the potentiality of death, a possibility that, not only cannot be surpassed – it is certain, but also, is possible at any moment – he is faced with the fundamental question: Why is there anything at all, rather than nothing? Dasein suffers the crisis of his existence, the fact that his being is predicated on his not-being; but, in so doing, reaffirms himself as an “I”.

<sup>29</sup> See also Heidegger (1974: 283).

The man who wants to work – or who must work – must repress the instinct that drives him ‘to consume’ ‘immediately’ the ‘raw’ object. And the Slave can work for the Master – that is, for another than himself – only by repressing his own desires. Hence, he transcends himself by working – or, perhaps better, he educates himself, he ‘cultivates’ and ‘sublimates’ his instincts by repressing them. On the other hand, he does not destroy the thing as it is given. He postpones the destruction of the thing by first trans-forming it through work; he prepares it for consumption – that is to say, he ‘forms’ it. In his work, he trans-forms things and trans-forms himself at the same time: he forms things and the World by transforming himself, by educating himself; and he educates himself, he forms himself, by transforming things and the world.

The master does not work; he merely consumes the products of his slave’s forced labour. His “idle enjoyment” remains purely subjective inasmuch as it is derived from the “immediate” satisfaction of desire. In a sense, the master is consumed by his animal desire. Hegel (118) points out that the satisfaction achieved from the pure negation of the object is fleeting “for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence”: the independence of the object is not acknowledged; accordingly, the independence of the subject has not been confirmed.

Confirming Kojève’s interpretation up to a point, Hegel describes work as “desire held in check, fleetingness staved off”. Through his labour, by transforming and reshaping nature, whose independence he has affirmed, the slave gains recognition of his subjectivity directly from *aufgehobene* nature. Through his action, the slave cultivates nature – he creates culture, put differently, he humanises nature. In this process, his own humanity, recently degraded when he lost the fight for recognition, is elevated. The servile consciousness, argues Hegel (118), discovers its own independence – its being-for-self – in the independent being of the object, “and thereby becomes *for himself*, someone existing on his own account.” Hyppolite (176) points out that “not only does the slave shape himself by shaping things; he also imprints the form of self-consciousness on being ... in the product of his work, he finds himself.” Thus, the self-consciousness gained is not the abstract being-for-itself of the master, which is attained only by ridding the self of the external.

Regarding the slave’s being-for-self, Hegel (118) writes: “The shape does not become something other than himself through being made external to him; for it is precisely this shape that is his pure being-for-self.” In the labouring slave, Hegel posits a consciousness in which

being-for-itself and being-in-itself are reconciled. However, this reconciliation is at this stage an abstract thought, there is still a long road ahead before self-consciousness is actualised. Hegel (118-119) notes: “Through this rediscovery of himself by himself, the slave realises that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he requires a mind of his own.” Having a mind of one’s own does not correspond to actual freedom; it is “self-will, a freedom which is still enmeshed in servitude.” The master-slave dialectic, it must be remembered, is for Hegel an illustration of one-sided, therefore, illusory or incomplete recognition. The slave cannot will himself out of slavery, only reciprocal recognition can ensure his freedom.

To his credit, Kojève understands that the meaning Hegel attaches to servile labour stretches beyond a simple instrumental value, whereby, for instance, “raw materials” are manufactured for consumption, technological advances unlock the frontiers of old, and wealth gets accumulated. Work has intrinsic value insofar as the process itself, the “forming activity of work” (Kojève: 25), generates consciousness of the self. However, by interpreting the slave’s recovery of himself as the cue to “take up once more the liberating Fight for recognition that he refused in the beginning for fear of death” (29-30), the significance of the slave’s labour takes on the proportions that transform Hegel into a Marxist phenomenologist. Riley (1981: 17), Matthews (1996: 112) and Lynch (2001: 44) concur, the latter suggesting a correlation between Kojève’s emphasis on the master-slave struggle – an account that leads to a liberating revolution – and a Marxist commitment to a revolutionary social vision.

Permit me to cite the core of Kojève’s reasoning over several pages:

Through his work, therefore, the Slave comes to the same result to which the Master comes by risking his life in the Fight: he no longer depends on the given, natural conditions of existence; he modifies them, starting from the idea he has of himself. In becoming conscious of this fact, therefore, he becomes conscious of his freedom (*Freiheit*), his autonomy (*Selbständigkeit*). ... To be sure, in the Slave properly so-called, this notion of Freedom does not yet correspond to a true *reality*. He frees himself mentally only thanks to *forced* work, only because he is the Slave of a Master. ... However, the insufficiency of the Slave is at the same time his perfection: this is because he is not actually free, because he has an *idea* of Freedom, an idea that is *not* realised but that can be realised by the conscious and voluntary transformation of given existence, by

the active abolition of Slavery. ... Now, my freedom ceases to be a dream, an illusion, an abstract idea, only to the extent that it is universally recognised by those whom I consider as worthy of recognising it. And this is precisely what the Master can never obtain. ... On the other hand, if – at the start – the Slave’s freedom is recognised by no one but himself, if, consequently, it is purely *abstract*, it can end in being realised and in being *realised* in its *perfection*. For the Slave *recognises* the human reality and dignity of the Master. Therefore, it is sufficient for him to impose his liberty on the Master in order to attain the definitive Satisfaction that *mutual* Recognition gives and thus to stop the historical progress. Of course, to do this, he must fight against the Master ... A liberation without a bloody Fight, therefore, is metaphysically impossible.

(49-56)

For Kojève, work is synonymous with *Bildung*: not only does it form and transform the world to better serve man’s needs, but, additionally, it forms and transforms man to become fully human. Through his negating action, or, more precisely, his “revolutionary overcoming” (29) of nature (or the world, the thing, the object), the slave transforms nature and also his own nature. Thus, Kojève (51) infers: “Where there is Work, then, there is necessarily change, progress, historical evolution” and slavery “is the source of all human, social, historical progress” (20). The slave also “transforms the world in which it lives according to projects that cannot be explained by the given conditions of its real existence in this world” (226), for instance, he builds submarines and spacecraft, thus, through his projects, he actually *expands* his grasp upon his reality. The slave, driven initially by his animal desire for preservation, was enslaved by nature but, in the process of mastering nature through his labour, frees himself from (his) nature. While his labour does not release him from his concrete bondage, it does provide him with an identity – to be sure, the identity of a slave, but at least one that is generated through his *own* activity rather than a passive submission to the given.

In contrast to the slave’s burgeoning freedom, the master can never attain “the freedom that would raise him above the given world”, since he transcends this world “only in and by the risk of his life” (29). Put differently, only when he dies can the master be free. In idle enjoyment of the fruits of the slave’s labour, the master does not evolve beyond the point of the abstraction  $I = I$ . Indeed, Kojève (248) goes so far as to describe the master’s existence as a “deferred death” on account of his indolence. By not acknowledging his mortality in the fight, by not looking death in the eye, the master exists only in a biological sense. His

inactivity amounts to a living death. Death is the end of potential; thus, the master lives as a “given”. Insofar as man’s freedom is the “actual *negation* by him of his own given ‘nature’” (Kojève: 250), the master, who seemed to have realised “his freedom by surmounting his instinct to live in the Fight” (49) is actually unfree. This second definition of freedom posited by Kojève – the first having been analysed as the liberation from otherness – is clearly a nod to Heidegger. In this regard, Kojève (247) writes: “Therefore Death and Freedom are but two (‘phenomenological’) aspects of one and the same thing, so that to say ‘mortal’ is to say ‘free’, and inversely.” In both instances freedom is associated with negation: negating self-externality in the first instance and givenness in the second; indeed, Kojève (222) insists: “Freedom can *be* and *exist* only as negation.”

Only the slave has the opportunity to actualise freedom in the given world. The condition for attaining this “perfect freedom”, according to Kojève, is to re-enter the struggle for recognition!

The slave already acknowledges the master, but this recognition must be reciprocated. In another revealing passage Kojève (21) writes: “In order that mutual and reciprocal recognition, which alone can fully and definitively realise and satisfy man, be established, it suffices for the Slave to impose himself on the Master and be recognised by him.” It may seem that Kojève, who had hitherto omitted the significance that reciprocity holds for Hegel’s account of the process of recognition, here acknowledges that importance. However, the basis of Hegel’s call for reciprocity is for both parties to renounce the domination and oppression of the other. According to Kojève, reciprocity is achieved when the slave “imposes himself” on the master – one may add – “just as the master had done to the slave” (Lynch 2000: 44).

Thus, Kojève is clearly not referring to reciprocal recognition, but merely to a recycling of the power relation, with the roles between master and slave now reversed, since the slave, in Kojève’s (23) own words, “rules – or, at least will one day rule –as absolute Master”. Given Kojève’s previous dismissal of mastery as self-subverting, the “victory” of the slave will once again result in the incomplete and illusory self-consciousness of the oppressing and

dominating master.<sup>30</sup> Hence, the conquering slave will not actually have made any progress and, more fundamentally; otherness, difference, is reduced to sameness.

Let us review now what Kojève's reading of the first part of *Phenomenology of Spirit* means *vis-à-vis* the "French Hegel". Firstly, Kojève has no interest in interpreting *Phenomenology of Spirit* as an introduction to the system of philosophy that Hegel will explicate in his later texts.<sup>31</sup> Since, for him, the theme of the struggle for recognition with a concomitant emphasis on the master-slave dialectic is central, it is as anthropology that Kojève appropriates *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Secondly, Kojève omits the first dialectical movement in which the subject learns the futility of positing itself to the exclusion of everything else. He shows his impatience to get the story of the struggle for domination underway by immediately introducing the theme of desire. In the process, he loses sight of the extent to which Hegel describes a journey that begins with the "natural solipsism of the self" and progressively becomes "a story of *self-overcoming*" (Williams 1997: 47-50). With *desire* as his starting point, Kojève narrates a story of *otherness-overcoming*.

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<sup>30</sup> Reminiscent of Foucault, Williams (62) makes the very interesting point that while the master-slave dialectic signifies "a cultural development away from sheer savagery and violence ... it also institutionalises violence." Violence, writes Williams, is *aufgehoben* inasmuch as it is not completely overcome but preserved in the inequality of the recognition between master and slave. Williams' use of the term *aufgehoben* is in my opinion a perversion of Hegel. What Williams is describing is a violence sustained through becoming more insidious, less overt. For Hegel, the moment of *aufheben* is preceded by an acknowledgment of the shortcomings of the previous movement, so, the life and death struggle is *aufgehoben* when the mutually essential being of life (the other) and freedom (self-consciousness) is recognised – when violence is renounced.

<sup>31</sup> None of the commentators of *Phenomenology of Spirit* whom I have encountered, including Jean Hyppolite, reads it as an introduction to *The Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. At most, they (e.g. Hyppolite: 3-4 and Solomon: 238) consider only Hegel's *Preface* to serve this function.

Thirdly, Kojève's analysis holds interest insofar as it postulates the enduring notion that we attach our identities and worth to our work. In *Part 3* I return to this topic.

Lastly, Kojève glosses over the significance of desire as a *double movement*; hence, his reading disregards the central motif of reciprocity in Hegel's text. Another famous scholar of Hegel, Frantz Fanon (1970: 154), notes: "At the foundation of Hegelian dialectic there is an absolute reciprocity which must be emphasised ... [because if] I close the circuit, if I prevent the accomplishment of movement in two directions, I keep the other within himself." Thus, Fanon understands that Hegel advocates the respect and safeguarding of difference. At the start of his analysis, Kojève puts the subject in the context of the social, which could be read by us as a portrayal of Hegel as an antidote to Cartesianism. However, the society envisioned by Kojève is one in which "each person's own sense of identity, is founded upon domination and submission; and one's best hope – itself a tragic one – is to rise through work to the position of mastery" (Lynch: 45). In this regard, I am left with the impression that Kojève himself never really leaves the Cartesian-Kantian paradigm of the Subject, and, by implication, Hegel is received as simply continuing the tradition of German idealism.

Next, I turn to Jean Hyppolite for a brief reflection on the aftermath of the master-slave dialectic. I have suggested that, despite its reputation for being as impartial a rendering of Hegel as was available to French scholars of the 1940s and 1950s, Hyppolite's *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* resembles Kojève's analysis in significant ways.<sup>32</sup> Hyppolite's treatment of "unhappy consciousness" as the fundamental theme of *Phenomenology of Spirit* offers further evidence of his adherence to the conventional interpretation of Hegel.

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<sup>32</sup> See also Heckman (in Hyppolite 1964: xxxvi).

## d) Hyppolite and the Unhappy Consciousness

Recall that, for servile consciousness, the master's consciousness represents the essential, which means that the slave considers being-for-itself to be external to him. What he will discover is his self-consciousness through formative activity. Put differently, the form that he imprints on independent objects is his own essential being-for-itself. Moreover, his self-consciousness is a being-for-itself-in-itself: "self-consciousness and being-in-itself are not separate" (Hyppolite 180). The master tried vainly to posit a "pure I" through the exclusion by itself of the being of life. Since it made living consciousness the absolute other, its own unmediated self-consciousness was only an abstraction. The "I" of servile consciousness is, for itself, an object precisely because the object of the slave's formative activity – the being of life – is not "an absolute other, but is itself" (180). The slave succeeds where the master has failed insofar as he is a subject who is for himself an object, he is the "immediate unity" (Hegel: 120) of being and consciousness.

When the master-slave dialectic is resolved, self-consciousness takes on "a new shape, a consciousness which ... is aware of itself as essential being, a being which *thinks* or is a free-self-consciousness" (Hegel: 120). Thought indicates freedom. Hegel (120) explains: "In thinking, I *am free*, because I am not in an *other*, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself, and the object, which is for me the *essential* being, is in undivided unity my being-for-myself; and my activity in conceptual thinking is a movement within myself." This phase of consciousness is Stoicism.

Stoicism is based on the assumption that "consciousness is a being that *thinks*, and that consciousness holds something to be essentially important, or true and good only in so far as it *thinks* it to be such" (Hegel: 121). Freedom is not an action; it is a disposition, a state of mind.<sup>33</sup> Otherness disappears, for it is merely what is postulated by thought and, as the thought of consciousness-for-itself-in-itself, not distinct from the self. For the Stoic, freedom is to be rid of difference: "to maintain that lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence," regardless of "whether on the throne or in chains" (121). Since

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<sup>33</sup> See Hyppolite (182) for an elaboration on the effects of the Stoic position.

the freedom of self-consciousness is indifferent to concrete existence, it actually affirms, rather than negates, the independence of existence; consequently, it “has only *pure thought* as its truth, a truth lacking in the fullness of life”. Stoicism is nothing more than the “Notion of freedom, not the living reality of freedom itself” (122).

Hegel (123) continues: “*Scepticism* is the realisation of that of which Stoicism was only the Notion, and is the actual experience of what the freedom of thought is.” Scepticism “causes to vanish ... not only objective reality as such, but its own relationship to it” and, through this absolute negation of all otherness, “procures for its own self the certainty of its freedom” (124). In previous phases, the movement of dialectic “appears to consciousness as something which it has at its mercy” – a movement external to consciousness. However, in scepticism, “consciousness itself is the dialectical unrest” (124): consciousness itself will annihilate the objective other. Hyppolite (187) concludes: “Thus nothing subsists except absolute self-certainty.” However, self-certainty comes from the negation of the other; thus, sceptical consciousness is in fact bound to otherness: “It lets the unessential content in its thinking vanish; but just in doing so it is the consciousness of something unessential” (Hegel: 125). Sceptical consciousness is a dual consciousness. As such, it oscillates between, on the one hand, suspending the world and transcending all the forms of being that it constitutes, and, on the other, being “caught in this world of which it is only a contingent fragment” (Hyppolite: 189). Sceptical consciousness “keeps the poles of its self-contradiction apart” (Hegel (125).

Then again, as Russon (2004: 115) notes, Hegel generally does not allow for any dualism to be left unreconciled; thus, “scepticism’s lack of thought about itself must vanish because it is in fact *one* consciousness which contains within itself two modes” (Hegel: 126). From sceptical consciousness emerges a consciousness, one that “*knows* it is the dual consciousness of itself, as self-liberating, unchangeable, and self-identical, and as self-bewildering and self-perverting, and it is the awareness of this self-contradictory nature of itself” (126). This new consciousness of the self as a duality is “unhappy, inwardly disrupted consciousness”.

Hegel (126) continues: “The Unhappy Consciousness itself *is* the gazing of one self-consciousness into another, and itself *is* both, and the unity of both is also its essential nature ... [but] it is not as yet explicitly aware that this is its essential nature, or that it is the unity of

both.” Since unhappy consciousness has not yet reflected on itself as the unity of self and other, Hegel (126-127) refers to this movement as only the “immediate unity of the two”. As such, unhappy consciousness views the self and other posited by sceptical consciousness only as opposites that are alien to one another, to wit, the “simple Unchangeable”; or, as Hyppolite (204) translates, “an immutable, a universal, which, by definition, lacks nothing and is both in-itself and for-itself”, which it considers to be essential, and the “protean Changeable”, a merely particular individual, that it takes to be “unessential”. Hegel (127) submits that, since unhappy consciousness “is itself the consciousness of this contradiction, it identifies itself with the changeable consciousness, and takes itself to be the unessential Being.” However, since unhappy consciousness is also consciousness of unchangeableness, “it must at the same time set about freeing itself from the unessential, i.e. from itself” (127).

Neither unchangeable consciousness, nor changeable consciousness, can posit themselves without the other. What we discover in this movement is that the being of changeable consciousness, the particular individual, is entrenched in universal being, but, equally, universality is encoded in the particular individual. Hegel (128) suggests that “first, the Unchangeable is opposed to individuality in general; then, being itself an individual, it is opposed to another individual; and finally, it is one with it.” Through the movement of the unhappy consciousness, we, once again, catch a glimpse of Spirit, here defined as the *universal individual*. For Hegel (128), the union of the particular with the universal, that is, consciousness’ discovery that “I” is also “we” is a joyful moment, rather than a disquieting identity crisis.

By contrast, Hyppolite (196) describes the meeting between self-consciousnesses as “the most disturbing fact of existence.” For Hyppolite (190), consciousness “is in principle always unhappy consciousness” and a “happy consciousness” is more likely “a naïve consciousness which is not yet aware of its misfortune”. Effectively, Hyppolite suggests that, rather than being an *aufgehobene* self, consciousness as being-for-itself-in-itself is always naïve consciousness, which implies that consciousness never overcomes its solipsism. If he seems to appreciate that, for Hegel, “otherness does not disappear” (168), he considers this only as the “misfortune of consciousness” (194).

According to Hyppolite (204-205), critics “generally prefer what Hegel calls ‘unhappy consciousness’ to what he calls ‘spirit.’” Notwithstanding his insistence that his own commentary will only elucidate, and not evaluate, Hegel’s position, Hyppolite leans towards a reading in which the attainment of Spirit, “the union of unity and duality” (196) is not only deferred, but should, in fact, be avoided. He privileges “unhappy consciousness” over Spirit because such an interpretation of *Phenomenology of Spirit* complements his vision of Hegel as an “existentialist”. In *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, Hyppolite (1969: 23-24) proposes:

What interests us is to reveal in Hegel, as we find him in his early works and in the *Phenomenology*, a philosopher much closer to Kierkegaard than might seem credible. ... We shall ignore the fact that the *Phenomenology*, which describes the itinerary of consciousness, or the cultural adventure of human consciousness in search of a final concord and reconciliation, culminates in Absolute Knowledge, that is to say, in a system which transcends diverse world visions. Instead we shall inquire whether there is not in this work a conception of existence which is kin to certain contemporary existentialist notions. The *Phenomenology* possesses such a wealth, and often such an obscurity, that we must confine ourselves to choosing certain aspects which illustrate in a special way what one could already describe as a concept of existence. In the final paragraph of his analysis of self-consciousness Hegel writes: “Consciousness of life, of its existence and action, is merely pain and sorrow over this existence and activity.” The consciousness of himself that man realises, and which as we shall show, is consciousness of life too, results in the unhappy consciousness.

There is an internal contradiction in Hyppolite’s reading of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. On the one hand, he praises Hegel for portraying the movements of consciousness and self-consciousness separately, thus, underscoring the importance of being-with-the other. On the other hand, he tacitly criticises Hegel for the attempt to reconcile the self and other. Thus, in a 1946 lecture, Hyppolite (cited by Kruks 1981: 26-27) declares that “in spite of the ‘existentialism’ of its early chapters, Hegel’s *Phenomenology* finally ended up by subordinating individual existence to the Universal, in the form of the march of history towards Absolute Knowledge.” It is disingenuous to berate Hegel for not remaining “existentialist” when he has been appropriated by Hyppolite to fit into the mould of “existentialism”. Hyppolite’s fidelity to “certain contemporary existentialist notions” includes an emphasis on duality and separation, disquiet and the hostility that marks consciousness’ relationship with others. In short, his commentary is firmly entrenched in the conventional interpretation of Hegel.

The lingering Cartesianism suggested by his and Kojève's analyses is explicitly endorsed by Jean-Paul Sartre, in his assessment of Hegel, his postulation of freedom and his depiction of self-other relationships in *Being and Nothingness*. It is to these themes that I now turn.

### e) **The Cartesian ghost in Sartre's ontology**

In my opinion, Riley (1981: 20-21) correctly argues that Sartre's text "was more the attempt of Cartesian rationalism to defend itself in the face of the dissolution of the individual subject into historical social being". Sartre's account of self-consciousness does not form the bridge to the social being, which Riley finds in Kojève's account of the development of self-consciousness. To be sure, we have seen how Kojève, at the start of his analysis, ties the struggle for recognition to the social; however, I have suggested a latent Cartesianism in Kojève's appropriation of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hence, the following section will show the important ways in which the Kojèvean and Sartrean accounts of Hegel *converge*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Tellingly, Sartre had not actually read *Phenomenology of Spirit*, so he would have had to rely on second-hand analyses on which he based his rejection of Hegel. In an interview, Sartre (quoted in Williams 1997: 373, footnote 31) confirms that he became acquainted with Hegel's thought "through seminars and lectures, but [he] didn't study him until much later, around 1945". Presumably, these lectures would include those of Kojève, which I have shown is the assumption of most commentators on French phenomenology. In *History and the Dialectic of Violence: an analysis of Sartre's Critique de la raison dialectique* (1975), Raymond Aron, who famously introduced Sartre to the central ideas of Husserlian phenomenology, insists that Sartre never attended Kojève's classes. (Aron 1975: iv) In keeping with the conventional interpretation of *Being and Nothingness*, Aron (1969: 9) notes: "Sartre, in spite of everything, never transcended the Cartesian duality as reinterpreted by Husserl." While I agree with his assessment of Sartre, I disagree with Aron's insinuation that Kojève overcomes Cartesianism.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (1956: 26) sharply opposes “two regions of being that are without communication”; to wit, *l'être-en-soi*, or being-in-itself, which is the being of phenomena or the object, thing or world and *l'être-pour-soi*, or being-for-itself, which is self-consciousness or “human reality” – his translation of *Dasein*.

Being-in-itself is “uncreated”, “neither passivity nor activity”, “equally beyond negation as beyond affirmation”, “an immanence which cannot realise itself” (27), contingent, opaque, “has no *within* which is opposed to a *without* and which is analogous to a judgment, a law, a consciousness of itself”, “solid”, “the synthesis of itself with itself” (28), “superfluous” (*de trop*), “full positivity”, it “knows no otherness” and “it is what it is” (29). Sartre’s being-in-itself, is non-conscious being, in other words, it is a realm in which the subject is entirely absorbed in the world of phenomena without having a sense of self.

Contrastingly, being-for-itself is “empty distance”, “fissure” (125), “supported and conditioned by transcendence” (50), which is “the pro-ject of self beyond” (52), it “does not coincide with itself in full equivalence” (120), in other words, the “being” of consciousness is always in question, “it is a decompression of being” (121), a “nothingness” that “*is not*”, it is “*made to be*” (125), a nothingness that is a “hole in being” (126), an expanding de-structuring of the in-itself” (133), “perpetually determining itself *not to be* the in-itself” (134), “it exists as the disengagement from a certain existing given and as an engagement toward a certain not yet existing end” (615). The “for-itself must perpetually constitute itself as in withdrawal in relation to itself; that is, it must leave itself behind as a *datum* which it no longer is” so it “finds *no help, no pillar of support* in what it was” and, thus, it is “free and can cause there to be a world because the for-itself is the being *which has to be what it was in the light of what it will be*” (616). In arguably one of the most famous lines of his text, Sartre (100) describes human reality as “a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Incidentally, Hyppolite (1974: 150) gives a verbatim description of the existent, although he does not credit Sartre, whose text was published three years before *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Like Kojève, he describes man, or more precisely, the existent, as negating activity, a lack, which reveals self-consciousness' "being" as becoming, or, used more often by Sartre, transcendence. Furthermore, like Kojève, Sartre assumes that consciousness already implies self-consciousness; thus, self-consciousness is not based on a mutually dependent relationship with the world.<sup>36</sup> However, unlike Kojève, Sartre is forthright about his Cartesianism: he postulates that "the only point of departure possible is the Cartesian cogito" (338), or, more specifically, "the interiority of the cogito" (329). Taking his cue from Descartes, for whom certainty is situated in the ego and the self "becomes the hub of reality" (Steiner 1987: 36), he demonstrates how little his account of self-recognition has in common with that of Hegel.

Sartre (327-328) contends

According to Hegel the Other is an object, and I apprehend myself as an object in the Other. But one of these affirmations destroys the other. In order for me to be able to appear to myself as an object in the Other, I would have to apprehend the Other as

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<sup>36</sup> Although Sartre in his later writings is considered to be more explicitly materialist (Moran 2000: 357), from certain segments in *Being and Nothingness*, for example, "consciousness is its own foundation" (Sartre: 130) and "[the] existence of consciousness comes from consciousness itself" (18), one gathers that he is describing a self-positing consciousness. Certainly, his critique of Hegel gives credence to such a reading of Sartre's notion of self-consciousness. Yet, Sartre (408) also argues that "the for-itself is not its own foundation." As we have seen, he says of the in-itself and for-itself that they are "two regions without communication". At the same time, Sartre (405) notes: "We know that there is not a for-itself on the one hand and a world on the other as two closed entities for which we must subsequently seek some explanation as to how they communicate." Moran (387) infers: "Sartre has a peculiar and entirely unexplained view of self-creating consciousness emerging at the heart of a brute being" and any attempt to find in his work a resolution of this contradiction will succeed only in "multiplying the assertions – one will not find an argument." Thus, the problem is the Cartesian dilemma of having to connect the notion of a self-positing consciousness with its location in a body. Sartre's former teacher, Jean Wahl (1969: 44), views this problem as such: If he gives primacy to the in-itself and maintains that the for-itself is merely a sort of gap in the in-itself, Sartre would be committing himself to realism. If he prioritises the for-itself, he would be embracing idealism. Of course there is the possibility that what is being interpreted as "contradictory" could point to the "ambiguity" of human existence, but, in my opinion, this would be an over-estimation of *Being and Nothingness*.

subject; that is, to apprehend him in his interiority. But in so far as the Other appears to me as object, my objectivity for him can not appear to me.

His analysis is based on the assumption that subjectivity = interiority, i.e., my subjectivity is unmediated. Indeed, Sartre (366) writes that “I am my own mediator between Me and Me, all objectivity disappears.” Hence, “the problem of the Other is a false problem” (330) and “between the Other-as-object and Me-as-subject there is no common measure, no more than between self-consciousness and consciousness *of* the Other” (328). It seems that, not only is there no interdependent relationship between the subject and the world, but, moreover, a relationship between self-consciousnesses is inherently impossible.

Sartre’s (321-323) rejection of the mutually mediated self and other in *Phenomenology of Spirit* is worth noting:

Hegel’s brilliant intuition is to make me depend on the Other *in my being*. I am, [Hegel] said, a being for-itself which is for-itself only through another. Therefore the Other penetrates me to the heart. I cannot doubt him without doubting myself ... [thus] solipsism seems to be put out of the picture once and for all. ... Yet in spite of the wide scope of this solution, in spite of the richness and profundity of the detailed insights with which the theory of the Master and Slave is filled to overflowing, can we be satisfied with it? To be sure, Hegel has posed the question of the being of consciousnesses. It is being-for-itself and being-for-others which he is studying ... [Nevertheless] it is certain that this ontological problem remains everywhere formulated in terms of knowledge. The mainspring of the conflict of consciousnesses is the effort of each one to transform his self-certitude into *truth*. And we know that this truth can be attained only in so far as my consciousness becomes an *object* for the Other at the same time as the Other becomes an *object* for my consciousness. ... [However] there is a *truth* of consciousness which does not depend on the Other; rather the very *being* of consciousness, since it is independent of knowledge, pre-exists its truth.

For Sartre, knowledge is a substance. Recall that, in Hegel’s account, knowledge of the True is *both* substance and subject. Given that Absolute Knowledge is self-knowledge, and that the self remains unconfirmed outside the meeting with the other, “the truth” of the individual’s existence is wrapped up in his relationships with others. Sartre assumes that the *being* of consciousness can be reached through some kind of transcendental reflection: since the existent is distinguished from the phenomenal world by the very fact that *he* asks the

*Seinsfrage*, “the truth” of his existence is already confirmed. Put differently, *I think, therefore, I am.*

Sartre (324) continues his dismissal of Hegel’s call for intersubjectivity with the offhand remark: “Here as everywhere we ought to oppose to Hegel Kierkegaard, who represents the claims of the individual as such.”<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, he does introduce into subjectivity “the deepest intersubjective structure of the *mit-sein*” (92) that “presupposes my existence, the existence of the *Other*, my existence *for* the Other, and the existence of the Other *for* me” (88). Moreover, he writes that this consciousness of being an object “can be produced only in and through the existence of the Other”; thus, “Hegel was right” (363). Yet, Sartre dismisses the notion of a being for-itself which is for-itself only through another. Instead, he contends that “we encounter the Other, we do not constitute him” (336); thus, Hegel was wrong. However, Sartre (376) concedes that “human-reality must of necessity be simultaneously for-itself and for-others” but does not seek to explicate the implications of this since his “present investigation does not aim at constituting an anthropology.”

Heidegger, too, was wrong: the foundation of the relations between consciousnesses is not the *Mitsein*, it is conflict. (475; 555) The source of this conflict is Sartre’s (401-404) distinction between two “incommunicable levels of being”, to wit, “my body for-me” and my “body for-others”. For Sartre, the “object which the Other is for me and this object which I am for him are manifested each *as a body*” (399). There is no link between what the subject’s body is for himself (consciousness) and what it is for the Other (objectivity). Sartre (403) submits: “Of course, the discovery of my body as an object is indeed a revelation of its being ... [but] the being which is thus revealed to me is its *being-for-others*.” According to this perspective, my “being-for-others” is the equivalent of “me-as-object”. I cannot be an object for myself because “the object is that which is not my consciousness” (365). Even if I attempted to make myself an object, “I would already be myself at the heart of that object which I am; and at the very centre of that object I should have to be the subject who is looking at it” (326).

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<sup>37</sup> Sartre is over-stating his allegiance to Kierkegaard. In total, there are only four cursory references made to Kierkegaard and these, it seems, come from reading Jean Wahl’s account of Kierkegaard (see, for example, Sartre: 65, footnote 18).

While I can on principle not be an object for myself (345), I am an object for the Other, that is, “the being *through whom* I gain my objectness” (361). Specifically, the “I” is an object by virtue of the Other’s “look”: “If someone looks at me, I am conscious of *being* an object” (363). The world is *my* world, everything exists for me, until an other appears, and by virtue of seeing what I see, he has “stolen the world from me” (343) and made it “alien to me” (350). Moreover, my *being-seen-by-another* is the alienation of myself, since the apprehension of myself as *seen* is “to apprehend myself as seen *in the world* and from the standpoint of the world” (353). I am alienated from my possibilities and cast into the “in-itself”, into “thisness”: “for the Other I have stripped myself of transcendence” (352). Put differently, the other is the “death of my possibilities” (354).

From the point of having his being “outside”, the being-for-others feels shame. “Shame”, writes Sartre (384), “is the feeling of an *original fall*, not because of the fact that I may have committed this or that particular fault, but simply that I have “fallen” into the world<sup>38</sup> in the midst of things and that I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am.” For Sartre (358), “my defenceless being for [another’s] freedom” is what is meant by slavery. I am enslaved, not on the basis of some historical event, but inasmuch as “my being is dependent at the centre of a freedom which is not mine and which is the very condition of my being.”

Thus, contrary to Hegel’s appeal to intersubjectivity as a precondition for freedom, Sartre offers a view of intersubjectivity as the cause of slavery. Sartre (475) argues that this slavery “by no means [suggests that we are] dealing with unilateral relations with an object-in-itself, but with reciprocal and moving relations.” Just as the other attempts to enslave me, I seek to enslave him: “conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others”. As we saw with Kojève, Sartre equates intersubjectivity with conflict and domination and reciprocity with reactionary violence.

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<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, “human-reality” is at bottom not “worldly”: self-consciousness resides in the for-itself and being-for-others “is not an ontological structure of the For-itself” (Sartre: 376).

Sartre's concept of *freedom* is also derived from Descartes.<sup>39</sup> According to Sartre (567, 623), I am "condemned to be free", my freedom is absolute. Thus, I "can not be sometimes slave and sometimes free" (569); "I am absolutely responsible for my situation" (653) and "even torture does not dispossess us of our freedom; when we give in, we do so *freely*" (672). The implication is, as Moran (2000: 358) correctly infers, that freedom "resides in the intellect"; that freedom is "a stance of consciousness, in fact the fundamental stance". Freedom is associated with the for-itself. Sartre (658) argues that "the being which is what it is [in other words, being-in-itself] can not be free," thus, "freedom is not a being; it is *the* being of man" (569). From this, Sartre (571) submits the "false choice" (Merleau-Ponty: 1964: 72) that "either man is wholly determined (which is inadmissible, especially because a determined consciousness, i.e., a consciousness externally motivated – becomes itself pure exteriority and ceases to be consciousness) or else man is wholly free."

Sartre's underlying idealism reveals itself in his lack of concern for what he calls "the empirical and popular concept of 'freedom' which has been produced by historical, political, and moral circumstances" (621-622). To be sure, Sartre (619-707) identifies the relationship between freedom and "situation". He may concede that human beings are always *situated*; nonetheless, Sartre does not take seriously the limits that one's situation or facticity places on one's freedom.<sup>40</sup> Thus, he argues that success, in other words, "to obtain what one wishes", is

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<sup>39</sup> In *Existentialism and Humanism*, the text that was supposed to expand on the topic of ethics, to which Sartre alludes towards the end of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (1966: 44) proclaims his *sine qua non*; to wit: "Our point of departure is, indeed, the subjectivity of the individual, and that for strictly philosophic reasons ... we seek to base our teaching upon the truth, and not upon a collection of fine theories, full of hope but lacking real foundations. And at the point of departure there cannot be any other truth than this, I think, therefore I am, which is the absolute truth of consciousness as it attains to itself." Dermot Moran (2000: 358) observes: "For Sartre, Descartes had claimed that no one can do my thinking for me: 'In the end we must say yes or no and decide alone, for the entire universe, on what is true'. Sartre agrees with Descartes' optimistic view that humans make themselves through their use of what they have been given, and most humans possess more or less the same abilities."

<sup>40</sup> A number of more recent publications offer more sympathetic interpretations of Sartre's text; for example, Chris Falzon (2003: 132) points to a "double movement" in Sartre's thought; to wit: "the attempt to locate human freedom, to make it more concrete, embodied, and situated, and at the same

not important to freedom. (621) Instead, he emphasises the *autonomy* of choice, i.e., self-determination. Yet again we observe the appeal to a self-positing consciousness. Once more, we are confronted with the heroic, entirely self-reliant individual who transcends his concrete existence, including his relationships with others, in order to become “truly” himself.

I have shown that, for Hegel, intersubjectivity is a precondition for freedom. Hegel links intersubjectivity to mutuality and reciprocity – to a generosity of spirit – among individuals vying for self-recognition. *Generosity* signifies a mutual release of the other, in other words, “letting the other be” by not imposing the self onto the other. Both selves decide to cease their domination over one another. Thus, Hegel connects freedom to the reciprocal giving back and receiving of one another. Freedom is described, not in terms of conflict but, rather, as the renunciation of violence.

An important implication of this notion of freedom as an act of generosity is that the other is not a threat to my freedom; on the contrary, freedom is dependent on an affirmation of otherness. Put differently, if freedom equals identity and otherness equals difference, identity is not degraded or threatened by difference, on the contrary, difference is the *precondition* for identity. I can only be free if the other is free, that is to say, if the other remains *other*. Judith Butler (in Salih and Butler 2004: 48) argues that the notion of difference as it is encountered by the Hegelian subject “is misunderstood ... as contained within or by the subject”, that difference is not resolved into identity, i.e., the subject does not assimilate the other’s otherness. It is certainly possible to argue that the independence of the other, which Hegel insists upon at the resolution of every dialectical turn, serves as a bulwark against assimilation. Recall that the fight to the death of the other is the self’s attempt to rid himself of otherness, so that he can once again be self-equal, unmediated and independent. Crucially, however, if the self releases the other, that other “is affirmed, not simply in its identity, but also in its difference” (Williams: 56). Generosity – the safeguarding of otherness – opens up the opportunity for friendship between subjects.<sup>41</sup>

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time a reduction of situation to a function of freedom in order to preserve the latter’s absoluteness.” Nevertheless, Falzon concludes that, in Sartre’s account, *situation* becomes subordinated by freedom.

<sup>41</sup> However, as I show during the course of *Part 3*: “Despite taking difference seriously, Hegel views human progress in general and the development of rational subjectivity in particular, as an overcoming

Consider, by contrast, Sartre's perspective on generosity, as recounted by Merleau-Ponty (1964: 74):

The very decision to respect the other smacks of selfishness, for it is still my generosity to which the other owes my recognition of him and about which I am self-satisfied. "To give is to obligate."

For Sartre, then, generosity is merely veiled self-interest. Like Kojève and Hyppolite, Sartre portrays the world as a hostile environment that threatens to usurp the subject's existence or freedom. Consequently, the exponents of early French phenomenology lose sight of the possibility of friendship in Hegel's account of the relationship between the self and the other.

Now, following a line of reasoning that Nietzsche employs in his re-evaluation of *mercy*,<sup>42</sup> one could ask if generosity, defined by Hegel as the overcoming of domination, remains the privilege of the most dominant. Let us take into account that Hegel describes the release of the other as a *double* movement, so the self and other are *equals* insofar as they need each other equally to freely recognise them as individuals. When both parties deny their equal and essential need for each other, they engage in the life and death struggle; when only one party denies this need he becomes the deluded and self-subverting master. What Hegel does not seem to take into account with his insistence on a double movement is a scenario where the self-other relationship is from the outset unequal, where there exists a prior asymmetrical power relationship. This shortcoming in Hegel's analysis of self-other relationships will become one of the central problems discussed in *Part 3*.

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of differences" (Diprose 1994: 38-39). The Absolute is a universal subject, in other words, an identity without difference. Diprose (41) elaborates: "Beneath differences there is a deeper identity, the ground or the unity of identity and difference, towards which the dialectic proceeds ... [but] what will be exposed is that the unity of identity and difference is impossible. Within Hegel's own terms there will always be an excess operating which mitigates against unity and sameness." The concept of *excess* will be one of the central themes of *Part 3*.

<sup>42</sup> See Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (1989), particularly page 73).

## Summary

One of the defining features of early French phenomenology is a resurgence of interest in the earlier texts of GWF Hegel, principally, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Both architects of this movement, Kojève and Hyppolite, underscore the importance of intersubjectivity in Hegel's text. However, at the heart of their respective analyses of the dialectical movements that lead up to Absolute Spirit, together with the analyses of some of their famous students, like Sartre, is a belief in the inevitable, even necessary, violence of intersubjectivity. The emphasis on conflict aids Kojève in the justification of his Marxist agenda; Sartre in his defence of Cartesian rationalism and Hyppolite in his privileging of the movement of unhappy consciousness over the dialectic of universal individuality.

While Hegel shows that conflict is always a risk in the struggle for recognition, with enslavement and even death the possible outcomes of such violence, his appeal to reciprocal recognition and generosity opens up the possibility of friendship between subjects. Hegel's call for reciprocity must not be confused with the reactionary violence that Kojève describes in his account of the first meeting between two consciousnesses. Retaliation indicates the action of a single consciousness, rather than the double movement between consciousnesses that Hegel depicts. For Hegel, reciprocity refers to a *mutual* respect for and safeguarding of the other's otherness. By overlooking the importance of mutuality in Hegel's account, early French phenomenology has the tendency to view self-other relationships from the point of view of the solitary individual, which reinforces the conventional estimation of Hegel as a disciple of German idealism.

### Part 3 “Simone de Beauvoir’s Hegel”

Thus, I’m living not exactly cocooned in philosophical optimism – for my ideas aren’t clear enough – but at least on a philosophical plane such that optimism is possible. I so wish we could make a comparison between your ideas on nothingness, the in-itself, and the for-itself, and the ideas of Hegel. For there are many analogies – although Hegel turns into joy that which for you is instead gloomy and despairing. It seems to me that both are true, and I’d like to find a point of equilibrium.

Beauvoir (1991: 335-336)<sup>1</sup>

I have described how this book was first conceived: almost by chance. Wanting to talk about myself, I became aware that to do so I should first have to describe the condition of woman in general; first I considered the myths that men have forged about her through all their cosmologies, religions, superstitions, ideologies and literature.

Beauvoir (1968: 195)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This extract from a letter to Sartre, dated 19 July 1940, provides some important clues regarding Beauvoir’s critical engagement with Hegel at the birth of French phenomenology. Certainly, *The Second Sex* (1997) can be read as an attempt to reconcile Hegel’s distinction between consciousness and self-consciousness with Sartre’s distinction between *l’être-en-soi* and *l’être-pour-soi*. However, part of the problem of such reconciliation is already revealed in Beauvoir’s letter. The “philosophical optimism” to which she refers corresponds to what Sartre rejects as Hegel’s “epistemological optimism” in favour of an unmediated self-consciousness. In addition, it will become clear that Beauvoir neither retains Sartre’s meaning of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, nor does she maintain the distinction consistently; indeed, at various points in her text she suspends it. Finally, the themes of joy and friendship, which Beauvoir finds in Hegel’s philosophy, not only reverberate through *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) and *The Second Sex*, but will be crucial to our understanding of her departure from the approach to self-other relationships advanced by early French phenomenology.

<sup>2</sup> See Tidd (2004: 49-50) for an overview of the oppressive situation of women in France until the 1970s and Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 11-22) for details regarding the status of French women during the inter-war years. In her memoirs, Beauvoir (e.g. 1963: 291 and 1968: 199) points out that her status as a woman made her an anomaly in the world of writers, while her status as a writer made her an

## a) Spectres of Hegel in Beauvoir's moral period

In *The Prime of Life*, Simone de Beauvoir (1963: 359-369) recalls the start of the “moral period” of her writing career:<sup>3</sup>

It is impossible to assign a particular day, week, or even month to the conversion that took place in me about this time. But there is no doubt that the spring of 1939 marked a watershed in my life. I renounced my individualistic, anti-humanist way of life. I learned the value of solidarity. ... History took hold of me, and never let go thereafter; and I threw myself totally and permanently into a life of literature. ... Hitherto my sole concern had been to enrich my personal life and learn the art of converting it into words. Little by little I had abandoned the quasi-solipsism and illusory autonomy I cherished as a girl of twenty; though I had come to recognise the fact of other people's existence, it was still my individual relationships with separate people that mattered most to me, and I still yearned fiercely for happiness. Then, suddenly, History burst over me, and I dissolved into fragments. I woke to find myself scattered over the four quarters of the globe, linked by every nerve in me to each and every individual. All my ideas were turned upside down; even the pursuit of happiness lost its importance.

The onset of World War Two and the Nazi Occupation precipitated among French intellectuals the need to unshackle themselves from the confines of Cartesian and Kantian rationalism and bourgeois individualism. Like her contemporaries, Beauvoir links this conversion, both intellectual and moral, to the revival of interest in Hegel.<sup>4</sup> Her initial

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atypical woman. What interests her is not how the many ways in which she herself had been oppressed coincides with woman's general oppression, as Rosi Braidotti (1991: 158) ventures; rather, the extent to which her sense of self does, in fact, *not* coincide with a general condition. Her concern is this: how it is possible to be an anomaly, to deviate from the norm? I believe what Beauvoir is hinting at when she refers to the origin of *The Second Sex*, and will become the underlying theme of that text, is the intuition of a gap between a specific woman's experience of herself and *being-a-woman*.

<sup>3</sup> See Arp (2001: 9-19) for a discussion of the ways in which Beauvoir's personal situation informs her writing.

<sup>4</sup> From *The Prime of Life*, we can trace the beginning of Beauvoir's reading of Hegel, in the original German, at the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, to July 6, 1940, shortly after the capitulation of the French Army at the hands of the Nazis. Beauvoir (1963: 363) writes: “I have embarked upon Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*; at present can scarcely make head or tail of a word of it.” In one of her

reaction to Hegel's text is buoyant; indeed, his "amplitude of detail dazzled [Beauvoir], and his system as a whole made [her] feel giddy" (372).

In the citation, Beauvoir's conversion is marked by her vivid portrayal of the displacement and rupture of the Cartesian ego: the pure, naively solipsistic *I* is forced to become concretely aware of the indubitable bond between the individual, the social and history.<sup>5</sup> Her preoccupation with personal autonomy is replaced with an emphasis on solidarity, intersubjectivity, collectivity. Even the watery imagery suggested by 'burst' and 'dissolved' is apt considering that *fluidity* is, as we have seen, one of the recurring themes of *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Let us for a moment consider the situation in which Beauvoir subsequently turns away from Hegel. In Occupied France, she was living the life of a survivor.<sup>6</sup> She was neither active in the

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letters to Sartre, Beauvoir (1991: 326) describes her deciphering of Hegel's text with the help of Jean Wahl's *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la Philosophie de Hegel*, only to come to the conclusion that "he [Wahl] makes clear at length how he understands nothing."

<sup>5</sup> Earlier in *The Prime of Life*, Beauvoir (1963: 105-106) is more candid about her complicity to the narcissism and isolationism encouraged by her bourgeois upbringing: "In my day-to-day life I scarcely ever departed from the habit of cautious isolation I habitually practised, and I refused to envisage other people as potential individuals, with [consciousnesses], like myself. I would not put myself in their shoes; ... such gratuitous stupidity involved me in difficulties and ill will and errors of judgment. This did not stop me from picking all and sundry to pieces with Sartre till the cows came home."

<sup>6</sup> In *The Coming of Age* (Beauvoir 1972: 440) describes a survivor as "a dead man under suspended sentence", which seems an apt description of the vacuity that filled her days. Biographer Deirdre Bair (1990: 284) describes Beauvoir's world during the war as "solipsistic ... its boundaries were her hotel room and Sartre's ... [and] composed entirely of their fractious intrigues, unsatisfied appetites and economic insecurities." The financial woes were alleviated by participating in broadcasts on the Nazi-friendly Vichy state radio. (Bair: 279) The "fractious intrigues" are recounted in Beauvoir's *Letters to Sartre* (1991). In Beauvoir's most autobiographical novel, *The Mandarins* (2005), her fictional counterpart, Anne, still reeling from the news of Hiroshima, tries to rationalise the moral dilemma faced by leftists who had been pinning their hopes on the Soviet Union to deliver their world from the evil of capitalism, only to learn about the labour camps in Russia: "Everything passes; 'all is vanity and vexation of spirit'; we'll be past this someday. ... It's laughable, this little ephemeral life brooding over those camps which the future had already abolished! History takes care of itself and each of us into the bargain. Let's just keep quiet, then, each in his own little hole" (Beauvoir 2003: 432) and "I

Resistance Movement, nor did she, or most of her countrymen, disobey Nazis commands. In *The Prime of Life*, she links this stupor to her preoccupation with Hegel's text. Beauvoir (372-373) remembers:

It was, indeed tempting to abolish one's individual self and merge with Universal Being, to observe 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 instant of time then appear, viewed against the world's long history, and how small a speck was this individual, myself! Why should I concern myself with my present surroundings, with what was happening to me *now*, at this present moment? But the least flutter of my heart gave such speculations the lie. ... I turned back to Kierkegaard and began to read him with passionate interest. ... 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."

Beauvoir ascribes her apathy to the horrors of war to being momentarily overwhelmed by the "flight into the Universal". The Hegelian System no longer underscores her connectedness to the world, her solidarity with each and every individual; instead, it symbolises detachment and indifference. Previously, she enjoyed the world's embrace; now, she feels engulfed by it. Dissolving into fragments had seemed like an overcoming of her previously solipsistic self; now, the disappearance of her "self" in the vastness of the history of the world is no longer portrayed as the birth of her ethical consciousness, but only as the death of her individuality. Beauvoir repeats Sartre's rejection of Hegel in favour of Kierkegaard<sup>7</sup> and, in the formulation

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was thinking today that people are really wrong to torment themselves over anything and everything. Things are never as important as they seem; they change, they end, and above all, when all is said and done, everyone dies." (433). Robert, Anne's husband, replies that she, like most other witnesses to human suffering, takes refuge in apathy because of the feeling of powerlessness "in the face of certain overwhelming facts", like the sheer number of people murdered, tortured, displaced and enslaved between the Nazi camps and the Russian camps. Note how Anne's sentiments echo Beauvoir's own apathy during the time when first started reading *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

<sup>7</sup>See *Part 2e*. Coincidentally, Beauvoir, like Sartre, refers to Kierkegaard only four times in *The Second Sex*, and none of those references have any bearing on individualism, dialectics or Hegel. Given that Beauvoir connects her indifference to the Occupation to her reading of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it escapes her sense of irony that she turns from the flight into the Universal only to be passionately absorbed by Kierkegaard. She feels no contrition for her apathy, only for having enjoyed Hegel.

“I am, I exist, here and now, I am myself”, she seems to be referring to the same unmediated subject of *Being and Nothingness* that Sartre posits as an alternative to the ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’. This retrospective dismissal of the Hegelian system symbolises her public allegiance to existentialism in general, and Sartre in particular.<sup>8</sup>

It does not, however, point to an absolute disavowal of Hegel. Indeed, the very first of the texts produced during Beauvoir’s moral period, *She Came to Stay* (1949), is prefaced: “Each consciousness seeks the death of the other one.”<sup>9</sup> Beauvoir (1948: 70) quotes this exact line in

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<sup>8</sup> At the risk of over-interpreting Beauvoir’s public rejection of Hegel at this precise moment in French history, I would venture that it serves as atonement for her compliance with a Nazi order to sign an oath that she was neither a freemason nor a Jew in order to continue teaching at the *Lycée Camille-Séc*, which Sartre condemned as an act of complicity with the enemy and a betrayal of their philosophy (Beauvoir 1977: 369).

<sup>9</sup> In the dramatic conclusion of her first novel, Beauvoir (1949: 431) writes: “Xavière was there, existing only for herself, entirely self-centred, reducing to nothingness everything for which she had no use; she encompassed the whole world within her triumphant aloneness, boundlessly extending her influence, infinite and unique; everything that she was she drew from within herself, she barred all dominance over her, she was absolute separateness. And yet it was only necessary to pull down this lever to annihilate her. ‘Annihilate a consciousness! How can I?’ Françoise thought. But how was a consciousness not her own capable of existing? She repeated ‘She or I’. She pulled down the lever.” *She Came to Stay* satirises the desire for self-recognition. The first seven pages establish that Françoise, Beauvoir’s heroine, suffers from the naïve solipsism of the consciousness asserting itself at the cost of everything else. When she is confronted by Xavière, an equally narcissistic young woman who resists being assimilated by Françoise, and threatens to disrupt the world that the latter had created for herself, she sees no alternative but to murder this rival consciousness and in so doing, re-assert her freedom. In short, the novel begins with Françoise embodying the “I = I” of naïve consciousness in the first movement of the dialectic and ends with Françoise once again embodying the “I = I” after defeating the other. Such an interpretation of freedom corresponds to Kojève’s perspective regarding the struggle for recognition. In the final passage, Beauvoir (431) writes: “No one could condemn or absolve her. Her act was her very own.” Françoise’s act is beyond judgment precisely because it is *her* act. Within the framework of radical individualism evident in *Being and Nothingness* and posing as Marxist phenomenology in Kojève’s lectures, there is no possibility of judging actions beyond ascertaining whether or not they are expressions of freedom, i.e., whether or not they are self-serving. Thus, Françoise’s murderous act is consistent with a view of the struggle for recognition as the annihilation of otherness. It is rather curious that the two combatants in *She Came to*

*The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Furthermore, the text that signifies the culmination of this period, *The Second Sex*, takes the dialectic of recognition as its point of departure. Many of Beauvoir's texts suggest a preoccupation with the meaning of mortality and, to varying degrees, all of these texts are concerned with the relationship between the individual and the social, responsibility and the problem of identity: Hegel is invoked, by name or by association, in all of them.<sup>10</sup> Thus, despite her professed disenchantment with the Hegelian system after her initially positive reception of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Beauvoir's moral period is marked by a recurrent engagement with Hegel.

Most recent Beauvoir scholars remark on the textual tensions in her work. They distinguish between the "dominant voice" in Beauvoir's work, which is most often associated with Sartre and, a "marginal voice" with less certain origins, which supposedly subverts the main argument.<sup>11</sup> Michèle le Dœuff (in Simons 1995: 63) goes so far as to describe Beauvoir's thought as "precariously balanced between that which she really seeks to think and the doctrinal line that she receives ready-made ... [by] the readers of Kierkegaard and Heidegger ... [and] the image she leaves us is that of a woman entangled in these references imposed by the times, neither truly gypped nor truly destroyed, but trapped, at least halfway, obliging herself to embrace a doctrinal framework with which, finally, she had little to do, and abandoning what she found in grappling with the arduous reading of Hegel." While I agree with Le Dœuff's insight that "Hegel" is at the heart of what seems muddled and contradictory in Beauvoir's thought, her assessment needs to be qualified. During the course of *Part 3*, I show that Beauvoir "embraces" Marxist phenomenological existentialism, which Le Dœuff (1991: 107) traces back to Kojève, only insofar as she includes, but does not accept as dogma, this doctrine in her critical analysis of the dialectic of recognition. Ultimately, "Beauvoir's Hegel" is strikingly different from the incarnation of Hegel advanced by early French

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*Stay* are women, given, as I will show, Beauvoir's suggestion in *The Second Sex* that participation in the life and death struggle is the sole prerogative of males. For further discussion, see Simons (in Card 2003: 112-128) and Sirridge (in Card 2003: 138-141).

<sup>10</sup> For discussions centered on some of the texts that precede *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, see Sirridge (in Card 2003: 143-145), Schott (in Card 2003: 233-239), Arp (2001: 21-46), Tidd (1999: 17-24), Barnes (in Fallaize 1998: 157-170), Bergoffen (1997: 45-66) and Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 152-164).

<sup>11</sup> Debra Bergoffen, in *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities* (1997), is one of the noted Beauvoir scholars to draw her distinction between what she refers to as Beauvoir's dominant and "muted" voice.

phenomenology. I now turn to an important precursor to Beauvoir's reinterpretation of the dialectic of recognition, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

## **b) *The Ethics of Ambiguity*: freedom, power and the bond**

### **b.1) Ambiguity versus absurdity**

Beauvoir (1948: 7-9) begins with an appeal to a fundamental ambiguity that signifies human existence:

As long as there have been men and they have lived, they have felt this tragic ambiguity of their condition, but as long as there have been philosophers and they have thought, most of them have tried to mask it. ... And the ethics which they have proposed to their disciples has always pursued the same goal. It has been a matter of eliminating the ambiguity by making oneself pure inwardness or pure externality, by escaping from the external world or by being engulfed in it, by yielding to eternity or enclosing oneself in the pure moment. Hegel, with more ingenuity, tried to reject none of the aspects of man's condition and to reconcile them all. According to his system, the moment is preserved in the development of time, Nature asserts itself in the face of Spirit which denies it while assuming it; the individual is again found in the collectivity within which he is lost; and each man's death is fulfilled by being cancelled out into the Life of Mankind. One can thus repose in a marvellous optimism where even bloody wars simply express the fertile restlessness of the Spirit. At the present time there still exist many doctrines which choose to leave in the shadow certain troubling aspects of a too complex situation. ... Those reasonable metaphysics, those consoling ethics with which they would like to entice us only accentuate the disorder from which we suffer. ... In spite of so many stubborn lies, at every moment, at every opportunity, the truth comes to light, the truth of life and death, of my solitude and my bond with the world, of my freedom and my servitude, of the insignificance and the sovereign importance of each man and all men. There was

Stalingrad and there was Buchenwald, and neither of the two wipes out the other. Since we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us therefore try to look the truth in the face.

Many of the central tenets of Beauvoir's philosophy emerge from these opening lines: her rejection of reductionist thinking and embrace of ambiguity, her rejection of ethics as a form of calculation and her call for an ethics that reflects the complexity of human existence, her simultaneous acknowledgment of Hegel's attempt to overcome duality and rejection of his attempt at synthesis.

The existent, argues Beauvoir, is both subject and object, materiality and consciousness, a separate individual within a collective.<sup>12</sup> However, she draws a distinction between *ambiguity* and the kind of *absurdity* that is presupposed in Sartre's postulation of man as a "useless passion". For Beauvoir (129), to "declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won." Fundamentally, "it is because man's condition is ambiguous that he seeks, through failure and outrageousness, to save his existence." Beauvoir's renunciation of the absurd, her insistence on the necessity of failure and outrageousness, which denotes indeterminacy and excess, aligns her position to the hopefulness at the core of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Indeed, Beauvoir (10) could well be referring to Hegel's text when she notes "that the most optimistic ethics have all begun by emphasising the element of failure involved in the condition of man; without failure, no ethics; for a being who, from the very start, would be an exact co-incident with himself, in a perfect plenitude, the notion of having-to-be would have no meaning ... [moreover,] one does not offer an ethics to a God."

The terms *outrage* and *outrageousness* feature prominently in Beauvoir's text. By definition, an *outrage* implies the other, more particularly, violence directed at the other. For Beauvoir (60): "Every undertaking unfolds in a human world and affects men". She discusses various attempts by the individual to deny his relationship to the world and to other individuals.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Langer (in Card 2003: 87-106, particularly p.89) for further analysis of the meaning of *ambiguity* in the work of Beauvoir.

<sup>13</sup> Prominent Beauvoir scholar, Kristana Arp, observes that, unlike Sartre, who associates *bad faith* almost exclusively with women, Beauvoir's examples of "ethical failure" are all designated by the term *man*. According to Arp (2001: 56), Beauvoir "usually uses the term "man" to stand for all humans". I will show that this is decidedly not the case in *The Second Sex*, where "man" refers only to

Firstly, the sub-man “discovers around him only an insignificant and dull world ... [in which he] cannot prevent himself from being a presence ... [but] would like to forget himself ... [and] is thereby led to take refuge in the ready-made values of the serious world” (43-44). In denying consciousness and, thus, the ambiguity of being both materiality *and* consciousness, the sub-man projects his rejection of existence onto readily available opinions and labels. However, Beauvoir (43) counters, the existent is not merely “a datum which is passively suffered; the rejection of existence is still another way of existing; nobody can know the peace of the tomb while he is alive.”

Now, earlier in her discussion, Beauvoir (10) writes: “Hegel tells us in the last part of the *Phenomenology of Mind* that moral consciousness can exist only to the extent that there is disagreement between nature and morality.” Describing the failure of the sub-man, who “feels only the facticity of his existence”, Beauvoir (44) declares: “Ethics is the triumph of freedom over facticity.” The suggestion here is that ethics presupposes “the relative independence of consciousness, its ability to transcend material conditions” (Arp 2001: 49). It is unclear how such a notion corresponds to Beauvoir’s appeal to ambiguity, unless one argues that the statement, “humans are both materiality and consciousness”, presupposes the very duality that it claims to surmount; that it confirms mind and matter as, first (and foremost?), two distinct poles that are somehow fused by superimposing “ambiguity” onto existence.<sup>14</sup>

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men. On the topic of bad faith, note that Beauvoir never specifically refers to the types discussed above as examples of “bad faith”. At any rate, if she had, she would not be attaching the same meaning suggested by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, that is, to lie to oneself about the absolute freedom of human existence. Instead, she would define bad faith as an “attempt to deny our dependence upon others and the existence of other minds” (Simons in Card 2003: 117). Regarding the apparatus of limitation employed by Arp in her analysis of Beauvoir’s ethics, I would venture that these are propelled by her acknowledged unwillingness “to give up on the idea that all people are in some sense free” (Arp: 142). By “free” she means *ontologically free*, in other words, “the type of freedom that Sartre emphasises in *Being and Nothingness* all humans always possess” (2). Beauvoir herself does not refer to “ontological” or “existentialist” freedom and I intend to show that her postulation of freedom radically departs from the type of freedom that she associates with Sartre’s ontology.

<sup>14</sup> Arp (52) seems to reach the same conclusion.

Another consideration is that Heidegger himself does not offer any kind of moral imperative for Dasein to triumph over his facticity, thrownness or inauthenticity – these elements are constitutive of its ontological structure. Heidegger (1979: 223) explicitly states: “Dasein exists factically.” Dasein’s possibilities are factual; they are disclosed in the situation in which he is thrown. In the first half of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir is inclined to oppose “transcendence”, “project” and “freedom” to “facticity” and, moreover, to use “facticity” and Sartre’s notion of “being-in-itself” interchangeably.

Elsewhere in her discussion, Beauvoir (71; 100) relates facticity to “hardening”, reminiscent of Sartre’s description of the *en-soi* as solidity. Towards the end of *Being and Nothingness*, as I will show, this compressibility, now called “the slimy”, is depicted as hostile to the *pour-soi* – it threatens to devour, to congeal, transcendence. In short, for Sartre, and certainly the way Beauvoir uses the term on occasion, facticity equals stagnation. Such an interpretation, I think, stretches Heidegger’s meaning of the term. The latter draws a distinction between *factuality* and *facticity*. In brief, “Dasein is constantly ‘more’ than it factually is ... [however] Dasein is never more than it factually is, for to its facticity its potentiality-for-Being belongs essentially” (Heidegger: 185). The “factual” refers to the given, the “factual” concerns projection. Thus, when Heidegger says, “Dasein exists factically”, it is “only because it *is* what it becomes (or alternatively, does not become)” (186). The corruption in meaning comes from ascribing a moral value to the insight:

Dasein’s facticity is such that as long as it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw, and is sucked into the turbulence of the “they’s” inauthenticity. Thrownness, in which facticity lets itself be seen phenomenally, belongs to Dasein.

(Heidegger: 223)

However, we will see shortly how Beauvoir amends her position regarding the relationship between freedom and facticity when she introduces the concept of oppression.

A second reaction to the lack of being is the serious man, described by Beauvoir (46), citing Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, as one who confers an absolute status upon certain values and “imagines that the accession to these values likewise permanently confers value upon himself”. Without scruple, the serious man sacrifices others for the values to which he unconditionally submits, even though the “thing that matters to the serious man is not so much the nature of the object which he prefers to himself, but rather the fact of being able to

lose himself in it” (47). If the serious man manages to convince himself that he is sacrificing nothing, it is because, for him, the “rest of the world is a faceless desert” (51).

Thirdly, “disappointed seriousness which has turned back upon itself” (52) describes the nihilistic attitude. The nihilist’s realisation “that the world *possesses* no justification and that he himself *is* nothing” coincides with “a systematic rejection of the world and man and if this rejection ends up in a positive desire for destruction, it then establishes a tyranny” (57).

A fourth response to the absence of external justification for existence, is the “gratuitous display of activity” (58) of the adventurer. The adventurer “acts just for the sake of acting, for the sake of expending his constantly renewed energy, of expressing his vitality and the joy he takes in life” (Arp 2001: 60). Now, while it will become clear that Beauvoir promotes the notion of a joyful existence, the adventurer falls short in her estimation because he shares the nihilist’s contempt for other people. An adventurer, argues Beauvoir (61), “is one who remains indifferent ... to the human meaning of his action, who thinks he can assert his own existence without taking into account that of others ... [and] ... treat them like instruments; ... destroy them if they get in his way.”

Fifthly, the passionate man imbues the object of his passion with the status of an absolute; however, unlike the serious man, he does not posit the object “as a thing detached from himself, but as a thing disclosed by his subjectivity” (64); put differently, “the passionate man realises that the importance of this object depends entirely on his passion” (Arp: 62). In this way, he “causes certain rare treasures to appear in the world, but he also depopulates it” (Beauvoir: 65). I return to the theme of the passionate man in the analysis of the erotic experience as a possible counter to the interpretation of self-other relationships mooted by early French phenomenology.

Finally, Beauvoir (68-69) also mentions “the critic who assumes for himself independence of mind” and warns that this independent man “is still a man with his particular situation in the world” and that his “criticisms fall into the world of particular men”; that he “does not merely describe ... [he] takes sides.”

At the heart of Beauvoir’s critique of the moral failings of these self-others relationships, we find that, “no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself”, instead, it “appeals to

the existence of others” (67): those who “attempt to fulfil themselves outside of the world” (68) when they become “aware of the risks and the inevitable element of failure involved in any engagement” (67-68) are thwarted by the fact that there “is no way for a man to escape from this world” (69).

## **b.2) Eating the other’s freedom**

Early in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir (15) writes that the existent’s “original springing forth is a pure contingency”, which means that it can be neither foreseen nor willed: “an upsurging as stupid as the clinamen of the Epicurean atom which turned up at any moment whatsoever from any direction whatsoever” (25). At the same time, Beauvoir (25) holds that, “Every man is originally free, in the sense that he spontaneously casts himself into the world.” The suggestion of man “casting himself into the world” can be interpreted as the self-causing cogito of *Being and Nothingness*,<sup>15</sup> particularly because Beauvoir associates this *original*

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<sup>15</sup> Hitherto, I have associated the exponents of early French phenomenology, particularly Sartre, with Cartesianism. However, I wish to briefly express some doubt regarding the extent to which Heidegger escapes the idea of a self-determining cogito. Regarding Dasein’s factual possibilities, David Couzens Hoy (in Guignon 1993: 178-179) contends: “Heidegger wishes to distance himself from the traditional idea that these possibilities should be thought of as spontaneously free choices ... which is to say that Dasein is not some free-floating spirit that transcends its material situation.” Despite Heidegger’s (1978: 219-224) postulation of Dasein as *verfallen*, he suggests that, “Dasein projects itself and presents itself with possibilities” (217). Furthermore: “Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence – in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not to be itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already. Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting” (33). If human existence is projection and the existent projects itself, Dasein causes itself to exist. On what basis can Dasein present itself with possibilities, i.e., cause those possibilities, as opposed to having possibilities presented to him, i.e., receive them? The former implies the action of a solitary individual; the latter a relationship with others. I am suggesting here that Dasein can only bestow possibilities onto itself if a

*freedom* – “natural freedom” (24) – with Sartre. In this regard, consider that *contingency* also means *possibility*. If Beauvoir is stating that the original surge into existence is a possibility, what makes such a possibility pure? After all, the contingent denotes inconsistency, provisionality and uncertainty. Does a “pure possibility” presume a possibility before facticity or a possibility before being-in-the-world-with-others, in other words, that the existent’s birth is some kind of perfect possibility, perhaps the possibility of perfection, which is then “compromised” by the factual situation in which he finds himself, or “contaminated” by his engagement with the world? In other words, does the notion of pure contingency indicate a metaphysically privileged moment when possibility falls outside the realm of the concrete? Certainly, this seems to be the case if Beauvoir holds the position, like Sartre, that being-with-others signifies an alienation from the existent’s possibilities and amounts to being cast into the in-itself, which is, for Sartre, the world.<sup>16</sup> The implication is that my possibility is independent of, even opposite to, the world, in which case Beauvoir would be describing a self-positing existent; thus, reaffirming Cartesian rationalism.

Regarding Sartre’s idea of freedom as a purely interior stance, impervious to context, facticity, the subject’s relationship with the world and others, etc., Beauvoir (24), however, challenges: “Now Sartre declares that every man is free, that there is no way of his not being free ... [but] does not this presence of a so to speak natural freedom contradict the notion of ethical freedom?” Beauvoir does not provide us with a ready-made definition of *ethical freedom*; her meaning unfolds in the second half of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

Soon after she introduces the notion of ethical freedom, Beauvoir’s discussion moves away from the self-determining individual to the bond of each individual with all others. She connects the “spontaneous liberality which casts him ardently into the world” (70) to the naïve solipsism that Hegel posits as consciousness’ first movement. She suggests that the notion of unmediated subjectivity is unavoidably linked to conflict (70-71). Beauvoir (72) continues:

[I]f it is true that every project emanates from subjectivity, it is also true that this subjective movement establishes by itself a surpassing of subjectivity. Man can find a

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freedom outside Being-in-the-world is presupposed. If I am correct in this conjecture, Heidegger will not have succeeded in distancing himself from the tradition of the “free-floating spirit”.

<sup>16</sup> See *Part 2e*.

justification of his own existence only in the existence of other men. ... I concern others and they concern me. There we have an irreducible truth. The me-others relationship is as indissoluble as the subject-object relationship.

Hegel's influence is evident. The originating subjective movement that must pass through the objective in order to justify his existence corresponds to Hegel's naïve consciousness who becomes self-conscious only through a process of mediation that appeals to the other. Note how, in contrast to Sartre's distinction between being-for-itself (project) and being-in-itself (the world), Beauvoir posits *project* in relation to, not separate from or in opposition to, others. Debra Bergoffen (1997: 62) counters: "So long as intersubjectivity is seen through the prism of the project, the other appears to me as either an obstacle, ally, or enemy ... the other ... appears to me as a freedom to be harnessed for my goals". However, Beauvoir (153) anticipates this charge:

The fact is that the man of action becomes a dictator not in respect to his ends but because these ends are necessarily set up through his will. Hegel, in his *Phenomenology*, has emphasised this inextricable confusion between objectivity and subjectivity. A man gives himself to a Cause only by making it *his* Cause; as he fulfils himself within it, it is also through him that it is expressed, and the will to power is not distinguished in such a case from generosity.

Towards the end of *Part 2*, I considered the viewpoint that generosity is the prerogative of the privileged. By positing the meeting between the subject and his other as a double movement, Hegel himself shifts, as Beauvoir suggests, the meaning of subjectivity so that the matter of prerogative is much more ambiguous. Of course, in so doing, Hegel assumes that everyone is free and equal. Later on in the discussion, it will become apparent that *The Second Sex* is an attempt to posit the double movement of generosity in the face of asymmetrical power relations. For now it is crucial to note that, after this reference to Hegel's dialectic of recognition, Beauvoir devotes the rest of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* to an analysis of the bond that the existent shares with the world and others.

It is precisely the bond between people that makes possible the phenomenon of oppression; equally, this bond is the precondition for Beauvoir's concept of "freedom". Permit me to cite Beauvoir (81-83) at length:

Perhaps it is possible to dream of a future when men will know no other use of their freedom than this free unfurling of itself; constructive activity would be possible for all; each one would be able to aim positively through the projects at his own future. ... As we

have already seen, every man transcends himself. But it happens that this transcendence is condemned to fall uselessly back upon itself because it is cut off from its goals. That is what defines a situation of oppression. Such a situation is never natural: man is never oppressed by things; in any case, unless he is a naïve child who hits stones or a mad prince who orders the sea to be thrashed, he does not rebel against things, but only against other men. ... Certainly, a material obstacle may cruelly stand in the way of an undertaking ... but here we have one of the truths of Stoicism: a man must assume even these misfortunes. ... Only man can be the enemy for man; only he can rob him of the meaning of his life because it also belongs only to him to confirm it in its existence, to recognise it in actual fact as a freedom. ... One does not submit to a war or an occupation as he does to an earthquake: he must take sides for or against, and the foreign wills thereby becomes allied or hostile. It is this interdependence which explains why oppression is possible and why it is hateful. [It] is other men who open the future to me, it is they who, setting up the world of tomorrow, define my future; but if, instead of allowing me to participate in this constructive movement, they oblige me to consume my transcendence in vain, if they keep me below the level which they have conquered and on the basis of which new conquests will be achieved, then they are cutting me off from the future, they are changing me into a thing. Life is occupied in both perpetuating itself and in surpassing itself; if all it does is maintain itself, then living is only not dying, and human existence is indistinguishable from an absurd vegetation ... . Oppression divides the world into two clans: those who enlighten mankind by thrusting it ahead of itself and those who are condemned to mark time hopelessly in order merely to support the collectivity; their life a pure repetition of mechanical gestures; their leisure is just about sufficient for them to regain their strength; the oppressor feeds himself on their transcendence and refuses to extend it by a free recognition.

This crucial passage suggests that all humans have some kind of freedom. *Having* this freedom does not guarantee the *exercise* of it, since the existent's freedom can also be "cut off from its goals".

It appears that the exercise of this freedom is what Aristotle posits as "purposive activity" – here called *constructive activity* – what Hegel describes as going "beyond itself" – here called *free unfurling, transcendence* and *surpassing* and Heidegger refers to as "projection" or "Being towards-possibilities" – here called *project*. Now, Hegel's dialecticity of existence, together with Aristotle's teleology, to which the former owes a considerable debt, presuppose a concept of the present as a delineation of both the past and the future. Heidegger, too, in his

reference to the “transcendence of time”, suggests that the “present moment goes beyond, or “transcends”, the merely present in the way that it, as present, is at the same time future and past” (Dostal in Guignon 2003: 156). Beauvoir (116) refers to Heidegger’s concept of the future, which she privileges over an approach, “hesitantly reflected in the systems of Hegel and of Comte ... [in which] the Future appears as both the infinite and as Totality”.

Later in the discussion, Beauvoir (105) contends that “even Hegel retreats from the idea of this motionless future; since Mind is restlessness, the dialectic of the struggle and conciliation can never be stopped: the future which it envisages is not the perpetual peace of Kant but an indefinite state of war.”<sup>17</sup> Now, this allusion to the dialectic of recognition suggests that Beauvoir rejects the notion of Absolute Spirit and that she follows the early French phenomenologists in their presumption of consciousnesses as fundamentally separate, concomitantly, that conflict between existents is inevitable. On this topic, Beauvoir (119) offers:

But the truth is that if division and violence define war, the world has always been at war and always will be; if man is waiting for universal peace in order to establish his existence validly, he will wait indefinitely: there will never be any other future. It is possible that some may challenge this assertion as being based upon debatable ontological presuppositions; it should at least be recognised that this harmonious future is only an uncertain dream ... Our hold on the future is limited.

Beauvoir does not rule out the possibility of friendship between existents, but she suggests that one can begin to entertain such a future only if there is a fundamental shift in how existents have heretofore related to one another. Even if such a shift can be produced, it might not result in peace and harmony, since no future is ever guaranteed. However, if our hold on the future is indeed *limited*, conflict among existents is no less axiomatic than friendship. What will become apparent during the course of this analysis is that, for Beauvoir, self-other relationships vacillate between friendship and hostility and this vacillating movement, or *tension*, marks the future. Thus, “man must accept the tension of the struggle ... without aiming at an impossible state of equilibrium and rest” (Beauvoir: 96). While I will argue that Beauvoir does indeed argue for the perpetuity of the dialectic, it is clear that her motivation for rejecting the notion of a final sublation differs from the conventional approach to Hegel.

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<sup>17</sup> See also Beauvoir (117-118).

Insofar as there is a temporal aspect in her concept of freedom, Beauvoir asserts a particular concern with the *future* contained in the present moment: the exercise of this freedom discloses the future. That said, she argues also for the importance of the past. Beauvoir (92) observes:

All that a stubborn optimism can claim is that the past does not concern us ... and that we have sacrificed nothing in sacrificing it; thus, many revolutionaries consider it healthy to refuse any attachment to the past and to profess to scorn monuments and traditions. ... To abandon the past to the night of facticity is a way of depopulating the world.

She implies that the future that we aim for determines the legacy of the past we uphold in the present. The past, Beauvoir (93) writes, is not a “brute fact”, it does not exist somewhere independent of existents’ vested interests.

Beauvoir also suggests that the failure to exercise this freedom turns man into “a thing”, “an absurd vegetation”, a survivor relentlessly marking time. Beauvoir adheres to the dictum that “we are what we do” (Moi 1999: 55).<sup>18</sup> The kind of action Beauvoir has in mind here is creative (it “sets up the world of tomorrow”) dynamic (as opposed to “absurd vegetation” and “mechanical gestures”) and varied (as opposed to “pure repetition” and “marking time”). In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (1997: 609-611) describes this kind of action as “true action”, which she opposes to monotony and docility.<sup>19</sup> The inability to act with creativity, dynamism and variety – the inability to disclose the future – degrades human existence to the extent that “a man no longer appears as anything more than a thing among things which can be subtracted from the collectivity of other things without its leaving upon the earth any trace of its absence” (Beauvoir 1948: 100).

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<sup>18</sup> Moi attributes this dictum to existentialism. I am loath to follow her on this point, if for no other reason than the fact that Sartre, who posits freedom as intentionality, is widely held to have been an “existentialist”. Quite likely we find the influence of Hegel in the notion that we are defined by our acts. Indeed, Kojève (1969: 221-222) attributes to Hegel the distinction that the “animal only *lives*; but living Man *acts*”, that “it is only in and by Action that he *is* specifically human”.

<sup>19</sup> Her position echoes that of Marx, as cited by Sonia Kruks (in Fallaize 1998: 56): “the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production.”

Perhaps on account of her bourgeois upbringing, or perhaps because she was one of the most prominent members of the French *intelligentsia*, Beauvoir tends to overlook the possibility that a factory worker or a housewife might take great professional and personal pride, even pleasure, in his or her work without their satisfaction being the effect of wholesale mystification. In this regard, she follows a tradition – dating back at least as far as Machiavelli and, in Beauvoir’s own context, reinforced by Alexandre Kojève’s preoccupation with mastership in his retelling of Hegel’s dialectic of recognition – that portrays human beings as fundamentally marked by a relentless *ambition*. Is it quite certain, however, that being human presupposes a desire for professional advancement or personal prestige?

Furthermore, given that “the situation for most men is marked by their being compelled to occupy themselves only with the maintenance and preservation of their own lives and the life of the collective” (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996: 233), most of human existence is *degraded* if measured by Beauvoir’s standards for *true action*. Beauvoir posits two “clans” of people; to wit, those who create the future and those who maintain the present. In suggesting the pre-eminence of the creators, Beauvoir reverts to a conception of time that ignores the extent to which the present implies both past and future. Moreover, she underestimates the degree to which the creators are dependent on the day-to-day toil of others to make possible the enactment of their “freedom” – what future world can there be without the maintenance of the present world? This is inconsistent with her viewpoint regarding the interdependency at the core of all self-other relationships. The implication is that it is the sole prerogative of the privileged to *liberate* the supposedly disgruntled working class from the doom of repetition and frustrated ambition, to ensure that the “working stiffs” may too be allowed the “element of novelty ... [and the] creative flow” (Beauvoir 1997: 610) of *true action*.

In accordance with Arp (122), we gather that, for Beauvoir, “a distinctively human existence requires something over and above the continued existence as a material thing in the world.” This *higher* existence presupposes at least a certain level of material comfort; indeed, in an earlier text, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, Beauvoir (cited by Arp: 122) asserts: “I demand for men health, knowledge, well-being, leisure in order that their freedom does not consume itself in fighting sickness, ignorance and misery.” A lack of material well-being certainly contributes to the degradation of existence inasmuch as it absorbs those who suffer the shortage primarily in matters of survival. However, in itself, the material well-being of the existent is no guarantee of the exercise of his freedom.

In the passage under the discussion, Beauvoir notes that certain “material obstacles” or forces of nature, such as an earthquake, may seem to hinder the existent’s activity. However, he cannot be oppressed by things and nature cannot be held accountable for whatever humans suffering it causes. The forces of nature do not degrade his freedom; instead, they are the setting for that freedom. We find in this notion of freedom a consideration of the facticity of human existence. If existence is factual, the existent’s freedom is enacted – and this “freedom” is only insofar as it acts – *in* factual conditions. Facticity points not to the limits of freedom, if by *limit* is meant the end of something or the beginning of something else, which, in turn, points to a distinction between freedom and facticity. Instead, Beauvoir evokes a notion of freedom that one could describe as “always already” factual.

The degradation of freedom is triggered only by other existents, who either force the existent to “vainly consume” his freedom, or “feed” upon it themselves.<sup>20</sup> To Beauvoir, these two possibilities signify oppression. While Beauvoir (7) opens *The Ethics of Ambiguity* with the paradox that the existent is “a pure internality against which no external power can take hold, and he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things”, she now insists that man can be oppressed *only* by man.<sup>21</sup>

Oppression is a side-effect of this interdependence among existents. Importantly, this means that oppression is neither fundamental to, nor an inescapable aspect of, human existence. What is fundamental is the bond between existents. Beauvoir constantly underlines this bond: “Man can find a justification of his own existence only in the existence of other men”;<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> With this suggestion of “freedom” as *edible*, Beauvoir contradicts Sartre’s notion of freedom. See also Arp (26).

<sup>21</sup> This insight will have important repercussions for her analysis of woman’s oppression in *The Second Sex*, particularly her often maligned suggestion that a woman’s body is one of the central elements in her enslavement to human society.

<sup>22</sup> In her effort to refute the claim that existence is absurd, Beauvoir’s main preoccupation in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is to highlight the problem of the justification of existence. Regarding the “freedom” of others, Beauvoir argues that we must combat oppression in order to justify our own existence. Michèle le Dœuff (1991: 56) challenges this strategy of expressing the problem of oppression in such abstract terms. Le Dœuff (59) observes: “Later, when Beauvoir’s commitment becomes more concrete and less isolated, first during the Algerian war and then side by side with other women, she no longer asks herself what is bad about oppression; it is not necessary to prove that a

“Only man can be the enemy for man; only he can rob him of the meaning of his life because it also belongs only to him to confirm it in its existence” and “[It] is other men who open the future to me, it is they who, setting up the world of tomorrow, define my future.”<sup>23</sup> The

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scandal is a scandal. This development of hers is important: seeking to justify oneself in fighting oppression means one is still caught in the ideology which sanctions that oppression.” In *Force of Circumstance*, Beauvoir (1968: 76-77) herself explains: “[S]o soon after a war which had forced us to re-examine all our ideas, it was natural enough to attempt to reinvent rules and reasons. France was crushed between two blocs, our fate was being decided without us; this state of passivity prevented us from taking practice as our law; I find nothing surprising, therefore, in my concern with moral questions. What I find hard to understand is the idealism that blemishes these essays [*The Ethics of Ambiguity* and four articles written for *Les Temps Modernes*]. In reality, men defined themselves for me through their bodies, their needs, their work; I set no form, no value above the individual of flesh and blood. ... But then, why did I take this circuitous route through other values besides need to justify the fundamental importance I assigned to need itself? Why did I write *concrete liberty* instead of *bread*, and subordinate the will to live to a search for the meaning of life? I never brought matters down to saying: People must eat because they are hungry. Yet that is what I thought. ... I was – like Sartre – insufficiently liberated from the ideologies of my class; at the very moment I was rejecting them, I was still using their language to do so. That language has become hateful to me because, as I now know, to look for the reasons why one should not stamp on a man’s face is to accept stamping on it.”

<sup>23</sup> See also Schott (in Card 2003: 228-247), who contests what she considers as Beauvoir’s Hegel-inspired depiction of oppression as “an expression of the interdependency” (232) between existents. Citing the work of Arendt and Bauman, Schott argues that the “Nazis did not derive their self-recognition in relation to the Jews so much as detach themselves from human interaction with them.” Referring in particular to Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Schott writes: “Eichmann, for example, may have found recognition as father and loyal bureaucrat from his family and Nazi colleagues. But did he seek recognition from the Jews he helped annihilate?” While I wish to avoid getting mired in the specifics of Eichmann’s role in the Holocaust, it must be noted that Arendt’s interpretation – that he was the personification of the banality of evil – does not accord with other accounts that portray him as not “merely” adhering to the *Führerprinzip*, but acting on his own anti-Semitism.

At any rate, Beauvoir’s work offers possible responses to Schott’s critique. If we accept the portrayal of Eichmann as an “ordinary” man following orders and denying culpability, Beauvoir would refer to him as a *sub-man*. If we suggest that Eichmann committed evil unto his Jewish countrymen because he was anti-Semitic, Beauvoir would describe him as a *serious man*. We have seen that the sub-man works in the service of the serious and the serious presupposes that the world is a “faceless desert”.

individual's actions can have no meaning, he cannot justify his own existence or create a future without other existents; indeed, even his sense of himself is mediated by others. Let us investigate in more detail how the primacy of the bond relates to Beauvoir's notion of *freedom*.

### **b.3) Power to do what we like, freedom to do what we ought**

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Thus, Schott's emphasis on detachment as the driving force for committing atrocity does not invalidate Beauvoir's earlier arguments.

When Schott suggests that Eichmann did not seek recognition from Jewish people, she misses the point of Beauvoir's postulation of oppression: the oppressor refuses to acknowledge that his own sense of identity is enmeshed with the other – an Aryan race is posed only in opposition to a non-Aryan (historically, Semitic) race, the superiority of Germans can be established only on the basis of the inferiority of non-Germans and German Jews, etc. Furthermore, for Beauvoir, oppression, which, incidentally, is described in *The Second Sex* as an “absolute evil” (Beauvoir 1997: 29), can never be banal. Consider this extract from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*: “High as it may be, the number of victims is always measurable; and each one taken one by one is never anything but an individual: yet, through time and space, the triumph of the cause embraces the infinite, it interests the whole collectivity. In order to deny the outrage it is enough to deny the importance of the individual, even though it be at the cost of this collectivity: it is everything, he is only a zero. ... [If] an individual is a pure zero, the sum of those zeros which make up the collectivity is also a zero: no undertaking has any importance, no defeat as well as no victory” (Beauvoir 1948: 100-103). Applying these words, I think that the number of perpetrators is equally measurable and to describe their evil as *banal* is to deny the importance of the individual's culpability; in a sense to deny the *outrage* of his evil action. For Beauvoir (133), “one must retreat from neither the outrage of violence nor deny it, or, which amounts to the same thing, assume it lightly.” A position that describes evil as “banal” can too easily descend into a kind of relativism that somehow absolves a perpetrator or renders his actions meaningless, thereby conspiring in the dehumanisation of his victims. That said, Beauvoir herself addresses in *The Second Sex* one of the major shortcomings of an analysis of human conflict based on Hegel's dialectic of recognition: the presumption of equality among opposing existents.

The “freedom” that is degraded, fed upon or unrecognised by the other most assuredly cannot refer to “natural freedom”. If the world can bite into it, then it must possess a certain material quality – and Beauvoir (78) warns against “emptying the word freedom of its concrete meaning” – in contrast to the freedom that takes the Cartesian cogito as its point of departure. Furthermore, natural freedom presupposes that everyone – the torturer and his prisoner – is equally free; thus, it rules out the possibility of oppression. As it will become clear below, the whole rationale for Beauvoir’s postulation of *ethical freedom* is the fact that “whatever may be true ontologically, we are not ... equally free in the everyday world” (Bergoffen 1997: 97).

Suppose that the “freedom” that the oppressor curtails signifies the existent’s *power*.<sup>24</sup> Unlike the kind of freedom associated with Sartre, a person’s power can be limited by factual conditions, by others and even by oneself. Such an interpretation resonates with Beauvoir’s (91) assertion that “it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future”. Recall that in the passage relating to oppression, Beauvoir associates “freedom” with goals, making new conquests, setting up the world of tomorrow; this freedom exists amidst material obstacles and can only be confirmed by other human beings. Recall also Thompson’s definition of power in *Part 1*, that is, “a socially or institutionally endowed capacity which enables or empowers some individuals to make decisions, pursue ends or realise interests”.<sup>25</sup> To make decisions implies choice; to pursue ends implies future-orientated action.

Early in her essay, Beauvoir (22) indicates that hers is a “philosophy of freedom”; as such, she forestalls the rejection of “the ontological possibility of a choice”. Beauvoir attributes this

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<sup>24</sup> I credit Kristana Arp with this suggestion. (See, in particular, Arp: 120-124; 141-142.) Unfortunately, Arp’s commitment to the notion that “even the most severely oppressed ... always retain their ontological freedom” (7) leads her to abandon her brief substitution of ontological freedom (natural freedom) with the concept of power. Consequently, she interprets ethical freedom as the concrete expression of ontological freedom, rather than its contradiction.

<sup>25</sup> Whether one calls it *freedom* or *power*, note how in both instances the possession thereof depends on others – freedom must be confirmed by others and power is endowed by the social. When Beauvoir discusses the phenomenon of oppression, she focuses only on the process whereby the oppressor extends his freedom/power by feeding on the freedom/disempowering the other. What is missing from her analysis is the extent to which the oppressor relies on the oppressed to recognise his power. Beauvoir addresses this issue when she reinterprets the master-slave dialectic in *The Second Sex*.

critique specifically to a Marxist approach, by which “a man’s action seems valid only if the man has not helped set it going by an internal movement.” Concurring with Merleau-Ponty,<sup>26</sup> Beauvoir (20-21) argues:

The very notion of action would lose all meaning if history were a mechanical unrolling in which man appears only as a passive conductor of outside forces. By acting, as also by preaching action, the Marxist revolutionary asserts himself as a veritable agent; he assumes himself free. ... Now, neither scorn nor esteem would have any meaning if one regarded the acts of a man as a purely mechanical resultant. In order for men to become indignant or to admire, they must be conscious of their own freedom and the freedom of others.

To be sure, Beauvoir does not posit a consciousness that is invulnerable to outside forces; after all, as I show, it can be mystified by oppressors. The antidote to mystification is relentless questioning fuelled by a deep suspicion<sup>27</sup> of all human situations held to be “natural”.

Beauvoir holds that the individual’s choices and actions ought not to be unrestrained. She emphasises the link between power and ethics. Every choice presupposes a limited perspective, “rooted in a particular situation in one point in time [and] ... with an imperfect grasp of all the factors involved” (Arp: 131), guessing at an unforeseeable future. For Beauvoir (133), “morality resides in the painfulness of an indefinite questioning” – moral choices can not be indiscriminate. Nonetheless, Beauvoir (92) understands also that “the tendency of man is not to reduce himself but to increase his power”. Thus, “in the name of the serious or of his passions, of his will for power or of his appetites, he refuses to give up his privileges” (96) and “instead of accepting his limits ... tries to do away with them [and] ... aspires to act upon everything and by knowing everything” (121). If *being free* means surpassing the given toward an open future, that “openness” should not amount to unbridled expansionism or self-enrichment at the cost of others.

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<sup>26</sup> See *Part 2c.2*.

<sup>27</sup> The source of this suspicion is, ironically, a Marxist perspective: In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (1997: 84) writes: “The theory of historical materialism has brought to light some most important truths. Humanity is not an animal species, it is a historical reality. Human society is an antiphysis – in a sense it is against nature; it does not passively submit to the presence of nature but rather takes over the control of nature on its own behalf.”

The oppressor's power is "the freedom of exploiting" (90), that is, a freedom that does not recognise the "freedom" of others or disempower them through force or mystification. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir focuses only on the power of mystification. Let us briefly reflect on the following two passages from the text:

There are beings whose life slips by in an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads. Like the child, they can exercise their freedom, but only within this universe which has been set up before them, without them. This is the case, for example, of slaves who have not raised themselves to the consciousness of their slavery. This is also the situation of women in many civilisations; they can only submit to the laws, the gods, the customs, and the truths created by the males. ... The negro slave of the eighteenth century, the Mohammedan woman enclosed in a harem<sup>28</sup> have no instrument,

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<sup>28</sup> Beauvoir seems to have a particular fondness for this example. In *The Prime of Life*, Beauvoir (1963: 346) recalls debating with Sartre on the relationship between freedom and situation: "I maintained that from the angle of freedom as Sartre defined it – that is, an active transcendence of some given context rather than mere stoic resignation – not every situation was equally valid: what sort of transcendence could a woman shut up in a harem achieve. Sartre replied that even such a cloistered existence could be lived in several quite different ways. I stuck to my part for a long time, and in the end made only a token submission. Basically I was right. But to defend my attitude I should have had to abandon the plane of individual, and therefore idealistic, morality on which we had set ourselves." I wish to draw attention to two aspects related to this passage. Firstly, we have already glimpsed, if not outright abandonment, a distancing from "the plane of the individual" in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. In an interview with Simon (in Fraser and Bartky 1992: 32), Beauvoir reinforces this separation from Sartre's project: "*Being and Nothingness* is concerned with the individual and not so much with the relations among individuals. ... [In] *The Second Sex*, I place myself much more on a moral plane whereas Sartre dealt with morality later on. In fact, he never exactly dealt with morality."

A second point relates to the example itself. For Beauvoir, a Mohammedan woman secluded in a harem presents a clear example of someone whose vulnerability to mystification absolves her from the charge of "bad faith" in the Sartrean sense. She says nothing specific about the oppression that this woman suffers, she is only a cipher for what Beauvoir deems the most repressive conditions that feeds upon freedom. Tellingly, she is *elsewhere*, screened from (Western) eyes. She is not, for instance, a French Muslim woman. Penelope Deutscher (2004: 663-664) criticises Beauvoir's tendency to depict women as "racially and culturally homogeneous ... a plurality of race and cultural differences never mediates or divides or fragments a subject in an on-going way. Subjects are culturally separated from

be it in thought or by astonishment or anger, which permits them to attack the civilisation which oppresses them. (37-38)

The slave is submissive when one has succeeded in mystifying him in such a way that his situation does not seem to him to be imposed by men, but to be immediately given by nature, by the gods, by the powers against whom revolt has no meaning; thus, he does not accept his condition through a resignation of his freedom since he can not even dream of any other ... (85).

The power to mystify is the ability to oppress someone without him being aware of his oppression. The mystified remains disempowered, not because he flees from existential angst or resigns himself to submission, but simply because he knows only obedience and servility. Beauvoir likens the mystified to children. Both live in the world of the serious, that is, the world of ready-made values; this situation is imposed on them by others who demand their respect and obedience.

Regarding the situation of children, Beauvoir (35-36) writes:

The child's situation is characterised by his finding himself cast in 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. In his eyes, human inventions, words, customs, and values are given facts, as inevitable as the sky and the trees. This means that the world in which he lives is a serious world, since the characteristic of the spirit of

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each other just as self-enclosed communities and neighbourhoods within cities and countries exist side by side." The women discussed in both *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex* represent different economic classes and different age groups and even different sexual orientations. However, Beauvoir, for all her emphasis on the specificity of difference, ignores other indicators of difference, like race and religion. I return to this problem below.

At this point, let it be noted that, at least as far as *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is concerned, Beauvoir reveals a propensity for exoticism in her analysis of oppression. In contradistinction, "the western women of today" (Beauvoir: 38) are not really oppressed; instead, they either choose the limits of their freedom themselves or, since they offer no resistance, they consent to the limits imposed by others. Arp (115) counters: "But if a woman consents to her lot, does that mean that she is not oppressed?" *The Second Sex* addresses the voluntarism implied in Beauvoir's position. For criticism of a perspective that is very similar to that of Deutscher, see Moi (in Ferguson and Wicke 1994: 89, footnote 5).

seriousness is to consider values as ready-made things. That does not mean that the child himself is serious. On the contrary, he is allowed to play, to expend his existence freely. ... He feels himself happily irresponsible. ... Even when the joy of existence is strongest, when the child abandons himself to it, he feels himself protected against the risk of existence by the ceiling which human generations have built over his head. And it is by virtue of this that the child's condition (although it can be unhappy in other respects) is metaphysically privileged. Normally the child escapes the anguish of freedom.

For Beauvoir, there is a qualitative difference in the situations of the mystified and the child. The oppression of the mystified occurs behind the façade of a “natural situation”, whereas childhood really is “a natural situation whose limits are not created by other men and which is thereby not comparable to a situation of oppression” (141). One does not need to look far, particularly in an African context, to challenge this idealisation of childhood. Be that as it may, Beauvoir (85) suggests that, while we may justifiably expect children to respect and obey their elders, the mystified individual's “submission is not enough to justify the tyranny which is imposed upon him.”

Regarding Beauvoir's viewpoint, Arp (116) notes that “the slave's assessment of his own position is not the ultimate criterion of whether he is oppressed or not.” At the same time, Beauvoir (138-139) contends that, though “the ‘enlightened elites’ strive to change the situation of the child, the illiterate, the primitive crushed beneath his superstitions ... they must respect a freedom which, like theirs, is absolute ... [by not] forgetting that man always has to decide by himself in the darkness, that he must want beyond what he knows.”

While Beauvoir's account of mystification is more nuanced in *The Second Sex*,<sup>29</sup> her position in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is, firstly, that there is a direct correlation between the level of economic and social constraint of an individual's situation and his susceptibility to

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<sup>29</sup>By documenting in *The Second Sex* how we, in every sphere of our lives, from the earliest days of our childhood, internalise certain standards of behaviour, Beauvoir demonstrates the pervasive and insidious nature of mystification. Arp (123) observes that the “dutiful bourgeois daughters, wives, and mothers whose lives Beauvoir depicts” are examples of privileged individuals who are nonetheless oppressed. Additionally, Beauvoir suggests that even women who grasp the power of mystification, personified by the *Eternal Feminine*, cannot, with any degree of permanency and without incurring heavy penalties – if they are able to do so at all – extract themselves from its clutches.

mystification; secondly, that one of the requirements of ethical freedom is the demystification of all people.

Beauvoir (48) contends: “The less economic and social circumstances allow an individual to act upon the world, the more this world appears to him as given.” Concomitantly, those with access to the corridors of power have the concrete means – education, wealth, social standing, weaponry, etc. – to, not only grasp a situation as oppressive, but, fundamentally, to resist oppressors. Moreover, for Beauvoir (86), these privileged people must “furnish the ignorant slave with the means of transcending his situation by means of revolt, to put an end to his ignorance”, in other words, “freeing the slave from the powers of mystification, showing the slave that revolt is possible, is the responsibility of the one who is not mystified” (Bergoffen: 88).

This responsibility indicates a moral imperative: “If I want the slave to become conscious of his servitude, it is both in order not to be a tyrant myself – for any abstention is complicity, and complicity in this case is tyranny – and in order that new possibilities might be opened to the liberated slave and through him to all men” (Beauvoir: 86). Once more, it is clear that Beauvoir does not in this instance refer to “natural freedom”. The latter, we have seen, refers to something that is somehow self-causing, which all existents always possess, irrespective of the bond with others. The notion of freedom that emerges here, however, is qualified by, even premised on, the relationship with others: “In taking up the cause of the other’s freedom I am, therefore, taking up my own fight” (Bergoffen: 89). Likewise, “if the oppressor were aware of the demands of his own freedom, he himself should have to denounce oppression” (Beauvoir: 96).

I submit that Beauvoir’s stance reflects the perspective of the privileged. She approaches the problem of oppression almost exclusively from the perspective of the powerful – she views oppression and the triumph over oppression from the perspectives of oppressors and combatants, but rarely from the position of the sufferers. Elsewhere, Beauvoir (1997: 722) acknowledges that “to regard the universe as one’s own, to consider oneself to blame for its faults and to glory in its progress, one must belong to the caste of the privileged.”

Now, in the citation in which she defines oppression, Beauvoir argues that the oppressor refuses to recognise the existence of the oppressed and changes him into a thing. An existence

that is degraded to the point where it is no different from “absurd vegetation”, aggravated by the lack of instruments of revolt, can make only a silent appeal to the powerful to recognise its humanity. The upshot of such an existence is that the oppressed is neither seen amidst other objects nor heard above the din of the oppressor’s feast. The oppressor, even if he were *aware of the demands of his own freedom*, is not likely to heed these demands, since the tendency is for man to extend his power. Thus, for Beauvoir, those among the privileged, who are outraged by the violence exerted on their fellow existents, are morally responsible for creating a situation in which no-one can turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to the appeals of oppressed people. Such a situation may require demystification or the provision of the instruments of revolt, be they weapons, a platform from which they can express themselves in safety, money, or even themselves.

Another reason why Beauvoir’s stance can be interpreted as one of privilege actually *has* bearing on the oppressed person. She holds that the slave must seize the “possibility of liberation” (38); when he is able to see through his mystification, it is his responsibility “to deny the harmony of that mankind from which an attempt is made to exclude him, to prove that he is a man and that he is free by revolting against the tyrants” (87). The belief that the mystified slave can “decide positively and freely” (87) after having his consciousness raised, that he can transcend his enslavement through personal resolve, calls upon the traditional idea of the individual as an autonomous agent who wills his own subjectivity. Such self-centred notions appear entirely at odds with Beauvoir’s appeal to the primacy of the bond. We find in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that Beauvoir calls upon the powerful to relinquish their power and authority; yet, paradoxically, she exhorts the powerless to become powerful and exercise self-authority. Further on in this discussion, we will note Beauvoir’s argument, in *The Second Sex*, that, in a hegemony, even disenfranchised individuals oppress those who are more vulnerable than they. Beauvoir certainly does not urge the oppressed to become oppressors in turn. If Beauvoir argues for the empowerment of the oppressed, it is not in order to reassert conflict and domination as the fundamental basis of self-other relationships, but because she intuits a link between power – particularly the ability to make decisions – and ethics. After all, to ask the question of ethics – *What ought I to do?* – presupposes more than one course of action, which, in turn, points to *choice*. The possibility of choice affirms some kind of individual will. A truism: ethics presupposes an other. However, as Tidd (1999: 20) notes: “We cannot use the Other or retreat to collective identity as a means to avoid the burden of individual

responsibility". Simone de Beauvoir reminds us that ethics also presupposes a *subject* that can be held accountable for his or her choices.

Although *The Ethics of Ambiguity* espouses the perspective of the privileged, it will soon become apparent that Beauvoir does not place anyone, even dissidents, on the moral high ground. Fundamentally, everyone – including bystanders, since *abstention is complicity* – is implicated in the situation of oppression.<sup>30</sup> For Beauvoir (89), every individual “is affected by

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<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Beauvoir herself does not assume “the blameless position of a political dissident” (Murphy in Simons 1995: 284); instead, she comes to realise that the continued commitment to the bond means “that a clear conscience was truly not possible” (285). Regarding Beauvoir’s guilty conscience, Murphy (263-297) focuses specifically on her involvement in the trial of Djamila Boupacha, a twenty-two year old Muslim-Algerian woman who had been raped and tortured by members of the French Armed Forces during the Algerian War of Independence. (For her own account of her involvement in Boupacha’s case, see Beauvoir 1968: 513-518.) Murphy (281-282) cites a passage from an article relating to the case, which Beauvoir wrote in *Le Monde*: “For whether we choose our rulers willingly, or submit to them against our natural inclination, we remain their accomplices whether we like it or not. When the government of a country allows crimes to be committed in its name, every citizen thereby becomes a member of a collectively criminal nation. Can we allow our country to be so described? The Djamila Boupacha affair is the concern of every person in France.” Now, it would be easy to scoff at the nationalism revealed in these words: the “Djamila Boupacha affair” – note how Boupacha is represented as a case study rather than a flesh and blood woman carrying the scars of torture on her body – concerns the reputations of French citizens. In this regard, Frantz Fanon (cited in Murphy: 282) writes about French intellectuals in general: “The gravity of the tortures, the horror of the rape of little Algerian girls, are perceived because their existence threatens a certain idea of a French honour. ... Such shutting out of the Algerian, such ignoring of the tortured man or of the massacred family, constitute a wholly original phenomenon. It belongs to that form of egocentric, sociocentric thinking which has become the characteristic of the French.” Given the personal and professional risks (for a summary, see Murphy: 279 and also Beauvoir 1968: 628-629 for a retelling of the threats on her life) incurred by her involvement in the “Djamila Boupacha affair”, is it reasonable to extend Fanon’s criticism to Beauvoir?

Recall her own assertion that an individual commits to a Cause “only by making it *his* Cause”. This Hegel-inspired insight rings true in this case, particularly since “Beauvoir had never met Boupacha though she had countless opportunities” (Murphy: 283). Elsewhere in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir (86) recognises that “there is nothing more arbitrary than intervening as a stranger in a

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destiny which is not ours: one of the shocking things about charity – in the civic sense of the word – is that it is practiced from the outside, according to the caprice of the one who distributes it and who is detached from the object.” Intellectually, Beauvoir argues that French citizens could not simply distance themselves from government sponsored acts of violence, even if they were opposed to these acts: firstly, the bond precludes “the insulation of subjectivities from each other” (Murphy: 285), and, secondly, to refuse “responsibility for a government acting contrary to her wishes could only be an abstract refusal, a sort of good faith perhaps, in the erroneous belief that beliefs alone determine responsibilities” (284-285). What was needed was constructive action. However, on an intersubjective level, the “Djamila Boupacha” that emerges from *Force of Circumstance* seems more like Beauvoir’s own *Cause* than a concrete individual. Such an approach belies Beauvoir’s (106-107) declaration: “In order for this world to have any importance, in order for our undertaking to have any meaning and to be worthy of sacrifices, we must affirm the concrete and particular thickness of this world and ... if the individual is set up as a unique and irreducible value, the word sacrifice regains all its meaning”.

Now, it may be asked if this is over-stating Beauvoir’s supposed indifference to the person of Djamila Boupacha. It may be suggested that criticising Beauvoir for her failure to physically meet someone, whose plight she nevertheless helped bring to light, hints at a metaphysics of presence, that is, the assumption that the “immediacy” of a face-to-face meeting would affirm Boupacha in some or other essential way. Now, Beauvoir works from a philosophical framework that privileges *Mitsein*; indeed, *The Second Sex* is premised on the idea that subjectivity can only be affirmed by the mutual recognition of existents. Such recognition has a very strong concrete element. Specifically, Beauvoir critically engages with two movements of recognition – *seeing-and-being-seen-by-the-other* and *touching-and-being-touched-by-the-other* – both of which have a material and an ethical dimension. Her engagement with these phenomena challenges any rigid distinctions between proximity/distance and interiority/exteriority.

That said, I would suggest that the “Beauvoir-Boupacha affair” can be explained in terms of the shame of “being-seen-by-the-other” that Sartre’s subject feels in *Being and Nothingness*. In the segment relating to “the look”, Sartre (1956: 345) submits: “‘Being-seen-by-the-Other’ is the *truth* of ‘seeing-the-Other’”. Perhaps Beauvoir was not so much ignoring Boupacha as she was evading the shame of a face-to-face meeting with an oppressed other. The following revelations in her memoir substantiate such an interpretation: “I was seeing myself through the eyes of women who had been raped twenty times, of men with broken bones, of crazed children: a Frenchwoman” (Beauvoir 1968: 381-382) and “‘I’m French’. The words scalded my throat like an admission of hideous deformity. For millions of men and women, old men and children, I was just one of the people who were torturing them, burning them, machine-gunning them, slashing their throats, starving them; I deserved their hatred because I

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could still sleep, write, enjoy a walk or a book” (396-397). Beauvoir’s self-flagellation masks the ethical failure of the serious (wo)man fighting for Justice by means of the faceless other. Furthermore, by owning up to her complicity in the oppression of Algerians without it being recognised by any actual Algerians, Beauvoir can also take ownership of it, thus, not risk her subjectivity – a meeting with Boupacha exposes the possibility of being *seen* as a “criminal Frenchwoman”. It reminds me of an exchange between Beauvoir and Sartre in *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (Beauvoir 1984: 286-289):

“De Beauvoir: After all, asking someone for the name of a street ... is putting oneself on the plane of reciprocity. It is recognising him as your equal.

Sartre: Yes, for one thing. And what is more important, I don’t much care for another’s subjectivity.

Sartre: Although I’m neither clever nor handy, I always prefer to manage by myself rather than ask anyone for anything. I don’t like being helped. I find the idea quite unbearable.

De Beauvoir: Once again I say it’s odd, this contrast between your stiffness and a welcoming attitude, a kindness ...

Sartre: As soon as anyone turns to me to ask for something ...

De Beauvoir: Yes, because at that moment you are acknowledged.”

Using her own words, one could interpret Beauvoir’s avoidance of Djamilia Boupacha as a circumvention of the plane of reciprocity and a failure to recognise Boupacha as an equal. Beauvoir responds to Boupacha’s appeal to be considered a human being, with a particular history, culture, belief system, body, etc., rather than a Colonised Other or a War Statistic. She does not, however, make the reciprocal appeal to Boupacha to acknowledge her own specificity, perhaps because she takes it for granted, which is inconsistent with her philosophical outlook, or perhaps out of dread, which is a common response to the ambiguity that marks the reception between the self and the other.

Another possible explanation for Beauvoir’s attitude towards Boupacha stems from her belief that “there are men who expect help from certain men and not from others, and these expectations define privileged lines of action” (Beauvoir 1948: 144). As Tidd (2004: 42) explains: “To belong to an oppressed group is to have *lived experience* of oppression that cannot be shared by an individual who chooses to express solidarity with the struggle of another oppressed individual.” This stance will also be evident in *The Second Sex*, for example, in the contention that even “the most sympathetic of men never fully comprehend woman’s concrete situation” (Beauvoir 1997: 26), that “certain women ... are best qualified to elucidate the situation of woman.” Significantly, Beauvoir’s entire involvement with Boupacha’s trial was mediated by Gisèle Halimi, an activist-lawyer from Jewish and Muslim extraction who defended Boupacha and other members of the Algerian National Liberation Front. Although she earned her law degree at the University of Paris, Halimi hailed from Tunis, which had been occupied by the French for 75 years, until 1956. Baldly speaking, Halimi had the right “struggle

this struggle in so essential a way that he cannot fulfil himself morally without taking part in it". The individual is, according to Beauvoir, morally obliged to participate in liberation struggles; his "freedom" hinges on such engagement. This is because "the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom" (91).

The "freedom" that is based on the recognition of the fundamental bond with the other and tied to moral fulfilment is what Beauvoir calls *ethical freedom*.

Now, Arp (118) incorrectly surmises: "Freedom fighters who work with others to overcome their own oppression achieve the pinnacle of moral freedom<sup>31</sup> according to [Beauvoir's] view." At various points in her text, Beauvoir shows that, even with the noblest of intentions, *freedom fighters* often perpetuate oppression. For example, there is the "question of throwing men in spite of themselves, under the pretext of liberation, into a new world, one which they have not chosen, on which they have no grip" (Beauvoir: 85); furthermore, "the oppressor has a good case for showing that ... one can never respect all freedoms at the same time" (96); indeed, "the situation of the world is so complex that one can not fight everywhere at the same time and for everyone"(98). Another consideration is that the "struggle is not one of words and ideologies; it is real and concrete" (84), which amounts to being "forced to treat

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credentials" to become personally involved in Boupacha's case. Likewise, Halimi was in a position to collaborate with Beauvoir on an "equal" footing. Bergoffen (1997: 50) points to an important distinction that Beauvoir makes between "acting with the other" and "acting for the other". Beauvoir's ethics of generosity, which I will discuss in the final part of this study, concerns itself with the preservation of the otherness of the other. For Beauvoir, continues Bergoffen, preventing the "other's strangeness from sliding into the idea of our necessary estrangement (the look)", necessitates the avoidance of the "impossible intimacy" of acting for the other. The situation of Beauvoir's *complicity* to the oppression of Algerians would have made it impossible for her to meet Boupacha as anything other than the dominant subject reaffirming her privilege over the subjugated other. Any actions relating to Beauvoir's defence of Boupacha would thus be *for* her and not *with* her. In this respect, we can interpret Beauvoir's avoidance of Boupacha and collaboration with Halimi as philosophically consistent.

<sup>31</sup> The English version of *Pour une morale de L'ambiguïté* translates "liberté morale" as "ethical freedom". Arp's use of the term *moral freedom* is, by her own admission, a matter of preference. At any rate, Beauvoir does not draw any clear distinction between morals and ethics; throughout the text she refers more often to *morality* and *morals*.

certain men as things in order to win the freedom of all” (97). Beauvoir (99) reminds us that such confrontations expose the bodies of all participants to “the same brutal hazard: they will be wounded, killed, or starved.” In short, as Arp (128) herself perceives, for Beauvoir, “one must countenance political violence if one refuses to countenance oppression.”

Beauvoir stops short of justifying violence. Hence: “A freedom which is occupied in denying freedom is itself so outrageous that the outrageousness of the violence which one practices against it is almost cancelled out” (97) – *almost* – but the indissoluble bond between the individual and the collective reminds us that the oppression of a single individual, even if he has set out to exploit or hurt others, “make[s] all humanity appear as a pure thing, and this negation of transcendence is the mark of failure for which there is no compensation” (Bergoffen 1997: 57).

*The Ethics of Ambiguity* is remarkable for the stance it takes with regard to this failure. As Bergoffen (50) notes, Beauvoir considers “the failures of humanity’s history of conflict, oppression, and exploitation ... as evidence of our mutual responsibility for each other”. Now, Beauvoir is neither the only, nor even the first, to suggest that human beings are fundamentally responsible to each other. Indeed, in one of her earliest texts, *The Blood of Others*, Beauvoir (cited by Allen in Simons 1995: 115) opens with Dostoevsky’s adage that “each of us is responsible for everything and to every human being”. The interesting turn in Beauvoir’s work is the connection of this responsibility to *failure*. Indeed, her ethics is premised on the assumption of such failure – recall Beauvoir’s principle: *without failure, no ethics*. The question of what one ought to do compromises the individual because no solution can ever allow one to meet one’s responsibility to everyone,<sup>32</sup> put differently, “no action can be generated for man without its being immediately generated against men” (Beauvoir : 99).

For Arp (50), the “surprising new angle that Beauvoir brings to existentialist thought [is that] my realising my freedom does not necessarily conflict with others realising their freedom.”<sup>33</sup> However, given her emphasis on *failure*, it is rather the case for Beauvoir that the individual can never fully attain (ethical) freedom. He can be powerful, but he can never be ethically

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<sup>32</sup> When I turn to the theme of generosity in Beauvoir’s work, it becomes clear that this responsibility refers to the protection of the otherness of the other.

<sup>33</sup> Murphy (in Simons 1995: 280) offers a matching perspective.

free, or rather, ethical freedom is an ideal to which he can – must – aspire but cannot attain as long as others remain oppressed. Yet, this is the kind of freedom that affirms our humanity. As such, it elevates existence from mechanical gestures, absurd vegetation and pure repetition, it creates a situation in which it is possible for every individual to freely, that is, without force or mystification, recognise and be recognised by others.

Given that the individual's relationship with the world is marked by failure, he is himself a failed human being. None of us, not only the objectified oppressed, are fully human – at best, we are becoming-human-beings in our endeavour to be ethically free. However, far from despairing of the inevitable failure of man, Beauvoir's perspective delights in existence. Beauvoir (135) declares that “at every instant; the movement toward freedom assumes its real, flesh and blood figure in the world by thickening into pleasure, into happiness.” For Beauvoir (135-136), the “living joy” of existence to be found in, for example, “the satisfaction of an old man drinking a glass of wine” or “the laugh of a child at play” – in short, the “love [of] life on our own account and through others” – gives concrete meaning to the search for ethical freedom.

Crucially, Debra Bergoffen (101) qualifies:

None of this is sentimental. Beauvoir does not envision a humanity circled in mutual embrace. In the concrete world, love, though an absolute value, is also a precarious one. Risk is never absent. Violence is ever present. Sometimes, Beauvoir says, it cannot be avoided. She is under no illusions. There will always be tyrants – those who use violence to negate the freedom of the other. To liberate the oppressed we may have to destroy the tyrants. The existential will that Beauvoir invokes in defence of this violation is not a self-righteous will but a passionate one. It is driven by love to undertake the causes of liberation. In the approach that dominates *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, I express my love of the other and affirm the joy of existence through acts of recognition that enact projects of freedom. I accept the risk that the other is to me. Without negating the power of the other to violate me, I appeal to the other in the name of our freedom to recognise us as bound to each other.

While I hesitate to follow Bergoffen in the precise *letter* of her interpretation – *freedom* is much too contentious a concept in Beauvoir's work to use it without proviso and, as for Beauvoir invoking an *existential will*, it seems to me that *The Ethics of Ambiguity* has far less to do with affirming *existentialism* (at the very least it counters Sartre's brand of

existentialism), than introducing the key concern of *The Second Sex*, namely, the self-other relationship – I do agree with the *spirit* of her reading.<sup>34</sup>

Even as she reels from the horrors of Stalingrad and Buchenwald, Beauvoir maintains that existence is not absurd. However, if man is to justify his existence, he has to meet some stringent requirements. Primarily, he will have “to outdo himself at every moment” (Beauvoir 1997: 172), which returns us to the earlier insight that man tries to save his existence through outrageousness and the positive assumption of his failure. Outdoing oneself means moving beyond solipsism, self-interest and self-satisfaction, acknowledging one’s bond with and, thus, dependence on the world and embracing one’s permanent responsibility to others.

Importantly, Beauvoir’s emphasis on failure also indicates her alignment with Hegel. Recall that every movement on consciousness’ quixotic journey to the Absolute is characterised by failure, though no lesson (at least up to the point where one can glimpse Spirit) is ever learnt, since it is perpetually forgotten. There is an incorrigible optimism at play in both accounts, which is the result of not taking their protagonists too seriously. In my opinion, Beauvoir does not posit the crusading existentialist hero that, for instance, Max Deutscher (2003: 22) finds in her work. If anything, as will become more apparent in *The Second Sex*, she systematically strips the existent of his machismo. Already in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, his constant doubt about the course of moral action is never assuaged by any measure of success, because he always fails. His entire existence, his reason for being, is wrapped up in his relationships with others. Love and compassion undercut his ambition and conceit. Crucially, his body, always already factual, is vulnerable to forces of nature as well as the violence people inflict upon one another. Next, I turn to *The Second Sex*, which concretely substantiates the ethical perspective that Beauvoir introduces in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

### **c) Master, Slave, Woman**

The complex bond between the individual and others is once again paramount in Simone de Beauvoir’s reinterpretation of the dialectic of recognition – with one crucial difference: the bond takes on an entirely different aspect when the individual is a woman. I start my analysis

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<sup>34</sup> That said, Bergoffen finds the influence of Husserl in Beauvoir’s ethics (e.g. Bergoffen 1997: 205), whereas I suspect always the spirit of Hegel.

at Beauvoir's own point of departure, namely, the question of woman.<sup>35</sup> For Beauvoir, a more fundamental question emerges from the discourse on woman, namely, the question of otherness.

### **c.1) Restating the question of woman**

Beauvoir (1997: 13) asks at the start of *The Second Sex*: "What is a woman?" In her opening remarks, she refutes a number of perspectives regarding the meaning of *woman*. The first of these is an essentialist attitude, which, we will shortly see, is encapsulated in the postulation of the Eternal Feminine. Beauvoir's (31) response is a rejection of "archetypes", "changeless essence" and "eternal verities".<sup>36</sup> Secondly, Beauvoir (14) considers the nominalist view that "women ... are merely the human beings arbitrarily designated by the word *woman* ... a rather inadequate doctrine". Her rejection of nominalism reflects her endeavour "to describe the common basis that underlies every individual feminine existence" (31). Moreover, it will become clear during the course of this discussion that there is nothing arbitrary about the designation *woman*, since it serves the interests of the patriarchal order, and the failure to conform to this designation involves serious penalties. Thirdly, she dismisses as abstract the humanist claim that "woman is, like man a human being"; instead, Beauvoir (14) insists "that every concrete human being is always a singular, separate individual." For this reason, Beauvoir (124) warns that "abstract rights are not enough to define the actual concrete situation of woman". The notion of *humanity* is an abstraction. Thus, contrary to Braidotti's interpretation,<sup>37</sup> Beauvoir would argue that "human rights" is also an abstraction that does not

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<sup>35</sup> See Toril Moi's (1999: 169-250) rigorous interpretation of the opening pages of *The Second Sex*.

<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere, Beauvoir (1977: 494) tells us that she does not believe that there are "specific feminine qualities, values or ways of life", since such a belief would presuppose the existence of a specifically female nature.

<sup>37</sup> See *Part I c*.

concern itself with the inequity and exploitation that mark the situations of specific individuals and groups.

Next, Beauvoir (15) contends that to express the question of woman is “to suggest, at once, a preliminary answer.” Given that “a man would never set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male”, the very positing of the *woman question* is revealing. The need for such a question calls attention to the common belief that there is no need for a man to represent himself “as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man”; whereas, “everything about woman is a riddle” (Nietzsche 1969: 91).

The presumption that a man is self-evidently male relates to the equally common belief that “man represents both the positive and the neutral” (Beauvoir: 15). *Man* signifies human beings in general: “humanity is male” (15). Here and throughout Beauvoir’s text, we find the notions that this “has always been a man’s world” (93); that “political power has always been in the hands of men” (102), and, moreover, that men “describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth” (175). If “representations of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men” (175), the implication is that men are also responsible for the representations of *woman*.

Indeed, Beauvoir (16) writes that man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being ... she is simply what man decrees.” In *Part Three* of her study, entitled *Myths*, Beauvoir gives a critical account of woman as “the repository of male fantasies” (MacDonald 1995: 105).<sup>38</sup> She searches for manifestations of the myth of

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<sup>38</sup> Ursula Tidd (2004: 64) states that Beauvoir’s concept of myth takes its cue from the “Marxist notion of ideology as ‘false consciousness’, or beliefs which conceal the economic basis of society and the oppression wreaked by capitalism.” What Tidd is referring to is the *epiphenomenal conception* of ideology, although, I would argue, Beauvoir relies also on what John Thompson labels the *latent conception* of ideology when she argues that a myth cannot easily be described because “it haunts the human consciousness without ever appearing before it in fixed form” (Beauvoir: 175). Briefly, the latent conception refers to the ubiquity of symbolic constructions: symbols, slogans, customs, values and traditions that “move people or hold them back, propel them or constrain them ... [and] are not swept away once and for all ... they live on, they modify and transform themselves ... [so that] social relations may be sustained and social change arrested” (Thompson 1990: 41).

woman, which she labels the *Eternal Feminine*, in sayings, religion, taboos, laws, philosophy, literature, popular media, symbols, fairytales, anthropology, cosmology, etc.

One of the many examples that can be cited is also one of the most pervasive and enduring manifestations of the myth of woman; to wit, *Eve* in the creation story depicted in Genesis. Beauvoir (173) posits:

Eve was not fashioned at the same time as the man; she was not fabricated from a different substance, nor of the same clay as was used to model Adam: she was taken from the flank of the first male. Not even her birth was independent; God did not spontaneously choose to create her as an end in herself and in order to be worshipped directly by her in return for it. She was destined by Him for man; it was to rescue Adam from loneliness that He gave her to him, in her mate was her origin and her purpose; she was his complement in the order of the inessential.

Firstly, Eve's creation from Adam's rib highlights her derivative nature. The ideological function of woman as "by-product" is, as will become clear from Beauvoir's analysis, to justify her non-participation – since it is reserved for fully-fledged subjects – in the dialectic of recognition. Secondly, it is also to be remembered that Eve is the woman held responsible for the fall of humanity; thus, she is the representation of evil.<sup>39</sup> Thirdly, the Virgin Mary, also known as the "second Eve", atones for the evil through her purity, which shows that, the "myth is so various, so contradictory, that at first its unity is not discerned" (Beauvoir: 175). During the course of her discussion, Beauvoir does detect the unambiguous agenda common to all these depictions, which is to attribute to woman the status of Absolute Other.

Beauvoir (282-283) proposes:

[T]he myth of woman, sublimating an immutable aspect of the human condition – namely, the 'division' of humanity into two classes of individuals – is a static myth. It projects into the realm of Platonic ideas a reality that is directly experienced or is conceptualised on a basis of experience; in place of fact, value, significance, knowledge, empirical law, it substitutes a transcendental idea, timeless, unchangeable, necessary. This idea is indisputable because it is beyond the given: it is endowed with absolute truth. Thus, as against the dispersed, contingent, and multiple existences of actual women, mythical thought opposes the Eternal Feminine, unique and changeless. If the definition

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<sup>39</sup> See Robin Schott (in Card 2003: 228-247) for elaboration on Beauvoir's discussion of the cultural representations of evil as "feminine".

for this concept is contradicted by the behaviour of flesh-and-blood women, it is the latter who are wrong; we are told not that Femininity is a false entity, but that the women concerned are not feminine.

Consider the clear distinction that Beauvoir makes between the myth of woman – the Eternal Feminine – and concrete women with *dispersed, contingent, and multiple existences*. The Eternal Feminine is entirely without particularity; that is, it is a givenness, beyond concrete existence. Since it is immutable, The Eternal Feminine is neither constituted, nor transformed, by facticity, historical contingency, cultural specificity, social and economic change. Rather than signifying flesh-and-blood women, the Eternal Feminine resembles a top-down model in which individual women are defined as *woman* to the extent that they conform to the norms of womanhood.

In the postulation of the Eternal Feminine, women are confronted by something akin to a Platonic Idea, dressed up in different, seemingly contradictory, guises. Thus, before we have an opportunity to become disillusioned with current manifestations of the myth, new ones are being forged to confirm and sustain the status quo. Even when an individual is armed with intellectual and political tools, her efforts at debunking the myth of woman are met with harsh penalties; she is, according to Beauvoir (692), “still not free to do as she pleases in shaping the concept of femininity.” The Eternal Feminine is the normative standard of womanhood espoused by patriarchal culture. As such, “a woman who has no wish to shock or devalue herself socially should live out her feminine situation in a feminine manner; and very often, for that matter, her professional success demands it.” Regardless of the factual conditions that delineate every existent’s situation, “the common basis that underlies every individual feminine existence” (31) is the requirement to obey the normative standard of womanhood.

However, an individual woman’s exclusion from the human *Mitsein* is more or less assured by her adherence to the Eternal Feminine, given its ideological function of dehumanising women. A male-orientated society attributes to *man* the status of human being, with the concomitant qualities of subjectivity, autonomy, self-certainty, normality; to *woman*, the absence or lack of these traits. While Beauvoir acknowledges the fiction of the *Eternal Masculine*, she quite pointedly avoids the argument that both men and women are victims of normative constructs. Recall in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that Beauvoir does not even exempt the dissident from moral culpability for the oppression of others. Thus, while certain males may not personally dominate or exploit women, while they may even be woman’s rights

activists, they continue to live and work in and profit from a sexist world. I return to this theme during the course of this analysis.

Man denies all ambiguity in human existence – that is, male existence – which is precisely how it is possible for him to be self-evidently male. At the same time, he depicts woman as the embodiment<sup>40</sup> of ambiguity, which enables him to exclude her from his definition of *humanity*. The *ambiguity* inscribed by patriarchal culture on woman's body does not refer to the *fundamental ambiguity of human existence* that Beauvoir describes in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Indeed, the myth of woman strips women of our fundamental ambiguity by focusing exclusively only on the corporeal aspects of a woman's existence, to the extent that “her intellect, her political, social, and economic independence are smothered in her womb” (Deranty 2000: 160). The ambiguity to which I refer pertains to the seemingly ambiguous depictions of woman as both life and death, nature and artifice, virgin and whore, evil and good, etc., which Beauvoir (171-229) critically analyses in the chapter entitled, *Dreams, Fears, Idols*. What she shows is that each of these expressions of the Eternal Feminine, regardless of whether they worship or debase woman, serve the ideological function of dehumanising her. In turn, as it will become clear, this dehumanising process enables man to turn woman into the desired intermediary between himself and nature; by implication, he forges the opportunity to affirm himself without having to participate in the dialectic of recognition.

When a woman conforms to the Eternal Feminine, she is cut off from humanity; when a woman resists conformity, she faces devaluation, even expulsion, from the world of men, the human world.<sup>41</sup> Excluded, she finds herself in “the infantile world of ready-made values”

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<sup>40</sup> *Embodiment* is apt, given that a common feature of the manifestations of the myth of woman “is that they are related more or less directly to ... the female body – its functions and significance” (Arp in Simons 1995: 172). Fundamental to the Eternal Feminine is that she is defined entirely through her body. In the *Introduction*, Beauvoir (16) writes that woman “is called ‘the sex’, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less”. Elsewhere, Beauvoir (175) reiterates that we “sometimes say ‘the sex’ to designate woman; she is the flesh, its delights and dangers.”

<sup>41</sup> Beauvoir expresses here a line of reasoning that Thompson (1995: 210) develops in *The Media and Modernity: a social theory of the media*: “A variety of terms have been introduced, from Althusser's ‘interpellation’ to Foucault's ‘techniques’ or ‘technologies’ of the self, to try to specify the ways in which individuals are turned into subjects who think and act in accordance with the possibilities that

(Beauvoir 1948: 141), a world in which the myth of woman is an absolute truth. In short, if woman is, like man, a *vervallen* existent, the situation into which she falls is always already set up for her to fail. She fails at forging her own identity, at developing and acting on behalf of her own subjectivity and agency.<sup>42</sup> When women adhere to the myth of woman, man confirms his superiority; when a woman disavows the Eternal Feminine and “insinuates herself into a world that has doomed her to passivity” (692), when she acts like a (hu)man, man confirms his superiority.

The concept *Eternal Feminine* is rarely used in *The Second Sex*. Occasionally, Beauvoir distinguishes “woman” from “women”, “we” or a specific woman; more often, the reader has to discern whether she is referring to an impersonal Eternal Woman or to the specific lived experiences of particular women. On the whole, Beauvoir uses the term “woman” to designate the fictional Woman invented by patriarchal culture. Thus, Beauvoir (218) plainly states that if *woman* “did not exist, men would have invented her.” The conflation between the myth of woman and flesh-and-blood women is, firstly, a deliberate strategy to destabilise the absolute status of the Eternal Feminine; secondly, to play with the notion of woman as pure ambiguity.

Thirdly, Beauvoir (24) submits:

[W]hen an individual (or group of individuals) is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that he *is* inferior. But the significance of the verb *to be* must be rightly understood here; it is in bad faith to give it a static value when it really has the dynamic Hegelian sense of ‘to have become’.

To say “woman is inferior” is to express the situation of the Eternal Feminine created by patriarchy – one that has the appearance of absolute truth; to say “this woman is inferior” or “all women are inferior” is to point, not to the “natural order of things” but to a process by

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are laid out in advance. Of course, the dominant symbolic systems (what some used to call ‘ideologies’, but what many now prefer to call ‘discourses’) will not define an individual’s every move. Like a game of chess, the dominant system will define which moves are open to individuals and which are not – with the non-trivial difference that, unlike chess, social life is a game that one cannot choose not to play.”

<sup>42</sup> See also Bergoffen (1997: 169) and Le Dœuff (1991: 102-103). Of course, woman’s failure is not the same as the existent’s failure, described in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, which denotes precisely the kind of indeterminacy not associated with the Eternal Feminine.

which individual or groups of women have been mystified, habituated or forced to assume the role of Eternal Feminine. The confusion over the status of “is” in assertions like “woman is passive”, “woman is the Other”, etc., has the effect of making Beauvoir vulnerable to assorted charges of determinism, radical individualism, nominalism, essentialism, misogyny and penis-envy. However, the *sine qua non* of her philosophy is that the “existent *is* nothing other than what he does” (287), or, in the case of the woman existent, what she is compelled to do. Since she is compelled to partake of it, the Eternal Feminine *is* what she “is”.<sup>43</sup>

*What is a woman?* Beauvoir’s preliminary answer is that *woman* is what men have made of her; more precisely, *woman* is an expression of male privilege. Beauvoir (16) continues:

[Woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.

This passage heralds Beauvoir’s foray into Hegelian dialectics. It is supplemented by a highly significant, but often overlooked, footnote in which she singles out Emmanuel Levinas’ essay, *Temps et l’Autre* (1948), as an expression of male privilege.<sup>44</sup>

Let us consider some of the assertions in *Time and the Other* that pique Beauvoir:

Does a situation exist where the alterity of the other appears in its purity? ... I think the absolutely contrary contrary [*le contraire absolument contraire*], whose contrariety is in no way affected by the relationship between it and its correlative, the contrariety that permits its terms to remain absolutely other, is the *feminine*. ... Sex is not some specific difference. ... [The] difference between the sexes [is not] a contradiction. ... Neither is the difference between the sexes the duality of two complimentary terms, for complementary terms presuppose a pre-existing whole. ... The other as other is not here

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<sup>43</sup> For a similar argument, see Kruks (1995: 87). It must be stressed that distinguishing between a particular individual woman and the universal Eternal Feminine does not amount to a sex-gender distinction: i.e., there is no pre-social moment in which the body and/or consciousness of an individual female is somehow “pure”, that is, not subjected to and situated within the laws, conventions, myths, taboos and representations of the world. This is, the mistake made by, for instance, Judith Butler (in Fallaize 1998: 29-42) in her interpretation of Beauvoir’s famous line “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”, which, for Butler, amounts to the ability to “choose” to be a woman.

<sup>44</sup> Among scholars, Beauvoir’s reference to Levinas is seldom mentioned, with the notable exception of Sara Heinämaa (e.g. in Card 2003: 72, 85).

an object that becomes ours or becomes us; to the contrary, it withdraws into its mystery. Neither does this mystery of the feminine – the feminine: essentially other – refer to any romantic notions of the mysterious, unknown, or misunderstood woman. ... The Other is not a being we encounter that menaces us or wants to lay hold of us. The feat of being refractory to our power is not a power greater than ours. Alterity makes for all its power. Its mystery constitutes its alterity. In positing the Other's alterity as mystery, itself defined by modesty, I do not posit it as a freedom identical to and at grips with mine; I do not posit another existent in front of me, I posit alterity. Just as with death, I am not concerned with an existent, but with the event of alterity, with alienation. The existent is accomplished in the "subjective" and in "consciousness", alterity is accomplished in the feminine. ... The transcendence of the feminine consists in withdrawing elsewhere, which is a movement opposed to the movement of consciousness. But this does not make it unconscious or subconscious, and I see no other possibility than to call it mystery.

(Levinas 1987:85-88)

While Levinas insists that "the feminine" does not "refer to any romantic notions of the mysterious, unknown, or misunderstood woman"; instead, it is "a movement opposed to the movement of consciousness", it should be noted that, in French, *féminine* denotes "female", *féminin* denotes "feminine" and *féminité* denotes "womanhood"; thus, it would be disingenuous to claim that *the feminine* has no relation to *woman*. There is something suspect in co-opting a term that signifies *woman* to symbolise absence, mystery, non-being, modesty, concealment, indeterminacy, etc. – by way of a textual "sleight of hand, woman is assimilated to the feminine" (Braidotti 1991:124). Certainly, Beauvoir reads Levinas' statements about "the feminine" as statements about woman.<sup>45</sup>

Beauvoir (16, footnote 1) notes:

But it is striking that [Levinas] deliberately takes a man's point of view, disregarding the reciprocity of subject and object. When he writes that woman is mystery, he implies that she is a mystery for man. Thus his description, which is intended to be objective, is in fact an assertion of male privilege.

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<sup>45</sup>In the *Preface* to this later edition of *Time and The Other*, Levinas (1987: 39) amends his position regarding the supposed sex-neutrality of *the feminine*: "[T]he differences between the sexes in general – appeared to me as a difference contrasting strongly with other differences, not merely as a quality different from all others, but as the very quality of difference." Although he wrote these words thirty years after *Le Deuxième Sexe* was published, they convey the reason why, of all self-other relationships, Beauvoir focuses on the relationship between man and woman.

A sympathetic reading of *Time and the Other* would undoubtedly point out that, for Levinas, the feminine is a *privileged* concept – the feminine as ‘absolute other’ serves (always in the service of some master, even when he is trying to renounce his mastership) as the counterpoint to Unity, the Ideal, Truth and the Rational Subject. The feminine, Levinas suggests, is not an existent, but “the event of alterity”. For Hanssen (2000: 292, footnote 9), Levinas’ “discourse on “the feminine” elevates women to a transcendental position, stripping them of actional subjecthood.” This is precisely what Beauvoir objects to in Levinas’ postulation of the feminine as the opposite of consciousness and subjectivity, as mystery, modesty and alienation, as the absolutely or essentially other. His representation of the feminine conveys the idea that, more than the peculiarities that mark the distance between each and every subject, woman’s separation extends even further to an *exclusion* from the “human *Mitsein*” (Beauvoir 102, footnote 2). If the feminine is the opposite of consciousness and subjectivity, it is also, within the phenomenological framework, the opposite of being human. Thus, notwithstanding his veneration of the feminine, Levinas reinforces the patriarchal standard of the Eternal Feminine.

Note Beauvoir’s response to Levinas’ suggestion that woman represents *mystery*. In the chapter, *Myth and Reality*, she expands on the theme of woman as the symbol of mystery. Regarding symbolism, Beauvoir (79) asserts that it “did not come down from subterranean depths – it has been elaborated, like language, by that human reality which is at once *Mitsein* and separation”. Quite pointedly, she links the use of symbols – including, one may suppose, the Eternal Feminine – to the tradition of phenomenology. While Beauvoir finds the myth of woman in numerous discourses, she never loses sight of the ways in which philosophy, specifically, a movement that takes Hegel, Heidegger and Husserl as its point of departure, a movement that extends to Levinas, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, conspires to women’s oppression.

Beauvoir (285-286) submits:

Few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling caste than the myth of woman: it justifies all privileges and even authorises their abuse. ... Of all these myths, none is more firmly anchored in masculine hearts than that of the feminine ‘mystery’. It has numerous advantages. And first of all it permits an easy explanation of all that appears inexplicable; the man who ‘does not understand’ a woman is happy to substitute an objective resistance for a subjective deficiency of mind; instead of admitting his ignorance, he perceives the

presence of a 'mystery' outside himself: an alibi, indeed, that flatters laziness and vanity at once. ... Surely woman is, in a sense, mysterious, 'mysterious as is all the world', according to Maeterlinck. [F]rom this point of view the other is always a mystery. ... The truth is that there is mystery on both sides ... [but] in accordance with the universal rule I have stated, the categories in which men think of the world are established *from their point of view, as absolute*: they misconceive reciprocity, here as everywhere. A mystery for man, woman is considered to be mysterious in essence.

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir (1948: 67) suggests that "it is only as something strange ... that the other is revealed as an other", in other words, what makes the other *other* is that he or she is strange, that is, different, unfamiliar, mysterious. From the point of view that regards recognition as the double movement of two subjects "othering" one another, everyone is strange, different, mysterious. What Beauvoir argues in the passage regarding "the myth of woman" is that the man-woman relationship does not typify this reciprocal exchange between strangers. Instead, the othering of woman by man resembles the naïvely solipsistic stance of the subject who posits himself through the exclusion of everything else. Beauvoir (289) suggests that "woman does not always 'understand' man; but there is no such thing as a masculine mystery"; that man is "on the Master side and that Mystery belongs to the slave."

She links the male prerogative to posit "woman as Mystery" to the solipsistic viewpoint of the master in Hegel's master-slave dialectic. In this context, she shows that, since the man-master forgets his own ambiguity and posits himself as Subject, he recognises only that which coincides with himself, he recognises sameness; the woman-other's difference, those aspects that point to her independence from this Master-Subject, is labeled by him as Mystery. Her difference estranges her from man and, by implication, humanity. Since there is no reciprocity in the exchange between her and man, woman is the absolute stranger. Thus, she belongs on the outside; she is cast outside of humanity.

Through an expression of male privilege, as the example of *Time and the Other* shows, man is posited as the Absolute Subject and woman as the Absolute Other. From this point, Beauvoir's discussion unfurls on two different albeit connected levels: a general analysis of the concepts *subjectivity* and *otherness* and an intimate examination of the othering of women. Her starting point is a review of the dialectic of recognition.

## c.2) The subject, his other and the Other

Beauvoir introduces the theme of subjectivity in terms of the self's relationship with the other. She proposes that a subject can be posited only by distinguishing itself from an "other". Of the categorisation of "the Other", Beauvoir (16-17) writes that it is "as primordial as consciousness itself" and that "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought."

Furthermore, she links the process of *othering* to the experience of oppression. In her attempt to understand the origin of oppression, Beauvoir (17) turns to Hegel:

If three travellers chance to occupy the same compartment, that is enough to make vaguely hostile 'others' out of all the rest of the passengers on the train. In small-town eyes all persons not belonging to the village are 'strangers' and suspect; to the native of a country all who inhabit other countries are 'foreigners'; Jews are 'different' for the anti-Semite, Negroes [*sic*] are 'inferior' for American racists, aborigines are 'natives' for colonists, proletarians are the 'lower class' for the privileged. ... These phenomena would be incomprehensible if in fact human society were simply a *Mitsein* or fellowship based on solidarity and friendliness. Things become clear, on the contrary, if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed – he sets himself as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object. But the other consciousness, the other ego, sets up a reciprocal claim ... [which] tend to deprive the concept of Other of its absolute sense and to make manifest its relativity; willy-nilly, individuals and groups are forced to realise the reciprocity of their relations.

She sets aside the possibility of human society based on "solidarity and friendliness". It is important to note Beauvoir's mention of reciprocity, which, I will show, punctuates every reference to the dialectic of recognition in *The Second Sex*. She reserves the possibility of friendship. Conflict is not, as Kojève and indeed Sartre suppose, the inevitable outcome of the existent's meeting with other existents. In *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex'*,<sup>46</sup> which is a highly regarded addition to the scholarship on Beauvoir, Eva Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 171) notes this reciprocity and finds it "the point of departure for a

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<sup>46</sup> Henceforth abbreviated to *Sex and Existence*.

possible *identification* with the other – something that would have been inconceivable, however, were man’s relation with the other exclusively one of hostility and conflict.” The problem with this assessment is revealed in the manner in which Lundgren-Gothlin (171) describes what Beauvoir calls *a reciprocal claim*, to wit: “Beauvoir emphasises that the other group or the other consciousness immediately reacts with similar behaviour”. Lundgren-Gothlin understands the meeting of consciousnesses in the manner described by Kojève, that is, the movement of a solitary individual searching for self-certainty, instead of the double movement of two consciousnesses posited by Hegel. We saw how Kojève’s focus on the single subject mastering the world leads to an account of reactionary violence – that *reciprocity* in Kojève’s account means “retaliation”, which paves the way for an endless cycle of conflict. Lundgren-Gothlin does not grasp the significance of the interpretation of the other’s behaviour as a *reaction*; thus, she incorrectly associates Kojève with ideas of friendship and generosity among existents. Moreover, *Sex and Existence* is premised on the assumption that Beauvoir’s interpretation of Hegel is substantially influenced by Kojève’s lectures on *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, revealing the basis for the apparatus of limitation that she employs in her reading of Beauvoir’s work, Lundgren-Gothlin (219) insists that “Beauvoir’s model is Kojèvean-Marxist throughout: demands for recognition, requiring participation in productive work and control of childbearing [thus], in Beauvoir’s philosophy, women have to adopt a male model of work and participation in the public sphere in order to achieve liberation.”<sup>48</sup> Certainly, as I will show, on the surface one can find some parallels between Kojève’s lectures and Beauvoir’s engagement with the dialectic of recognition. However, I believe that Beauvoir’s initial engagement with *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1940 yielded aspects of Hegel’s philosophy that

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<sup>47</sup> See Hutchings (2003: 61-63) for a similar reading of Kojève. Hutchings’ analysis follows the same trajectory as that of Lundgren-Gothlin: Beauvoir supposedly interprets *Phenomenology of Spirit* via Kojève, which signifies a philosophical departure from Sartre.

<sup>48</sup> An exhaustive investigation of Beauvoir’s memoirs yields no evidence that Beauvoir attended Kojève’s seminars, although it is certain that she was acquainted with his ideas (e.g., Beauvoir 1968: 43). However, Lundgren-Gothlin (273, footnote 16) claims that, during their interview in 1985, Beauvoir confirmed that she had read *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* and was particularly interested in Kojève’s interpretation of the master-slave dialectic. Given that Kojève’s text was published in 1947, precisely when Beauvoir was writing *The Second Sex*, it is possible that she read and was influenced by it at that time.

were either ignored or underdeveloped in Kojève's lectures; thus, also by the conventional French approach to Hegel.

In effect, Lundgren-Gothlin's insistence on a Kojèvean influence in *The Second Sex* reinforces the idea of Beauvoir as a mere disciple of a philosophical perspective that was fashionable during the war years; it greatly limits the hermeneutic possibilities of her text and detracts from the singularity of Beauvoir's interpretation of Hegel. Still, lest I distance Beauvoir too soon from the taste for conflict that defines early French phenomenology, it can be argued that her acknowledgement of the value of reciprocity remains at an ideal level inasmuch as she considers friendship and generosity to be man's "highest achievement" (173). Above, she suggests that human society is not "simply" based on solidarity and friendship. Elsewhere, Beauvoir (88) surmises: "If the original relation between a man and his fellows was exclusively a relation of friendship, we could not account for any type of enslavement". Friendship cannot be discounted but human relationships can also be violent and oppressive. Indeed, Beauvoir's initial and, it must be said, predominant focus in her account of the struggle for recognition is on conflict and domination.

Thus, phenomena of oppression – slavery, xenophobia, colonialism, racism, class-wars, cultural imperialism, etc. – must be understood in terms of a primal desire to assert oneself at the expense or even demise of everyone else. In Hegelian terms, this "original aspiration to dominate the Other" (89) refers to the first phase of the movement in which consciousnesses meet each other. The naïvely solipsistic desire to dominate others is linked to self-consciousness' point of departure, which is an awareness of a distinction between itself and the other (thing, nature, consciousness): the subject becomes conscious of himself as an *I* only through the consciousness of things that are *not-I*.<sup>49</sup>

The subject's consciousness of the *not-I* marks their mutual separation, e.g., I am not that tree; equally, that tree is not me. Prior to the first movement of consciousness, there was no knowledge of a distinction between them, and if there was no knowledge, then such a

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<sup>49</sup> Since phenomenology takes as its point of departure an *I* who posits the world, whose prerogative it is to turn everything and everyone into not-I, and since Beauvoir argues that the world is ruled, defined and evaluated by and for men, she effectively attributes "maleness" to this phenomenological *I*.

distinction could exist only to those studying the movements of consciousness. Now that there has been consciousness of the tree as *not-I*, the subject has won its independence from the tree, but, of course, the tree has won its independence from the subject. Through consciousness' negating action, the difference that had always existed between the subject and the tree is affirmed. Consciousness of the *not-I* takes away something that had never belonged to the subject and, at the same time, gives him the experience of that *not-I* in its newly affirmed independence.

However, through separation anxiety, through disquiet, the subject might desire, either to forfeit his own independence, in other words, the subject might wish to become once again (at) one with the tree, which is, "the dream of an inhuman objectivity" (Beauvoir 1948: 14), the dream of "wanting to be" (12); alternatively, the subject might refuse to acknowledge the independence of the tree, yet still insist upon his own, which is, as we have learnt from *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, what Beauvoir means by oppression.<sup>50</sup>

Beauvoir considers another approach to the subject's disquiet: to prevent the distance that defines the relationship with the other from becoming the justification for exploitation and domination, which is the moral responsibility of the existent to affirm the bond. In *The Second Sex*, the opening remarks concerning the dialectic of recognition that I have cited, above; specifically, Beauvoir's emphasis on the *relativity* of otherness, paves the way for a position that belies the assumed inevitability of domination and reasserts her ethical perspective.

The example of the fellow train-travellers shows that the othering of the rest of the passengers is based on a random and short-lived proximity. Distance can have the same effect, e.g., the citizen of a country who considers those who live in other countries as "foreigners", finds to his dismay when travelling abroad that he is now "regarded as a 'stranger' by the natives of neighbouring countries" (Beauvoir 1997: 17). Beauvoir (18) acknowledges that there are instances in the history of human society "in which a certain category has been able to dominate another completely for a time", where, for instance, "the majority imposes its rule

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<sup>50</sup> In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir (1948: 12) describes these scenarios thus: "I should like to be the landscape which I am contemplating, I should like this sky, this quiet water to think themselves within me, that it might be I whom they express in flesh and bone, and I remain at a distance."

upon the minority or persecutes it". However, these instances of subjugation are based on specific historical events, such as the "scattering of the Jews, the introduction to slavery into America, the conquests of imperialism" (18). Often the oppressors and the oppressed had formerly been independent and perhaps they had recognised each other's autonomy, or, in some cases, they had previously not even known of each other's existence. In many instances, the two groups had "possessed in common a past, a tradition, sometimes a religion or a culture" (18). The point is that "otherness" takes on many different guises depending on the particular context – in some cases it lasts as long as a journey on a train and in other instances it is used to justify the oppression of a group over many lifetimes.

Beauvoir understands that otherness is a relative term precisely because it signifies a mutually constituting relationship between two (or more) consciousnesses. By this reasoning, there can be no "Pure Subject", no unmediated  $I = I$ , and, crucially, no "Absolute Other".<sup>51</sup> The relativity of the concept of otherness paradoxically demonstrates its ubiquity – everyone is always already in multiple ways "other". Quite clearly, this signifies a departure from early French phenomenology. Recall that, for Sartre, the existent is a subject without mediation. Additionally, both Sartre and Kojève define freedom in terms of ridding the self of otherness, and, while Hyppolite more readily grants the significance of otherness in Hegel's dialectic, it only leads him to over-emphasise the "unhappy consciousness".

Now, Susan James (in Card 2003: 149) suggests that, from the perspective of the relativity of otherness, every form of subjugation or discrimination is to be expected "since it exemplifies a universal disposition", i.e., the "fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness". If *otherness* is a relative term, if the process of *othering* is ubiquitous, her argument goes, one can deduce that everyone is predisposed to be racist, ethnocentric, classist, etc. Penelope Deutscher (2004: 656-671) follows this line of reasoning in her article, *Enemies and Reciprocities*. Deutscher (660-661) claims:

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<sup>51</sup> Michèle le Dœuff (1991: 108) reaches the same conclusion. Problematically, she adds: "However there is one exception to this rule: between the sexes there is no reciprocity ... because women have not (yet) done the same back to those who set them up as others." Like Lundgren-Gothlin and Hutchings, Le Dœuff interprets Beauvoir's use of *reciprocity* in the Kojèvean sense of reactionary violence.

Though it is not the case made overall by *The Second Sex*, she seems to be on the brink of claiming that racism is inevitable. ... Beauvoir almost naturalises both othering and racism, and it is this banalisation that grounds her turn to ethics.

Neither James, nor Deutscher, take into account that, if Beauvoir is following Hegel, to be conscious of the other as *other* and the desire to assimilate otherness, which is what domination means in Hegel's account, are two *separate* movements of consciousness. For Hegel, the othering process is marked by its *immediacy*, and it is dialectically overcome upon the reflection that the movement of the subject to set himself as "I" is in fact the double movement of the self and the other subject. At best, consciousness will come to understand that difference is a precondition for identity. At worst, the master-subject will refuse to acknowledge the independence, and thus difference, of his adversary. In Hegel's account, the recognition of difference is something positive, in fact, it is the opposite of domination. The reason for Hegel's stance may well be that the differences that he has in mind do not relate to such peculiarities as skin colour, sex, sexual orientation, religion, etc.; certainly, as I will show, Beauvoir challenges this shortcoming in his dialectic of recognition.

However, even without the benefit of a cursory understanding of Hegel's dialectics, the assertion that Beauvoir's "naturalisation of racism grounds her turn to ethics" – notwithstanding fact that the only form of imperialism that she focuses on in *The Second Sex* is the problem of sexism – would imply a number of things that are the *exact opposite* of the arguments that Beauvoir has already put forward in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*: that no-one is truly oppressed, that the creation of identity is the prerogative of the self, that none of the phenomena of oppression can in reality evoke the outrage that Beauvoir's ethics takes as its point of departure.

*The Second Sex* employs two conceptions of otherness.<sup>52</sup> Firstly, there is, as I have just noted, the relative otherness that is the upshot of the dialectic of recognition. The second conception is of an Other with a capital "O", that is, the notion of an "absolute" or "pure" other. Beauvoir departs from both Hegel and the exponents of early French phenomenology in arguing that there is a particular self-other relationship in which "one of the contrasting terms is set up as the sole essential, denying any relativity in regard to its correlative and defining the latter as

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<sup>52</sup> See also Hutchings (2003: 67-69).

pure otherness” (17-18). This “primordial *Mitsein*” (19, 67) is the relationship between man and woman.

Recall that Hegel suggests three possible outcomes to the confrontation between consciousnesses engaged in the dialectic of recognition, namely, death, the bondage of one party or, ideally, reciprocity and mutuality. Beauvoir proposes a fourth possibility: *woman* represents “a means for escaping that implacable dialectic of master and slave” (172), she provides man an opportunity to elude it. Let us follow the line of reasoning that brings Beauvoir to this twist.

In the first few paragraphs of the third part of her text, Beauvoir (171-172), gives an account of the dialectic in terms that will seem familiar:

It is the existence of other men that tears each man out of his immanence and enables him to fulfil the truth of his being, to complete himself through transcendence, through escape towards some objective, through enterprise. But this liberty not my own, while assuring mine, also conflicts with it: there is the tragedy of the unfortunate human consciousness; each separate conscious being aspires to set himself up alone as sovereign subject. Each tries to fulfil himself by reducing the other to slavery. But the slave, though he works and fears, senses himself somehow as the essential; and, by a dialectical inversion, it is the master who seems to be the inessential.

Here we find the Kojèvean mixture of Marxism and existentialism, with references to intersubjectivity based on conflict, the master-slave dialectic and the eventual victory of the slave through labour;<sup>53</sup> the immanence-transcendence opposition of Sartre; even a reference to the unhappy consciousness that preoccupies Hyppolite and Jean Wahl.

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<sup>53</sup> Beauvoir’s chapter on the perspective of historical materialism shows some similarities to Kojève’s appropriation of Hegel. Following the same path as Kojève, she casts the human *I* as an active and negating *I*; to wit, “it does not passively submit to the presence of nature but rather takes over the control of nature on its own behalf”, which is accomplished “objectively in practical action” rather than through “an inward, subjective operation” (84). To be considered fully human presupposes a separation: “the original condition of the existent ... [is] an inclination ... to think of himself as basically individual, to assert the autonomy and separateness of his existence” (87). To extend his grasp upon the world, man is always armed. However, argues Beauvoir (87-88), man’s tools alone cannot explain what it is about his nature that would bring about an interest in the enslavement of others. Thus, like Kojève, she finds the Marxist analysis of the foundation of oppression superficial;

Now, it must be noted that Beauvoir uses the term “immanence” interchangeably with “passivity” or “inertia”, “facticity”, “corporeality”, “objectivity”, “animality”, “givenness” and “preservation” or “maintenance”. When Beauvoir assumes the language of the phenomenological tradition, as she does in the citation under discussion, she opposes immanence to “transcendence”. Within the phenomenological framework, *transcendence* is the mark of surpassing activity, creativity, humanity, subjectivity and consciousness.

However, very early in her discussion it becomes clear that Beauvoir’s distinction between transcendence and immanence does not follow the *l’être-pour-soi-l’être-en-soi* dichotomy of *Being and Nothingness*. Beauvoir (29) contends:

Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the ‘*en-soi*’ – the brutish life of subjection to given conditions – and of liberty into constraint and contingency. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil.

Recall that, for Sartre, the *pour-soi* (existence) and *en-soi* (being) are regions without communication. As Kruks (1987: 115) correctly surmises: “For Sartre, either the ‘for-itself’, the uncaused upsurge of freedom, exists *whatever* the constraining facticities of the situation, or else it does not exist [and] one is dealing with the realm of inert being.” The “degradation” or “downfall” of the for-itself would, in Sartrean terms, mean the end of human existence. Since, for Sartre, human existence cannot “fall back into immanence”, what can be construed as the subject’s *consent* cannot in reality bring about such a downfall. Bad faith, to which this “moral fault of consent” presumably refers, signifies the existent’s desire for mere being, which causes him to deny – futilely – “the indestructible upsurge of ‘being-for-itself’” (Kruks: 113). Moreover, the notion of oppression – that the existent can be *compelled* to fall into immanence – is not in accordance with a version of freedom that is entirely unconnected to self-other relationships, the factual situation and power relations. Thus, the notion of “falling back into immanence” expresses a possibility beyond the ontological framework set out in *Being and Nothingness*.

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moreover, she also implies that the Marxist perspective ought to be supplemented by Hegel’s account of the struggle for self-recognition. Thus, according to Beauvoir (89), the foundation for oppression is an “imperialism of the human consciousness ... an original aspiration to dominate the Other”.

Beauvoir (172) resumes her account of the dialectic of recognition:

It is possible to rise above this conflict if each individual freely recognises himself and the other simultaneously as object and subject in a reciprocal manner. But friendship and generosity, which alone permit in actuality this recognition of free beings, are not facile virtues; they are assuredly man's highest achievement, and through that achievement he is to be found in his true nature. But this true nature is that of a struggle unceasingly begun, unceasingly abolished; it requires man to outdo himself at every moment. We might put it in other words and say that man attains an authentically moral attitude when he renounces mere being to assume his position as existent; through this transformation also he renounces all possession, for possession is one way of seeking mere being; but the transformation through which he attains true wisdom is never done, it is necessary to make it without ceasing, it demands a constant tension.

Of the numerous references to the struggle for recognition in her work, this passage most clearly shows Beauvoir's nod to the version of the dialectic excluded from the "French Hegel". Beauvoir posits reciprocal recognition as an alternative to conflict and domination. Here, *reciprocity* refers, not to the reactionary violence that we found in the conventional interpretation of the dialectic, but to the double movement of two consciousnesses that Hegel presents in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Both subjects are simultaneously subject-and-object, same-and-other, identity-and-difference, I-and-We.

I have argued that the generous subject, in Hegel's account, *lets the other be*, that is, recognises the other as a separate, not-to-be-assimilated, individual, in short, recognises the otherness of the other. In this passage, Beauvoir considers such generosity to constitute what it truly means to be human. Given that we are failed human beings, as she argues in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, generosity is an ideal to which we aspire. More often than not, as failed humans, we are prone to possessiveness. I return to the topic of *possession* later. Regarding Beauvoir's use of the term in this citation, suffice it to say that it designates the violence that occurs, as Hegel has shown, when one party, the naïvely solipsistic consciousness, who becomes the master, acknowledges only one of the two mutually constituting aspects of his and others' subjectivities. In brief, he posits himself as purely subject-same-identity-I and the other as purely object-other-difference-We. The difference of the other is defined by the master as "different-from-me", not as different-in-him/herself. Hence, the master takes possession of the independence, the individuality, the otherness of the other.

However, Beauvoir will not follow Hegel to the final resolution of all the dialectic movements, to Absolute Spirit; instead, *the struggle is unceasingly begun, unceasingly abolished*. For Beauvoir, the spirit of generosity is absent from the Absolute. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir (1948: 104-105) declares:

The essential moment of Hegelian ethics is the moment when consciousnesses recognise one another; in this operation the other is recognised as identical with me, which means that in myself it is the universal truth of my self which alone is recognised; so individuality is denied, and it can no longer reappear except on the natural and contingent plane; moral salvation will lie in my surpassing toward the other who is equal to myself and who in turn will surpass himself toward another. ... The Mind [Spirit] is a subject; but *who* is a subject?

Recall that Hegel's system is predicated on the expression of Spirit not only as substance but also as subject. The dialectical movements towards Spirit are supposed to become increasingly concrete, but, as Beauvoir argues in this citation, this concreteness does not extend to the individual, the peculiar, the different. Hegel himself shows that friendship is impossible without generosity, that is, the recognition of difference. For Beauvoir (1997: 93), the relationship between individuals is "sometimes in enmity, sometimes in amity, always in a state of tension." Only this *constant tension*, upheld by the recognition of the otherness of both individuals, ensures that their relationship does not become one of possession.

Having prepared us for a departure from Hegel, Beauvoir (172) continues:

And so, quite unable to fulfil himself in solitude, man is incessantly in danger in his relations with his fellows: his life is a difficult enterprise with success never assured. But he does not like difficulty; he is afraid of danger. He aspires in contradictory fashion both to life and to repose, to existence and to merely being; he knows full well that 'trouble of the spirit' is the price of development, that his distance from the object is the price of his nearness to himself; but he dreams of quiet in disquiet and of an opaque plenitude that nevertheless would be endowed with consciousness. This dream incarnated is precisely woman; she is the wished-for intermediary between nature, the stranger to man, and the fellow being who is too closely identical. She opposes him with neither the hostile silence of nature nor the hard requirement of a reciprocal relation; through a unique privilege she is a conscious being and yet it seems possible to possess her in the flesh.

We have seen that man's life is a ceaseless, perhaps foolish, struggle for self-mastery. Indeed, the struggle for recognition is a life and death struggle. As Lundgren-Gothlin (in Fallaize 1998: 98) explains, "man hopes to avoid ... the constant tension and conflict in the human relationship, the need of others and the concomitant risk of being subordinated."

The reason why man believes that he can avoid the struggle through his relationship with woman is the fact that "woman has always been man's dependant, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality" (Beauvoir: 20). Later, Beauvoir (25-26) qualifies:

[T]he vast majority of men ... do not *postulate* woman as inferior, for today they are too thoroughly imbued with the ideal of democracy not to recognise all human beings as equals. ... When he is in a co-operative and benevolent relation with woman, his theme is the principle of abstract equality, and he does not base his attitude upon such inequality as may exist.

Put differently: "*De jure* women are men's equals, *de facto* they are not" (Deranty 2000: 156).

Whatever the risks of participating in the dialectic of recognition, whatever the outcome, consciousnesses enter the dialectic as independent<sup>54</sup> equals. Since woman is not the equal of man, since she "finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other ... [where] they propose to stabilise her as object and to doom her to immanence" (29), she has lost the battle for recognition even *before* its commencement. Beauvoir (102) affirms: "For the male it is always another male who is the fellow being, the other who is also the same, with whom reciprocal relations are established."

Accordingly, Rosalyn Diprose (1994: 47) proposes that the "struggle for mutual recognition is not the battle between the sexes but a battle between two equal self-consciousnesses, both of whom have negated the significance of their embodiment – they have negated their differences." Indeed, the notion of a *battle of the sexes* is a myth: women's combat "has never

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<sup>54</sup> A contentious concept, since one of the fundamental ambiguities of human existence is the individual's "solitude and bond with the world" (Beauvoir 1948: 9); since man is defined by interdependence (82); and since human reality "is at once *Mitsein* and separation" (Beauvoir 1997: 79).

been anything more than a symbolic agitation [since] they have gained only what men have been willing to grant” (Beauvoir: 19).<sup>55</sup>

One cannot simply draw parallels between women’s oppression and “other cases in which a certain category has been able to dominate another completely for a time” (18). Unlike cases where “the majority imposes its rule upon the minority or persecutes it” (18), women make up half of the world’s population. Nor is the subordination of women “the result of a historical event or a social change – it was not something that *occurred*” (18). Consequently, though she describes the struggle for self-certainty in terms of the master-slave dialectic, Beauvoir (20, 173) does *not* simply equate *woman* with *slave*.

Beauvoir (96) *does* note in the chapter entitled, *The Nomads*:

Certain passages in the argument employed by Hegel in defining the relation of master to slave apply much better to the relation of man to woman. The advantage of the master, he says, comes from his affirmation of Spirit as against Life through the fact that he risks his own life; but in fact the conquered slave has known the same risk. Whereas woman is basically an existent who gives Life and does not risk her life; between her and the male there has been no combat.

She likens the relationship between man and woman to the first phase of the master-slave dialectic, where the master is the consciousness that dares to face death for the sake of something higher – self-recognition – and the slave is the consciousness that turns himself into a “thing” for the sake of survival. She suggests that both the slave and woman embody the principle of Life as opposed to Spirit.

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<sup>55</sup> Beauvoir (160) expands: “Feminism itself was never an autonomous movement: it was in part an instrument in the hands of politicians, in part an epiphenomenon reflecting a deeper social drama. Never have women constituted a separate caste, nor in truth have they ever as a sex sought to play a historic role. The doctrines that object to the advent of woman considered as flesh, life, immanence, the Other, are masculine ideologies in no way expressing feminine aspirations. The majority of women resign themselves to their lot without attempting to take any action; those who have tried to change it have intended not to be confined within the limits of their peculiarity and cause it to triumph, but to rise above it. When they have intervened in the course of world affairs, it has been in accord with men, in masculine perspectives. This intervention, in general, has been secondary and episodic.”

Throughout *The Nomads*, she brings into play – *play* being the operative word – the distinction, central in Kojève’s understanding of the dialectic of recognition, between the animal desire for self-preservation (*Life*) and a higher degree of consciousness above and beyond nature, which is associated with risking one’s life in order to affirm one’s humanity (*Spirit*). Recall that the appropriation of Hegel by early French phenomenology is defined by its preoccupation with the life and death struggle and the subsequent portrayal of the dialectic of recognition as inexorably violent. Thus, Kojève (1969: 41) maintains:

Therefore, human, historical, self-conscious existence is possible only where there are, or – at least – where there have been, bloody fights, wars for prestige. And thus it was the sounds of one of these Fights that Hegel heard while finishing his *Phenomenology*, in which he became conscious of himself by answering his question “What am I?”

Additionally, Kojève (226-227) argues:

No animal commits suicide out of simple shame or pure vanity ... no animal risks its life to capture or recapture a flag, to win officer’s stripes, or to be decorated; animals never have bloody fights for pure prestige, for which the only reward is the resulting glory and which can be explained neither by the instinct of preservation (defence of life or search for food) nor by that of reproduction; no animal has ever fought a duel to pay back an insult that harmed none of its vital interests, just as no female has died “defending her honour” against a male. Therefore it is by negating acts of this kind that Man realises and manifests his freedom – that is, the humanity which distinguishes him from the animals.

In these citations I find the most obvious support for Eva Lundgren-Gothlin’s hypothesis of a Kojèvean influence in *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir seems to have Kojève’s words in mind when she shows, in *The Nomads*, that “being human” implies the opposite of preserving, caring and nursing; that “humans” are reactionaries, pillagers, warmongers and rapists, driven by ambition and self-importance. At bottom, “being human” also implies not being “woman”. Kojève would argue that, by avoiding combat, woman has not acted upon the anthropogenetic desire that would confirm her human status.

Imitating Kojève, Beauvoir (95-96) asserts:

The warrior put his life in jeopardy to elevate the prestige of the horde, the clan to which he belonged. And in this he proved dramatically that life is not the supreme value for man, but on the contrary that it should be made to serve ends more important than itself. The worst curse that was laid upon woman was that she should be excluded from these

warlike forays. For it is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal; that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills.

Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 78) infers: “Since Beauvoir, like Kojève, sees risking one’s life as basic to the appearance of humanity, to belong to the sex whose biological orientation is towards giving birth, towards representing the re-creation and preservation of life, rather than the sex that puts life at risk in the struggle for recognition, is a ‘curse’.” Persuaded by a recurring, seemingly negative attitude towards motherhood in *The Second Sex*,<sup>56</sup> she incorrectly interprets this passage, indeed, the entire chapter, as Beauvoir’s veneration of violence.<sup>57</sup>

In this context, Lundgren-Gothlin (in Fallaize 1998: 99) concludes that the unique nature of woman’s oppression – that she is the Other who remains other – emerges from her non-participation in the process of self-recognition. Since there is no combat between the sexes, since woman ostensibly does not participate in the life and death struggle for recognition, the relationship between man and woman is non-dialectical. The lack of dialecticity explains the unique nature of woman’s oppression, i.e., her status as Absolute Other. Lundgren-Gothlin reads *The Second Sex* as an appeal for woman to enter the dialectic of recognition in order to affirm her humanity and attain full subjectivity. In short, the solution to the oppressive relationship between man and woman will resemble the resolution to Kojève’s master-slave dialectic: woman’s release from enslavement comes from her becoming like the man-master.

What Lundgren-Gothlin might also have put forward, if we were to follow her line of argumentation, is the charge of voluntarism in Beauvoir’s supposed stance that woman’s subjugation results from her failure to participate in the dialectic of recognition.<sup>58</sup> After all, it

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<sup>56</sup> See, in particular, Lundgren-Gothlin (in Fallaize 1998: 105) and Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 80). Beauvoir’s stance regarding motherhood will be discussed in more detail in the section to follow.

<sup>57</sup> Michèle le Dœuff (1991: 332, footnote 107) challenges another aspect of Beauvoir’s reiteration of the Spirit-Life opposition: “By contrasting ‘giving life’ with ‘risking one’s life’, Beauvoir contributes to the social silence in which death in childbirth was, so to speak, buried. In the nineteenth century one birth in six ended in the death of the mother. But social thinking maintained a barrier between discourses of motherhood and those of death.” In truth, Beauvoir (e.g. 62; 521), acknowledges the dangers of childbirth, including the possibility of death.

<sup>58</sup> See also Heinämaa (in Card 2003: 66) and Butler (in Fallaize 1998: 34-36).

is not the master that enslaves his adversary; instead, the slave contrives his own bondage through his attachment to animal desire. Of course, before his bondage, the slave had been the master's equal; whereas Beauvoir's point of departure is that woman has *never* been man's equal. Indeed, from a Kojèvean perspective that tends to associate the slave with the proletariat, Beauvoir (89) counters that "the antagonism of the sexes" cannot be reduced to class conflict. Firstly, "proletarians have not always existed, whereas there have always been women" (18). Secondly, "there were not at first free women whom the males enslaved nor were there even castes based on sex" (172-173). If woman is absent from the dialectic of recognition – irrespective of whether or not Beauvoir believes that such absence is desirable – it is because she does not meet the entrance requirement of equality.

Given that *The Nomads* starts with Beauvoir's questioning of the accuracy of historical accounts regarding women's status and functions in early human societies (93); given that *The Ethics of Ambiguity* warns, firstly, against a naïve hatred that denies the primacy of the bond with others; secondly, against the dehumanising effect of violence; given that Beauvoir (45) argues, in *The Second Sex*, that there "are two interrelated dynamic aspects of life: it can be maintained only through transcending itself, and it can transcend itself only on condition that it is maintained"; given that, at the core of her work is the belief that combat is not the only and certainly not the preferable mode of intersubjectivity, it would be a mistake to interpret *The Nomads* as an endorsement of violence and/or a justification for women's subjugation based on their maternal functions.<sup>59</sup>

The recurring question of *The Second Sex* is: *Why is woman the Other?* In turn, the matter of woman's "absolute otherness" forces us to ask: What, after all, does it mean to be human? I have shown that the answer put forward by early French phenomenology is that being human means being violent. Thus, Beatrice Hanssen (2000: 193) finds that "in Kojève's highly anthropologised, even vitalistic reading of Hegel, the mortal combat gained immoderate precedence" to the extent that it becomes the "justification of an eternal human nature,

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<sup>59</sup> Bergoffen (1997:158-159) offers a somewhat different perspective: "Beauvoir makes it clear that within patriarchy the way of violence is privileged. It is identified as the only way the body expresses its subjectivity. Noting this patriarchal prejudice, Beauvoir insists that girls be given access to the ways of violence; for, so long as the prejudice of patriarchy prevails, girls must be allowed to fight their way out of their condition of inessential otherness. Neither the structures of patriarchy, however, nor the way of violence is sacrosanct. There are other ways of transcending the alienations of subjectivity."

mapped, subsequently, onto an existentialist fold of subjecthood, or – more likely – onto a masculinity that masquerades as the universal mean.” In her analysis, Beauvoir exposes this blood-thirsty, gung-ho machismo that permeates the French turn to the dialectic of recognition. She also shows that, since woman is excluded from the human *Mitsein*, she is precluded from engaging in the struggle for recognition; therefore, it is “impossible to consider her as another subject” (102).

Michèle le Dœuff (1991: 100-101) infers that Beauvoir uses *subject* in three ways, namely, “despotic subjects”, for whom the other is an inessential object; “minority subjects in struggle and resistance”, i.e., those who are considered as “others” but can “answer back and retain independence in relation to the dominator’s viewpoint because a community exists which make it possible to say ‘we’”; and finally, the “extinguished subject”, who is woman.

The problem with these designations is that they do not sufficiently account for the divided existence that women lead – the same woman who is treated as the inessential on the basis of her sex can assert her lordship over others by way of her membership to a privileged economic or racial “caste”. Beauvoir (173) points out that “there were women among the slaves, to be sure, but there have always been free women – that is, women of religious and social dignity.” These women with social standing, “live dispersed among males” so that, if “they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women; if they are white, their allegiance is to white men” (19), etc. When a woman says “we” in the context of her affiliation to, for instance, an economic, religious, educational or racial grouping, it is not to be supposed that she is an *equal* member of that group.

I am reminded of a passage in *Being and Nothingness*; to wit:

The ‘we’ is experienced by a particular consciousness; it is not necessary that all the patrons at the café should be conscious of being ‘we’ in order for me to experience myself as being engaged in a ‘we’ with them. Everyone is familiar with this pattern of everyday dialogue: ‘We are very dissatisfied.’ ‘But no, my dear, speak for your self.’

Sartre (1956: 536)<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See Max Deutscher’s (2003: xxi) discussion of this passage.

Beauvoir's analysis of woman as Other shows that woman never really belongs to any "we", that woman is the most "profoundly alienated (her individuality the prey of outside forces)" (Beauvoir: 64) existent, being "the Other, she remains exterior to man's world" (214), she "is outside the fray" (215). Moreover, she does not speak for herself – when she is not silenced through exclusion and indifference, she is silenced by men, who are endowed by the patriarchal order with the right to speak for her.

Even as "*privileged Other*" (278), woman represents "pure alterity" – she is not "subject in her own right" (277). Notwithstanding the social standing of concrete women, the myth of woman symbolises the absence or lack of identity. Earlier in her text, Beauvoir (15-16) attributes to Aristotle the contention that the "female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities ... a natural defectiveness." Is it not ironic that woman's perceived lack should point to her non-human status? After all, within the framework of early French phenomenology, the existent's "lack", his "empty greediness", indicates that aspect of his being that separates him from the world of mere objects, i.e., his "becoming" or "transcendence". Woman's "lack", on the other hand, is used to account for and justify her dehumanisation.

In the following section it will become apparent that woman's "lack" is inexorably linked to patriarchal constructs of the female body, in which the fact that a woman's body is *different* from a man's body seems sufficient reason to cast her as the Other.

### **c.3) *The slimy and other fictions of woman's body***

Early in *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel (1970: 3) declares: "Nature confronts us as a riddle and a problem, whose solution both attracts and repels us: attracts us, because Spirit is presaged in Nature; repels us, because Nature seems an alien existence, in which Spirit does not find itself. *The Second Sex* shows how man transfers onto woman, specifically, her body, his ambivalence towards *Nature*. Beauvoir (175-176) submits:

Man has his roots deep in Nature; he has been engendered like the animals and plants; he well knows that he exists only in so far as he lives. But since the coming of the

patriarchate, Life has worn in his eyes a double aspect: it is consciousness, will, transcendence, it is spirit; and it is matter, passivity, immanence, it is flesh.

Beauvoir associates dichotomous thinking with the patriarchal order: the construction of dichotomies is an intellectual tool invented by man as a “revolt against his carnal state” (177). He “sees himself as a fallen god ... and he finds himself shut up in a body of limited powers, in a place and time he never chose, where he was not called for, useless, cumbersome, absurd” (177). In particular, “he would sooner flee” than face up to “what is peculiar in death’s certainty – *that it is possible at any moment*” (Heidegger 1978: 302).<sup>61</sup> Recalling Heidegger, Beauvoir argues that death anxiety is mirrored by man’s dread of the maternal or pregnant body. Consider two of the numerous passages in *The Second Sex* that convey this argument.

In the first passage, Beauvoir (178) writes:

The quivering jelly which is elaborated in the womb (the womb, secret and sealed like a tomb) evokes too clearly the soft viscosity of carrion for him not to be shuddering away. Wherever life is in the making – germination, fermentation – it arouses disgust because it

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<sup>61</sup> In agreement with this view, Beauvoir (1948: 127) writes that the most fundamental ambiguity of the human condition is “that every living movement is a sliding toward death”. Thus, death is a recurring theme in Beauvoir’s work. Aside from the references in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir’s novel, *All Men are Mortal* (1946), is “a cautionary tale, not about the awfulness of death, but about the greater peril of being unable to die” (Rose in Beauvoir 2003: vi). The central character, Fosca, is immortal, and as a result he “doesn’t realise that the earth is so vast and that life so short; he doesn’t know that other people exist” (Beauvoir 2003: 6; see also Arp (2000: 40-44) and Marks (in Fallaize 1998: 132-154). In this novel, she suggests that ethics, law, love and meaning presuppose being mortal. Beauvoir does not always write about death in obviously existentialist terms. *A Very Easy Death* (1969a) is, in my opinion, one of the finest accounts of the phenomenon of dying ever produced. In it, Beauvoir (1969a: 92) concludes: “You do not die from being born, nor from having lived, nor from old age. You die from something.” The Heideggerian dictum that death is a phenomenon of life loses sight of the material specificity of death; it also does not acknowledge that the cancer-ridden body of a bourgeois woman dies an “easier” death – a death eased into by the finest medical care, a private room, successful children who can afford to keep vigil, a stately funeral, etc. – than her lower-class counterpart. Yes, “death is the external limit of my possibilities” (Beauvoir 1972: 441), but the *meaning* of that limit is inexorably tied to possibilities that had been available in life. See also Schott (in Card 2003: 230-231).

is made only in being destroyed; the slimy embryo begins the cycle that is completed in the putrefaction of death.

Undoubtedly, this is a reaction to Sartre's depiction of woman as "being-in-itself" in the final section of *Being and Nothingness*. In abbreviated form, Sartre (1969: 773-783) describes 'slime' and 'hole' as symbols of *being* in which the for-itself is swallowed up by the in-itself:

"[The slimy] teaches me about the world, that it is a *leech sucking me* ... Throw a slimy substance [on the ground]; it draws itself out, it displays itself, it flattens itself out, it is *soft*; touch the slimy; it does not flee, it yields. ... The slimy is compressible ... it is a being that can be *possessed* ... The slimy is *docile*. Only at the very moment when I believe that I possess it, behold by a curious reversal, *it* possesses me. ... [The] For-itself is suddenly *compromised*. I open my hands, I want to let go of the slimy and it sticks to me, it draws me, it sucks at me. ... It is a soft, yielding action, a moist and feminine sucking, it lives obscurely under my fingers, and I sense it like a dizziness; it draws me to it as the bottom of a precipice might draw me. ... The slime is like a liquid seen in a nightmare, where all its properties are animated by a sort of life and turn back against me. Slime is the revenge of the In-itself. A sickly-sweet, feminine revenge which will be symbolised on another level by the quality 'sugary.' ... The obscenity of the feminine sex is that of everything which 'gapes open.' It is an *appeal to being* as all holes are. In herself woman appeals to a strange flesh which is to transform her into a fullness of being by penetration and dissolution. Conversely woman senses her condition as an appeal precisely because she is 'in the form of a hole.' ... Beyond any doubt her sex is a mouth and a voracious mouth which devours the penis".

The horror of the *slimy* is "the fear that facticity [here used as a synonym for being-in-itself, which, in turn, is symbolised by woman] might progress continually and insensibly and absorb the For-itself" (778). The horror of the *hole* is that it is an *appeal to the flesh* and, as such, "the castration of the man" (782) – an interesting formulation, given, firstly, Beauvoir's notion of the penis as a symbol of transcendence, as I discuss below, and, secondly, the meaning of *castrate* as "deprive of vigour", thus "make inert", which is, ontologically speaking, man's removal from the for-itself into the *en-soi*.<sup>62</sup>

In the second passage, Beauvoir (197-198) writes:

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<sup>62</sup> See also, Deutscher (2003: 3-14, and particularly, 103-107), Midgley (2003: 98-99), Le Dœuff (1991: 60, 81-82).

The Mother dooms her son to death in giving him life; ... the alliance between Woman and Death is confirmed [...]. Thus what man cherishes and detests first of all in woman ... is the fixed image of his animal destiny; it is the life that is necessary to his existence but that condemns him to the finite and to death. From the day of his birth man begins to die: this is the truth incarnated in the Mother.

(197-198)

To compensate for his mortality, to placate his *angst*, man posits himself as the Essential, imbued with all the characteristics that deny his corporeality, his animalism, his being-towards-death. However, Beauvoir, (194), ironically appealing to Hegel, counters:

The penis, father of generations, corresponds to the maternal womb; arising from a germ that grew in a woman's body, man is himself a carrier of germs, and through the sowing which gives life, it is his own life that is renounced. 'The birth of children,' says Hegel, 'is the death of parents.' The ejaculation is a promise of death; it is an assertion of the species against the individual.

By setting up woman, most particularly, the mother, as the Inessential – by “dooming her to immanence” (Beauvoir: 29, 105, 278, 653) – man hopes to master his own nature. As Rosi Braidotti (1994: 152) correctly observes: “Simone de Beauvoir observed fifty years ago that the price men pay for representing the universal is a kind of loss of embodiment; the price women pay, on the other hand, is a loss of subjectivity and the confinement to the body.” Braidotti explains that men's supposed “disembodiment” allows them to exclusively occupy the realm of transcendence and subjectivity; whereas the depiction of women as “overembodied” justifies their relegation to immanence.

Already in her *Introduction*, Beauvoir (15) notes:

Woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity; circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands. Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as testicles, and that they secrete hormones. He thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world ... whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it.

Later, in *Dreams, Fears, Idols*, Beauvoir portrays the sexual life of a man as far more complicated than the widely held assumption that “it is not in opposition to his existence as a person, and biologically it runs an even course, without crises and generally without mishap”

(64). For Beauvoir, however, the point is not to *invert* the sexual differentiation, but to show that body and consciousness are not separable, in other words, to challenge the duality.

At any rate, since woman, as the incarnation of hostile Nature, must be controlled, “her body must present the inert and passive qualities of an object” (Beauvoir: 189). Deranty (2000: 145-146) finds in respectively, Kant, Fichte and Hegel the assumption that “woman’s body is frail, made for reproduction and for use by man; woman must be passive and receptive”.

Thus, Hegel (1970: 412-414) claims:

The *formation of the differentiated sexes* must be different ... as differentiated moments (*Differente*), they are an urge (*Trieb*). ... [T]he same type underlies both the *male and female genitals*, only that in one or the other, one or the other part predominates: in the female, it is necessarily the passive moment (*das Indifferente*), in the male, the moment of duality (*das Entzweite*), of opposition. ... Through this difference, therefore, the male is the active principle, and the female is the receptive, because she remains in her undeveloped unity. ... [T]he truth is that the female contains the material element, but the male contains the subjectivity. ... Conception, therefore, is nothing else but this, that the opposite moments, these abstract representations, become one.

In the chapter, *The Data of Biology*, which describes the bio-scientific explanation for woman’s Otherness, Beauvoir questions Hegel’s insistence on the need for sexual differentiation in order to achieve the unity between supposedly opposite moments. Beauvoir (38) suggests that “one feels in it all too distinctly the predetermination to find in every operation the three terms of the syllogism.” It is not that she *denies* sexual differentiation – “this differentiation is characteristic of existents to such an extent that it belongs in any realistic definition of existence” (39). It must be said that, for Beauvoir (39), it does not fall outside the realm of possibility to “imagine a parthenogenetic or hermaphroditic society.” Recall an earlier passage cited from Beauvoir’s *Introduction*, where she entertains the possibility that bodily differences “are superficial, perhaps they are destined to disappear.” Of course, since writing these words, phenomena such as sex-reassignment surgery, intersexuality, cross-dressing and gender-bending have contested what is now considered to be an overly simplistic, hetero-normative sexual differentiation. At any rate, Beauvoir will

even accept certain “scientific facts” that demonstrate woman’s “more restricted grasp on the world”.<sup>63</sup>

However, Beauvoir qualifies that we must view such data in the light of the existent’s entire situation. In this context, Beauvoir (67) argues:

[W]henever the physiological fact (for instance, muscular inferiority) takes on meaning, this meaning is at once seen as dependent on a whole context; the ‘weakness’ is revealed as such only in the light of the ends man proposes, the instruments he has available, and the laws he establishes. If he does not wish to seize the world, the idea of a *grasp* on things has no sense; when in this seizure the full employment of bodily power is not required, above the available minimum, then differences in strength are annulled; wherever violence is contrary to custom, muscular force cannot be a basis for domination. ... It has been said that the human species is anti-natural, a statement that is hardly exact, since man cannot deny facts; but he establishes their truth by the way in which he deals with them; nature has reality for him only to the extent that it is involved in his activity – his own nature not excepted.

At the start of her analysis, Beauvoir (28) cautions: “The way questions are put, the points of view assumed, presuppose a relativity of interest; all characteristics imply values, and every objective description, so called, implies an ethical background.” The *truth of biological facts* can only be established by virtue of the values conferred on them. Thus, we can ask of Hegel’s depiction of sexual differentiation: On what basis, aside from patriarchal prejudice, does passivity *necessarily* predominate in the female? What evidence – other than men’s viewpoint, *which they confuse with absolute truth* – supports the *truth* that the female contains materiality and the male contains subjectivity?

Beauvoir (40-41) suggests that Hegel’s designations merely point to his privileging of the *masculine principle*. The problem is exacerbated by Hegel’s (1967: 114) assertion, in *Philosophy of Right*, that the “difference in the physical characteristics of the two sexes has a rational basis and consequently acquires an intellectual and ethical significance”.

Regarding the intellectual significance of his position, let us briefly reflect on Hegel’s (1967: 263-264) proposal in *Philosophy of Right*:

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<sup>63</sup> See Beauvoir’s (66-67) inventory of such “facts”.

Women are capable of education, but they are not made for activities which demand a universal faculty such as the more advanced sciences, philosophy, and certain forms of artistic production. Women may have happy ideas, taste, and elegance, but they cannot attain the ideal. § The difference between men and women is like between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid and the principle that underlies it is the rather vague unity of feeling. When women hold the helm of government, the state is at once in jeopardy, because women regulate their actions not by the demands of universality but by arbitrary inclinations and opinions. Women are educated – who knows how? – as it were by breathing in ideas, by living rather than acquiring knowledge. The status of manhood, on the other hand, is attained only by the stress of thought and much technical exertion.

In this passage Hegel sets up two categories, which represent two types of thinking. The first, men, represents activity, universality, the ideal, rigour. These traits, in turn, enable the acquirement of advanced science, philosophy and art. The second category, women, represents passivity, arbitrariness, vagueness. These traits reflect the “happy ideas” and particular charms with which a woman is endowed – elegance and taste – but they amount to merely opinions and inclinations. Hegel suggests also a further distinction: male knowledge is acquired and female ideas “breathed in”. Thus, Hegel proposes a separation between men and knowledge, and, since knowledge is attained “only by the stress of thought”, implied is a further separation between thought and the corporeal. The distance between knowledge and the subject is overcome in women insofar as their ideas are embodied; however, since women are depicted as plants, it is not to be supposed that, for Hegel, they symbolise the overcoming of the consciousness-body dichotomy. The fact is that they have no minds to speak of; they “are” only their bodies. That is why Hegel is at a loss to account for the process by which they generate ideas – perhaps he has in mind a common prejudice, imparted by Beauvoir (15) early in *The Second Sex*; to wit, a woman “thinks with her glands”. In any event, what Hegel’s distinction boils down to is this: man equals thought and woman equals the absence or lack of thought.

Regarding the ethical significance of his position, consider the opposition between human and divine law that Hegel (1977: 266-278) sets up in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In *Glas*, Derrida (1986: 140) shows how Hegel associates woman, the symbol of divine law, with singularity, with the natural, with the nocturnal; thus, the hidden or unknown, with absence (“singularity can only disappear, can posit itself as such only in death”); while man represents the

universal, distance from nature (human law is made by man), daylight; thus, the known, the public and the visible. Derrida (187) continues:

Human law, the law of the rational community that institutes itself against the private law of the family, always suppresses femininity, stands up against it, girds, squeezes, curbs, compresses it. But the masculine power has a limit – an essential and eternal one: the arm, the weapon, doubtless impotent, the all-powerful weapon of impotence, the inalienable shot [*coup*], the inalienable blow [*coup*] of the woman, is irony. Woman, “[the community’s] internal enemy,” can always burst out [*éclater*] laughing at the last moment; she knows, in tears and in death, how to pervert the power that suppresses.

This hollow victory of woman reminds me of a remark by Aristotle (2000: 52) in the *Politics*: “Silence is a woman’s glory, but this is not equally the glory of man”, which offers Aristotle the rationale for woman’s exclusion from the polis – the same fate that befalls Hegel’s woman.

There is no *rational* basis for Hegel’s sexual differentiation. The active-male / passive-female opposition merely reaffirms the social hierarchy of the sexes. Beauvoir (65) infers that “biological considerations ... are insufficient for setting up a hierarchy of the sexes; they fail to explain why woman is the Other; they do not condemn her to remain in this subordinate role for ever.”

Taken out of context, certain passages in *The Data of Biology*, expose Beauvoir to the charges that she “reproduces ideas from androcentric biological science”, “accepts, for example, the traditional view of motherhood which associates it with incompetence and weakness” and, in the “tendency to employ parallels between man and animals when describing differences between the sexes ... runs the risk of falling into the trap of a biological determinism which she generally rejects” (Lundgren-Gothlin in Fallaize 1998: 105).

In one such passage, regarding procreation in “birds and mammals”, including humans, Beauvoir (53-54) writes:

Even when she is willing, or provocative, it is unquestionably the male who *takes* the female – she is *taken*. Often the word applies literally, for whether by means of special organs or through superior strength, the male seizes her and holds her in place; he performs the copulatory movements; and, among insects, birds, and mammals, he penetrates her. In this penetration her inwardness is violated, she is like an enclosure that

is broken into. The male is not doing violence to the species, for the species survives only in being constantly renewed ... [I]n penetrating [the female body] the male finds self-fulfilment in activity ... First violated, the female is the alienated – she becomes, in part, another than herself. ... Tenanted by another, who battens upon her substance throughout the period of pregnancy, the female is at once herself and other than herself; and after the birth she feeds the newborn upon the milk of her breasts. Thus it is not too clear when the new individual is to be regarded as autonomous: at the moment of fertilisation, of birth, or of weaning? It is noteworthy that the more clearly the female appears to be a separate individual, the more imperiously the continuity of life asserts itself against her separateness.

The male is associated with violent activity and creation – life springs forth from his loins. His is the “more transient role” (Lundgren-Gothlin in Fallaize 1998: 102) in procreation, which means that he can more easily recover his independence. The combination of separation and creation is precisely what is signified by transcendence. In the chapter, *The Psychoanalytic Point of View*, Beauvoir applies the logic of the dialectic of recognition to the traditional idea of the penis as incarnation of transcendence in. Beauvoir (79) observes:

The penis is regarded by the subject as at once himself and other than himself, because the functions of urination and later of erection are processes midway between the voluntary and involuntary, and because it is a capricious and as it were a foreign source of pleasure that is felt subjectively. The individual’s specific transcendence takes concrete form in the penis and it is a source of pride. Because the phallus is thus set apart, man can bring into integration with his subjective individuality the life that overflows from it. It is easy to see, then, that the length of the penis, the force of the urinary jet, the strength of erection and ejaculation become for him the measure of his own worth.

In the chapter entitled, *Childhood*, Beauvoir (306) formulates this idea slightly differently: “Because he has an *alter ego* in whom he sees himself, the little boy can boldly assume an attitude of subjectivity<sup>64</sup>; the very object into which he projects himself becomes a symbol of

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<sup>64</sup> Toril Moi’s (in Ferguson and Wicke 1994: 95) alternative translation more clearly shows Beauvoir’s appeal to the dialectic: “Because he has an *alter ego* in whom he recognises himself, the little boy can boldly assume his subjectivity”. Moi (96) replies: “To say that there is something Hegelian about Beauvoir’s argument here is not to claim that she is being particularly orthodox or consistent. Freely developing the themes of recognition and the dialectical triad, Beauvoir entirely forgets that for Hegel recognition presupposes the reciprocal exchange between two *subjects*. As far as I can see, however, Beauvoir never actually claims that the penis speaks back. Confronted with the alluring idea that it is

autonomy, of transcendence, of power". In *Dreams, Fears, Idols*, Beauvoir (194) notes again how the "grown man regards his [sex] organ as a symbol of transcendence and power", to which she replies:

That organ by which he thought to assert himself does not obey him; heavy with unsatisfied desires, unexpectedly becoming erect, sometimes relieving itself during sleep, it manifests a suspect and capricious vitality. Man aspires to make Spirit triumph over Life, action over passivity; his consciousness keeps nature at a distance, his will shapes her, but in his sex organ he finds himself again beset with life, nature, and passivity.

Here, the focus is not on the male subject who masters his own body, or turns it into an instrument of (sexual) power; instead, Beauvoir posits a distinctly vulnerable male at the mercy of his often volatile bodily functions. Instead of associating the male with transcendence, we find him immersed in "life, nature and passivity" – that is to say, "sunk in immanence".

Human existence, Beauvoir argues in the chapter on psychoanalysis, is simultaneously separation and *Mitsein*. As a separation, the subject reveals a tendency towards alienation, that is, he endeavours "to search for himself in things, which is a kind of flight from himself" (79). Put differently, *alienation* is an attempt by the existent "to re-establish his or her existence as a whole, concretised, reflected in someone or something – whether the penis, another's gaze, a totem, or property" (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996: 192). To strive to transcend in the midst of one's immanence, more precisely, the attempt "to recognise oneself consciously as object" (Beauvoir: 642), signifies the narcissist's flight of fancy. However, Beauvoir continues, "the duality is merely dreamed" – transcendence in immanence can never be realised because "it is impossible to be *for one's self* actually an *other*". Beauvoir (295) declares: "Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an *Other*." Perhaps amidst all this detail about the ways in which woman is *othered* this point has not been sufficiently stressed: "otherness" is conferred on someone *by someone else*; as such, "the other" presupposes a relationship. Both the subject and the other are constituted by the bond. For Beauvoir, it is the *bond*, not subjectivity or otherness, that is essential, fundamental, absolute.

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not only the little boy who must recognise himself in his penis, but the penis that must recognise itself in the boy, Hegel himself might have had some difficulty in recognising his own theory." The point that *Moi* is missing is that Beauvoir is all too aware of the inconsistency.

The penis-totem is not “eminently detachable” (Moi in Ferguson and Wicker 1994: 95), therefore, it cannot enable the male to “assume his subjectivity and act authentically” (96). The subject can, however, use his penis as an instrument of domination. Beauvoir (77) asserts:

Sexuality most certainly plays a considerable role in human life; it can be said to pervade life throughout. ... The existent is a sexual, a sexuate body, and in his relations with other existents who are also sexuate bodies, sexuality is in consequence always involved. But if body and sexuality are concrete expressions of existence, it is with reference to this that their significance can be discovered.

If subjectivity is confirmed through the domination, exploitation and objectification of other subjects, as Kojève and others postulate, and if the body is a concrete expression of existence, the body who rapes, kills, maims and exploits others is the incarnation of human transcendence. It is in this context that Beauvoir writes in the passage about procreation that the male “finds self-fulfilment” in sexually violating the female body.<sup>65</sup>

In that passage, the female embodies immanence. Firstly, her body is associated with submission and passivity – she cannot act but is acted upon first by the male and then by the growing foetus. Secondly, it is connected with “inwardness” and “enclosure” – she is “imprisoned” by her bodily, particularly reproductive, functions. Not only does the dominant male sexually possess her – practically rape her – but afterwards her body is “taken over” by “some sort of parasite eating into a woman’s independence” (Okely 1986: 7).

In terms of the dialectic of recognition, the growing foetus resembles the rival consciousness’ competing for self-recognition. As “the other”, it threatens to assimilate her as it uses her as a “vessel”; with every passing month jostling for more space to grow. Later, while she is nursing, she will become a “milk factory” – further dehumanising imagery that captures her

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<sup>65</sup> Mary Evans (1985: 73) suggests that Beauvoir “paves the way for those feminists who see only constant exploitation in heterosexual relationships” by excluding the possibility that a man and woman may be capable of forming supportive and emotionally rewarding unions. I submit that not only is Evans’ response a misreading of *The Data of Biology*, but it is also an incomplete reading of *The Second Sex*. In the final part of my analysis, I elaborate on Beauvoir’s conception of an “authentic love” between the couple, including the description of an erotic relationship that affirms friendship and respect.

inability to escape her enslavement to the species. It is an “other” that tries to assert its dominance as it incapacitates her with pain, fatigue and numerous “maladies” (62-63) and threatens her with danger, including her own death. It is one that literally induces nausea – a response, perhaps, to Sartre’s *La Nausée* (1938), in which the central character’s nausea is triggered by his sense that the other (things, nature, other people) eats into his subjectivity.

The blurring of boundaries between herself and this “other” suggests that she competes, phenomenologically speaking, with(in) her own body for a sense of individuality. Now, given this interplay between self and other, can we infer that the pregnant woman is the “true” symbol of transcendence? To be sure, in the chapter, *The Mother*, Beauvoir (513) writes:

It is especially noteworthy that the pregnant woman feels the immanence of her body at just the time when it is in transcendence; it turns itself in nausea and discomfort; it has seized to exist for itself and thereupon becomes more sizeable than ever before. The transcendence of the artisan, of the man of action, contains the element of subjectivity; but in the mother-to-be the antithesis of subject and object ceases to exist; she and the child with which she is swollen make up together an equivocal pair overwhelmed by life. ... She is no longer an object subservient to a subject; she is no longer a subject afflicted with the anxiety that accompanies liberty, she is one with that equivocal reality: life. Her body is at last her own, since it exists for the child who belongs to her. Society recognises her right of possession and invests it, moreover, with a sacred character.

Just as her reader is poised to leap to the conclusion that the mother-to-be is indeed the symbol of transcendence, Beauvoir (513-514) continues:

With her ego surrendered, alienated in her body and in her social dignity, the mother enjoys the comforting illusion of feeling that she is a human being *in herself*, a *value*. But this is only an illusion. For she does not really make the baby, it makes itself within her; her flesh engenders flesh only, and she is quite incapable of establishing an existence that will have to establish itself.

Lundgren-Gothlin (1997: 234) infers that, while woman’s “body may appear to transcend itself in motherhood, it is actually Nature, life itself, that does so; the woman is no more than a passive instrument and thus does not as subject consciously create the child, in the manner of a craftsman making an object.” Thus, according to Lundgren-Gothlin (234), “Beauvoir’s description parallels that of Marx, when he distinguishes between a bee building a hive and an architect designing a construction.” However, Lundgren-Gothlin is on the wrong track, because she is primarily responding to the assertion, in *The Nomads*, that “giving birth and

suckling are not activities, they are natural functions; no project is involved” (Beauvoir: 94). Within the framework of early French phenomenology, with a Marxist inflection, which, I believe, Beauvoir satirises in *The Nomads* and *Early Tillers of the Soil*, if maternity involves no project, mothers do not transcend. Thus, Lundgren-Gothlin (239), like Mary Evans (1985: 73) and others<sup>66</sup> criticise what they believe to be Beauvoir’s disdain of motherhood and domestic labour.

However, *The Second Sex* provides a far more measured perspective on motherhood than such criticism suggests. When Beauvoir describes the mother’s feeling of herself as “a human being in herself, a value” an *illusion*, she implies that maternity in itself is valued – to the limited extent that it is valued at all – only when patriarchal society deems children desirable. Beauvoir (69) observes: “The close bond between mother and child will be for her a source of dignity or indignity according to the value placed upon the child – which is highly variable – and this very bond ... will be recognised or not according to the presumptions of the society concerned.” In short, it is not the mother who is valued for having a close bond with the child but rather the child’s value that will determine the mother’s status.

Beauvoir (538-539) argues:

There is an extravagant fraudulence in the easy reconciliation made between the common attitude of contempt for women and the respect shown for mothers. It is outrageously paradoxical to deny woman all activity in public affairs, to shut her out of masculine careers, to assert her incapacity in all fields of effort, and then to entrust to her the most delicate and the most serious undertaking of all: the moulding of a human being. There are many woman whom custom and tradition still deny the education, the culture, the responsibilities and activities that are the privilege of men, and in whose arms, nevertheless, babies are put without scruple.

To idealise house-working and child-rearing, as Andrew (1998: 295) correctly interprets, is “part and parcel of idealising the role of patriarchal femininity”. Ward (in Simons 1995: 236) offers:

So, while some feminists charge Beauvoir with classism, it is instead the feminists who insist on the primary place and value of motherhood who may themselves be guilty of a classist assumption, one that assumes that all women are able to undertake pregnancy

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<sup>66</sup> See Pilardi (in Simons 1995: 34-35) for a review.

voluntarily, in comfortable economic situations and supportive surroundings, enjoying good health care throughout. Of course, as Beauvoir admits, under favourable conditions, children are bound to be highly positive experiences for the woman, but society can hardly choose to disdain women as human beings, give them no economic support for being mothers, exclude them from public life and then expect them to find motherhood rewarding.

Furthermore, when Beauvoir suggests that there is no project involved in maternity, she means that children are not projects. Beauvoir (514) states: “A mother can have her reasons for wanting a child, but she cannot give to this independent person, who is to exist tomorrow, his own reasons, his justification, for existence”. In the following section I will refer to Beauvoir’s notion of the generous love of a mother for her child as an alternative to self-other relationships that operate within the “paradigm of the project” (Bergoffen 1997: 61). Incidentally, Lundgren-Gothlin (1997: 229) recognises Beauvoir’s appeal to the generosity of motherly love; however, her focus is on those passages in *The Second Sex* that associate motherhood with immanence. Moreover, Lundgren-Gothlin disregards Beauvoir’s (540) assertion: “In a properly organised society, where children would be largely taken in charge by the community and the mother cared for and helped, maternity would not be wholly incompatible with careers for women.” Quite clearly Beauvoir argues that motherhood is not necessarily in conflict with a woman’s being-towards-possibilities – this is only the case in societies that contrive women’s failure.

According to Beauvoir’s analysis of the bio-scientific perspective, pregnancy is one of many bodily experiences, including menstruation, lactation, menopause, that place woman “in conflict” with herself. The implication is that her inability to attain subjectivity extends further than her non-dialectical relationship with man – even before her body is objectified through the gaze of another,<sup>67</sup> she is alienated and preyed on by these “foreign forces” (Beauvoir: 57, 63).

Sonia Kruks (in Fallaize 1998: 67) argues that Beauvoir, through her portrayal of woman’s body as simultaneously “self” and “alien object”, presents us with “an objectivity which is not

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<sup>67</sup> Recall Sartre’s distinction between my-body-for-me (my body as consciousness) and my-body-for-others (my body as object). We saw that, for Sartre, the body as object is mediated by the Other through the “look”.

mediated by another consciousness.” Thus, suggests Kruks, woman’s body is both a body-for-others and the *en-soi*, which neatly converges with the aforementioned fiction of *the slimy*. What Kruks fails to note is the significance of the missing element of woman’s experience of her body: my-body-for-me; that is, the subject’s body as consciousness. On one level, the example of the narcissist shows that the existent cannot objectify his or her body as this implies a body-consciousness duality that Beauvoir opposes. On another level, Beauvoir (68) points out that it “is not merely as a body, but rather as a body subject to taboos, to laws, that the subject is conscious of himself”. More specifically, “woman can be defined by her consciousness of her own femininity no more satisfactorily than by saying that she is a female, for she acquires this consciousness under circumstances dependent upon the society of which she is a member” (80).

In truth, women’s bodies are always already encoded with the myth of woman. As Tidd (1999: 46) correctly surmises, “women do not choose how they experience their body because their relationship to their own embodiment has been pre-defined by the patriarchal society in which they find themselves.” Thus, Beauvoir (169) submits: “[W]hat-in-men’s-eyes-she-seems-to-be is one of the necessary factors in [woman’s] real situation.” The actual “force” that *alienates* woman’s body is the “great force that constantly derails the line of thought of ... philosophers ... like Kant and Fichte [and] Hegel [who] cannot but interpret the otherness of the female body as an obstacle to female autonomy” (Deranty: 159-160). This “force” that pathologises, mythologises or deifies biological processes such as pregnancy and menstruation<sup>68</sup> is the very same one that wishes to enclose women in their perceived otherness.

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<sup>68</sup> A recent compilation of essays by Iris Marion Young, *On Female Bodily Experience: “Throwing Like a Girl” and Other Essays* (2005), looks at the process of othering women’s bodily experiences. For instance, in *Throwing Like a Girl*, Young (2005: 42-43) writes: “Women in a sexist society are physically handicapped. Insofar as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified. ... To be sure, there are actual women in contemporary society to whom all or part of the above description does not apply ... [but only insofar as a particular woman] has escaped, through accident or good fortune, or, more often, as that which she has had to overcome.” In *Menstrual Meditations*, Young (106-107) submits: “On the one hand, for a culture of meritocratic achievement, menstruation is nothing other than a healthy biological process that should not be thought to distinguish women and men in our capacities and behaviour. ... On the other hand, from our earliest awareness of

Thus, responding to Merleau-Ponty's suggestion, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, that the *subject is his body*, Beauvoir (61) counters: "Woman, like man, *is* her body; but her body is something other than herself."

For Merleau-Ponty, subjectivity is bound up with the body and the world: the body and existence presuppose each other. In this respect, "the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world" (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 475). "I am my body ... yet at the same time my body is as it were a 'natural' subject", contends Merleau-Ponty (231). We cannot reduce existence to the body or to sexuality, nor can we reduce the body or sexuality to existence: "the fact is that existence is not a set of facts ... capable of being reduced to others or to which they can reduce themselves, but the ambiguous setting of their inter-communication" (193). The theme of ambiguity is central to *Phenomenology of Perception*: "[A]mbiguity is of the essence of human existence, and everything we live or think has always several meanings" (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 196). "Everything is both manufactured and natural in man" (220), man's body is "rooted in nature at the very moment when it is transformed by cultural influence, never hermetically sealed and never left behind" (231), Merleau-Ponty argues.

Now, Beauvoir does not dispute these assertions. From *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, we have ascertained that she considers the fundamentally ambiguous human existence as at once consciousness and materiality, and that, try as he may, the individual cannot escape the bond between people, that the denial of the world is naively solipsistic. We have learnt that "the

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menstruation until the day we stop, we are mindful of the imperative to *conceal* our menstrual processes. Menstruation is dirty, disgusting, defiling, and thus must be hidden. In everyday life these requirements of concealment create enormous anxiety and practical difficulties for women, and are a major source of our annoyance with the monthly event. ... The message that a menstruating woman is perfectly normal *entails* that she hide the signs of menstruation." Moreover, Young (113-114) contends: "Schools, workplaces, and other public institutions of bureaucratic equality assume a standard body with standard needs, and that body does not menstruate. This assumption of equality as sameness often unfairly discomfords and disadvantages menstruating women and threatens us with embarrassment and shame. ... Disciplinary institutions nearly always restrict time in the bathroom, and often themselves set the time at which students or workers can use the toilet, rather than accommodating the needs of each body."

body itself is not a brute fact”, and we have seen this claim substantiated throughout *The Second Sex*. However, Beauvoir does not agree with the idea that “the body is solidified or generalised existence” (Merleau-Ponty: 192, cited also by Beauvoir: 78). By treating the body and sexuality as “generalised”, Merleau-Ponty, as Bergoffen (1997: 23) suggests, “holds the thought of [sex] difference at bay”. When Merleau-Ponty (521) suggests that the other “is not even ever quite an object for me”, he does not take into account a particular Other whose absolute otherness is premised on her not having a male body. Notwithstanding his “marvel or taste for ambiguity” (Bergoffen: 26), the reciprocity between ambiguous subjects, on which he focuses, is made possible by “their shared flesh” (27); in short, “with Merleau-Ponty ... we are still subjects of the same” (23-24).<sup>69</sup>

What Beauvoir means by “her body is something other than herself” is, not that woman feels herself alienated by the biological processes that mark her as female; rather, that her body has never “belonged” to her. Even before she is created by her parents, she will have been conceived as the Eternal Feminine by the patriarchal order, which will have laid claim to her body and inscribed it with the myth of woman. Moreover, the stance that she assumes in relation to her Otherness – resignation, resistance, mute irony, docility, narcissism or violence – takes place within the very same confines of the patriarchal order. Thus, even when she is in the privileged position to forge for herself some kind of identity in defiance of the normative order, she does so with the implicit consent of her oppressors – her struggle is merely *a symbolic agitation*.

To conclude this section, consider the only passage in her text that considers a definition of concrete, historical, individual woman. Beauvoir (83) submits:

The psychoanalyst describes the female child, the young girl, as incited to identification with the mother and father, torn between ‘viriloid’ and ‘feminine’ tendencies; whereas I conceive her as hesitating between the role of *object*, *Other* which is offered her, and the assertion of her liberty. ... For us woman is defined as a human being in quest of values in a world of values, a world of which it is indispensable to know the economic and social structure.

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<sup>69</sup> Some Beauvoir scholars, e.g., Heinämaa (in Card 2003: 66-86) and Langer (in Card 2003: 87-106) emphasise the philosophical connections between Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir.

A woman hesitates between the role of Other, between the role of the Eternal Feminine, and the assertion of her *liberty*, which can mean a number of things judging by the arguments advanced in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*, including, to surpass the given towards an open future, thus, towards indeterminacy; or to affirm the peculiarity, the difference, of her identity. This process of vacillation denotes a woman's reconsideration and re-evaluation of values. Certainly, as I have hoped to demonstrate, Beauvoir's work exemplifies such an interrogation of the standard. Beauvoir does not ask the question of woman's otherness in order to suggest ways in which women may overcome the absolute status of their "otherness" and become subjects who enjoy a relative otherness within the human *Mitsein*. To start with, she shows that we have to re-examine what it means to be human. Specifically, we have to ask if being human is inevitably tied to being violent, being egotistical and being the same. We need to reconsider the subject-object opposition, and concomitantly, re-imagine the meeting between self and other.

In the final section of this study, I conjecture what Beauvoir's alternative(s) to the traditional approach to the dialectic of recognition might be, based on her postulation of relationships defined by friendship and generosity.

## d) Friendship and generosity

### d.1) *Fraternité*

The final part of *The Second Sex* opens with a quote from the French poet, Jules Laforgue: “No, Woman is not our brother; through indolence and deceit we have made her a being apart, unknown, having no other weapon other than her sex, which not only means constant warfare but unfair warfare – adoring or hating, but never a straight friend” (Beauvoir: 725), and ends with the appeal “that by and through their natural differentiation men and women unequivocally affirm their brotherhood” (741).

Why does Beauvoir, at the end of a sustained critique of patriarchy, call upon a relationship of *brothers* as an alternative to women’s oppression?<sup>70</sup> Does this last word, *brotherhood* or *fraternité*, which, as an ethical imperative, is also the first word, attest to the “ameliorism” that contemporary critics attribute to Beauvoir?<sup>71</sup>

While I maintain that Beauvoir’s philosophy is, ultimately, one of hope, her discussion does not shirk from recognising man’s propensity for violence, avarice, egotism. To be sure, she does not provide her readers with many graphic depictions of the evil that men do or of which they are capable. However, it does not follow that “no one is incriminated in *The Second Sex* and there is no one in the dock, [that] all evil is blamed on the situation, the set of harmful traditions and perverse ideologies, a nasty history without a Subject, formed of codes and oppressive situations [of which] the fact that some men are ‘tyrants’ or ‘boors’ is simply an effect” (Le Dœuff 1991: 93).

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<sup>70</sup>Granted, the notion of an “end” in relation to the work of a writer who insists that she neither develops nor writes philosophical *systems*, is absurd; moreover, as an *appeal* this “ending” may be construed as the *beginning* of an approach to the primordial *Mitsein* of man and woman based on something other than violence and domination.

<sup>71</sup> See *Part I c*.

Let us not forget that *representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men*: flesh and blood men create, legitimise and uphold (through the family, media, religion, education, law, philosophy, etc.) the patriarchal norms that increase their power and oppress women. Recall Beauvoir's contention that man is inclined "not to reduce himself but to increase his power", thus, he is not likely to heed the call to renounce his privileges.

Applying this outlook to the relationship between the sexes, Beauvoir (25) suggests that "men profit in ... subtle ways from the otherness, the alterity of woman ... [therefore] cannot be blamed for not cheerfully relinquishing all the benefits they derive from the myth". Man's *will to power* is more likely to outweigh any *good will* to promote the "amelioration of the female condition". As we have seen, the supposed absolute otherness of woman enables men to escape the dialectic of recognition; it diverts man's anxieties about his own ambiguity, his corporeality and most especially his mortality. It is "a miraculous balm" (25) for browbeaten men whose lives amount to the *pure repetition of mechanical gestures*. Beauvoir (635-636) recognises:

There are many men who, like women, are restricted to the sphere of the intermediary and instrumental, of the inessential means. ... Destined like women to the repetition of daily tasks, identified with ready-made values, respectful of public opinion, and seeking on earth nothing but a vague comfort, the employee, the merchant, the office worker, are in no way superior to their accompanying females.

Nonetheless, Beauvoir (483-484) describes a typical situation of down-trodden husbands:

Home for the evening after a hard day of struggle with his equals, of yielding to his superiors, he likes to feel himself an absolute superior and a dispenser of undeniable truths. ... All the resentments accumulated during his childhood and his later life, those accumulated daily among other men whose existence means that he is browbeaten and injured – all this is purged from him at home as he lets loose his authority upon his wife.

Beauvoir suggests that the struggle for recognition elicits slaves who, occupied in tedious drudgery and rendered "immanent" by their superiors, compensate for their lack by oppressing those more vulnerable than they. Additionally, Tidd (2004: 77) asserts that "even if men are also in certain ways victims of the patriarchal system, they nevertheless profit from it and internalise its ideology." Yes, men suffer the burden of the Eternal Masculine. Nonetheless, conformity in the individual man holds little danger, "custom being based on his

needs as an independent and active individual” (Beauvoir: 692); indeed, “[he] is very well pleased to remain the sovereign subject, the absolute superior, the essential being” (726).

On the other hand, “woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the *Other*”. The chapter on *Childhood* demonstrates how, from their infancy, women are habituated to become the docile and dutiful daughters of the patriarchal order: “the delights of passivity are made to seem desirable to the young girl by parents and teachers, books and myths, women and men; she is taught to enjoy them from earliest childhood; the temptation becomes more and more insidious; and she is the more fatally bound to yield to those delights as the flight if her transcendence is dashed against harsher obstacles” (325).

Michèle le Dœuff (1991: 92-93) correctly observes: “In Beauvoir’s work the notion of bad faith is merely on the horizon, a kind of hollow mould of oppression, and it is noticeable that the category of ‘the bad faith of the other’ is never used, even when the context invites it.” Thus, for instance, when Beauvoir (641-687) discusses the narcissist, the mystic and the woman in love, she is careful not to describe them as models of bad faith: their actions signify failed attempts – one might be tempted to call them self-destructive attempts but for the fact that they had never possessed a sense of self that was not already decreed by the male-dominated world – to escape the prison of immanence to which they have been doomed, put differently, “to survive the indignities of patriarchy” (Bergoffen 1997: 195-196).

Even when a woman is wise to the insidious power of mystification, “even though women may try as hard as they can to individualise themselves and even though the men that they meet may not be ‘all the same’, it is still true that in the life of society any woman encounters the standard feminine position and is liable at any moment to be treated not as the individual she wants to be but as ‘woman’, in other words according to the average idea of what a woman is and should be” (Le Dœuff: 127).

Does the call for a brotherhood between men and women prove Eva Lundgren-Gothlin’s hypothesis that *The Second Sex* is modelled on the conventional, particularly Kojèvean, interpretation of self-other relationships that hinges on the assimilation of the Other by the Same?

Certainly, Beauvoir (639) argues for an “economic evolution of woman’s condition”. In the chapter, *The Independent Woman*, Beauvoir (689) notes: “It is through gainful employment that woman has traversed most of the distance that separated her from the male; and nothing else can guarantee her liberty in practice.” However, Beauvoir (691) warns: “The woman who is economically emancipated from man is not for all that in a moral, social, and psychological situation identical with that of man ... [f]or when she begins her adult life she does not have behind her the same past as does a boy; she is not viewed by society in the same way; the universe presents itself to her in a different perspective.” For these reasons, “it will be necessary for the woman who also is subject, activity, to insinuate herself into a world that has doomed her to passivity” (692).

Beauvoir (727-728) suggests that reciprocal recognition between the sexes cannot be attained “as long as femininity is perpetuated as such” (728). Insofar as Beauvoir can be interpreted from a Kojèvean, thus, conventional perspective, we have come to the heart of the matter. The *emancipated* or *modern* woman “refuses the passivity man means to impose on her”; “she accepts masculine values” (727). Recall Beauvoir’s argument that “man” occupies both the positive, masculine pole and the human norm, whereas “woman” is defined solely in terms of lack and difference. Beauvoir (722) reiterates this view in *The Independent Woman*: “It is in man and not in woman that it has hitherto been possible for Man to be incarnated.” Hence, Gatens (in Card 2003: 278) concludes that Beauvoir’s “approval” of the emancipated woman’s embrace of “masculine qualities” – human qualities – reflects her call for women to “wrest back those values that express activity and transcendence as values that are appropriate to them also.”

Now, if Beauvoir believes that women should “insinuate” themselves into the patriarchal world to achieve *emancipation*, she would be taking for granted that *man* equals *transcendence*. So, woman’s transcendence coincides with *being man*, put in terms of the dialectic, woman’s recognition hinges on the “Other” being assimilated by the “Same”. From this perspective, the “brotherhood” between the sexes depends on woman’s “endeavour to traverse the distance that separates her from the male”, and the extent to which man allows her to insinuate herself in his world.

As we have seen, Beauvoir posits subjectivity in terms of ambiguity and rejects the Cartesian Subject’s disavowal of his body, of nature and the world. If women were to insinuate

themselves into the league of brothers, they would be compelled to deny their bodies. As such, they will not have attained what Beauvoir means by subjectivity. Moreover, the brotherhood has a vested interest for women to remain defined solely in terms of their bodies. A woman simply does not have a man's body and, in a male-orientated world, being-different-from-man equals being-less-than-man: "difference has been colonised by power relations that reduce it to inferiority, as Simone de Beauvoir pertinently put it in *The Second Sex*" (Braidotti: 147). Thus, we find that those women who manage to forge a place for themselves in the fraternity are constantly reminded, through sexist jokes, patronising attitudes, unequal pay, sexual harassment, the glass-ceiling effect, indifference in public workplaces to female-specific needs, such as tampon dispensers in bathrooms, etc., that they are other (and therefore less) than men.

Perhaps Beauvoir's postulation of a *fraternité* between the sexes is a veiled reference to the brother-sister relationship as depicted in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Before "the spirit of family shifts into the consciousness of universality" (Hyppolite 1974: 346), Hegel posits three "natural" relationships – between husband and wife, parents and child and brother and sister – that are markedly different from the self-other relationships in the *polis*.<sup>72</sup>

Regarding the relationship between brother and sister, Hegel (1977: 274-275) avers:

They are the same blood which has, however in them reached a state of rest and equilibrium. Therefore, they do not desire one another, nor have they given to, or received from, one another this independent being-for-self; on the contrary, they are free individualities in regard to each other. Consequently, the feminine, in the form of the sister, has the highest *intuitive* awareness of what is ethical. She does not attain to *consciousness* of it, or to the objective existence of it, because the law of the Family is an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling and the divine element that is exempt from an existence in the real world. ... The brother, however, is for the sister a passive, similar being in general; the recognition of herself in him is pure and unmixed with any natural desire. In this relationship, therefore, the indifference of the particularity, and the ethical contingency of the latter, are not present; but the moment of the individual self, recognising and being recognised, can here assert its right, because it is linked to the equilibrium of the blood and is a relation devoid of desire. The loss of the brother is therefore irreparable to the

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<sup>72</sup> I will shortly return to the relationships between husband and wife and parents and child.

sister and her duty towards him is the highest. The relationship is at the same time the limit at which the self-contained life of the Family breaks up and goes beyond itself. The brother is the member of the Family in whom its Spirit becomes an individuality which turns towards another sphere, and passes over into the consciousness of universality. The brother leaves the immediate, elemental, and therefore, strictly speaking, negative ethical life of the Family, in order to acquire and produce the ethical life that is conscious of itself and actual. He passes from the divine law, within whose sphere he lived, over to human law. But the sister becomes, or the wife remains, the head of the household and the guardian of the divine law. In this way, the two sexes overcome their [merely] natural being and appear in their ethical significance, as diverse beings who share between them the two distinctions belonging to the ethical substance.

We find in this interpretation of *Antigone* the postulation of “two single consciousnesses that, in the Hegelian universe, relate to each other without entering a war” (Derrida 1986: 149). Without having engaged each other in a life and death struggle, the brother and sister have “independent being-for-self”; their recognition of each other is not based on desire or on opposition, since they are already free individuals. Derrida suggests that the absence of desire points to the apparent suspension of sexual difference; yet, Hegel posits a *brother-sister* relationship, not a relationship of brothers or a relationship of sisters. Derrida (149) deduces that “a sexual difference is still necessary, a sexual difference posited as such and yet without desire.” Their sexual difference enables Hegel to posit the brother and sister as, respectively, the embodiments of the law of universality (human law) and the law of singularity (divine law). Thus, the relationship “does not lack differences, but the differences are not yet oppositions” (Hyppolite: 335), whereas opposition is an essential aspect of “the self-conscious spirit of the city” (346). The brother and sister are *diverse* rather than *opposite* beings.

Yet, the brother abandons his sister. He becomes a citizen. The sister remains shut up in the family abode – the impotent keeper of divine law, entrusted with the “toilette of the dead” (Derrida: 143).

In *The Second Sex*, even when the situation invites it – for example, the chapter on *Patriarchal Times and Classical Antiquity* – Beauvoir does not directly broach the topic of Hegel’s interpretation of *Antigone*. The clearest reference emerges in *Dreams, Fears, Idols*, where Beauvoir (212-213) observes:

In paintings we see her opening the door or a window upon paradise, or placing a ladder between the earth and the firmament. ... She sways divine Justice, smilingly weighting on the side of charity the scales that tell the worth of souls. ... Here on earth men are defenders of the law, of reason, of necessity; woman is aware of the original contingency of man himself and of this necessity in which he believes, hence come both the mysterious irony that flits across her lips and her pliant generosity. She heals the wounds of the males, she nurses the newborn, and she lays out the dead; she knows everything about man that attacks his pride and humiliates his self-will.

In short, what Beauvoir shows is that the sister is once again a cipher, at once imbued with celestial power and excluded from humanity.

Toril Moi offers another interpretation of this apparent appeal to brotherhood. Moi (in Fallaize 1998: 84-85) suggests:

Rhetorically as well as thematically, the last word of *The Second Sex* represents Beauvoir's final utopian gesture. 'All oppression creates a state of war,' she writes (SS, p. 726; DS II, p. 645). Only when oppression ceases will genuine solidarity be possible between men and women: Beauvoir's final *fraternité* must be imagined as situated in a space where patriarchy no longer rules, for only then can the word be given the truly universal meaning it ought to have had all along. In such a space the word *sisterhood* will finally be taken to be just as universal as *brotherhood*. There is here, of course, a deliberate allusion to the French Revolution: her utopia, Beauvoir is saying, would consist in a world in which the ideals of freedom, equality and brotherhood would finally be translated into reality.<sup>73</sup> Equality here does not mean sexual *sameness*: hers is not a theory of a sexless society, in any sense of the word. For Beauvoir, political equality presupposes social and economic equality. Together, these three elements make up the *sine qua non* of ethical equality between the sexes. Ethical equality implies the mutual recognition of the other as a free, acting subject, and in *The Second Sex* this is usually called *reciprocity*, not *brotherhood*.

In Moi's analysis, Beauvoir rehabilitates the concept of *fraternité*, endows it with a post-patriarchal meaning that recognises difference. To be sure, we can recall Beauvoir's argument

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<sup>73</sup> Michèle le Dœuff (1991: 95) posits: "Let us consider, for example, the third term of the motto of the French Republic, 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity'. 'Fraternity' is an alliance between brothers and this word implies that the Republic is not a mixed state. It should long ago have been replaced by 'Solidarity'." In her essay, Moi uses *fraternity* and *solidarity* interchangeably.

that language “did not come down from subterranean depths”, that it is developed within “that human reality which is at once *Mitsein* and separation”: since language is constructed to reflect the values espoused by the language-makers, it can be constructed differently if those *values* are displaced. However, “if one wishes to give the word [*brotherhood*] a universal and absolute meaning, it is always a question of reabsorbing each man [and woman?] into the bosom of mankind” (Beauvoir 1948: 112).<sup>74</sup> The problem is that *mankind* is once more a concept that designates the *human* and *men* in general. Those who engage in *the mutual recognition of the other as a free, acting subject* are, according to the arguments posited in *The Second Sex*, exclusively *brothers*, not sisters or brothers and sisters.<sup>75</sup>

In Beauvoir’s reinterpretation of the dialectic of recognition, we have seen her rejection of the final sublation that realises the Universal Individual. While she follows Hegel in the emphasis of the bond, there is, for Beauvoir, no final reconciliation between identity and difference. Instead, she attributes to this relationship a tension, which is maintained as long as the differences between individuals – the limits that define their relationship – are reciprocally recognised. To this end, Beauvoir highlights the “restlessness” of Spirit and the ceaselessness of the dialectic of recognition. In accordance with the exponents of early French phenomenology, Beauvoir argues against the attainment of the Absolute. However, Beauvoir’s appeal to the constancy of the struggle is not a *justification* for positing existence as inevitably violent, which is, as I have shown, the conventional approach to Hegel’s dialectic. For Beauvoir, the dialectic must continue in order to *avoid* the ultimate violence: assimilation of otherness into the Same.

This concern with preserving otherness takes on a more concrete focus in *The Second Sex*. Recall Beauvoir’s challenge to Hegel: “The Mind [Spirit] is a subject; but *who* is a subject?” This question points not only to a general focus on the loss of personal identity in the movement towards the Absolute. It signifies more than the concern that a part of Hegel’s

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<sup>74</sup> Beauvoir’s original formulation is: “But is the cause of Man that of each man? That is what utilitarian ethics has been striving to demonstrate since Hegel; if one wishes to give the word *useful* a universal and absolute meaning, it is always a question of reabsorbing each man into the bosom of mankind”.

<sup>75</sup> In a later text, Moi (1999: 112) qualifies: “The old choice between sameness and difference does not apply here [since] *The Second Sex* doesn’t ask us to choose between a society with or without sexual difference but between one with or without sex-based oppression.”

“progression towards the unity of identity and difference involves the dissolution of sexual difference” (Diprose 1994: 39), that the universal subject is progressively stripped from all specificity, including sex differences. Fundamentally, this question regarding the subject on Hegel’s journey of self-discovery introduces us to what is, ultimately, Beauvoir’s contention; to wit, that sexual difference was *not there to begin with*, that the journey towards the Absolute is undertaken exclusively by brothers.

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, notwithstanding her privileging of the bond, Beauvoir (108) recoils from the notion of brotherhood:

A collectivist conception of man does not concede a valid existence to such sentiments as love, tenderness, and friendship; the abstract identity of individuals merely authorises a comradeship between them by means of which each one is likened to each of the others. In marching, in choral singing, in common work and struggle, all the others appear as the same; nobody ever dies. On the contrary, if individuals recognise themselves in their differences, individual relations are established among them, and each one becomes irreplaceable for a few others.

This passage conveys why, instead of exhorting women to join the brothers on the endless journey to the Absolute, Beauvoir focuses on various personal relationships that challenge both Hegel’s version of the dialectic of recognition and its perversion by early French phenomenology. In the same way that the intimate relationship between man and woman, along with the relationships between brothers and sisters and parents and children, are, for Hegel “the kernel and, as it were, the potentiality of this world” (Hyppolite 1974: 335), Beauvoir shows how maternal love, lesbian love and, most fundamentally, the authentic erotic experience between the heterosexual couple may offer us a glimpse of self-other relationships that are not based on conflict and domination, but on generosity and reciprocity.

## **d.2) Possession versus erotic generosity**

Early in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir refers to the heterosexual couple as a “primordial *Mitsein*” that operates, not on the basis of a struggle for recognition in which combatants seek to dialectically overcome each other; instead, on man always already asserting his lordship over woman in the absence of combat, symbolic or otherwise. In the chapter, *The Woman in Love*, Beauvoir gives an account of “the patriarchal erotic” (Bergoffen 1997: 110) to illustrate the non-dialecticity of the man-woman relationship. She commences with a quote from *The Gay Science*:

The single word love in fact signifies two different things for man and woman. What woman understands by love is clear enough: it is not only devotion, it is a total gift of body and soul, without reservation, without regard for anything whatever. This unconditional nature of her love is what makes it a *faith*, the only one she has. As for man, if he loves a woman, what he *wants* is that love from her; he is in consequence far from postulating the same sentiment for himself as for woman; if there should be men who also felt that desire for complete abandonment, upon my word, they would not be men.

(Nietzsche, cited in Beauvoir 1997: 652)

We recognise the male lover in this citation as the *passionate man*, critically analysed by Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. The passionate man, for all his “maniacal” or “amorous passion”, does not *love*, since he “seeks possession; he seeks to attain being” (Beauvoir 1948: 64). Taking her cue from Nietzsche, Beauvoir (1997: 652-653) writes of passionate male lovers that “they never abdicate completely; even on their knees before a mistress, what they still want is to take possession of her; at the very heart of their lives they remain sovereign subjects; the beloved woman is one value among others”.

Notwithstanding the nod to Nietzsche, it is to Sartre that we must turn for the account of *possession* that inspires Beauvoir’s postulation of the passionate man.

Towards the end of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre develops the idea that “sight serves the illusions of autonomy and self-identity and empowers the desires of the imperialist [subject]” (Bergoffen 1997: 34). Sartre (1956: 738) asserts: “What is seen is possessed; to see is to *deflower*.” In the following paragraphs, he puts forward a concept of epistemology based on sexual and alimentary metaphors: knowledge is virginity deprived (738), it is at once “a *penetration* and a *superficial* caress” (740) and “to know is to devour with the eyes” (739).

The object of the possessor's "appropriative enjoyment" is unmistakably female. Sartre (739-760) spells out:

There is a movement of dissolution which passes from the object to the knowing subject. The known is transformed into *me*; it becomes my thought and thereby consents to receive its existence from me alone. ... It is an unhappy fact – as Hegel noted – that desire destroys its object. In this sense, he said, desire is the desire of devouring. In reaction against this dialectical necessity, the For-itself dreams of an object which may be entirely assimilated by me, which would be *me*, without dissolving into me but still keeping the structure of the *in-itself*; for what I desire exactly is *this* object; and if I eat it, I do not have it any more, I find nothing remaining except myself. This impossible synthesis of assimilation and an assimilated which maintains its integrity has deep-rooted connections with the basic sexual drives. The idea of "carnal possession" offers us the irritating but seductive figure of a body perpetually possessed and perpetually new, on which possession leaves no trace. This is deeply symbolised in the quality of "smooth" or "polished". What is smooth can be taken and felt but remains no less impenetrable, does not give way in the least beneath the appropriative caress – it is like water. This is the reason why erotic descriptions insist on the smooth whiteness of a woman's body. Smooth – it is what re-forms itself under the caress, as water re-forms itself in its passage over the stone which has pierced it. ... To possess means *to have for myself*; that is, to be the unique end of the existence of the object. ... I possess this pen; that means that this pen exists *for me*, has been made *for me*. Moreover originally it is I who make for myself the object which I want to possess. ... To have is first to create. And the bond of ownership which is established then is a bond of continuous creation; the object possessed is inserted by me into the total form of *my* environment; its existence is determined by my situation and by its integration in that same situation. ... Thus to the extent that I appear to myself as *creating* objects by the sole relation of appropriation, these objects are myself. The pen and the pipe, the clothing, the desk, the house – are *myself*. ... I *am* what I have. It is I myself which I touch in this cup, in this trinket. ... Thus possession is in addition a *defence against others*. What is mine is myself in a non-subjective form inasmuch as I am its free foundation. ... No particular appropriation has any meaning outside its indefinite extensions: the pen which I possess is the same as all other pens; it is the class of pens which I possess in it. ... Each possessed object which raises itself on the foundation of the world manifests the entire world, just as a beloved woman manifests the sky, the shore, the sea which surrounded her when she appeared.

To see is to possess; to possess is to create. The world revealed in Sartre's account is in the mode "of serviceability, conduciveness, usability, and manipulability" (Heinämaa in Card 2003: 78); in short, the possessor sees the world as ready-to-hand. That which the possessor appropriates is defined only in terms of the function it fulfils in his existence – in any other context, the possessed object is "radically extinguished" (Sartre: 753). On the other hand, the act of possessing extends the appropriator's grip on the world: "To appropriate this object is then to appropriate the world symbolically" (760). The possessed object – note how Sartre moves, without qualification, between the image of the possessed as inanimate object (pen, desk, pipe, etc.) to "a beloved woman"<sup>76</sup> – "is" the possessor in non-subjective form. To possess is to achieve "the project of the in-itself-for-itself" (755), in other words, "that impossible synthesis ... that is called God" (Beauvoir 1948: 14).

Sartre's portrayal of possession serves as the template for the patriarchal erotic in *The Second Sex*. If the love of the woman in love is a *religion*, it is because the man "is represented to her as the absolute, as the essential ... a god" (Beauvoir 1997: 653). She embodies the *zu-handen* quality of objects in the possessor's world. Beauvoir (678) explains: "But most often woman knows herself only as different, relative; her *pour-autrui* ... is confused with her very being; for her, love is not an intermediary 'between herself and herself' because she does not attain her subjective existence; she remains engulfed in this loving woman whom man has not only revealed, but created." The woman's lover "is an eye, a judge, and as soon as he looks at anything other than herself, he frustrates her; whatever he sees, he robs her of; away from him, she is dispossessed, at once of herself and of the world" (667), like the object that is extinguished when it is not in the possession of the appropriator.

The woman in love serves the passionate man's desire for an object that is "absolutely his and yet a stranger" (674), he "seeks his reflection in her ... but ... the loving woman's ... love disfigures her, destroys her; she is nothing more than this slave, this servant, this too ready mirror, this too faithful echo" (675). Since she is deprived of her otherness, since she is for her lover a mirror, the sexual act is not "an intersubjective experience in which each goes beyond self" (465): "It is I myself which I touch in this cup, in this trinket", the appropriator remarks; likewise, the passionate man's penetration of his lover's body is a form of

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<sup>76</sup> Indeed, as Le Dœuff (1991: 82) notes, "woman ... had already become an object when the object of knowledge (or rather 'the thing') was assimilated to 'the smooth whiteness of a woman's body'."

masturbation. Beauvoir (397-419) suggests that the repulsion a woman feels towards sex is not necessarily symptomatic of “feminine frigidity”, but often a reaction to “the male organ [that] seems not to be desirous flesh but a tool skilfully used” (413), to a situation in which “the man confines himself to taking without giving or if he bestows pleasure without receiving, the woman feels that she is being manoeuvred, used; once she realises herself as the Other, she becomes the inessential other” (417), to the reality that the passionate man “seeks domination much more than fusion and reciprocity” (418).

Recall, however, that the passionate man, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, fails in his attempt to assimilate the object of his desire. Beauvoir (1948: 66) observes that the source “of the passionate man’s torment is his distance from the object; but he must accept it instead of trying to eliminate it.” Desire does not only destroy the object, as Sartre argues via Hegel, it also destroys subjectivity. For there to be a self, there must be an other. The disappearance of otherness marks the death of the subject. As we have seen, the movement towards possessing the object extends to an appropriation of the world in order to achieve the synthesis of the *en-soi* and *pour-soi*. Having set up the object as an absolute so that “nothing exists outside of his stubborn project”; “having involved his whole life with an external object which can continually escape him, [the passionate man] tragically feels his dependence”, Beauvoir (65) suggests.

Two conceptions of *desire* emerge. There is erotic desire that Beauvoir associates with “desirous flesh”; and there is the desire of the project, which is the desire to attain self-recognition through a movement of possessing others, and through them, the world. In his portrayal of “carnal possession”, Sartre seems to conflate these two desires. In reality, he views carnality through the lens of the project only – the man seeking to devour the female figure is not driven by sexual desire but by the desire to overcome her otherness and, in so doing, symbolically extend his grasp on the world. Thus, if the figure of woman is *irritating*, as Sartre suggests in the passage under discussion, it is because the sexual drama enacted on it is yet another version of the master-slave dialectic, which ends in the man-master’s frustration, having made his self-recognition dependent on an enslaved other.

In his depiction of “carnal possession”, Sartre is once again aligned with Kojève. In *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Kojève (1969: 6) inserts, without further elaboration, in

his analysis of anthropogenetic desire, the following description of the man-woman relationship:

Thus, in the relationship between man and woman, for example, Desire is human only if the one desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other; if he wants “to possess” or “to assimilate” the Desire taken as Desire – that is to say, if he wants to be “desired” or “loved”, or, rather, “recognised” in his human value, in his reality as a human individual.

Anthropogenetic desire, the desire to possess, is a human desire; sexual desire is, by implication, an animal desire. In agreement with Debra Bergoffen’s (1997: 180) assessment, I argue that, for Beauvoir, the erotic has an ethical dimension to which patriarchal culture is indifferent.

Although she is the dominated other in the sexual drama of the patriarchal erotic, the woman in love is, in Hegelian terms, no less culpable of the lack of reciprocity between the lovers. In this context, Bergoffen (164) explains “that where man forfeits the requirements of reciprocity in the exercise of his transcendence, woman forfeits the requirements of reciprocity in the name of the bond.” Recall that, in her *Introduction*, Beauvoir offers woman’s commitment to the bond – “she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity” – as one of the reasons for woman’s status as Other.

The amorous woman’s sacrifice of her own subjectivity for the sake of the bond with her lover, does not, however, place her on a higher moral plane, since she does not love a human being, but worships an absolute subject. The passionate man denies the subjectivity of his lover, but the woman in love also renounces her subjectivity; or, rather, since her subjectivity has always been degraded, the woman in love vainly seeks self-recognition through the sexual union with her Master. Indeed, the woman in love tries to graft her entire existence onto the supposedly transcendent existence of her lover in the hope that she may attain transcendence by proxy.

Thus, Beauvoir (663) observes: “The supreme happiness of the woman in love is to be recognised by the loved man as a part of himself; when he says ‘we’, she is associated and

identified with him, she shares his prestige and reigns with him over the rest of the world; she never tires of repeating – even to excess – this delectable ‘we’.”<sup>77</sup>

In short, both the passionate man and the woman in love make absolutes of their others. Beauvoir (664) counters that an “authentic love should accept the contingency of the other with all his idiosyncrasies, his limitations, and his basic gratuitousness [and] not pretend to be a mode of salvation, but a human interrelation.”

Beauvoir (418) points out that the renouncement of the passionate man’s dominion over his mistress “requires a great deal of love or of generosity.” Since it “is only as something strange, forbidden, as something free, that the other is revealed as an other” (Beauvoir 1948: 67), all forms of *Mitsein*, including the sexual act between a man and a woman, operate on the basis of the desire of the project, which is the desire for possession, *only to the detriment of both parties*. Beauvoir (67) declares that “to love [someone] genuinely is to love him in his otherness and in that freedom by which he escapes.” In other words, *genuine love* is the disavowal of possession.

With her emphasis on generosity as the love of the other’s otherness, Beauvoir unequivocally departs from early French phenomenology, for which otherness is either something threatening that must be overcome, or something to be assimilated by the greedy nothingness that is man.<sup>78</sup>

Consider, for example, the representation of generosity in *Being and Nothingness*:

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<sup>77</sup> Beauvoir dramatises the situation of the woman in love in her short story, *The Woman Destroyed* (1969b). The story revolves around the disarray and abject terror felt by the protagonist, Monique, when faced with the prospect of losing her husband, Maurice, to another woman. The following passage portrays the debilitating effects of Monique’s worship of her husband: “Here I am at forty-four, empty-handed, with no occupation, no other interest in life apart from you. If you had warned me eight years ago I should have made an independent existence for myself and now it would be easier for me to accept the situation” (Beauvoir 1969b: 178-179). It is clear that Monique has defined herself entirely through her relationship with Maurice. Inevitably, she loses her reason for living, her identity and her mind when Maurice leaves her for his mistress.

<sup>78</sup> See also Debra Bergoffen (1997: 96), for whom “the idea of generous passion may also be seen as contesting the ... desires of the project.”

Thus generosity is above all a destructive function. The craze for giving which sometimes seizes certain people is first and foremost a craze to destroy; it is equivalent to an attitude of madness, a “love” which accompanies the shattering objects. But the craze to destroy which is at the bottom of generosity is nothing else than a craze to possess. All which I abandon, all which I give, I enjoy in a higher manner through the fact that I give it away; giving is a keen, brief enjoyment, almost sexual. To give is to enjoy possessively the object which one gives; it is a destructive-appropriative contact. But at the same time the gift casts a spell over the recipient; it obliges him to re-create, to maintain in being by a continuous creation this bit of myself which I no longer want, which I have just possessed up to its annihilation, and which finally remains only as an image. To give is to enslave.

Sartre (1956: 758)

Sartre maintains the logic of possession – the gift is *mine* to give away and, since I *am* my possessions, I insert *myself* into your existence by giving you this part of me; moreover, my generosity obligates you to give life to the gift by taking it in your possession, by implication, I compel you to symbolically extend *my* existence. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir connects possessiveness to the generosity of the woman in love, who submits her entire existence to the gratification of her lover’s desires, both sexual and ontological.

Beauvoir (666) writes:

It is one of the curses afflicting the passionate woman that her generosity is soon converted into exigence. Having become identified with another, she wants to make up for her loss; she must take possession of that other person who has captured her. She gives herself to him entirely; but he must be completely available to receive this gift.

The difference between this account and the one Sartre puts forward is this: the woman in love hopes that by giving herself body and soul to the man, that she may escape her Absolute Otherness and be positively defined by their union, that she may become *the same* as he; whereas the possessor-giver in *Being and Nothingness* gives in order to *take away* the other’s otherness, which is another way of saying “enslaving” the recipient.

For Beauvoir, the gift is not a *demand* but an act of *outrageousness*. In the study of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, we saw that an outrageous act moves beyond the self-interest and conceit of the solipsistic ego, towards a recognition of the indissoluble bond between individuals, as well as their mutual need for and responsibility to each other. To give generously means not to impose oneself on the other; indeed, it is the very movement of otherness. In its appeal to the

bond, it strips the giver of his or her self-centredness, and, since it makes no demands upon the gift-recipient – since it lets the other be – it affirms the otherness of the other.

To give generously is to risk oneself. On the one hand, the giver “forgoes the securities of possession” (Bergoffen: 138); on the other hand, as an appeal to the bond, the giver hopes – and he or she can only *hope*, since true recognition cannot be demanded, only freely given – that the recipient will also recognise his or her own otherness, that the recipient will receive the gift generously.<sup>79</sup>

The stakes are that much higher when the gift is oneself, particularly in an erotic situation.<sup>80</sup>

Beauvoir turns to the erotic experience between a man and woman to challenge certain conventional ideas; to wit, that eroticism is part of the animal or natural order of things; that

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<sup>79</sup> To receive a generously given gift can create its own set of problems. Bergoffen (1997: 63) offers: “Fearing that they have been viewed as objects by a strange freedom, receivers of gifts, wanting only to believe in their own freedom, attempt to transform the giving of the gift into an economic exchange. They try to pay the giver back. The attempt is an insult. It may also be bad faith, for in refusing the gift, I insist on containing freedom within the limits of the project – on saving it from its excess. In refusing the gift, I refuse the otherness of the other and myself.”

<sup>80</sup>In the chapter, *The Mother*, Beauvoir considers maternal love in terms of the generous gift. Citing Stekel, Beauvoir (537) admonishes: “Children are not substitutes for one’s disappointed love, they are not substitutes for one’s thwarted ideal in life, children are not mere material to fill out an empty existence. Children are a responsibility and an opportunity. ... Children are obligations; they should be brought up so as to become happy human beings.” Rejecting the notion of a maternal instinct, as well as the notion that maternal love is “natural”, Beauvoir (538) contends that “there is nothing natural in such an obligation: nature can never dictate moral choice; this implies an engagement, a promise to be carried out.” To love a child is to assume an ethical responsibility for another. What makes such a responsibility an act of *generosity* “is the fact that it implies no reciprocity; the mother has to do not with a man, a hero, a demigod, but with a small, prattling soul, lost in a fragile and dependent body. The child is in possession of no values, he can bestow none, with him the woman remains alone, she expects no return for what she gives, it is for her to justify herself.” Thus, Beauvoir (537) infers: “[T]he child brings joy only to the woman who is capable of disinterestedly desiring the happiness of another, to one who without being wrapped up in self seeks to transcend her own experience.”

the erotic experience is based on possession and, as such, detrimental to being-for-itself, that women do not experience sexual desire or that female eroticism is something deviant.<sup>81</sup>

In her analysis, Beauvoir confronts the erotic experience described in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel does not describe the intimate relationship between man and woman in terms of carnal possession. Hegel (1977: 273) writes that “the relationship of husband and wife is in the first place the one in which one consciousness immediately recognises itself in another, and in which there is knowledge of this mutual recognition.” However, for Hegel, the recognition between a husband and wife is “natural” rather than ethical. Self-recognition that is ethical belongs exclusively in the public domain; as such, it refers to “the difficult recognition of man by man” (Hyppolite 1974: 344). Further on in his analysis, Hegel (274-275) claims:

[T]he relationships of the woman are based, not on feeling, but on the universal. The difference between the ethical life of the woman and that of the man consists in just this,

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<sup>81</sup> In the chapter, *The Lesbian*, Beauvoir (444) suggests that “homosexuality ... is one way, among others, in which woman solves the problems posed by her condition in general, by her erotic situation in particular”. She considers the possibility of lesbian relationships as a counter to “the paradigm of the heterosexual couple that ... sustains patriarchal policies” (Bergoffen in Card 2003: 255). Beauvoir (436) ventures: “Between women love is contemplative; caresses are intended less to gain possession of the other than gradually to re-create the self through her; separateness is abolished, there is no struggle, no victory, no defeat; in exact reciprocity each is at once subject and object, sovereign and slave; duality becomes mutuality.” At the same time, Beauvoir associates lesbianism with narcissism (436-437). Now, the suggestion that sex between women is based on mutuality and reciprocity, and not, at least in some cases, on possession and struggle, stems from the assumption that women do not oppress each other on the basis of sex (although, as I have shown, sometimes on the basis of class, race, etc.). Does Beauvoir refer to concrete women or the Eternal Feminine, whose body represents docility, care, ambiguity, etc.? To link the lesbian erotic with “mirroring”, problematically implies that women’s bodies and sexual experiences are the same. Part of Beauvoir’s agenda is to show that Hegel’s account of reciprocity is flawed because it is ultimately based on the notion of *sameness*. How, then, can “exact reciprocity” be possible in a supposedly narcissistic relationship? When Beauvoir describes the “authentic” erotic experience between the heterosexual couple, it has much in common with lesbian love, with the crucial difference that man and woman *are* different, that their differences are used by the patriarchal order to justify woman’s inessentiality. She argues that such differences are the precondition for an authentically erotic experience and, more generally, the possibility of friendship between the sexes.

that in her vocation as an individual and in her pleasure; her interest is centred on the universal and remains alien to the particularity of desire; whereas in the husband these two sides are separated; and since he possesses as a citizen the self-conscious power of universality, he thereby acquires the right of desire and, at the same time, preserves his freedom in regard to it. ... [T]he wife is without the moment of knowing herself as *this* particular self in the other partner.

Findley (in Hegel 1977: 553) understands Hegel's position on woman to be that, "as mother and wife there is something natural and replaceable about her, and her unequal relation to her husband, in which she has duties where he mainly has pleasures, means that she cannot fully be aware of herself in another." In response, Beauvoir (454-455) conjectures:

In regard to [woman's] erotic fate, two essential consequences follow: first, she has no right to any sexual activity apart from marriage; sexual intercourse thus becoming an institution, desire and gratification are subordinated to the interest of society for both sexes; but man, being transcended towards the universal as worker and citizen, can enjoy contingent pleasure before marriage and extramaritally. ... In the second place ... in accomplishing his specific task as husband and as reproductive agent, the former is sure of obtaining at least some sexual pleasure; in the female, on the contrary, the reproductive function is very often dissociated from erotic pleasure. So that, while being supposed to lend ethical standing to woman's erotic life, marriage is actually intended to suppress it.

Further into her analysis, Beauvoir (624) contends:

Man gladly accepts as his authority Hegel's idea according to which the citizen acquires his ethical dignity in transcending himself towards the universal, but as a private individual he has a right to desire and pleasure. His relations with woman, then, lie in a contingent region, where morality no longer applies, where conduct is a matter of indifference. With other men he has relations in which values are involved; he is a free agent confronting other free agents under laws fully recognised by all; but with woman – she was invented for this purpose – he casts off his responsibility of existence, ... he is 'at ease', he 'relaxes', in view of the rights acquired in his public life.

Hegel posits the natural/sexual relationship between man and woman in terms of a mutual recognition, instead of possession. Man can indulge his sexual desire without the need to dominate woman. Conveniently, she does not express the desire for desire; thus, they do not compete with one another and he need not risk his subjectivity. Moreover, his self-consciousness is ethically affirmed by his fellow male citizens in the *polis*; thus, the

“generosity” he shows his wife is really the condescension he feels towards a lesser being. His violence towards woman is not the desire to devour her, which, in its perversity, acknowledges her independent existence; rather, it is a complete indifference to her existence.

Beauvoir takes from Hegel’s account, firstly, the idea of an erotic situation not based on the desire for possession and directed at the project, but sexual pleasure; however, in her description of a loving, consenting erotic experience, *both* man and woman feel sexual desire and pleasure. Secondly, like Hegel, Beauvoir connects familial relationships to the ethical order,<sup>82</sup> although Beauvoir’s version of the ethical order does not exclude women. Thirdly, Beauvoir brings into play the idea, put forward by Hegel, that the family represents the specific, the particular, the individual.<sup>83</sup> By emphasising the erotic relationship of the couple, Beauvoir ingeniously exploits Hegel’s own separation of the private and civic domains, as well as his acknowledgment of specificity within familial relationships, to challenge, on a political level, the patriarchal nation, and, on a philosophical level, universal Spirit.

In the final part of her study, Beauvoir (736-737) asserts: “Virile aggressiveness seems like a lordly privilege only within a system that in its entirety conspires to affirm masculine sovereignty”. The same system treats women as sex objects and their bodies as pure matter, to be encoded with the Eternal Feminine, rendered docile and devoured. Beauvoir’s rejoinder is to call upon the fundamental ambiguity of human existence. We have seen that at the heart of conflict and oppression is a denial of ambiguity. Thus, writes Beauvoir (737): “In those combats where they think they confront one another, it is really against the self that each one struggles, projecting into the partner that part of the self which is repudiated; instead of living out the ambiguities of their situation, each tries to make the other bear the abjection and tries to reserve the honour for the self.” In a system that denies ambiguity, it comes as no surprise that the erotic experience assumes the drama of possession, of prevailing over the other, of extending the project.

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<sup>82</sup> To be sure, for Hegel (1977: 268), the family is “a *natural* ethical community” and “the *immediate* being of the ethical order”. In its immediacy, the family is not yet the actualised or existing ethical order but it is the potentiality of the ethical order.

<sup>83</sup> Hegel (268) suggests that the family “stands opposed to the nation itself ... stands over and against that order which shapes and maintains itself by working for the universal; the Penates stand opposed to the universal Spirit.”

A further implication of the abjuration of ambiguity is the creation of dualisms that benefit men and denigrate women: man-consciousness-activity-transcendence-subjectivity versus woman-materiality-passivity-immanence-objectivity. Beauvoir counters that both sexes, as ambiguous existents, are at once consciousness and body, active and passive, subject and object, immanence and transcendence. That said, Beauvoir also creates the impression that human existence “is” *neither* body<sup>84</sup>, *nor* consciousness,<sup>85</sup> it “is” *neither* passive, nor active, since these designations are, as Beauvoir argues in her discussion of the bio-scientific perspective, *values* created to consolidate the patriarchal order; it “is” *neither* to be a subject, *nor* an object, since, as we have seen in Beauvoir’s *Introduction*, it is man who *attributes to himself* the status of Subject, while positing woman as the Other; as a “*becoming*” (Beauvoir: 66), human existence is *neither* immanence (the given), *nor* is it, as something that can “*fall back into immanence*”, that can be degraded, transcendence.

I submit that Beauvoir goes one step further than appealing to ambiguity. Those concepts in the pairs that are traditionally ignored or disparaged, particularly materiality and passivity, are central to and do not have negative connotations in Beauvoir’s depiction of the erotic experience as a non-violent alternative to the dialectic of recognition. Thus, as Bergoffen (1997: 160) observes, “the erotic, ambiguous body, not the violent, transcending one ... becomes the privileged site of subjectivity.” It is in this intimate setting that the couple can contest what the patriarchal world has made of them. Furthermore, this intersubjective situation reflects the elements of friendship to which Hegel alludes: generosity, reciprocity, the upholding of difference, joy, the overcoming of the solipsistic ego, the ever-present threat of danger, “the inextricable confusion between objectivity and subjectivity”.<sup>86</sup>

Beauvoir (421-422) proposes:

[W]hen woman finds in the male both desire and respect; if he lusts after her flesh while recognising her freedom, she feels herself to be the essential, her integrity remains

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<sup>84</sup> For instance, Beauvoir (69) argues that “woman’s body is not enough to define her as a woman”.

<sup>85</sup> Beauvoir (80) submits: “Woman can be defined by her consciousness of her own femininity no more satisfactorily than by saying that she is a female, for she acquires this consciousness under circumstances dependent upon the society of which she is a member.”

<sup>86</sup> See *Part 3 b.2*.

unimpaired the while she makes herself object; she remains free in the submission to which she consents. Under such conditions the lovers can enjoy a common pleasure, in the fashion suitable for each, the partners each feeling the pleasure of being his or her own but as having its source in the other. The verbs *to give* and *to receive* exchange meanings; joy is gratitude, pleasure is affection. Under a concrete and carnal form there is mutual recognition of the ego and of the other in the keenest awareness of the other and of the ego. Some women say that they feel the masculine sex organ in them as a part of their own bodies; some men feel that they are the women they penetrate. These are evidently inexact expressions, for the dimension, the relation of the *other* still exists; but the fact is that alterity has no longer a hostile implication, and indeed this sense of the union of really separate bodies is what gives its emotional character to the sexual act; and it is the more overwhelming as the two beings, who together in passion deny and assert their boundaries, are similar and yet unlike. This unlikeness, which too often isolates them, becomes the source of their enchantment when they do unite. ... All the treasures of virility, of femininity, reflect each other, and thus they form an ever shifting and ecstatic unity. What is required for such harmony is not refinement in technique, but rather, on the foundation of the moment's erotic charm, a mutual generosity of body and soul.

One of the key elements missing from this rendering of the sexual drama is the devouring gaze elaborated by the patriarchal erotic. Seeing is possessing, Sartre writes; thus, the subject not only undresses the woman with his eyes, but he strips her of her otherness by making her *his object* of desire. As such, the appropriating gaze denies the idea of human reality as both *Mitsein* and *separation*. Instead of the visual, we find in Beauvoir's account an emphasis on the tactile. Beauvoir (399) insists: "Nothing is so equivocal as a *touch*." Thus, the "erotic experience is one that most poignantly discloses to human beings the ambiguity of their condition; in it they are aware of themselves as flesh and as spirit, as the other and as subject" (423). The gaze denies ambiguity as it turns the dispossessed other into brute facticity; whereas the lovers' touch transgresses the limits between body and consciousness, between the self and the other.<sup>87</sup>

Touching and being touched cause the lovers to become intoxicated with each other, with the attending quality of excess implied in such intoxicification. Intoxicated, their passion denies,

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<sup>87</sup> See also Andrew (1998: 290-300) and Bergoffen (1997: 35).

conceals or shifts the boundaries between them. By implication, they forget themselves.<sup>88</sup> We have seen that, for Hegel, generosity refers to the consciousnesses' mutual release of one another – giving back the other's otherness. As a loss of self-control, the sexual drama *extends* the concept of generosity also to the *receiving* of one's otherness. Since Hegel does not focus on what the subject receives, the aspect of self-forgetfulness is missing from his account, which is why his account of the generosity of the subject offers “no escape from the paradox of self-reference” (Kolakowski 2001: 105). Tellingly, the thing that consciousness forgets at the beginning of every new dialectic movement is his relationship with the other.

There are two implications of the idea of *otherness* as a gift from the other that I wish to introduce.

The first concerns the nature of the self-other relationship in the dialectic of recognition. As I have argued, both Hegel and Beauvoir believe that identity and difference are inexorably linked. However, Beauvoir takes Hegel to task for abandoning difference in his conception of the Absolute. By imagining otherness as something received from another, in other words, not something that the subject is in possession of, Beauvoir maintains the bond between identity and difference. As *excess*, subjects can never know themselves, they are indeterminate. Their identities are not based on asserting their difference from one another, because they do not possess the self-knowledge to know how they are different. They receive their difference from others. For anyone to have a “complete” sense of *self*, to understand the full extent to which he or she is different, he or she would have to be engaged with *all* others. Thus, Beauvoir, like Hegel, argues that the individual is implied in the collective and the collective is implied in the individual.

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<sup>88</sup> On the topic of intoxication, consider also Beauvoir's later criticism of the Marquis de Sade. Beauvoir (in Sade 1966: 21) offers: “From adolescence to prison, Sade had certainly known the insistent, if not obsessive, pangs of desire. There is, on the other hand, an experience which he seems never to have known: that of emotional intoxication. Never in his stories does sensual pleasure appear as self-forgetfulness, swooning, or abandon. ... The male aggression of the Sadean hero is never softened by the usual transformation of the body into flesh. He never for an instant loses himself in his animal nature; he remains so lucid, so cerebral, that philosophic discourse, far from dampening his ardour, acts as an aphrodisiac.” See also Butler (in Card 2003: 168-188). Butler (185) also refers to the “necessary experience of intoxication” that she finds in Beauvoir's postulation of eroticism, but she does not link the themes of self-forgetfulness, self-abandonment or intoxication to *The Second Sex*.

However, there are two crucial differences, no pun intended, in their perspectives. Firstly, for Beauvoir, the collective represents difference rather than universality. Secondly, as her portrayal of the erotic experience shows, the individuals reciprocally recognise one another as both self and other through giving *and* receiving; whereas Hegel's generosity extends only to the reciprocal release of the other. Hegel's stance is an advance from the notion of reciprocity advocated by early French phenomenology; to wit, both selves mutually assimilate the other's otherness into their subjective being.

Nonetheless, what Hegel does not sufficiently highlight in this reciprocal release is what the self *receives* in return for his giving: his own otherness. For this reason, his system continues on the path of the master-slave dialectic. If the subject generously receives the gift of his otherness from the other subject, he will recognise that he oppresses himself when he oppresses the other. This is precisely what Beauvoir argues in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and what she reiterates with her description of the authentic erotic drama: touching and being touched make the couple aware of the permeability of their personal boundaries, so that "I discover that any exploitation of the other touches me" (Bergoffen: 35).

This brings me to a second implication of generosity as the receiving of one's otherness. Receiving is associated with two closely related qualities that are conventionally associated with woman's inessentiality; to wit, vulnerability and passivity.

Beauvoir's depiction of the erotic experience as an intoxication involves the lovers' self-forgetfulness. Not only do the lovers let one another be, they let go of themselves within the passionate embrace of another. Both lovers are vulnerable inasmuch as they receive their otherness only through the *loss* of self-control. Beauvoir stresses, however, that *alterity has no longer a hostile implication*. The "self" that each abandons is the solipsistic self, that is, the self for whom otherness is something threatening that must be destroyed. The lovers do not take otherness away; they mutually receive their otherness from each other.

This receiving of one's otherness implies a certain passivity, since it is the *other* who acts by giving. Reciprocal recognition demands a certain passivity in both parties. One who gives without receiving is a possessor. Of course, in the context of the dialectic, givers are subjects. Recall how the master cannot attain self-certainty because his recognition comes from a slave,

a degraded subject. In the context of the sexual experience, givers have sexual agency. Beauvoir (400) suggests that to “*make* oneself an object, to *make* oneself passive, is a very different thing from being a passive object”. Only a *subject* can make himself or herself passive. The giving of otherness can be enacted in the carnal situation only if there are *subjects* to bestow this gift. Thus, Beauvoir is adamant that respecting woman’s freedom – that is, her difference, her otherness – must accompany the man’s sexual desire. For his *lust after her flesh* to not be an act of aggression, he must recognise her subjectivity as well as the difference of her eroticism. This means that he must renounce what patriarchal society has made of her: Eternal Feminine. As Bergoffen (in Card 2003: 255) proposes: “Beauvoir sees the heterosexual couple as the site where the mystifications that position woman as the inessential Other can be challenged.”

It is no coincidence that Beauvoir’s appeal to the preservation of otherness is framed in terms of the erotic. Throughout *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir argues that patriarchal culture reduces woman’s subjectivity to her flesh, particularly her ovaries, and her uterus. The erotic encounter between the couple can be experienced as a reaffirmation of woman’s degraded subjectivity and, thus, a carnal enactment of male privilege, or, it can be an opportunity to enjoy not only each other’s fundamental ambiguity but also the ambiguity of their simultaneous union and differences. The flesh-and-blood couple who experience pleasure in their own ambiguity, in exploring one another’s differences and being receptive to the possibility of having other aspects of themselves revealed by their partner, offers the hope of a self-other relationship based on friendship and generosity rather than combat and possession.

Friendship, as we have previously gauged from Beauvoir’s ethics, does not signify the absence of tension. To be sure, Beauvoir describes a beautiful celebration of giving and receiving between generous individuals. But this erotic generosity starkly opposes her other depictions of the sexual experience between the couple. These are filled with indifference (e.g. Beauvoir: 395) and violence (e.g. 403-404). Ultimately, she believes that the couple *can* “live out their erotic drama in amity” (737). However, they both have to assume their own ambiguity, as well as the ambiguity of the situation, “with a clear-sighted modesty”. Such modesty is in stark contrast to the conceit, the macho posturing and aggression of the other-conquering Cartesian hero-possessor. *Modesty*, it may be recalled, is what Levinas associates with the *feminine*, i.e., the counterpoint to Consciousness and Subjectivity.

Thus, with her own textual sleight of hand, Simone de Beauvoir disarms fraternal power by constituting an ethics of friendship and generosity as the assumption of modesty, corporeality, passivity and vulnerability. Beauvoir reconceptualises these traits that have traditionally been employed to produce, legitimise and reinforce woman's status as the Inessential Other as the very characteristics that may deliver us from the tyranny of power.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> In an interview Beauvoir (cited by Brison in Card 2003: 191) suggests: ““Precisely because they don't generally have power, women don't have the flaws that are linked to the possession of power. For example, they don't demonstrate the self-importance, the fatuousness, the complacency, the spirit of emulation that you find in men. Women ... play fewer roles, wear fewer masks, and I think the kind of truthfulness you find in many women is there because, in a sense, they have to have it, and that's a quality they should keep and should also transmit to men. There are also qualities of devotion. Devotion is very dangerous because it can become a way of life and can devour people sometimes, but it has its good sides; if it's what we think of as altruism. There is often, in women, a kind of caring for others that is inculcated in them by education, and which should be eliminated when it takes the form of slavery. But caring about others, the ability to give to others, to give of your time, your intelligence – this is something women should keep, and something that men should learn to acquire.”

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