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SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S THE SECOND SEX
IN THE LIGHT OF
THE HEGELIAN MASTER-SLAVE DIALECTIC
AND
SARTRIAN EXISTENTIALISM

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Title of Thesis Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex in the light of the Hegelian
master-slave dialectic and Sartrean existentialism.

Part I illustrates de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "the Other." It asserts that the experience of woman has been neglected by conventional theorists and that although The Second Sex is the foremost theoretical work of its kind, it has never been properly discussed.

Part II provides the theoretical framework for an understanding of The Second Sex. It begins by outlining the main aspects of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, as extrapolated by Alexandre Kojève. It then summarises and comments on aspects of Jean-Paul Sartre's work. It traces the development of Sartre's thought from ontology to ethics, and finally to Marxism. The way in which Hegel and Sartre provide the theoretical basis for de Beauvoir's analysis of woman, is illustrated in the subsequent chapter. It develops the concept of woman as "the Other" and explains how de Beauvoirian woman is "alienated" and "oppressed."

Part III examines de Beauvoir's theory of the sources of woman's oppression. It begins by assessing the significance de Beauvoir attributes to woman's biology. It argues that the logic of her idea that woman is "alienated" in her reproductive role is the elimination of biological femininity. De Beauvoir's theory of the history of the male-female relationship is then outlined. By using the Hegelian principles of mastery and slavery to explicate de Beauvoir's account of woman's oppression, it shows how man is privileged in her theory because historically he fought and laboured. This account of human development is criticised in the following chapter. It questions the values and assumptions on which de Beauvoir's ideas of human development are based and outlines an alternative theory; a theory which values woman's reproductive role. Finally, the meaning of de Beauvoir's emphasis on such factors as private property is discussed. By way of a comparison with Engels, it shows how de Beauvoir's theory is rooted in idealist philosophy.

Part IV illustrates de Beauvoir's theory of the contemporary relations between the sexes. It outlines her theory of the development of a girl's life from birth to maturity, and how it is the girl who ultimately "chooses" her feminine destiny. The way in which woman attempts to justify and compensate for the "mutilated" condition of femininity is the subject of the following chapter. Finally what man wants to attain from his relationship with woman is outlined. It shows how in de Beauvoir's theory it is through woman that man hopes to attain "recognition" and unity with Nature.

Part V assesses de Beauvoir's politics. It begins by examining her concept of woman's emancipation. As it is the male revolutionary who is portrayed as woman's liberating hero, de Beauvoir's inability to provide a convincing strategy for change is outlined. This leads to an examination of the socialist nature of de Beauvoir's theory. De Beauvoir claims that she was a "socialist" when she wrote The Second Sex, yet we find few traces of socialism in her theory. The last chapter examines the feminism of The Second Sex. It shows that the major difference between de Beauvoir and modern feminists is that she wants woman to become like man. This male bias in de Beauvoir's theory is rooted in the Hegelian and Sartrean concepts which she employs.

Use this side only

It is a strange experience for an individual who feels himself to be an autonomous and transcendent subject, an absolute, to discover inferiority in himself as a fixed and preordained essence: it is a strange experience for whoever regards himself as the One to be revealed to himself as otherness, alterity. This is what happens to the little girl when, doing her apprenticeship for life in the world, she grasps what it means to be a woman therein. The sphere to which she belongs is everywhere enclosed, limited, dominated, by the male universe: high as she may raise herself, far as she may venture, there will always be a ceiling over her head, walls that will block her way.

Simone de Beauvoir

The Second Sex

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Part I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter One

"The Second Sex"



In Ways of Seeing (1972) John Berger uses this picture by Trutat to illustrate the difference between masculine and feminine consciousness. He writes: "Men act and women appear."¹ As the picture suggests, man is active and assertive and appraises woman as object.² Because woman's success in man's world depends on her qualities as an inert and desirable object (e.g. youth, beauty, poise) she too comes to "survey" herself in this way. In seeing herself as object, Berger claims that woman's "own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another."³

Berger's revealing illustration of woman's self-perception uses the concepts of the Hegelian and existentialist philosophical traditions in which the relation between Self and Other is analysed in terms of subjects and objects. Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex (1949) also employs these Hegelian and Sartrean concepts to analyse the feminine condition.⁴ She begins by positing that in the male-female relationship woman is "the Other."⁵ For de Beauvoir "the drama of woman"⁶ is that she sees man as the essential being - the sovereign subject - and defines herself as inessential and object with reference to him. It is this notion of woman as "the Other" which is the leitmotiv of The Second Sex. De Beauvoir uses it to explain how man sees woman and how woman sees herself. In Ways of Seeing Berger comments revealingly on the nature of feminine consciousness but for a comprehensive and compelling theory of the feminine condition we must turn to de Beauvoir's work.⁷

In The Second Sex de Beauvoir analyses the feminine condition from an existentialist perspective and frequently uses the Hegelian master-slave dialectic as a source of ideas, but neither Hegel nor Sartre have properly considered the male-female relationship. Still less do these theorists discuss whether the consciousness they describe is applicable to the male human being and to the female. We are not led to ask whether the self-consciousness locked in deathly combat with the Other in Hegelian philosophy can be female, or whether "the Look" in Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness (1943)⁸ has the same dynamic irrespective of the sex of the existents involved. Thus in neither Hegel's nor Sartre's work do we know if the hateful objectification of oneself affected by the Other is influenced by gender.

Indeed, for different reasons, Hegel and Sartre would be unsympathetic to a study of woman's experience. In The Phenomenology

of Mind (1807) Hegel does not lead us to inquire whether the consciousness of which he writes may be female,⁹ but in The Philosophy of Right (1821) he portrays woman's consciousness as unworthy of philosophical investigation:

The difference between men and women is like that 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. ... 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 by acquiring knowledge. The status of manhood, on the other hand, is attained only by the stress of thought and much technical exertion.¹⁰

Although it was Sartre who originally suggested to de Beauvoir that she undertake the project which culminated in The Second Sex, there is no hint in Being and Nothingness that he would have been very sympathetic to such a study. To be sure Sartre does not subscribe to Hegel's view of the difference between men and women, but his silence implies that a study of woman's experience is unnecessary in as much as what may be said of the for-itself and the relations between existents applies equally well to male and female. Other political philosophers rarely see the relationship between men and women as a power relationship rooted in social organisation and therefore requiring political resolution, and so they too have not addressed themselves to this issue.¹¹

By keeping silent, either through hostility or indifference, philosophy has not contributed to a discussion of feminine experience and how its negative features might be overcome. By using Sartrian and Hegelian ideas de Beauvoir broke this silence. Her work is the foremost philosophical treatise on woman's experience. However, the public

outcry which followed publication of de Beauvoir's work reinforced the idea that such a study is not a serious contribution to our understanding of human existence. Accordingly it is rarely acclaimed as a theoretical work. As the indignation subsided only its commitment to a change in woman's role has ensured it lasting success.

Currently The Second Sex is hailed as "the Bible of feminism."¹² But although this book is revered by feminists, they have not thoroughly examined de Beauvoir's particular theory of woman's subordination. Thus there has been no proper assessment of what contribution de Beauvoir's philosophical perspective has made to an understanding of the feminine condition. Sadly this has meant that de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "Other" has little ¹³ currency in feminist thought. To understand why The Second Sex is extolled yet de Beauvoir's theory neglected, we must know something of its historical background.

I

The Second Sex was first published in France in 1949 under the title Le Deuxième sexe.¹⁴ Appearing almost midway between the two great waves of feminism - the early 1900's and the late 1960's - it was isolated from any movement to achieve woman's emancipation. Although de Beauvoir was committed to such emancipation, The Second Sex was originally conceived as a philosophical work. At this time de Beauvoir, aged forty-one, had been involved with Jean-Paul Sartre for twenty years and was a committed existentialist. With a number of philosophical essays and novels to her credit,¹⁵ de Beauvoir decided to write an autobiographical work in which she would use existentialism to analyse

her past. But, as she explains in Force of Circumstance (1963), in order to undertake such a project she had to take account of how gender affects "facticity"; she had to decide how her femininity had affected her choices and the general shape of her life.¹⁶ As she never experienced any feelings of inferiority about her status as a woman, de Beauvoir thought she could "dispose" of the subject quite quickly. Sartre, however, suggested that she should look into it further. Although de Beauvoir felt that the issue was personally irrelevant to her, she followed this advice and began to investigate the idea that there is a specifically "feminine" situation. "The problem did not concern me directly," de Beauvoir writes in her memoirs, "and as yet I attributed very little importance to it, but my interest had been aroused."¹⁷¹⁸

The fruit of such arousal was the publication of The Second Sex. However, although de Beauvoir spent several years researching into the question of woman's situation, her fundamental attitude to this issue did not change. She devoted almost two years to analysing how femininity limits a woman's life, yet she still maintained that for her it is a rather unimportant aspect of human existence.¹⁹ The introduction to the book reads like an apology: de Beauvoir apparently felt that she must justify herself; explain to her readers why she had devoted so much time to a subject which is "irritating" and "not new."²⁰ It appears that de Beauvoir was only able to overcome her initial hesitation to write a book on women because she believed the level of discussion on the subject urgently required to be raised.

In place of the controversy and quarrelling which, she claims at the outset of The Second Sex, usually characterises books written by women on their situation, de Beauvoir intends to undertake an objective investigation. De Beauvoir considers herself well qualified for such

a task; not only does she know "the feminine world more intimately than do the men" but also, because she has "escaped" the usual oppression of her sex, she can "afford the luxury of impartiality."²¹ Thus, from the introduction to The Second Sex, we may expect of de Beauvoir a study of woman's subordination which is more of an "effort towards clarity and understanding" of the issues than a polemical attempt to assert women's rights.²²

De Beauvoir's hopes for elevated discussion of the issues never attained fruition. The subject matter of The Second Sex, still less de Beauvoir's ideas, was too controversial for it to be met with equanimity and reason. In de Beauvoir's own words it "shocked" and "troubled people's minds."²³ In Force of Circumstance she discusses the impact the book had in France. She describes some of the numerous obscene and disparaging letters she received and how the critics went "wild." In such a climate, her complacency about her position in the world as a woman who had escaped oppression was short-lived. From de Beauvoir's own comments and from the reviews it seems that in the absence of a feminist movement or a philosophical tradition concerned with the issues she raises, there were few attempts to discuss or criticise the content of The Second Sex. In place of scholarly or serious criticism de Beauvoir herself became the object of attack. For example, it was claimed that de Beauvoir only wrote this book because she was "frustrated," "cheated," "envious" and "embittered."²⁴ The review in Time magazine of the American publication of the book is almost a caricature of the sentiments of many reviewers:

... author de Beauvoir knows how to take on a man and brings him down like a sack of hypocrisy. More's the pity that she writes pages of non-sensical epitaphs over her bleeding targets. The chip on her shoulder makes her believe that every man is as autocratic as a Turk and every female as malleable as a slave. Many of her protestations would strike even the inmates of a harem as being behind the times.²⁵

More surprisingly, many of de Beauvoir's male literary colleagues did not treat the book seriously. In the introduction to The Second Sex de Beauvoir criticises Claude Mauriac for his attitude to women, but his retaliation did not take issue with de Beauvoir's ideas; it tried to undermine de Beauvoir as a woman. He wrote to one of the contributors of Les Temps Modernes (of which de Beauvoir was a member of the editorial board): "Your employer's vagina has no secrets from me."²⁶ De Beauvoir also reports that Albert Camus "in a few morose sentences" accused her "of making the French male look ridiculous."²⁷

The controversial nature of The Second Sex was the main reason for its immediate commercial success. After serialisation in Les Temps Modernes, the first volume alone sold twenty-two thousand copies in the first week. It was, as Laurent Gagnebin points out, "le succès de scandale."²⁸ But despite such good sales Caroline Moorhead of The Times can with justification claim that "people were not ready for what ... (de Beauvoir) said in 1949."²⁹ As it was not part of a movement for woman's emancipation and was the only recent book on this topic, it first appeared in an environment unsympathetic to her aims. And this inhibited discussion of de Beauvoir's ideas. Those opposed to the notion that woman's situation should be changed dismissed her ideas as the product of one frustrated woman's imagination, while those sympathetic came to de Beauvoir's defence. In such polarised surroundings The Second Sex was associated with the cause of woman's rights and

those in favour could not afford to criticise, or indeed evaluate, the only book which proclaimed the cause.

From its publication in France in 1949 to the appearance of Betty Friedan's book The Feminine Mystique published in the United States in 1959, The Second Sex remained the sole work of its kind.³⁰ It was only with the emergence of the women's liberation movement in the late 1960's that feminist books began to appear in any number. For nearly two decades, then, de Beauvoir's book was the most significant analysis of woman's oppression.³¹ The sustained interest shown in The Second Sex illustrates that there were women who, although not actively seeking to change their situation, were eager to read a book which expressed dissatisfaction with the role to which they had been consigned. That it had an impact on them cannot be denied. Margaret Walters in an article called "The Rights and Wrongs of Women" (1976) is critical of major aspects of de Beauvoir's theory yet claims that it had an enormous impact on her own and on other women's lives:

When I first read The Second Sex - ... before the present women's movement - it shook me with the force of a genuine revelation. It helped me make some sense of my confused and isolated depression. Since the book appeared in 1949, de Beauvoir has received thousands of letters from women all over the world, grateful for the way the book has helped them to see their personal frustrations in terms of the general conditions of women.³²

In a period in which there was neither a coherent organisation of feminists nor a body of feminist theory, The Second Sex thus had a valuable consciousness-raising effect. But while this increased the book's reputation and sales, it did not promote a systematic evaluation of de Beauvoir's theory.

The Second Sex continues to be neglected in this way. Suzanne Lilar, one of the few serious commentators on this book, complained of this neglect when she said: "A ma connaissance ... jamais personne n'a discuté ce livre. C'est un phénomène de fascination. On a comme un sentiment religieux à son égard. C'est un livre tabou."³³ Although Lilar's comments were made in 1969 before the surge of interest in feminist literature had reached its peak, they still retain their relevance. There are two main reasons for this.

Although feminist literature has been much in demand in recent years, The Second Sex has been by-passed in favour of more readable and contemporary works. Nowadays Kate Millet's Sexual Politics (1969), Germaine Greer's Female Eunuch (1970), and Eva Figes' Patriarchal Attitudes (1970) are more likely to be read by those interested in feminism than de Beauvoir's thirty year old book.³⁴ Moreover, although much has been written on women over the past ten years, this literature lacks an analytical history. Many writers have provided information on women's condition and given their interpretation of it but there are few books on the nature and development of feminist theories.³⁵ And it is only in this kind of systematic analysis that de Beauvoir's particular contribution can be appraised.

What is surprising, then, is that The Second Sex continues to sell well. One explanation for this may be de Beauvoir's personal reputation and following as a novelist and autobiographer. As Caroline Moorhead points out, in recent years de Beauvoir has become something of a "cult figure."³⁶ Indeed de Beauvoir is often portrayed as the high priestess of feminism idolised by a growing number of disciples. In 1977 Alice Schwartz in an interview with de Beauvoir referred to such devotion when she said:

I know that for nearly thirty years you have been receiving letters everyday from women all over the world. For many of them, you Simone, have been, even before the new united struggle of women, the living incarnation of our revolt. This is due no doubt to the whole of your work of analysis in depth of the position of women, and also to your autobiographical novels, because they presented a woman who dared to exist.³⁷

Certainly the untimely publication of The Second Sex has ensured de Beauvoir a reputation as the darling of feminism. But the respect which de Beauvoir has gained from women around the world is, as Schwartzner indicates, also due to her novels and to her autobiography. Her most recent novels have particularly focussed on the problems women face and her autobiography has always given women insight into how it is possible for a woman to lead a life as a writer and intellectual.

A second reason for the popularity of The Second Sex is that it is now the "classic" work of feminist literature. But like many classical texts it is frequently extolled and infrequently read. The Second Sex is a difficult book to understand. It requires to be read and understood against the theoretical background from which many of its insights are gained, yet increasingly Sartre and Hegel are not theorists which many people encounter. Thus although de Beauvoir states in the introduction to her book that she hopes her analysis of woman's situation will be an "effort towards clarity and understanding" in comparison with most other books on the subject her argument is complicated and obtuse. As Sheila Rowbotham indicates when discussing her own feminist development in Woman's Consciousness, Man's World (1973), de Beauvoir's ideas may remain stubbornly incoherent despite a rigorous academic training: "I had been picking up and putting down The Second Sex since I had been at university but I found the ideas

very inaccessible at first. They were not easy to internalise."³⁸
 Rowbotham's comments also highlight the way in which many readers approach The Second Sex: for instead of reading it systematically from cover to cover, they flick through it only reading sections of immediate interest or intelligibility; a practice which makes it even more difficult to grasp the precise nature of de Beauvoir's theory.

Flicking through a long book is no way to come to terms with its arguments but ironically de Beauvoir's prolixity may be protecting The Second Sex's reputation as "the Bible of feminism." At the time of writing this book, de Beauvoir had little sympathy for feminists; we are even urged in the introduction to regard "feminists with suspicion."³⁹ There are also a good many strands in her theory which, once clearly appreciated, would be anathema to contemporary feminists.⁴⁰ Thus although they may continue to regard this work as a milestone in the development of feminist theory, few would praise it wholeheartedly if they understood de Beauvoir's ideas.

II

There is little commentary on The Second Sex.⁴¹ The most substantial work is Le Malentendu du Deuxième sexe (1969) by Suzanne Lilar. It is a critical work which begins from the assumption that it is time to "profane" The Second Sex - to break the reverent silence. Lilar recognises de Beauvoir's debt to Sartre's philosophy and helpfully explains some aspects of de Beauvoir's analysis with reference to Sartre's work, but she neglects the influence of Hegel. This profane work does not pretend to be a theoretical explication of The Second Sex, Lilar's main contribution to an understanding of this book is to be

found elsewhere. For example, she criticises the general style of de Beauvoir's theory, maintaining that this is based on "trois vices":

... le manque de rigueur. L'obstination que l'auteur met à réaffirmer sa thèse ne doit pas faire illusion sur la consistance du questionnement. Seul le ton est résolu. Une trop grande complaisance dans le choix des citations et des exemples, la hâte à conclure sur des prémisses incertaines ... d'autres procédés ... aident l'auteur à se débarrasser de ce qui lui fait échec. Une question embarrassante? Ce n'est jamais le moment d'en parler. Un exemple contraire à sa thèse? C'est l'exception qui confirme la règle.⁴²

Another major aspect of Lilar's criticism of de Beauvoir concerns biology. Lilar claims that de Beauvoir's views of the biological differences between men and women are scientifically inaccurate. She takes into account advances in endocrinology since 1949 and appends a discussion on this topic by an endocrinologist. Lilar also takes issue with de Beauvoir's descriptions of how women experience their reproductive role and, as author of Aspects of Love in Western Society (1963), she disagrees with de Beauvoir's portrayal of the couple.⁴³ Lilar's criticisms of de Beauvoir are made from the standpoint either of "scientific facts" or of "common sense," and so her worthwhile contribution to an understanding of The Second Sex lacks a theoretical perspective. This is also true of Daniel Armogathe's book Le Deuxième sexe (1977).⁴⁴ As part of the "Profil D'une Oeuvre" collection, its aim is to summarise the main aspects of de Beauvoir's theory in simple fashion and make only occasional criticisms of the theory.

Apart from these two books, there are only short articles or chapters in books which are specifically on The Second Sex. And the limitation of space is always such that they do not manage to summarise or criticise the totality of de Beauvoir's ideas. Thus de Beauvoir's work, like its subject matter, has been little discussed by theorists.

This thesis aims to begin such discussion. It intends to explicate de Beauvoir's theory and evaluate it on its own terms; to see what she contributes to our knowledge of woman's experience. This will lead us to question aspects of de Beauvoir's ontology and ethics. Because de Beauvoir's theory is indebted to Hegelian and Sartrean philosophy we shall also begin to evaluate what contribution these theorists can make to an analysis of woman's situation.

As it is de Beauvoir's theory which is of predominant interest, for the most part we shall not make evaluations or criticisms on other grounds. Certainly the factual basis of the book is suspect. As the anthropologist Margaret Mead in a review (1953) points out:

To appreciate it properly The Second Sex must be recognised as the work of a French woman novelist who has drawn with high personal selectivity from a large number of fields - comparative religion, psychiatry, Marxism, existentialist philosophy- and she has cast her work in the form of a piece of specialist non-fiction which is precisely what it is not.⁴⁵

However, what Mead does not realise is that de Beauvoir's "personal selectivity" is due to her existentialism; that it is this which leads her to portray the world in a narrow way. Witness, for example, de Beauvoir's interpretation of the origin of incest taboo. In line with the existentialist revulsion for Nature, and hence the reproductive process, de Beauvoir claims that the "universal law of incest" is due to man's desire to eliminate motherhood from his carnal relationship with women: "Man finds it repugnant to come upon the dreaded essence of the mother in the woman he possesses; he is determined to disassociate these two aspects of femininity."⁴⁶ However, even the translator indicates the dubiety of de Beauvoir's theory. He writes in a footnote:

According to the view of the sociologist, G.P. Murdoch, ... incest prohibition can be fully accounted for only by a complex theory, involving factors contributed by psychoanalysis, sociology, cultural anthropology, and behaviouristic psychology. No simple explanation, ... is at all satisfactory.⁴⁷

As such unsatisfactory aspects of The Second Sex emanate from its theoretical perspective it is best to concentrate on evaluating this aspect of de Beauvoir's work.

Likewise we shall not attempt to evaluate de Beauvoir's contribution to an analysis of woman's situation by examining her personal life. As de Beauvoir has written volumes of autobiography it is possible to illustrate how de Beauvoir acted out aspects of her commitment to woman's emancipation. This is what Albert Memmi does in a chapter of his book Dominated Man (1968) where he argues that if we take The Second Sex together with de Beauvoir's own life we have the most important "feminist project" ever to have been attempted.⁴⁸

However, while this approach gives certain insights into de Beauvoir's theory it is of limited use to us here; instead of concentrating on the precise theoretical contribution de Beauvoir has made we would easily become embroiled in appraising such individual matters as the success of her relationship with Sartre and what sacrifice was involved in de Beauvoir's evasion of maternity. For the most part, then, the background material used to illuminate de Beauvoir's work will be theoretical, not personal.

This thesis is divided into four parts. The first gives the theoretical framework of The Second Sex and outlines the way in which de Beauvoir portrays the negative aspects of the feminine condition.

Part II

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter Two

The Hegelian Master-Slave Dialectic

Hegel's master-slave dialectic underlies much of de Beauvoir's theory in The Second Sex - her emphasis on recognition, work, fighting, all can best be understood with reference to Hegelian ideas. But although the master-slave dialectic haunts de Beauvoir's analysis of the male-female relationship, she refers to it on very few occasions. It is only if we have prior knowledge of its dynamics that we can therefore appreciate de Beauvoir's indebtedness to Hegelian theory.

In this chapter we shall set out the main aspects of the master-slave dialectic which are helpful in understanding The Second Sex. For this purpose we shall use Alexandre Kojève's exposition of Hegel, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures in the "Phenomenology of Spirit" (1947).¹ Kojève's work has been acclaimed as an exposition of Hegel, but there is some doubt about the accuracy of his interpretation.² However, it is a Kojévian Hegel which is most suitable as the theoretical background for de Beauvoir's ideas: his lectures in France in the 1930's were profoundly influential on the intellectual circles in which de Beauvoir moved;³ and, as Kojève's interpretation has an existentialist tinge, he makes Hegel more compatible with de Beauvoir's ideas.⁴

I

For Hegel men, unlike animals, are self-conscious. A necessary condition of this self-consciousness is desire, for it is this which

forces man to act, to negate the given in accordance with his wishes, and which reveals man to himself as an "I." However, for Hegel, it is not unqualified desire which leads to self-consciousness, as this would necessarily include basic animal desire. Rather, it is desire which is directed towards something which goes beyond material objects and that something is desire itself. Thus, Kojève writes: "... anthropogenetic Desire is different from animal Desire ... in that it is directed, not towards a real 'positive,' given object, but toward another Desire."⁵ Man wants another human being to "recognise" his value. As we shall see, in defining self-consciousness as arising from desire, and in emphasising the importance of recognition, Hegel avoids the static implications of consciousness dependent on contemplation and places man within a world in which it is action and relations with others which ultimately lead to a full awareness of his existence.

The awakening self-consciousness exists for and in itself; that is, its identity depends on the simple exclusion of every other thing from itself. Man as a self-conscious subject sees himself as essential and everything else as inessential, yet the full awareness of his being is dependent on his relations with another, albeit non-essential, consciousness. This dependence on the Other in the Hegelian system may be seen in two ways. Being-for-others is a necessary structure of the world where man does not exist in isolation and so a self-consciousness must be shown how it appears to others; that is, as an external and determined object. Moreover, man sees himself as a sovereign subject but this notion remains within himself as pure subjectivity unless it can find objective expression in the recognition of another separate yet identical being. Thus the truth of man's sovereignty depends on

its "recognition" by another human being and it is this notion, leading to the idea of man risking his life for the recognition of another, which underpins the Hegelian master-slave dialectic.

In the Hegelian system, pure self-consciousness is egotistical, in the sense that it considers itself the essential being, and directed to others in the attempt to gain confirmation of its pretensions. But when it is confronted by another the illusions of sovereignty, far from being confirmed, are shattered, for the other shows it to exist in an alien and unacceptable way; being-for-another means being an object for the Other. In this confrontation of Self and Other, both beings desire recognition and both are shown an alien image of themselves: this applies to both, for what we are discussing here is a facet of "raw" and undifferentiated being. Thus both want recognition of their sovereignty, the obliteration of their own object status and hence the destruction of the Other, so from this confrontation of two self-conscious subjects a life and death struggle ensues. It is this fight for recognition which provides the means by which one may attain objective proof of one's sovereignty, thus the combat to be meaningful must not only yield a victor but also must allow both opponents to survive the fight, else the victor's hopes for recognition will perish with the Other's death. A death other than a biological death must be achieved - the Other must be overcome "dialectically." The victor⁶ "must leave him life and consciousness and destroy only his autonomy."

Thus the fight ends when one opponent's fear of death forces him to submit;⁷ his preference for basic animal life to that of his own extinction leads him to surrender his previous notions of himself and he recognises without being recognised in return. It is in this

way that there arises a master and a slave. The master by risking his life and winning has asserted his humanity over his biological instincts, for he has preferred an abstract principle - the objective reality of his human existence - to his animal life. It is for this reason that the fight for recognition is, in Hegelian terms, the first truly human action in that it contradicts man's animal urge for self-preservation and shows him risking his life for an ideal. The slave has not, however, confirmed his humanity in this way. To him slavery appeared better than death and he preferred to accept the life given to him by another. In his own and others' view of him, the slave is simply an animal or thing; he is no more than a being-for-others.

Kojève argues that in Hegelian philosophy this division into master and slave is an essential prerequisite for human development. "In his nascent state," Kojève asserts, "man is never simply man. He is always, and essentially, either Master or Slave."⁸ This means that before the Fight there is in fact some differentiation between consciousnesses - one of them, through fear, must submit: "Without being predestined in any way, the one must fear the other, must refuse to risk his life for the satisfaction of his desire for 'recognition'."⁹

In Hegelian theory the master is the victor in the fight for recognition. But this is a victory devoid of satisfaction as it does not fulfil his original desires. The recognition he gains from the slave is not that of a fellow human being but that of a thing; it is a recognition which holds no value. Moreover, the fight has not allowed the master to gain autonomy but has in fact made him dependent on the slave: others accept his status as master only by virtue of his possession of a slave and his biological existence is sustained by

the products of the slave's work. The master's life becomes one of mere consumption of the products of the slave's work. In Hegelian terms this kind of immediate consumption can give some pleasure but it can never offer the lasting satisfaction which man desires. The master is in an "existential impasse":¹⁰ he has attained what he was prepared to die for but only to find that it is devoid of satisfaction. To attain satisfaction he would have to be recognised by another master, but as this contradicts the essence of mastery - death rather than recognition - this remains impossible. The assertion of his humanity has been confined to a life and death struggle - he is master in a world where human dignity is accorded solely through wars of prestige. He cannot transcend this world, so he must remain master or die.

The slave's situation, on the contrary, is not one he actively desired but merely one his fear of death forced him to accept. He could not adhere to the principle of his master, "to conquer or to die,"¹¹ and so the slave has preferred to accept the life granted to him by another. The essence of his subsequent slavery is forced labour: he is bound to work for his master, to use his life working for the benefit of another.¹² But paradoxically it is this which contains the germ of his liberation; for although work does not in itself liberate the slave, it does furnish him with the conditions necessary for him to take up his fight against the master.

According to Hegel, it is through forced labour - that is, work carried on in terror of the master - that man learns to repress his natural instincts to satisfy his desires by immediate consumption. If this repression did not take place the raw object would never be changed, and man's material existence would be confined to what is naturally given. The master asserted his humanity by overcoming the biological

desire for self-preservation, the slave now asserts his through forced but creative labour - he too represses his instincts in relation to an idea. Moreover, the slave through his work becomes master of Nature. "Understanding, abstract thought, science, technique, the arts," writes Kojève, "have their origin in the forced work of the Slave."¹³ In changing his environment the slave also changes and educates himself. The slave's work thus furnishes him with a new self-identity: after the Fight he accepted the master's definition of himself as a thing, but through labour he begins to develop notions of himself as a creative human being. This notion does not need the recognition of the Other in combat to be given objective expression, for the products of the slave's labour externalise his consciousness and affirm his objective existence as a self-conscious and creative subject. Objects which encapsulate the consciousness of their creator are thus the confirmation of the slave's humanity.

In this way the slave comes to know that he is not free but nevertheless believes himself to be a human being. Now he must claim recognition from the master, and for two reasons this necessarily means a fight: the master will not recognise another, and the slave's own liberation requires him to assert his humanity over his animal life. However, before "realizing Freedom the Slave imagines a series of ideologies, by which he seeks to justify himself, to justify his slavery, to reconcile the ideal of Freedom with the fact of Slavery."¹⁴

The first ideology which the slave adopts is Stoicism; he adheres to a philosophy in which freedom is an abstract idea and which renders one's actual physical situation irrelevant by denying the importance of the external world. Stoicism gives way to Scepticism

which also denies the importance of man's situation and which renders action irrelevant. However, this goes further than Stoicism in the sense that it completely denies the value of being in the world: everything is irrelevant and the Sceptic ought, taking his philosophy to its logical conclusion, to commit suicide. Christianity, the next stage in the slave's justification of his oppression, unlike the ideologies of Stoicism and Scepticism, does admit that the slave is unfree but claims that in God's eyes, and in the future world, men are equal. The slave frees himself to some extent from the human master but merely to be enslaved by God - the "Divine Master." Man thus adopts and accepts his own slavery; he enslaves himself in this respect for the same reasons as before - through fear of death and in face of the "Nothingness...at the foundation of his being." However, with the acceptance of Christianity and the emergence of what Hegel calls the "unhappy consciousness," the dialectic takes a new form. Unlike the master-slave relationship where the basis of true consciousness -that is, the recognition of selfhood and freedom both in oneself and the Other -are divided between two individual consciousnesses of master and slave, the division and basis of the dialectic now takes place within the same self.

These three ideologies adopted by the slave have staved off the necessity for his violent revolt. However, the true liberation of the slave cannot take place without the risk of life which up to now has been so carefully avoided: in the case of the "unhappy consciousness" it is not actual violence which is required but its acceptance of the human condition of existence - that of mortality. One of the strengths of Hegel's theory is his portrayal of the oppressed

slave. On the one hand, Hegel illustrates how man's relationship with the material world allows him to gain the consciousness requisite for his liberation, while on the other he shows that once a certain stage has been reached in the master-slave dialectic the continuation of the slave's oppression is to be found more in his psyche than in the external world. It is this delicate balance which we shall find lacking in existentialist works.

In the Hegelian system the liberation of the slave would not simply benefit the slave but is, on the contrary, necessary for the development of all mankind. "Man achieves his true autonomy, his authentic freedom," writes Kojève, "only after passing through Slavery, after surmounting fear of death performed in the servitude of another."¹⁷ The master, as we have seen, is unable to transcend the present situation and if he remains dominant, the first fight will be merely imitated in a succession of wars of prestige. Moreover, the master principle is one of universality; for "the Man who risks his life is in no way different, by the sole act of having risked his life, from all the others who have done as much." For example, within the family the master neither works nor fights and so it is not his humanity which is recognised but only his various family roles of father, brother, son and so on. The slave principle, on the other hand, is one of "particularity" for it is through creative labour that fundamental differences, in terms of personalities and capabilities, between men are established. It is this type of diversity which is, in Hegel's philosophy, a prerequisite of historical development and hence significant social change.

The slave is not only the one person who can initiate change, but it is also he who most desires it and who, in his work and his fear,

most understands the human situation. Through his "animal fear of death,"¹⁹ experienced in his combat with the master and now a fundamental part of his daily life, the slave grasps that being has at its foundation a Nothingness and that "the given world is hostile to him"²⁰ and must be overcome. He also realises the value of recognition and the value of an independent existence, for he recognises the master without being recognised in return. However, before the slave can carry out his historical mission he must impose himself on the master and overcome his fear of death. His liberation cannot be achieved until he is prepared to fight: he was enslaved through fear and so this fear must be transcended before he can liberate himself from the power of the master.

Thus we see how in the Hegelian master-slave dialectic the master is "the catalyst of the historical, anthropogenetic process"²¹ but that he is in an impasse: he is a trapped, unsatisfied man for whom death is the only escape. The slave, on the contrary, becomes the creator of history, as history becomes bound to the activities of the labourer. In short, the future belongs to the oppressed. In his desire to establish socialism Marx saw the advantage of such a theory; but an intriguing feature of de Beauvoir's work is that although she is committed to woman's emancipation she scarcely uses this liberating aspect of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. It is the principles of mastery and slavery - fighting and creative labour - which de Beauvoir most uses in explicating the nature and causes of woman's oppression. And, as we shall see, it is partly in accepting so wholeheartedly Hegel's notions of the preconditions of human development that

de Beauvoir's theory goes astray. But before we can turn to de Beauvoir's thought we must examine the other major source of ideas in The Second Sex - Sartrean existentialism.

Chapter Six

Sartrean Existentialism

In the introduction to The Second Sex de Beauvoir claims that she is an existentialist. This chapter sets out those aspects of Sartrean existentialism which enable us to understand de Beauvoir's work. By 1947 de Beauvoir had written a few existentialist essays and novels but Sartre's philosophical works provide the theoretical background to The Second Sex.¹ We shall begin our examination of Sartre's philosophy by explicating the ontology of his main philosophical work, Being and Nothingness. Then we shall summarise the ethical position Sartre adopted in his lecture Existentialism and Humanism (1945).² As the purpose of this chapter is to give the theoretical framework within which to understand The Second Sex we shall deal with Sartre's development up to the late 1940's. Thus we shall complete our study of Sartre's thought by looking at his early commitment to Marxism.

I

Being and Nothingness is subtitled: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology. In it Sartre aims to study "the structures of being" (p.788) by examining how such phenomena are given to us in experience.³ Subsequently Sartre discerns in the world a duality of being; a sharp division of the world into being-for-itself (être-pour-soi) and being-in-itself (être-en-soi). He makes a radical distinction between man, the being of consciousness, and the in-itself world of animals and

things. But despite this bifurcation of being, Sartre maintains that the two types of being are related; although the in-itself is a completed being which has no need of the for-itself, consciousness is dependent on an external object. "The cogito," writes Sartre, "necessarily leads out of itself" (p.786). The essential aspect of Sartre's definition of consciousness is precisely this idea that consciousness is always conscious of something, that it never exists in a pure state but is always directed towards something other than itself. Because Sartre maintains that self-consciousness does not imply consciousness of consciousness his definition is a modification of the Cartesian cogito. He claims that self-consciousness is not objective or reflective consciousness but, on the contrary, pre-reflective. This means that while I am conscious of objects, I am non-reflectively conscious of this awareness. Nevertheless, according to such a perspective it is possible for consciousness to reflect on itself and thus become its own object.

A significant feature of Sartre's duality is the way in which he conceptualises the distinction between the two types of being: a distinction which hinges on the notion that whereas the in-itself is an equivalence of being, an existent with clearly defined and limited properties, the for-itself is a being of nothingness and so the foundation of its being is a lack. In contrast to the for-itself which has a hole in its very being, the in-itself has not even "the tiniest crack through which nothingness might seep in" (p.121).

According to Sartre, then, nothingness is never the property of things for it is always generated by the for-itself. It is this notion that man, the conscious being, is the foundation of his own

nothingness which leads Sartre to the proposition: "The Being by which Nothingness arrives in the world is a Being such that in its Being, the Nothingness of its Being is in question" (p.157). Thus, unlike a table which is a table, man is not a "plenitude of being" (p.561). It is his being as nothingness which puts man's identity in question and which leads him to wonder what he is. Because man is able to put himself outside of being and ask questions about himself, he is not determined by his being and is able to modify it. Being undetermined man therefore escapes the causality of the world of the in-itself and exists as a free being. For Sartre, then, the major distinction between man and the in-itself is that for man "existence precedes ... essence" (p.565). In short, man exists first and defines himself later. It is this notion that freedom is not something which has been tacked on to man's existence but is on the contrary at its core that leads Sartre to the famous but chilling proposition that man is "condemned to be free" (p.186); that "there is no difference between the being of man and his being free" (p.60).

Although Sartre claims that man is free, he recognises that man's existence is "contingent" (p.132ff.) and appears to have the "character of an unjustifiable fact" (p.128). As man is not the foundation of his own being he is born into a world which is not of his choosing. If we take into consideration what Sartre calls the "facticity" of the individual - such factors as class, race, physiology, place in history, and his own past - there seems to be a number of barriers to freedom. But Sartre disputes this is the case. He maintains that it is facticity which grounds the for-itself in the world; it is this which links it to the in-itself and which allows us to say that the for-itself is.

Moreover, Sartre argues that to be free is "not to choose the historic world in which one arises - which would have no meaning - but to choose oneself in the world whatever this may be" (p.668). But although we have not chosen our facticity Sartre maintains that we are nevertheless responsible for it; responsible because we are free to determine what to make of it. Thus Sartre claims:

... I can not be crippled without choosing myself as crippled. This means that I choose the way in which I constitute my disability (as "unbearable", "humiliating", "to be hidden", ... "an object of pride" ... etc.) (p.432).

The for-itself is "situated" in the world and this "situation" has two dimensions: facticity and the resistance of things encountered in the "coefficient of adversity" (p.428) on the one hand, and the meanings and significations which man chooses to attribute to them on the other.

Although freedom is constitutive of Sartrean man's very being, it is in "anguish" that he is conscious of this freedom. Unlike fear, which is fear in the face of external objects, anguish is "anguish before myself" (p.65). It has no specific object and is simply a manifestation of the fear of one's own freedom; the realisation that meaning and value in the world can only be derived from oneself. But although Sartre claims that consciousness of freedom is anguish, he recognises that anguish is a relatively uncommon experience. To explain this Sartre argues that we are engaged in a ready-made world and that we usually act without reflecting on the significance of our actions. We also tend to accept the meaning of the world as fixed. In the form of policemen, signboards and alarm clocks we accept the

apparent solidity and permanence of the world and it is these "guard rails" (p.79) which help protect us from the agony of anguish. In moments of reflection, however, such guard rails collapse and we experience our freedom in anguish. Instead of confronting this reality our immediate response is to flee it; to hide from the anguish by denying the existence of our terrifying freedom. According to Sartre, such flight not only manifests itself in the way we individually live our lives but also in psychological determinism; that is, in theories which seek "to deny the transcendence of human reality" (p.79). It is for these reasons that Sartre claims: "Human reality may be defined as a being such that in its being its freedom is at stake because human reality perpetually tries to refuse to recognise its freedom" (p.568). The pattern of behaviour in which such a refusal is manifest is called by Sartre "bad faith" (mauvaise foi) and so is essentially a lie to oneself in an attempt to hide from freedom and so escape the agony of anguish. However, although bad faith may be likened to a lie it is different from other forms of deception in that there is no duality of deceiver and deceived. Thus Sartre claims that the consciousness which "affects" (p.89) itself with bad faith is simultaneously conscious of its bad faith.

Although Sartre gives a full description of bad faith, for the purposes of this study it is possible to summarise it as being an inability of the for-itself to co-ordinate the two aspects of its existence - facticity and transcendence. Thus I am in bad faith if I see my existence as being like that of the in-itself - if, for example, I claim I am a waiter or a homosexual in the sense that a table is a table. In other words, as soon as I try to strip myself of transcendence

and see myself as having some fixed unchangeable essence I am manifestly in bad faith. Conversely, if I see myself only as a transcendence and thereby deny my facticity, I am also in bad faith since I deny that I am actually grounded in the world. Thus I maintain myself in bad faith if I deny all responsibility for my past actions or if I claim that my past determines my future. Indeed Sartre claims that Freud's concept of the unconscious encourages bad faith in that it denies individual freedom of choice and allows people to disclaim responsibility for their actions.

As Sartre's concept of consciousness emphasises the intentional aspect of consciousness, it refutes the Freudian notion of the unconscious. What Freud attributes to the workings of the unconscious mind, Sartre views as the deliberate putting out of mind characteristic of bad faith. But Sartre maintains that bad faith may exist at the level of pre-reflective consciousness; although it is part of a conscious process the subject may not know it and so it may only be revealed to him by reflection. Such reflection, moreover, may have to be initiated by another person. Thus Sartre says of bad faith: "There is no question of a reflective, voluntary decision, but of a spontaneous determination of our being." (p.106). The Sartrian notion of consciousness and the continual emphasis on the freedom of choice of the individual lead Sartre to refute some of the major premises of conventional psychoanalysis. Indeed Sartre hopes to replace this with what he calls "existential psychoanalysis." Essentially this involves moving from an explanation of behaviour premised on biological drives towards one based on a notion of a fundamental human project. But in order to understand this it is necessary to reveal another aspect of Sartre's ontology.

Sartre claims that because the for-itself does not coincide with itself the foundation of its being is a "lack" (p.133ff). And what it lacks is being. In other words, it lacks that which would make it a totality. As Sartre maintains that "this perpetually absent being which haunts the for-itself is itself fixed in the in-itself" (p.140), it is the synthesis of "for-itself-in-itself" which it thus desires. But, according to Sartre, such a synthesis is impossible, for a satisfied for-itself would no longer be for-itself - it would, in fact, be God. Because Sartre claims that the for-itself is synonymous with this project of being God, he writes: "Consciousness is in fact a project of founding itself: this is, of attaining the dignity of in-itself-for-itself or in-itself-as-self-cause" (p.789).

Sartre's opposition to a conventional psychoanalytic interpretation of human behaviour and symbolism is neatly expressed in his discussion of the significance of holes. He argues that the for-itself is attracted to holes because they present themselves as a nothingness "to be filled" that people are greatly tempted to "plug up holes" - to use their body to fill a nothingness - so that a "plenitude of being" (p.781) may exist. In other words, the attraction of holes is that they present the symbolic possibility of achieving the desired synthesis of for-itself-in-itself. It is from this standpoint of being that Sartre thinks we can pass to a discussion of the sexual significance of holes. Thus unlike Freud who would maintain that holes are fascinating because of their sexual symbolism, Sartre claims that "sex is a hole" - an "appeal to being" (p.782).

Although the project of becoming God is for Sartre, the fundamental human project he believes it does not constitute a limit or obstacle

to individual freedom. Like the facticity of the for-itself, it is merely the framework within which individual choice must be made. For Sartre the way in which an individual embarks on "the project of being" (p.712 ff) depends on how he freely chooses to relate to being. There is therefore "an infinity of possible projects" just as there is an "infinity of possible human beings" (p.721).

In Sartre's theory it is ontological phenomenology which reveals the nature of the human project but it is existential psychoanalysis which reveals the nature of the individual's choice. Although Sartre rejects the premises of Freudian psychoanalysis, he hopes to use this method to elucidate the nature of the individual's choice of being. But in Being and Nothingness Sartre is vague on the question of how and when an individual makes this original choice.⁴ Such vagueness is predominantly due to his notion that choice and consciousness are synonymous. In other words, Sartre claims that it is not a question of an individual at a certain point in time making a deliberate and conscious choice but rather that this "profound choice is ... at one with the consciousness an individual has of himself" (p. 534ff). What is clear, however, is that this original choice, although creating a "hierarchy" (p.186) of possible choices leading the individual in a certain direction, can at any moment be altered radically. Indeed it is this total metamorphosis of an original project which Sartre claims underlies what is commonly referred to as "conversion."

But let us leave in abeyance the question of individual freedom and choice, and examine another aspect of Sartre's ontology - the relationship between the for-itself and the Other.

II

Although we shall see that there is a strong Hegelian element in Sartre's theory of the interaction between Self and Other, in several fundamental respects Sartre is critical of Hegel. Thus while Sartre is attracted to Hegel's notion that the Other is indispensable to the development of self-consciousness, he claims that the existence of the Other cannot be derived "ontologically" (p.376). Sartre argues that it is not possible to prove logically that the Other exists and that discussion can begin only with the cogito. In other words, as the Other is "encountered" (p.336) by us, Sartre claims it is not necessary to refute solipsism on a theoretical level for we may simply take the Other as given. Sartre's disagreement with Hegel on the ontological derivation of the Other does not simply lead to a different starting point in his own theory, but is, on the contrary, the basis for a major critique of Hegel's theory of Self and Other. As the criticisms are detailed and complex we are only able to outline them.

Sartre's main objection of Hegel is that it is not possible to recognise oneself in the Other. That is, one cannot see the Other simultaneously as subject and object and have oneself similarly reflected in the Other. As "the for-itself as for-itself cannot be known by the Other" (p.327) Sartre claims I cannot apprehend myself as I appear to the Other or apprehend how the Other is for himself. Sartre argues by claiming that I can know myself in the Other - that mutual recognition is possible - Hegel refuses to recognise the "ontological separation" (p.328) of consciousnesses; a refusal which leads Sartre to accuse him of "epistemological optimism" (p.324).

It is important to note, however, that although Sartre refutes the idea that "my objectivity for (the Other) can not appear to me" (p.327), he does accept that through my encounter with the Other I experience myself as an object. But this leads Sartre in a different direction from Hegel:

My object-ness for myself is in no way a specification of Hegel's Ich bin Ich. We are not dealing with a formal identity, and my being-as-object or being-for-others is profoundly different from my being-for-myself. ... Thus the Me-as-object-for-myself is a Me which is not Me; that is, which does not have the characteristics of consciousness. It is a degraded consciousness; objectification is a radical metamorphosis (p.365).

Therefore, Sartre rejects the initial stage posited by Hegel in which there is an identity between Self and Other, and categorically picks up on the notion that through the Other I experience myself as a fixed, determinate object. As this is feeling does not correspond to the way I see myself, Sartre argues it constitutes my alienation. Hegel, unlike Marx, defines objectification as alienation and Sartre follows him in this respect; "My being-for-others is a fall through absolute emptiness towards objectivity ... this fall is an alienation ..." (p.367).⁵ In other words, alienation results from the simple fact that I have an "outside" and so appear to the Other as an object.

But while Sartre accepts a Hegelian definition of alienation he does not follow Hegel and posit that such alienation can be removed.⁶ In fact, Sartre claims that in maintaining that conflict and alienation may be eradicated from human relations Hegel is guilty of "ontological optimism" (p.328). Indeed Sartre argues that Hegel views the relations between consciousness "from the point of view of the Absolute" (p.328); that is to say, Hegel's consciousness and his relation to the Other

are never called into question and he discusses the conflict between Self and Other as though it had already been resolved. Sartre claims that whereas ontology can only describe "the scandal of the plurality of consciousnesses" (p.329), Hegel attempts to use ontology to overcome it; an attempt which cannot succeed, for Sartre believes: "So long as consciousnesses exist the separation and conflict will remain" (p.329). But it is only by examining Sartre's own theory of the Other than we learn why he challenges Hegel and takes such a pessimistic view of human relations.

Instead of following Hegel and reducing the relation of Self and Other to knowledge, Sartre claims that we must see it as a relation of "being to being" (p.327ff). Thus we must see the encounter with the Other as taking place when consciousness already knows itself as such. The consciousness in question, moreover, must not be the "universal" consciousness of Hegelian philosophy and must refer to an individual being.

Beginning with the cogito, that is to say undertaking a phenomenological analysis, Sartre reveals that the foundation of the original relation between myself and the Other is the "appearance" (p.340ff) of the Other in my world. I "encounter" another being whom I differentiate from the other objects in my field of vision because I realise that he organises the world around himself and is capable of holding his own, as opposed to my, point of view. It is this regrouping of the world around the Other which Sartre claims we experience as an internal haemorrhage in our universe:

Thus suddenly an object has appeared which has stolen the world from me. Everything is in place; everything still exists for **me**; but everything is traversed by an invisible flight and fixed in the direction of a new object (p.343).

But this first encounter with the Other, although introducing a "drain-hole" (p.343) in the universe, does not mean that I perceive the Other as being anything more than a "privileged object" (p.344). Indeed it is only when the Other "looks" (p.344ff) at me that he ceases to be a mere object for me and, by annihilating my subjectivity, constitutes me as an object for him. By looking at me the Other implicitly evaluates and judges me and so the Look "shocks" (p.354) my being and forces me to realise that I exist in another way; that is, as an object in another's world.

For Sartre it is the feeling of shame which accompanies the realisation of objectivity for the Other. A feeling which does not result from "being this or that guilty object but in general of being an object" (p.384). Sartre indeed maintains that the feeling of shame demonstrates not only that I recognise that I am an object in the Other's world but also that I directly apprehend the existence of the Other. Even when the Other is not actually before me he is within my consciousness, leading me to appraise myself as object and making me feel guilt, shame or pride. Moreover, the Other's look shocks my being because it reveals to me my objectivity and forces me to realise that there is another being who can act as a barrier to my desires. As the Other is "the hidden death of my possibilities" (p.354) when I encounter him "I am no longer master of the situation" (p.355). In a word, I am a "transcendence-transcended" (p.352).

As Sartre argues that in "the phenomenon of the look, the Other is on principle that which can not be an object" (p.359), he maintains that the Other is not immediately perceived by us as object. Indeed he claims that perception of the Other only as object is the product

of self-defence. As one cannot look at the Look without cancelling its meaning, to look at the Other in retaliation is to affect his objectification. Subsequently he claims that it is possible to relate to one's status as object - come to terms with the notion that the Other holds "the secret" (p.475) of what you are - in two fundamentally different ways.

The first way in which one can relate to the Other is listed under the heading: "Love, Language, Masochism"⁷ The principle which underlies it is succinctly contained in Sartre's statement:

... in so far as the Other as freedom is the foundation of my being-in-itself, I can seek to recover that freedom and to possess it without removing from it its character of freedom. In fact if I could identify myself with that freedom which is the foundation of my being-in-itself, I should be to myself my own foundation (p.473).

Therefore the project involved in the adoption of this set of attitudes is to incorporate the freedom of the Other while retaining his freedom intact.

In love a fundamental desire is not to deny my being-for-Others but to adopt the lover's perspective on myself. I consent to being an object in this relationship and recognise the freedom of the Other but I desire that this freedom should take my objectivity as its object. That is, I want my existence to be justified by becoming the raison d'être of another's freedom.⁸ As my lover's freedom is central to the foundation of my being I want to possess the Other's freedom; to dispel my insecurity by subjecting his freedom to my freedom. But Sartre believes that the project of love is doomed to failure and is beset inevitably by conflict. He maintains that the lover will not freely agree to limit his transcendence and so the project of love becomes the project of seduction. In order to capture my lover's freedom I make myself "a

fascinating object" (p.484). If this strategy succeeds and I seduce the Other into loving me then he becomes a lover in his own right and hence wants me to be for him what I want him to be for me. Thus we both end attempting to conceal our freedom, the basis of the original attraction, in order to ensnare the freedom of the other. Indeed Sartre maintains: "... to love is in essence the project of making oneself be loved" (p.488). It is doomed not only for the reason already mentioned but also because the Other may at any point look at me and make me experience in alienation my own unmediated objectivity. Moreover, the lovers may be looked at by another and then each one will experience "not only his own objectification but that of the other as well" (p.490). Perhaps more importantly love, in Sartre's view, is doomed because it is a hopeless attempt to overcome the "ontological separation" of consciousnesses.

The project of love having failed, either of the lovers may attempt to overcome such failure by freely consenting to be an object for the Other. By becoming a masochist I could absorb myself in the Other's subjectivity. The attraction of this, according to Sartre, is that "if I relied on the Other to make me exist, I should no longer be anything more than a being-in-itself founded in its being by a freedom" (p.491). Thus unlike love where I want to be the object of the Other's transcendence, now I simply want to be used like any other object; become no different from the in-itself. Moreover, unlike love where I become a fascinating object for the Other in order to facilitate his seduction and my possession of his freedom, in masochism I am fascinated by my objectivity-for-others. But like love, masochism is doomed to failure - the masochist has to use his transcendence in order to become

a being-transcended. In other words, even when attempting to be a mere instrument for others the masochist is demonstrating his freedom of choice. Thus Sartre claims: "Even the masochist who pays a woman to whip him is treating her as an instrument and by this very fact posits himself in transcendence in relation to her" (p.493). In this way the masochist's desired objectivity escapes him.

With the failure of both love and masochism I may resort to the second fundamental attitude. An attitude which basically involves the attempt:

... to deny the being which is conferred upon me from outside; that is, I can turn back upon the Other so as to make an object out of him in turn, since the Other's object-ness destroys my object-ness for him (p.473).

In short I can attempt to transcend the Other's transcendence. I can, for example, treat others with "indifference"; I can pretend that they do not really exist and regard them as simple objects. Indeed Sartre maintains: "... there are men who die without - save from brief and terrifying flashes of illumination - ever having suspected what the Other is." (p.496). Instead of seeking to deny the Other's subjectivity in indifference I can attempt "to get hold of the Other's free subjectivity through his objectivity-for-me" (p.497); and it is this original project which Sartre calls "sexual desire." But before looking at its constituent parts it is necessary to understand something of Sartre's rather original approach to sexuality.

Sartre maintains that there are two basic ways in which we can interpret sexuality. We can either see it as "a contingent accident bound to our physiological nature, or ... (as) a necessary structure of being-for-itself-for-others" (p.499). In other words, Sartre claims

sexuality can be conceived primarily as a product of the reproductive process or as a medium through which the for-itself relates to others. And it is the latter approach which Sartre himself adopts. Identifying sexuality with desire, he takes issue with biological determinists and maintains: "... desire is by no means a physiological accident, an itching of our flesh which may fortuitously direct us on to the Other's flesh" (p.510). In this way Sartre also opposes Freud in as much as he does not see sexual desire as an attempt to release sexual energy. Indeed Sartre warns that we should not see desire as something which resides within consciousness, for consciousness "chooses itself as desire" (p.508). Desire, then, for Sartre is an expression of the freedom of the for-itself. This means that sexual impulses, the basis of Freudian analysis, are themselves a mere result of ontological needs. As John Passmore points out, Freudians may see sexual symbolism in Sartre's ontology but in response Sartre would maintain that they are attempting to disguise their "ontological loneliness" - seeking refuge "in the comfortable doctrine that loneliness is no more than a sexual need, not, then, beyond human skill to satisfy."

If desire is an expression of one's freedom what is it that one actually desires? According to Sartre: "The being which desires is consciousness making itself body" (p.505). In sexual desire, unlike hunger or other bodily desires, the body is overwhelmed by desire, consciousness becomes "clogged" and "invaded by facticity" (p.504). In other words, through desire the for-itself becomes a thing. Through the caress, which Sartre claims is the vehicle for the expression of such desire, the two subjects involved experience themselves and each other simultaneously as "flesh." The object of this exercise is to

"make myself flesh in the presence of the Other in order to appropriate the Other's flesh." In other words, as Wilfred Desan succinctly points out:

... I engulf myself into my body with the hope and the wish that the Other will also confine his possibilities, realize his being-matter, and become flesh not only in my eyes but in his own eyes as well. Desire is thus fundamentally an invitation to Desire. Only flesh find the way to the flesh.¹⁰

This attempt to "appropriate" the Other's flesh, to possess the Other's transcendence as body, is of course doomed to fail. Not only does the fulfilment of desire in coitus kill the desire but also the use of the Other's body reduces it to a mere instrument and hence to an ordinary object. Moreover, having reduced the Other to body, having grasped him only in his facticity, his sought-after transcendence is preserved intact. This leads Sartre to claim that the object of desire ultimately becomes so elusive that I am no longer sure of what I seek. He maintains that with desire extinguished in coitus one is left "like a sleepwalker who awakens to find himself in the process of grasping the edge of the bed while he can not recall the nightmare which has provoked his gesture." Gloomily he adds: "It is this situation which is at the origin of sadism" (p.517).

Certainly Sartre sees similarities between desire and sadism in as much as both use flesh as a way to overcome the transcendence of the Other. But they are different in as much as the sadist "wants the non-reciprocity of sexual relations" (p.518); he desires to use his body as an instrument which will forcibly subjugate the Other. This attempt also cannot succeed: not only may the victim be using the sadist as an instrument for his masochistic desire, but also he is

always free to look at the sadist. In other words the sadist may at any moment experience in the Other's look "the absolute alienation of his being in the Other's freedom" (p.525). Moreover Sartre claims that the victim is always free to "determine" (p.523) the precise moment at which the activities of the sadist become unbearable: a determination and control which lead Sartre to maintain that the victim is ultimately "responsible" for what he undergoes.

Having failed in this attempt to obliterate the subjectivity of the Other, the sadist may attempt to escape his objectivity for others by wishing their extinction or destruction - and it is this which Sartre defines as "hatred" (p.532ff). It is the most radical attempt to refuse to be an object for the Other. But paradoxically hatred necessarily contains a recognition of the Other's freedom and the threat he may pose to one's desires. Like the other attitudes adopted toward the Other it is bound to fail for even if one succeeds in eliminating this dangerous Other, one cannot bring about his non-being in the sense of obliterating his past life. Moreover, the very act of destruction is in itself proof of the importance and influence of the Other's existence. As Sartre maintains that hatred falls outwith the main categories of love/masochism and desire/sadism, he claims that with its failure "nothing remains for the for-itself except to re-enter the circle and allow itself to be indefinitely tossed from one to the other of the two fundamental attitudes" (p.534).

The notion of inevitability leads us to point out the status of the fundamental attitudes in Sartre's theory. Sartre argues that all these attitudes, with the exception of hate, are essentially sexual attitudes in the sense of being a fundamental project of the

for-itself. More importantly, these are attitudes which underlie all other examples of behaviour towards the Other. That is to say, "collaboration, conflict, rivalry, emulation, engagement, obedience etc." have as "their skeleton" (p.527) these fundamental attitudes. Thus Sartre says that both love and desire are contained in such emotions as maternal love, pity, and gratitude and that each person will be able to determine this relation by "referring to his own experience" (p.528).

Sartre's view of the for-itself's relation to the Other is therefore that it is inevitably beset by failure and conflict. Thus:

Everything which may be said of me in my relations with the Other applies to him as well. While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me. We are by no means dealing with unilateral relations with an object-in-itself, but with reciprocal and moving relations ... descriptions of concrete behaviour must therefore be envisaged within the perspective of conflict (pp.474-5).

However, while stating this Sartre nevertheless admits that such an account fails to include certain experiences where the Other is not seen in conflict with ourselves, but in community. He therefore embarks on an analysis of the communal dimension of human relations. He claims that the for-itself may experience a certain solidarity with the Other; a solidarity which is expressed in the grammatical terms "us" and "we" and which is of two different types. In the first type of communal experience, where the term "us" is appropriate, I feel solidarity with the Other only in the presence of a "third." Thus Sartre claims in the category of the "us-object ... I am engaged with Others in a community of transcendences-transcended, of alienated Me's. The 'Us'

here refers to an experience of being-objects-in-common" (p.537). In this sense, then, Sartre claims that the "us" refers to a "community alienation." It is a real aspect of our existence since it is an inevitable product of the combination of our being-for-Others and the presence of a third.

But according to such a perspective, while the experience of "us-object" is real, the experience of "we-subject" is not. It is a purely "psychological" experience which does not "correspond to any real unification of the for-itselfs under consideration" (p.549). I may experience a feeling of "we" but the Other, to whom the "we" refers may not. And so the gulf between my consciousness and the Other's consciousness remains. Accordingly Sartre rejects Heidegger for he maintains: "One must either transcend the Other or allow oneself to be transcended by him. The relations between consciousnesses is not the Mitsein; it is conflict" (p.555).

Returning to a comparison between Sartre and Hegel we thus see that in both the Sartrian theory of human interaction and the Hegelian master-slave dialectic there is an attempt to enslave the Other. In Hegel the desire to enslave leads to physical combat and the emergence of a victor who is able to exact recognition of his essential status from his vanquished opponent. The hostility between Self and Other is not masked but displayed quite openly in a murderous fight. In Sartre's theory, on the other hand, no such direct confrontation takes place and so any battle between the rivalrous subjects is conducted in a much more subtle manner. By substituting the Look for Hegel's Fight, Sartre leads us into the realms of psychological warfare. Indeed Sartre has also substituted the concept of war for Hegel's concept of battle or

Fight. In other words, there is no definitive act of hostility from which a master emerges but rather a series of acts of aggression which involves neither masters nor slaves. Continually engaged in conflict with the Other the for-itself is always a subject; but a subject who never manages to maintain a "consistent attitude towards the Other" (p.529). Thus what the attempt to enslave the Other leads to in Sartre's theory is not formal inequality, but simply the vacillation of the for-itself towards the Other - a vacillation which involves either seeing the Other as a "transcendence-transcended or as a transcendence-transcending" (p.529).

Although there is a strangely Hegelian tinge to Sartre's descriptions of the two sets of fundamental attitudes, in as much as in each case the relationship between the two consciousnesses is other than it first appears, we can now see the differences in approach. Unlike Hegel's theory where there is a continual dialectical movement towards the obliteration of objectivity, for Sartre relations between consciousnesses are fraught with eternal conflict and change happens in a cyclical and not a dialectical fashion. Thus when Sartre discusses the nature of the relationship between the for-itself and the Other he describes it as a "circle" in which both are "ceaselessly" and "indefinitely tossed" between the two fundamental attitudes.

In The Phenomenology of Mind the master-slave conflict is overcome by the potential inherent in the slave's labour, and so the foundations for change and development are contained within the relationship itself. It is the formalism of this approach which Sartre criticises and rejects when he maintains that the Hegelian analysis is undertaken from the point of view of the Absolute. Sartre's analysis, on the other hand,

is phenomenological for it begins with the cogito and from this constructs an ontology of the for-itself's relation to the Other. But in doing so Sartre's theory is limited by present experience. The way relationships are revealed to consciousness now is, according to such an approach, the way in which they must be. A picture of the world is built up using our every day experiences, but such a picture, far from illustrating the structures of human existence, may simply illustrate the particular nature of our culture. Thus, starting from the standpoint of a consciousness in a highly individualistic and competitive culture Sartre latterly concludes "conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others" (p.475, emphasis added).

Sartre has been repeatedly criticised for the pessimistic conclusion to this work.¹² From a footnote in Being and Nothingness and from later writings, we learn that Sartre too is dissatisfied. Thus when describing the circular nature of relationships he adds in a footnote: "These considerations do not exclude the possibility of an ethics of deliverance and salvation. But this can be achieved only after a radical conversion which we cannot discuss here" (fn p.534). Moreover, his concluding sentence promises that he will write a book on ethical questions. Later in this chapter we shall assess Sartre's concept of freedom and if he manages to move from a position of inevitable conflict to an "ethics of deliverance and salvation." But now, having outlined how Sartrian ontology describes the for-itself's relation to the world and to others, we should see what Sartre says about masculine and feminine existence.

III

Although sex is part of one's facticity, in this work Sartre says nothing specific about how the possession of a masculine or feminine body affects the for-itself.¹³ This is in harmony with Sartre's general view of the body for he does not see it as a significant determinant of human existence. The body is simply an instrument, a tool. Even when Sartre discusses carnal relations with the Other he does not comment on the way in which gender affects one's experience of desire or of the sexual relationship which ensues. Thus we must suppose that both male and female have the same purpose and intention in becoming carnally involved with the Other. It is only when Sartre discusses "holes" that he makes a distinction between males and females in this respect:

It is only from this standpoint that we can pass on to sexuality. 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 fulness 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 - a fact that can easily lead to the idea of castration (p.782).

It is interesting to note that in this passage Sartre describes male and female as being both active and passive. Woman "appeals" passively to the male; it is he who actively fills her through penetration. Yet she is also a "mouth" devouring the penis. But no matter what role the sexes are accorded here, one thing is clear - feminine sexuality is portrayed in a negative, frightening light.

The idea of woman trying to devour the male is an image which recurs in Being and Nothingness. Sartre sees the world of the in-itself as menacing; it is chaotic and threatens to engulf us.¹⁴ It is particularly the "viscous" with its gluey consistency which makes us fear being overwhelmed. And it is such "slime" which Sartre equates with femininity:

The slimy is docile. It is a soft, yielding action, a moist and feminine sucking; it lives obscurely under my fingers and I sense a dizziness; it draws me to it as the bottom of a precipice might draw me (p.777).

On another occasion Sartre states: "Slime is the revenge of the in-itself; a sickly sweet feminine revenge which will be symbolised on another level by the quality 'sugary'" (p.771). In short, Sartre equates femininity with repellant aspects of the world.

In his book on Sartre, Maurice Cranston argues that Sartre generally exhibits a revulsion for the natural world. As he points out in Sartre's work natural objects are portrayed as: "'vague,' 'soft,' 'flabby,' 'creamy,' 'thick,' 'tepid,' 'dull,' 'sickly,' and 'obscene.'¹⁵ De Beauvoir confirms that Sartre has such a disgust for Nature. In her memoirs she reports: "He was allergic to chlorophyll."¹⁶ On a more serious note she also maintained: "Il deteste la campagne. Il abhorre - le mot n'est pas trop fort - la vie grouillante des insectes et la pullulation des plantes."¹⁷

Sartre's revulsion for Nature encompasses the female sex. Woman's sexuality (her obscenity as a hole) and her bond, through reproduction, to Nature means that femininity inspires Sartre with horror. It is not surprising, therefore, as Cranston points out, that there is "something sickening about all the female characters in Sartre's plays and stories."¹⁸

In Being and Nothingness, then, Sartre occasionally equates between femininity and the viscous but his theory does not illuminate differences between feminine and masculine existence. No doubt the Sartre of this period would argue that no important differences exist - that what can be said of the for-itself applies equally to male and female. However, de Beauvoir reveals in The Second Sex that differences do exist. The Sartrian for-itself is male, for de Beauvoirian woman does not assume an authentically subjective attitude; she accepts man's definition of her as "the Other." But before we can explicate de Beauvoir's theory of woman's situation we must continue our study of Sartre's thought with an assessment of his notion of human freedom.

IV

According to Sartre's definition of the for-itself, freedom is not something which has been added on to man's being but is in fact the very "foundation" of it. As man is not free "to cease being free" (p.567), Sartre maintains that we are all "condemned to be free" (p.186). But Sartre points out that this definition of freedom is "philosophical"; that it does not concern morality or politics and simply refers to the individual's "autonomy of choice" (p.622). In contrast to "common sense" definitions of freedom, Sartre argues that freedom does not mean " 'to obtain what one has wished' " (p.620) for it is the ability to choose, not necessarily succeed, which is intrinsic to this concept of freedom. "Thus we shall not say that a

prisoner is always free to go out of prison," writes Sartre, "which would be absurd, nor that he is always free to long for release, which would be an irrelevant truism, but that he is always free to try to escape ... (p.622).

In Sartre's theory, then, if the individual's physical life is curtailed by the actions of others and if it is dangerous to rebel or attempt escape, he is still free to value life and security higher than starvation, imprisonment and death (p.672). In Force of Circumstance de Beauvoir informs us that Sartre defended this concept of freedom with "his morality of authenticity." She tells us that Sartre claimed: "... from the point of view of freedom all situations could be salvaged if one accepted (assumed) them as project." However, de Beauvoir, who was never totally convinced of this viewpoint, adds: "This solution was still very close to Stoicism, since circumstances often leave us
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no other way of transcending ourselves than submission."

This concept of freedom has prompted criticism from many quarters. In an article on Sartre in 1948, Herbert Marcuse, for example, claims:

If philosophy, by virtue of its existential-ontological concepts of man or freedom, is capable of demonstrating that the persecuted Jew or victim of the executioner are and remain absolutely free and masters of a self-responsible choice, then these philosophical concepts have declined to the level of mere ideology, an ideology which offers itself as a most handy justification for the persecutors and executioners.²⁰

However, Sartre does argue that there is one possible limit to freedom. And that limitation is freedom itself - only the for-itself can limit the freedom of the for-itself. But the limitation which Sartre has in mind is strictly of a psychological nature. Having

dismissed the idea that torture, imprisonment and slavery are real limitations to human freedom ("the autonomy of choice") Sartre posits a limitation to freedom which lies outwith the domain of socio-political freedom. Ultimately he concludes that "the true limit" (p.672) the Other imposes on my freedom is that through him my situation ceases to be a simple facet of my life and is grasped by him as an "objective form." In other words, because the Other sees only my attachment to the in-itself, the meaning of my life escapes me and in his presence I am "alienated"

But although Sartre clearly states that one's freedom is "truly" limited by the Other in this way, later he refutes the idea that this is the case. He maintains that as such alienation depends on the recognition of the Other as a transcendence, it is based on a free choice. Thus although I am alienated, the fact that this alienation depends on my choice means that "my freedom in a way recovers its own limits" (p.674, emphasis added). But by including "in a way" even Sartre does not appear convinced that he has not uncovered something which, in his terms, is a true limit to human freedom.

In Being and Nothingness the only possible limitation to freedom is thus an abstract, metaphysical limit. While Sartre at points maintains that both "selfs" hope to enslave the Other, the enslavement of which he speaks refers to objectification and not to some actual physical limitation to freedom. Thus, unlike Hegel's master-slave dialectic where the slave is actually forced to work for the master, Sartre's for-itself appears only to be enslaved in as much as he is alienated by the Look of the Other. And, as we have seen, even this limit is of a qualified kind.

As Sartre's ontological concept of freedom leads him to maintain that man is "condemned to be free," restrictions on an individual's liberty are thus not seen as eroding freedom. Indeed for such restrictions to be something more than a simple part of the individual's situation - the stuff of his projects - Sartre must allow for some value to be placed on socio-political freedom. In other words, for Sartre to say that an individual is oppressed, as opposed to simply existing in a situation in which his freedom of action is curtailed, he has to allow for some human situations to be intrinsically preferable. But this is precisely what Sartre does not allow for in Being and Nothingness. Sartre maintains that it is impossible to derive ethical precepts from ontology and that since there is no God - no source of absolute value - and no human essence to be realised, the individual is the only creator of value. It is only the individual in his project of becoming in-itself-for-itself - a project which is doomed to fail - that value enters the world. It is for these reasons that Sartre claims: "... all human activities are equivalent ... it amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations" (p.797, emphasis added). Thus, Sartre does not prefer some human situations to others, nor see some human projects of more value, and so there is no reason why a slave should want to rebel or a master morally condemned for leading a tyrannical existence.

But, having outlined an ontology in which there is a total democracy of values and little reasons for political action, Sartre finally draws back from the grimness of his own conclusion. Although he previously states that "all human actions are equivalent" and that it is all the same whether one gets drunk alone or is the leader of nations, subsequently he adds:

If one of these activities takes precedence over the other, this will not be because of its real goal but because of the degree of consciousness which it possesses of its ideal goal; and in this case it will be the quietism of the solitary drunkard which will take precedence over the vain agitation of the leader of nations (p.797).

Sartre, for no apparent reason, claims that there is value in leading an authentic life - a life where one is aware of the meaning of freedom and accepts responsibility for one's actions. Thereafter Sartre proceeds to ask a series of questions on how ethics can be linked to ontology and concludes by promising that he shall "devote" to such questions "a future work" (p.798).

Sartre's uneasiness with the logical conclusion of his ontology can partially be explained by the historical situation. Being and Nothingness was begun in the late 1930's and published in 1944 during the German occupation of Paris. As we have seen, its emphasis on the freedom of the individual - freedom resistant even to the activities of the torturer - means that individuals, no matter what their situation, are and remain completely free. This, combined with the fact that no situation or action is intrinsically preferable to any other, means that Being and Nothingness could be used, albeit unwittingly, as a justification for the status quo.

In The Prime of Life ⁽¹⁹⁶⁰⁾ de Beauvoir tells us that she was always sceptical of this aspect of Sartre's theory:

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 point 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 place of individual, and therefore idealistic, morality on which we had set ourselves. ²¹

It was only the war, his experience of prison camps, the brutality of fascism and the need for organised resistance which forced Sartre to modify aspects of his theory. Although Sartre has never formally rejected his ontology the difference in approach in the post-war period is considerable; the major difference being that he consistently began to take note of social reality. As Herbert Marcuse points out with the war the changes in Sartre's ideas were ones in which "pure ontology and phenomenology recede before the invasion of real history."²²

V

Sartre has never written the promised work on existentialist ethics. Indeed, his adoption of Marxism ultimately rendered the question of an individualistic ethics irrelevant.²³ However, before Sartre became fully absorbed in the project of integrating existentialism and Marxism, he did sketch out, albeit inadequately, a framework for existentialist ethics. This framework is contained in a lecture he delivered in 1945 and was published later under the title Existentialism and Humanism. It is first and foremost an attempt to defend existentialism against popular attack but it also tries to put some of the ideas of Being and Nothingness in less technical philosophical language. Although this former work is recognisably the philosophical foundation for much of his argument in Existentialism and Humanism, Sartre nevertheless redefines some of his former theory and gives it an ethical dimension.

Sartre still begins his discussion of man with the idea that "existence precedes essence" - that man is nothing but what he makes himself and that he is "condemned to be free."²⁴ Moreover, Sartre's

individual, when confronting the extent of this freedom, still experiences "anguish." However, anguish has an added dimension in Sartre's thought. We experience anguish, he claims, because in choosing for ourselves we are ultimately choosing for all. In other words, our choices - whether inconsequential or concerning the choice of our very being - is always made with reference to an "image of man."²⁵ Thus Sartre argues: "Everything happens to every man as though the whole human race had its eyes fixed upon what he is doing and regulated its conduct accordingly."²⁶ To this extent, then, we are responsible for the existence of others.

In Existentialism and Humanism Sartre upholds the idea that we can only begin a study of man with "the subjectivity of the individual"²⁷ but profoundly modifies the ontology outlined in Being and Nothingness. He maintains that the Other is indispensable for a knowledge of a certain dimension of existence and that we live in a world of "'intersubjectivity!'" "The intimate discovery of myself," Sartre claims, "is at the same time the revelation of the Other as a freedom which confronts mine, and which cannot think and will without doing so either for or against me."²⁸ Thus, the "we-subject," dismissed as "psychological" in Being and Nothingness, now appears as the starting point for Sartre's discussion of the relation between Self and Other. Concomitantly, the conflict earlier upheld as "the original meaning of being-for-others" has disappeared.

Moreover, although still identifying man with his choices, Sartre defines choice in terms of "commitment."²⁹ Thus man's choice now has a moral element and denotes man's freedom with reference to his "responsibility" to the Other. In Being and Nothingness "all human action is equivalent," but here there are two sets of criteria for

evaluating human actions: We can make logical or moral judgements about human behaviour. On the one hand we can judge actions to be wrong if they are based on "error" or "falsehood."³⁰ Authentic action, therefore, is logical and based on truth. On the other hand, Sartre claims, if someone wilfully deceives himself:

... I can pronounce a moral judgement. For I declare that freedom, in respect of certain circumstances, can have no other end and aim but itself; and when once a man has seen that values depend upon himself, in that state of forsakenness he can will only one thing, and that is freedom as the foundation of all values.³¹

Thus, we see that Sartre has reworked his notion of freedom. From it being a simple foundation of human existence in Being and Nothingness - something which could never be denied - it now appears as an absolute value. Moreover, through the introduction of the idea that one's choices lead to responsibility for the existence of others, Sartre maintains that freedom is not something one wishes for oneself but for all others. "I cannot make liberty my aim," he says, "unless I make that of others equally my aim."³² As the title of the lecture suggests Sartre maintains a humanist position. By defining freedom as the foundation of all human values, it becomes like an essence to be realised. Therefore, Sartre claims that it is "by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation and of some particular realisation, that man can realise himself as truly human."³³

In Existentialism and Humanism Sartre is trying to solve one of the major problems posed by the ontology of Being and Nothingness: If man is free to create his own values on what criteria must he base his choices? However, the answer he gives in this lecture is inadequately formulated; Far from it being an extension of the ontology of Being

and Nothingness, Sartre opts for a position which he had previously dismissed. In upholding the notion of inter-subjectivity and in failing to mention the previously asserted implacability of conflict, Sartre himself appears guilty of the ontological and epistemological optimism of which he had formerly accused Hegel. It is not surprising, therefore, that Sartre was dissatisfied with this lecture and later considered it an "error."³⁴

The problem of the relation between existentialist ontology and ethics was made redundant for Sartre with his acceptance of a Marxist perspective and the concomitant stress on political involvement. However, in the intervening period both Sartre and de Beauvoir, realising that existentialist ontology could be used to justify any kind of action and, conversely, that it is unable to discriminate between different types of political organisation, attempted to differentiate between ontological freedom and socio-political freedom. It was in the working out of the precise difference between these two conceptions of freedom that de Beauvoir made her most original contribution to existentialism, but with reference to her major work on the subject - The Ethics of Ambiguity (1947) - a contribution which she too later came to regret.³⁵ However, it is Sartre's early flirtation with Marxism to which we must now turn.

VI

In the early period of Sartre's political involvement and commitment to Marxism he argued that socialism is "the means which will allow for the realization of the reign of freedom,"³⁶ but he did not

wholeheartedly accept the philosophy or practice of communism.

Sartre accepted the spirit of Marx's writings but rejected the dogmatism of dialectical materialism, the philosophy underlying the communism of the Stalinist era. In 1946 in an essay entitled "Materialism and Revolution" Sartre rejects materialism while attempting to affect a reconciliation of Marxism and existentialism. The refutation of materialism is based on a number of objections.

In the first place Sartre argues that although materialism rejects idealism and claims to be scientific, it is nevertheless metaphysical in its reduction of mind to matter. Thus, according to Sartre, materialists may reject idealism because it is metaphysical but materialism is merely a metaphysics which repudiates all metaphysics. Sartre also believes the fundamental premise of materialism to be absurd for, he asks, how can matter give rise to the idea of matter? Consciousness is not merely an object amongst other objects, as materialism would have it, for how then is man able to reflect on and grasp the complexity of the objective world? Sartre argues instead that mind is not reducible to matter as it is also that which gives meaning to the physical world and which is ultimately able to transcend it. Sartre further criticises materialism as it eliminates subjectivity, gives precedence to material objects and, in its glorification of "objective" scientific investigation, denies the interaction of being and knowing and reduces the scientist to a mere observer and receiver of "facts." Thus Sartre rejects materialism because it is a philosophy which gives freedom to things and not to man (seeing man as a prey of historical forces), and therefore refuses to recognise that man is a being of nothingness and hence the only free being.

Sartre claims that revolutionary philosophy has no need of quasi-scientific theories. His own acceptance of the necessity for a socialist revolution is thus an outcome of existentialist ethics; from an inspection of the social and economic order he is able to see that society must be changed in order to realise human freedom. Thus commitment to socialism need not arise from a dialectical materialist analysis of the course of historical development and its future outcome. But despite these criticisms Sartre acknowledges that dialectical materialism fulfils some of the revolutionary needs of the working-class; that it has certain features essential for a philosophy of social change. However, he claims that it should simply be seen as an expedient "myth" which has revolutionary potential and not as an objective and scientific interpretation of the world.

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These concessions to dialectical materialism notwithstanding, Sartre ultimately maintains that it is a flawed theory and should be replaced. The new philosophy would be a refinement of some Marxist theories yet continue to provide the philosophical basis necessary for revolutionary politics. According to Sartre, a revolutionary philosophy ought to demonstrate the following: that man's existence is contingent, not God-given (hence any social order has been established by man and as such is changeable by him); that the values of any given society reflect its structure and tends to preserve it; and that these can be transcended by a new social order. Sartre proceeds to argue that as existentialism is able to fulfil the above criteria, it may be used as a revolutionary philosophy; the most important of its ideas in this context being, as Raymond Aron in a 1946 essay called "Sartre and the Marxist-Leninists" points out:

... the recognition and reflexive primacy of subjectivity, the fact that consciousness is perpetually unsatisfied and in a single movement discovers reality and wants to transcend it; thought is "in situation", contingent man has no raison d'être, but is simply "there", values are historical, man is free.³⁸

Sartre thus wants to accept the revolutionary aims of Marxism but replace dialectical materialism with existentialism. He claims that existentialism, by stressing the freedom of man, solves some of the problems of contemporary Marxist theory. The revolutionary solution presupposes man's freedom to engage in revolt; that is to say, man must be free prior to his liberation. However, the historical determinism of dialectical materialism fails to take man's freedom into account and explains the development of revolutionary consciousness in terms of historical events. Man is thus viewed as an object of history rather than its subject, and as such even his liberation results from circumstances which are almost outside his control. Sartre believes that without a different conception of freedom, one which recognises the subjectivity of man, the Marxism of dialectical materialism would only lead to new relations between objects and at best to a more rational organisation of society. Thus, according to Sartre, revolutionary philosophy must take man's freedom into account. Instead of showing that capitalism is doomed because of its inherent contradictions it must show that man is free and creator of society and that as such he is able to transcend the present situation towards a different future.

In using existentialism as a basis for revolutionary action, however, one is only faced with the idea that dramatic social change is possible because man is free to determine his own social organisation. Indeed Sartre's notion of change in this respect is similar to the Utopian socialists, criticised by Engels in his book Socialism: Utopian

and Scientific,⁽¹⁸⁷⁵⁾ who believe that the force of reason will urge people into changing the society in which they live.³⁹ Utopian socialists tend to view revolution as the result of ideas - in Sartre's case it is the idea that man's ontological freedom must be concretised and given true expression in a socialist society which is seen as the driving force of the revolution. Scientific socialists, on the contrary, claim that they analyse history and from the elucidation of its historical "laws" are able to see how society is developing. It is the historical situation which therefore gives rise to the idea of revolution, not the idea of revolution which in itself urges people to revolt. Thus we see that in this fundamental respect there is a wide divergence between Sartre's notions of revolution and those of historical and dialectical materialists. And so there is no reason to believe that Sartre's ideas, like those of Utopian socialists, should not be summarily dismissed by Marxists, in as much as he is only interested in the idea of socialism without understanding history or the mechanics of social change.

For other reasons, Raymond Aron believes that the gulf between Sartre and Marxism is so great that one cannot remain an existentialist and become a Marxist and that the opposite is true. He maintains that any similarities between these two theories are due to little more than the "residuum of an anthropology derived from Hegel"⁴⁰ As such these similarities are not enough to affect a synthesis of Marxism and existentialism. One basic difference between the two which Aron points out is that in Marxist thought history is viewed as a creative process in which contradictions are resolved. In Being and Nothingness, on the other hand, history is viewed as a series of failures. "The history of life, whatever it may be," writes Sartre, "is the history of a failure."⁴¹ (p.619).

Aron also indicates that in Marxism work is the essence of man and the relation between man and Nature is a fundamental and determining relationship affecting the mode of production and hence the superstructure and relations between men. In contrast, work is of little significance in Being and Nothingness. Although work could be integrated with some of the ideas there, Aron claims that in one crucial respect it could not be accommodated as a key concept. In Marxism work is the source of fundamental conflict between men, whereas in Sartre's philosophy conflict is due to the "ontological separation" of consciousnesses which means such conflict is an eternal feature of human interaction.

In the 1946 essay Sartre does, however, emphasise the importance of work. But this makes him little more than an "ouvrieriste." He maintains: "... work is, among other things, a direct link between man and the Universe. Man's hold on Nature and, at the same time, a primary kind of relation between men." ⁴² Moreover, the revolutionary (who Sartre defines as one who "belongs to those who work for the dominant class") ⁴³ hopes "that the relationships of solidarity which he maintains with other workers will become the very model of human relationships." ⁴⁴ Work has additional importance, Sartre claims, because it is "stolen" from man and prohibits him from feeling "solidarity with the society for which he produces" ⁴⁵ In a word, it is the core of man's "oppression." Echoing Hegel, Sartre also claims that work "offers the beginning of concrete liberation":

... it is, first of all, the negation of the accidental and capricious order that is the master's. The victim at work ... is no longer at the mercy of someone's humour. ... his work bestows mastery over things upon him; ... the determinism of matter gives him his first picture of his freedom. ... by

bestowing upon him sovereignty over objects and a specialist's autonomy over ⁴⁶ which the master has no power (work) liberates him. ...

But such an emphasis on work is not structurally linked to the ontology of Being and Nothingness. It appears to have been tacked on to his philosophy because it is necessary for his credentials as a Marxist. Likewise the revolution which he urges has little connection to his "phenomenological essay on ontology." It does not appear to solve the problems of the conflict between Self and Other or the relations between the for-itself and the in-itself. As the central problem for Sartre in Being and Nothingness concerns the solitary consciousness and his relations to others and the physical world, in his terms socialism seems little more than humanist wishful-thinking, a form of bad-faith.

Moreover in placing such an emphasis on the individual, the main tenets of socialism - the notion of collective action and salvation by history - do not square with the very basis of Sartre's philosophy. His subsequent commitment to revolution is thus not in harmony with the early philosophy and as this has not been properly amended or discarded, socialism is only an arbitrary goal to be fought for by the socially committed individual.

In later writings, Sartre resolves some of the problems inherent in the project of integrating existentialism and Marxism. In Critique of Dialectical Reason (1960), he bases the idea of fundamental conflict between individuals on "scarcity." ⁴⁷ In other words, he maintains this idea of conflict but replaces an idealist (ontological) explanation with a materialist one. As conflict is something rooted in man's natural environment it now may be overcome by human action. However, before this later stage in his development, Aron is certainly able to

justify the claim: "(Sartre's) existentialism presents itself as a revolutionary doctrine, but it leaves the particular content, the nature of this revolution in a limbo more suited to rhetoric than action."⁴⁸

VII

The purpose of this assessment of Sartre's philosophical development up to the late 1940's has been to provide the theoretical background required to analyse The Second Sex. As we shall see, de Beauvoir's theoretical perspective is similar to Sartre's in several fundamental respects. She uses the ontology of Being and Nothingness, which means that she equates human existence with freedom and postulates a fundamental conflict between individuals. However, freedom is not simply the foundation of man's being for, in line with existentialist ethics, it is also a value which man must realise. Superimposed on this ontology and ethics is a commitment to socialism - a commitment which is little more than an abstract belief in the idea of revolutionary social change.

As we shall see, in following Sartre in this way de Beauvoir's theory manifests many of the contradictions and problems inherent in his thought.

Chapter Four

Hegelian and Sartrean Concepts in "The Second Sex"

In this chapter we shall see how de Beauvoir portrays the essentially negative aspects of the feminine condition in a number of different ways. De Beauvoirian woman is not simply restricted by man, she is also "alienated" and dehumanised.¹ As we shall also see, in atomising the negative characteristics of woman's situation, de Beauvoir borrows a number of concepts from Hegel and Sartre.

I

A fundamental premise of The Second Sex is the Hegelian idea that "the subject can be posed only in being opposed - he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object" (p.17).² In other words, de Beauvoir claims that "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought" and that there is a "fundamental hostility" (p.17) between existents. However, as de Beauvoir argues that the Other "sets up a reciprocal claim" (p.17) to the status of sovereign subject there is usually reciprocity between individuals and groups. For example, foreigners abroad view the inhabitants as "Others" but they are ultimately forced to realise that they too are seen in this alien, hostile way. But although de Beauvoir maintains that there is a natural reciprocity between individuals and groups she claims that this is not true of the relations between man and woman. She argues

that the two sexes cannot be viewed as polar opposites both with a claim to sovereignty for man is defined as both male and neutral - the absolute human type thus being masculine - and woman is defined in relation to him. Aristotle, for example, believed woman to be an imperfect male; Rousseau claimed "but for her sex a woman is a man"; and more recently Freud defined her as a "castrated" male. And these are all definitions which in themselves illustrate de Beauvoir's notion that between man and woman "he is the subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other" (p.16).

According to de Beauvoir's theory, the peculiarity of the male-female relationship has its roots in woman's attitude to man. Man's view of woman is in harmony with what de Beauvoir considers the normal aspirations of the subject; it is the absence of woman's corresponding claim to the status of essential which is significant. Indeed de Beauvoir argues that woman must actually see man as "the Other" but that her attitude is not "thoroughly subjective" since she also sees herself as the "inessential" (p.251). Woman's acceptance of man's claim to sovereignty and her relegation to the status of "Other" may be seen in the fact that although Aristotle defined woman as an imperfect male, she does not view man as an imperfect female.³

For de Beauvoir, then, "the drama of woman" is to be found in the ontological structure of the subject who always sees the Self as essential and the realities of a world in which she "chooses" to define herself as the inessential. In other words, one of the tragic aspects of the feminine condition is that woman adopts as her own self-image something which is alien and at odds with her actual subjectivity.

The idea that woman sees herself in an alien light brings us to the way in which de Beauvoir infuses the notion of woman as "Other"

with Sartrean ontology. De Beauvoir portrays the feminine condition as essentially alienating and suggests that there are two courses of action open to woman. On the one hand, woman can try to live in accordance with the definition of the "true" woman and accept herself as an "alien" Other. On the other hand, she can reject this definition of femininity and, being true to her own subjectivity, assert her sovereignty. However, since it is across the meaning of femininity injected into the world by men in patriarchal society that woman must live her life, she is still bound to feel alienated; her actions will be transformed into something alien by the "look" of the Other. Thus her attempt to assert her sovereignty may simply be interpreted as the result of "penis envy" and so her authentically subjective action is distorted and she is presented an alien image of herself.

De Beauvoir defines this aspect of the feminine condition in terms reminiscent of Sartre in Anti-Semite and Jew (1946)⁴. In this book Sartre describes how the anti-Semite's definition of "Jewishness" leads the Jew to assume a "phantom personality, at once strange and familiar, that haunts him and which is nothing but himself - himself as others see him."⁵ Sartre acknowledges that, according to his own theoretical perspective, this is largely characteristic of the fundamental relation between Self and Other. However, he adds that the Jew is in an especially difficult situation in as much as "the Jew has a personality like the rest of us, and on top of that he is Jewish. It amounts in a sense to a doubling of the fundamental relationship with the Other." And thus, adds Sartre, "the Jew is 'overdetermined'."⁶ The over-determination of which Sartre writes is in a sense "overalienation" in that the Jew's self-image is hideously transformed by the anti-Semitic Other. Indeed

whether the Jew accepts or rejects this definition is irrelevant, since he is nevertheless forced to live his life with reference to it.

Woman and Jew may be similar in this respect but, according to de Beauvoir's theory, the subjugation of woman differs from other oppressed groups. It is particularly paradoxical since the couple is really "an original Mitsein" (p.67). In other words, it is especially strange that women should have an inessential status in a world where the sexes are interdependent - dependent on one another for reproduction. De Beauvoir claims, however, that despite this reciprocal bond women have never made contracts or exchanges with men on an equal basis but, as the anthropologist Levi-Strauss maintains, are themselves used as a means of exchange between men: "'The reciprocal bond basic to marriage,'" quotes de Beauvoir, "'is not set up between men and women but between men and men by means of women, who are only the principal occasion for it'" (p.103).⁷

It is this notion of woman as "Other" and the lack of reciprocity underlying the male-female relationship which is the keystone of de Beauvoir's theory in The Second Sex. Thus, as we shall see, de Beauvoir's main purpose is to discover the reason for woman's acceptance of herself as "the Other."

II

The idea that woman chooses to accept herself as "Other" is fundamental to de Beauvoir's theory and is Sartrean in so far as she defines the individual as a being of transcendence who continually manifests his freedom and autonomy of choice. Thus the human being is

unable to deny his subjectivity or "to relinquish his transcendence" (p.467). Thus when discussing man's desire for woman to be "the Other" de Beauvoir maintains: "... but all existents remain subjects, try as they will to deny themselves. Man wants woman to be object: she makes herself object; at the very moment when she does that, she is exercising a free activity" (p.626). Following Sartre de Beauvoir also claims: "An existent is nothing other than what he does; the possible does not extend beyond the real, essence does not precede existence: in pure subjectivity, the human being is not anything. He is to be measured by his acts" (p.287). In other words, in de Beauvoir's theory action is what grounds the human being and his consciousness in the world; it is this which reveals him as a free being and which reveals the nature of his choice of being.

De Beauvoir's previously outlined assertion that the fundamental relation between Self and Other is one of conflict, not only corresponds to an aspect of Hegelian philosophy but is also a premise of Being and Nothingness. Thus de Beauvoir echoes Sartre when she writes: "Every human relationship implies conflict" (p.369). However, as de Beauvoir wrote The Second Sex in 1947 by this time both she and Sartre had come 8 to believe that conflict in human relations could and should be overcome. This means that the theory underlying The Second Sex is not simply based on Being and Nothingness but is combined with the later existentialist ethics of the post-war era.⁹ The ethical perspective de Beauvoir adopts is one in which freedom is the foundation of all value and in which the authentic individual is one who attempts to give concrete meaning both to his own freedom and to others'. This reliance on existentialist ethics is explicitly, albeit hastily, acknowledged by de Beauvoir in

her introduction to The Second Sex when she attempts to dismiss the arguments of those who, in opposition to her, would claim that women are contented with their lot:

... our perspective is that of existentialist ethics. Every subject plays its part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out towards other liberties. There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. 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 immanence (pp.28-9).

For de Beauvoir the past and present situation of women is the epitome of such degraded existence. Indeed along with the idea that the tragedy of woman is to be found in her status of "Other," there is the notion that the essence of woman's degradation is that she is continually confined to a world of immanence and is deprived of the opportunity to use her liberty authentically. De Beauvoir argues that human existence is composed of transcendent and immanent components and that it is in this division which sexual inequality has its roots. Therefore while marriage based on woman's domestic servitude allows man to confine himself to a world in which he can be totally transcendent, in touch with the future, woman's domestic and maternal role imprisons her in tasks which merely perpetuate the given. The concept of oppression used by de Beauvoir in The Ethics of Ambiguity fits precisely the way in which she dichotomises the sexes: "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 endlessly in order merely to support the collectivity. ..."¹⁰

Because woman is confined to this kind of life she becomes dependent on man and tries to justify her existence through his. Dependence is, in fact, the essential ingredient in de Beauvoir's description of woman's relation to man. Thus de Beauvoir claims that with woman "dependency is interiorised"; that "she is a slave even when she behaves with apparent freedom" (p.500). De Beauvoir argues that woman's dependence on man is a further example of the unreciprocal nature of the male-female relationship. Man is for woman "the meaning, the justification of her existence," but for him she is simply "an amusement, a pleasure, ... an inessential boon." As the relationship between man and woman has by no means the same significance in each of their lives, de Beauvoir adds that "the exchange ... is not of equal value" (p.731). In an evocative passage de Beauvoir outlines the way in which woman's dependence on man is manifest in the fact that she spends her life "waiting":

In a sense her whole existence is waiting, since she is confined in the limbo of immanence and contingency, and since her justification is always in the hands of others. She awaits the homage, the approval of men, she awaits love, she awaits the gratitude and praise of her husband or her lover. She awaits her support, which comes from man; whether she keeps the cheque-book or merely gets a weekly or monthly allowance from her husband, it is necessary for him to have drawn his pay or obtained that rise. ... She waits for man to put in an appearance, since her economic dependence places her at his disposal; she is only one element in masculine life while man is her whole existence. The husband has his occupations outside the home, and the wife has to put up with his absence all day long; the lover - passionate as he may be - is the one who decides on their meetings and separations in accordance with his obligations. In bed, she awaits the male's desire, she awaits - sometimes anxiously - her own pleasure (p.621).

In harmony with the position she adopted in The Ethics of Ambiguity de Beauvoir maintains that if the kind of contingent, immanent

existence typical of woman's lot is imposed on a person then it constitutes "oppression" and that if it is freely chosen or consented to then it "represents a moral fault" (p.29). Moreover de Beauvoir follows Sartre and maintains that although this situation is in fact the frustration of human freedom, both the "anguish of solitude" (p.298) and the terrifying extent of human freedom may lead an individual into acts of deliberate self-deception. In other words an individual may be tempted to live a life of bad faith in which he tries to flee the responsibility concomitant with freedom and be "petrified into a thing" (p.296). Because the kind of life which woman leads can be interpreted in two ways - either as oppression or as bad faith - one of de Beauvoir's central concerns is to establish the extent to which woman is refused the opportunity for transcendence and the extent to which she deliberately foregoes liberty and unethically attempts to become a thing simply acted upon by others. Conversely de Beauvoir also tries to show whether man in his relationship with woman inauthentically uses her to flee certain aspects of the human condition.

In The Second Sex, then, de Beauvoir must account not only for why woman accepts herself as "the Other," but also why she does not rebel against the immanence and futility of feminine existence. In the ensuing chapters much of our attention will be focussed on de Beauvoir's explanation. Without pre-empting such a study, a preliminary point must be made concerning de Beauvoir's view of the nature of subjectivity.

De Beauvoir uses a number of different notions of subjectivity. On the one hand she argues that the existent must be involved in certain forms of action before he comes to see himself as a human being. Thus, following Hegel, she asserts: "There is in every consciousness an

aspiration towards subjectivity, but it can take affirmative action only in risking itself" (p.240). Elsewhere de Beauvoir argues that it is objectification which is necessary for self-awareness: An argument most succinctly expressed in the claim: "The existent succeeds in finding himself only in estrangement, in alienation; he seeks through the world to find himself in some shape, other than himself ... (p.88). As we shall see, it is this idea that one must alienate oneself in something in order to find oneself, which underlies much of the significance de Beauvoir attributes to such things as labour, private property, the penis and man's desire to possess woman. The superiority of the male in de Beauvoir's theory is that, for a variety of reasons, he has been able to gain through the processes of "affirmative action" and "alienation" a sense of his own existence as a sovereign individual. Conversely various facets of the situation of de Beauvoirian woman deprives her of such self-realisation.

In The Second Sex, co-existing uneasily with this idea that there are certain pre-conditions for the emergence of human consciousness proper, is de Beauvoir's notion that a human being simply is a human being; that no development is necessary and that it is impossible to escape a properly subjective attitude. Thus although the general drift of de Beauvoir's argument is that woman is deprived of the opportunity to assert herself as a human being, at other points she maintains that "woman is a subject - a fellow human being" (p.283). In this light her humanity is defined with reference to the fact that she feels an urge "to surpass herself" (p.96) and not that she actually reaps the benefits of such transcendence.

III

So far, then, we have established the tenor of de Beauvoir's theory of woman's situation and what she hopes to explain in the course of her study. But before we begin the detailed examination of de Beauvoir's theory, we must know something of how de Beauvoir approaches the subject.

In The Second Sex de Beauvoir divides the subject matter into two distinct parts. The first volume entitled "Facts and Myths" deals with those factors which make the feminine condition - biology, history, myth - and she evaluates the contribution made by psychoanalysis and historical materialism to the assessment of these "objective" factors. The second volume is called "Woman's ¹²Life Today" and is concerned with how woman responds to her feminine role. It examines woman's experience of childhood, adolescence, maternity and other aspects of feminine existence and also how, by becoming a career woman, a lesbian or a mystic, for example, individual women choose to deal with their womanly role. Together these two volumes analyse what in the Sartrian sense is woman's "situation."

Part III

THE SOURCES OF WOMAN'S OPPRESSION

Chapter Five

Biology

In The Prime of Life de Beauvoir claims of The Second Sex:

... what distinguishes my thesis from the traditional one is that, as far as I'm concerned, femininity is neither a natural nor an innate entity, but rather a condition brought about by society on the basis of certain physiological characteristics.¹

So let us begin our study of de Beauvoir's theory of the sources of woman's oppression by examining what significance she attributes to biology. In subsequent chapters we shall look at the relationships with men and with children which woman forms as a result of her reproductive role. Therefore in this chapter we shall concentrate on the biological givens of femininity and the limitations these place on a woman's life. To make sense of this, however, we must first know something of de Beauvoir's concept of the biological basis for sexual division.

At the very outset of the chapter on biology in The Second Sex de Beauvoir devotes a few pages to examining the relationship between reproduction and sexual bifurcation. Ultimately she concludes that as both parthenogenesis and hermaphroditism would permit reproduction "the perpetuation of the species does not necessitate sexual differentiation" (p.39). Indeed de Beauvoir claims that the division into male and female is not biologically necessary and so must simply be taken as an "irreducible fact of observation" (p.37). In other words, sexual bifurcation may not be necessary for reproduction but it is nevertheless part of the nature of our being. It is because de Beauvoir accepts such bifurcation as an "irreducible," if contingent, aspect of our

biological existence that she begins her inquiry into the origins of woman as "Other" by examining the facts of biology.

Following Sartre de Beauvoir argues that the human body is "the instrument of our grasp upon the world" (p.65). The importance of the body can be seen only with reference to our freely chosen projects. Thus, to use one of Sartre's examples, it is only because an individual wants to climb a mountain that his or her physiological incompetence for such a task acquires its relevance.² Weakness, like any other aspect of human anatomy, gains its meaning within a world of human actions and values. Moreover, as the body in such an existentialist perspective is simply an instrument, linked inexorably to our projects, it has by itself no power to shape or determine our lives.

Although such a concept of the body's insignificance ostensibly underpins de Beauvoir's theory in The Second Sex her general attempt to understand the relevance of sexual bodies to the human male and female runs counter to it; for de Beauvoir tries to see how biology has contributed to woman's oppression by examining the roles assigned to the sexes in animal species. In leaving the human realm, where an existentialist concept of the body makes sense, de Beauvoir enters a world where it is more relevant to discuss what is biologically given than freely chosen projects and values. As we shall see, de Beauvoir portrays woman's body not as an "instrument" - the way of acting on the world - but as a prison which keeps her at an animal level of life; and as a prison it is something which must be broken out of before woman can become a proper human being. However, to understand why de Beauvoir adopts such

a perspective we must first outline what she sees as the distinguishing features of masculine and feminine biology.

I

Although de Beauvoir concludes in The Second Sex that there are no essential differences between the sexes, in her section on biology she uses a rigorous dichotomy of masculinity and femininity. Thus de Beauvoir argues that biological masculinity and femininity represent two "diverse" aspects of life. In order to express such sexual bifurcation de Beauvoir does not use the common dichotomy of activity-passivity, but her own one of "maintenance and creation" (p.52).³ It is the female who represents the former aspect of life and the male who represents the latter in de Beauvoir's theory. Thus, for example, theorising on the role each sex plays in conception de Beauvoir claims; "it is the male element which provides the stimuli needed for evoking new life and it is the female element that enables this to be lodged in a stable organism" (p.45). In the higher primates the dichotomy of maintaining-creating can, according to de Beauvoir, be seen in the female's physiological subservience to maternity and in the male's role in intercourse. In other words, he initiates the act which creates a new being while she maintains the existence of the new life which has been created.

De Beauvoir, however, claims that it is really only in "higher forms of life" (p.51) that the sexual dichotomy is very clearly defined. And for de Beauvoir the major distinguishing feature between higher and lower forms of life is that in the former there is some degree of

individualisation within the species. Thus although she argues that both male and female animals are at one and the same time particular individuals and members of a species, she also claims that the difference between male and female in the higher primates is that whereas he is able to act as an individual, the female is frequently required to renounce her individuality for the benefit of the race. This means that although both sexes participate in reproduction there is a major difference in their role. In humans, for example, man "recovers his individuality the moment he transcends it" (p.54) in as much as his role in procreation need not extend beyond intercourse, whereas for women intercourse marks simply the beginning of her "subservience" (p.52) to maternity and hence to the species. Indeed de Beauvoir claims that women like most female animals are "victims" (p.52) of the biological process.

As we shall appreciate more fully below, according to de Beauvoir's philosophical perspective, the male's role in reproduction puts him in a privileged position because his subjectivity and individuality are integrated with his reproductive role. Although his body is also the vehicle for the continuation of Life, and he is thus to some extent controlled by external powers, the sexual role which he has been assigned actually encourages his transcendence - he has been endowed with a superior physique and he can assert his dominance through coitus. In short, de Beauvoir claims that man's sexual role encourages him to reach out towards the world and to put his subjective aspirations to the test.

In de Beauvoir's theory woman's role in reproduction is quite different from man's. While he is able to maintain or extend his humanity in reproduction, woman feels hemmed in by the fulfilment of her reproductive

role. Indeed throughout The Second Sex de Beauvoir continually emphasises the negative and alienating features of woman's biology. The definition of the concept of alienation used by de Beauvoir in this context is best summarised in the statement: "woman, like man, is her body; but her body is something other than herself" (p.61) - where what is "alien" and "other" to woman is the invading species. Thus the essentially alienating aspect of femininity for de Beauvoir is that woman's "physiological nature is very complex: she herself submits to it as to some rigmarole from outside; her body does not seem to her to be a clear expression of herself; within it she feels herself a stranger" (p.286).

At one point in The Second Sex de Beauvoir implies that woman's feelings of alienation are not due to actual physiological conditions but to the way in which woman's bodily functions are seen in patriarchal society. Woman "becomes a stranger to herself," writes de Beauvoir, "because she is a stranger to the rest of the world" (p.353). However, despite this claim, de Beauvoir does not generally link woman's feelings of estrangement to cultural factors for in her theory they emanate from woman's experience of her reproductive functions. As such alienation is linked to woman's biology, it is particularly acute, according to de Beauvoir, during woman's reproductive years and at various stages of the reproductive process. Thus in comparison with the menopausal woman who feels at one with her body, de Beauvoir claims that it is the menstruating woman who experiences her body "most painfully as an obscure, alien thing" (p.61).

However, despite de Beauvoir's claim that alienation is most acutely felt in menstruation, her descriptions of woman's experience of pregnancy indicate that this is by far the most alienating experience

for a woman. Indeed de Beauvoir maintains that from the moment of conception women "have within them a hostile element - it is the species gnawing at their vitals" (p.63). It is important to note here the vocabulary which de Beauvoir uses to describe the foetus and woman's experience of pregnancy: the woman, a "mere plaything of obscure forces" (p.512) is "tenanted," "possessed," "absorbed," and "ensnared" by the foetus which is frequently described as a "little stranger," an "intruder" and a "parasite" (pp. 53ff and pp. 512 ff). Indeed de Beauvoir particularly takes issue with doctors who "state that the foetus forms a part of the mother's body, that it is not a parasite living at the latter's expense" (p.504). Moreover as de Beauvoir maintains in another passage in The Second Sex that "every parasite is an exploiter" (p.626) we must conclude that in de Beauvoir's theory woman is not only alienated but also exploited in her reproductive role.

It must be pointed out, however, that although de Beauvoir portrays pregnancy as the source of much of the alienation experienced by women, she also tries to show how it may be experienced in a positive manner. Nevertheless, as the following quotation demonstrates, the positive feelings appear to be outweighed by the negative, alienating response which de Beauvoir believes is evoked by the pregnant woman's condition:

But pregnancy is above all a drama that is acted out within the woman herself. She feels it as at once an enrichment and an injury; the foetus is part of her body, and it is a parasite that feeds on it; she possesses it, and she is possessed by it; it represents the future and, carrying it, she feels herself vast as the world; but this very opulence annihilates her, she feels that she herself is no longer anything. A new life is going to manifest itself and justify its own separate existence, she is proud of it; but she also feels herself tossed and driven, the plaything of obscure forces. ... 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. Ensnared by nature, the pregnant woman is plant and animal, a storehouse of colloids, an incubator, an egg; she scares children who are proud of their young, straight bodies and makes young people titter contemptuously because she is a human being, a conscious and free individual, who has become life's passive instrument (pp.512-513).

Leaving aside for the moment the question of woman's alienation in pregnancy and menstruation, it is important to point out here that this concept of alienation also applies in The Second Sex to de Beauvoir's descriptions of woman's experience of sexual intercourse although this is not so specifically spelled out. Thus, whereas the male in coitus can use his body actively as a means of expressing his will, of transcending himself in action, de Beauvoir portrays woman as a mere receptacle whose "inwardness is violated" (p.53) in the sexual act:

She submits to the coition, which invades her individuality and introduces an alien element through penetration and internal fertilisation ... the sexual adventure is immediately experienced by her as an interior event and not as an outward relation to the world and to others (p.54).

Such a description of woman's experience of sexual intercourse seems, in de Beauvoir's terms, to be based on a concept of alienation in that not only is woman unable to express herself through her body but also she is used as a vehicle for another's desires. In menstruation or pregnancy it is Nature or the foetus which takes woman over: in sexuality it is man.

For de Beauvoir the negative aspects of feminine biology are not simply due to the fact that woman is the "prey" of external forces, for a number of other factors are involved. For example, de Beauvoir believes that females are the weaker sex and that this is quite apparent in both Homo sapiens and most animal species. This idea is best summarised by

de Beauvoir in her definition of the male, for she claims that he is "in general larger than the female, stronger, swifter, more adventurous" (p.56). Indeed not only does de Beauvoir believe that the very structure of masculinity and femininity gives him a physiological advantage but also she claims that the reproductive process tips the balance further in his favour. Thus de Beauvoir describes gestation as a "fatiguing task" (p.62) of no individual benefit to the woman and claims that "in natural circumstances" childbirth "often brings about the death of either the mother or the child" (p.521)⁵. Underlying de Beauvoir's comments on woman's reproductive role is the idea that woman is "handicapped" by her biology and that maternity naturally "dooms woman to a sedentary existence" (p.100); that it curtails her activity and subsequently renders her dependent on men. Consequently de Beauvoir claims that even if women were as strong as men (a question which she does not even raise in the section on biology and only later refers to in passing in her historical account) "the bondage of reproduction" originally must have been "a terrible handicap in the struggle against a hostile world" (p.94).

The biological disadvantages of being female and their implications for a woman's life are not merely confined in de Beauvoir's system to sheer physical capacity. Woman is not simply enfeebled by an inferior physique, she has also what de Beauvoir calls a "'hysterical' body" (p.356) - a body which is characterised principally by its instability. There is an in-built emotionalism, de Beauvoir claims, which means that "women are subject to such displays of agitation as tears, hysterical laughter and nervous crises" (p.64). Such alleged instability is closely linked in de Beauvoir's theory with menstruation which she describes in the following way: "Menstruation is painful: headaches, over-fatigue,

abdominal pains make normal activities distressing or impossible; psychic difficulties often appear; nervous and irritable, a woman may be temporarily in a state of semi-lunacy ... "(p.353).

With the physical weakness which de Beauvoir believes to flow from woman's musculature and condition of pregnancy we have little difficulty in interpreting its precise meaning, for it is obviously presented as part of the physiological basis of femininity: but with the concept of psychological weakness two different explanations are possible, and both are given in The Second Sex. In the chapter called "The Data of Biology" de Beauvoir explains the physical and psychological changes arising with menstruation as the result of hormonal reactions and claims that such distressing symptoms affect most of the female sex. However, in a later chapter, from which the above quotation is drawn, the distressing symptoms of menstruation are claimed to be "brought on by a psychic state" (p.356) and it would thus appear that to understand this apparent contradiction we should interpret the actual organic conditions as evoked by the workings of the mind. Indeed although de Beauvoir maintains that biological femininity requires the female to renounce her individuality, she nevertheless maintains that such renunciation is not easily made. The conflict between the female's own interests and those of the species lead to organic resistance and hence, according to de Beauvoir, to the fragility of constitution associated with femininity. De Beauvoir in fact maintains that it is in human beings, the most individualised of all mammalian species, that the enslavement of the female to reproduction is the most intense and the most unwillingly accepted. Thus, for example, in an attempt to interpret the alleged higher death statistics of pubescent girls de Beauvoir claims: "Not without resistance does the body of women permit the species to take

over; and this struggle is weakening and dangerous" (p.59). For similar kinds of reasons de Beauvoir also claims that "almost all spontaneous miscarriages are of psychic origin" (p.516) and that morning sickness "is the revolt of the organism against the invading species" (p.62).⁶

So far we have encountered a number of negative features of feminine existence attributed by de Beauvoir to woman's biology. Leaving aside the way in which biology has affected the development of woman as a human being, these negative features may be expressed simply as follows: alienation; weakness and dependency; and a number of other factors such as morning sickness linked to the resistance of woman's body. As de Beauvoir does not believe that woman's subservience to man or the species is inevitable, we must establish the extent to which de Beauvoir believes these negative aspects of biological femininity may be overcome.

II

In the introduction to this chapter it was claimed that although de Beauvoir conceptualises the body as an "instrument," her description of woman's experience of biological femininity leads us to see woman's body as a prison. In short, we come to see woman's body as something which leads to the curtailment of her activities and to a sense of estrangement. However, as de Beauvoir follows Merleau Ponty in his belief that human beings are not "a natural species but a historical idea" (p.66), she maintains that woman cannot be defined with reference to her biological characteristics, for it is her "possibilities which must be considered" (p.66). In other words, as woman is a human being she is a "becoming" (p.66), an existent with no fixed, unchangeable

essence. Thus de Beauvoir maintains that even though "the enslavement to the species and the limitations of her various powers are extremely important facts" (p.69), biology is not absolute. That is to say, biology is mediated by conscious acts and so gains significance only in the human context in which it is revealed. The significance of femininity and the restrictions which de Beauvoir claims it has historically imposed on woman may therefore be altered by conscious human acts.

However, although de Beauvoir claims that there is nothing "fixed" (p.65ff) about woman's biology, we must be somewhat sceptical of her alleged rejection of the absolute significance of biological phenomena. In this instance manifestations of biology, such as woman's role in maintaining the species, are associated too closely with de Beauvoir's absolute values of creativity and transcendence. Thus as de Beauvoir believes that pregnancy confines woman to immanence and as, according to her existentialist ethics, immanence means "a degradation of existence into the en-soi - the brutish life of subjection to given conditions" (p.29), then there seems to be little sense in which the actual significance of biology in this instance may be radically altered by human values. This point is particularly relevant to de Beauvoir's concepts of feminine weakness and maternity.

At one point in The Second Sex de Beauvoir argues that woman's weakness is not in itself "bad" as it is merely part of her biological existence and thus part of the basis on which she builds her life within a given social and economic context. But despite this claim, within de Beauvoir's framework of existentialist ethics there is the view that so long as feminine weakness forces woman into a dependent and immanent existence, such weakness will always have negative characteristics. Thus de Beauvoir's statement that "the concept of weakness can be defined

only with reference to existentialist, economic and moral considerations" (p.67) cannot be interpreted to mean that with different human values woman's weakness and its manifestations in dependency could become "good." It merely means that the impact of woman's biology could be changed by technological innovation, different economic and social structures and a new set of attitudes on the part of both women and men.

A similar kind of argument is applicable to de Beauvoir's view of maternity; that is, although aspects of woman's reproductive role could be changed by technology and economics, according to de Beauvoir maternity itself will never possess much human value. Indeed in The Second Sex de Beauvoir quite clearly rules out the possibility of childbirth being a transcendent and creative act; it cannot, she maintains, make woman equal to man. De Beauvoir partially adopts this attitude to maternity because it is a natural act outwith the woman's control. Thus she claims that "giving birth and suckling are not activities, they are natural functions; no project is involved" (p.94). Moreover, procreation does not correspond to de Beauvoir's ideas of human development - development, as we shall see in Chapter Six, based on violence and creative labour - and thus is of no relevance to the progress of mankind. It is for these reasons that de Beauvoir writes disparagingly of women who particularly enjoy pregnancy and believe it to be a creative act that they are simply like "fowls with high egg-production" (p.513). Indeed de Beauvoir maintains that such a woman's pleasure does not spring from the experience of actual creativity but merely from the "comforting illusion of feeling that she is a human being, in herself a value" (p.513). De Beauvoir in this implicit use of the concept of bad faith, thus dismisses the enjoyment of some pregnant women on the basis that they are deluded, for according to her existentialist perspective maternity in itself holds

little human value. Thus despite de Beauvoir's recent statement that when she advises women to avoid "the trap of motherhood" she is not making "a value-judgement,"⁷ there is a sense in The Second Sex that such a value-judgement is being made. Indeed as Margaret Mead in her book review pointed out, on de Beauvoir's part there is not only an "absolute failure to recognise anything creative in maternity," but also⁸ a tendency to denigrate it.

But let us leave in abeyance the question of de Beauvoir's complete devaluation of woman's reproductive role. For the time being let us merely assume that de Beauvoir argues that women should not be confined to motherhood but should be free to work and engage in various types of human pursuits. This plea for more freedom of choice for women would nowadays gain popular support since it is becoming increasingly accepted that with a declining birth rate, motherhood cannot be the only aim and justification of a woman's life. For de Beauvoir, then, if maternity is not a human activity, woman's human development depends on her involvement in properly human pursuits. The problem of woman's reproductive role for de Beauvoir thus becomes centred on the control of fertility and the integration of maternity with other social and economic aspects of existence. Indeed, bearing in mind de Beauvoir's avowed position on biology - that it merely furnishes the physical basis of one's existence - we should see whether in de Beauvoir's theory woman's biology, a simple facet of her facticity, can be integrated with her involvement in transcendent and liberating acts. In other words, the merits of de Beauvoir's view of a mediated biology might lie in the resolution of the alleged conflict between femininity and individualisation, where the emerging synthesis is woman, at once a human and a procreative being.

We could reasonably expect de Beauvoir to attempt a synthesis of the whole woman with reference to three related themes: technology,

work and the future of childcare. As far as technology is concerned we are not disappointed, for de Beauvoir places great emphasis on the liberating potential of technology. Technology is important for de Beauvoir for two reasons; it allows a restructuring of production techniques and the alteration of woman's biology itself. Thus, according to de Beauvoir, not only will the present trend toward mechanisation render woman's weakness irrelevant and herald her complete entry into the world of work, but also various technological advances will extend woman's freedom by allowing her to gain masterful control of her own body. Of central concern here is, of course, scientific methods of contraception which allow women to plan the course of their reproductive lives and free them from their previous "slavery" to procreation. There are, however, a few other scientific advances which do not spring so readily to mind. For example, as de Beauvoir believes that childbirth is naturally a very dangerous and painful process for women, she unreservedly welcomes the use of anaesthetics to lessen the pains of labour.

It is only when woman is released from various biological constraints that she will be able to be gainfully employed and attain in this activity the consciousness requisite for her liberation. Thus it is work, not technology, which fills the role in de Beauvoir's theory which labour fills for Hegel's slave. We shall see in Chapter Twelve that de Beauvoir sees woman's entry into the world of work as crucial for her liberation, ^{but} for the time being we must simply ask whether, given the tremendous importance of employment to woman's liberation, de Beauvoir thinks it possible for woman to be simultaneously a worker and a mother.

In The Second Sex de Beauvoir argues that such technological innovations as contraception and abortion are important to women not

simply because they permit her to control her body, but because they allow her to become gainfully employed. Indeed de Beauvoir optimistically states that with woman "protected ... from the slavery of reproduction she is in a position to assume the economic role which is offered her and will assure her of complete independence" (p.152). However, the question of woman's employment and her reproductive role does not simply involve the control of fertility. Even if women are able to decide if and when to have children, there is still the problem of how such children should be cared for while their parents work. Nevertheless, despite the importance of childcare, as we shall see de Beauvoir not only fails to deal adequately with the topic, but also the few references which do exist are somewhat contradictory and obscure.

At one point in The Second Sex de Beauvoir maintains that the co-existence of woman as mother and worker is a simple question of social and economic structure. Thus she states that if woman "procreates voluntarily and if society comes to her aid during pregnancy and is concerned with child welfare, the burdens of maternity are light and can easily be offset by suitable adjustments to working conditions" (p.85, emphasis added).⁹ However, de Beauvoir is far less optimistic about combining work with motherhood in other sections of her book. For instance, in the chapter entitled "The Independent Woman" de Beauvoir claims that "there is one feminine function that is actually impossible to perform in complete liberty. It is maternity." (p.705). Even taken in context it is difficult to ascertain if this statement refers to the actual nature of maternity or to the existing social structure. Given the fact that de Beauvoir goes on to examine the situation in France and America, we can assume that this is a comment on the present day.

However, de Beauvoir adds that the restrictions of maternity exist "in spite of convenient day-nurseries and kindergartens" and that such restrictions are "enough to paralyse woman's activity entirely" (p.705). The ambivalence of de Beauvoir's position on whether or not work and maternity can be integrated in a woman's life is apparent at another point in The Second Sex. And here the outlook for women in de Beauvoir's theory seems even more bleak. Outlining how in "a properly organised society ... children would largely be taken in charge by the community and the mother cared for and helped" de Beauvoir tells us that "maternity would not be wholly incompatible with careers for women" (p.540, emphasis added).¹⁰ De Beauvoir, however, does not explain why she has reservations on the possibility of completely harmonising work and motherhood. We do not know, for example, if the element of incompatibility emanates from the nature of maternity or from the problems of childcare. In other words, if it is due to biology or social structure. However, given the context of the sentence - a society in which children are communally cared for - the reservation probably implies restrictions imposed by pregnancy and lactation.

The problem posed by de Beauvoir's comments on childcare and maternity, however, is not simply one of interpretation. The fact that we are left guessing de Beauvoir's exact position on these matters is indicative of her failure to examine woman's oppression with reference to her maternal role. Indeed de Beauvoir may criticise Frederick Engels' Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884) for its failure to see that woman's "reproductive function is as important as her productive capacity no less in the social economy than in the individual's life" (p.89), but she is equally guilty of such neglect. This is especially

true of de Beauvoir's concept of woman's future liberation, for most of her discussion is set within an economic context, the question of the future of procreation and childcare being almost left untouched.

It may thus be claimed that de Beauvoir does not manage to argue coherently that there is any easy reconciliation of motherhood with other pursuits. This has prompted several commentators to point out that the de Beauvoirian woman achieves emancipation only by suppressing aspects of her reproductive role. Albert Memmi, for example, in his essay "A Tyrant's Plea," laments that de Beauvoir does not manage to liberate woman within the context of her motherhood and so has set woman's liberation at too high a price. In 1974 Judith Grether in an article on The Second Sex also points out that de Beauvoir does not manage to liberate woman as a mother. As a feminist Grether subsequently maintains:

Given the society's need for reproduction, it is clearly not possible for all or most women to refuse to bear children. At best, this formulation points towards test tube babies as the solution. At worst, it negates the possibility of liberation for all women.¹²

In other words, in the absence of technology capable of eliminating completely woman's reproductive role, Grether believes that emancipated women in de Beauvoir's theory can be conceived of only as a childless elite. An elite whose emancipation has been gained at the expense of childbearing sisters.

Bearing in mind the material outlined in the last few pages we thus see that even if we assume that for de Beauvoir maternity is something essentially neutral, neither adding to nor detracting from the human dimension of woman's existence, we find nevertheless that de Beauvoir never convincingly shows how the emancipated woman can also be a mother. In short there is no obvious synthesis of woman as a human and a procreative being in de Beauvoir's theory. Indeed if we leave the terms

of the above discussion, and return to the previous argument that for de Beauvoir there are essentially negative features attached to maternity and other aspects of woman's reproductive role, we shall see how and why in de Beauvoir's theory such a synthesis cannot easily emerge.

III

Earlier in this chapter we questioned the extent to which de Beauvoir thinks the weakness and dependency which flow from woman's reproductive role to be amenable to human change. It appeared that in de Beauvoir's theory some aspects of woman's physical weakness could more or less be eradicated from the economic arena by technological change and that some drawbacks of maternity could be neutralised, if not completely eliminated, by conscious human acts. It was within this context that such matters as contraception and maternal care were considered significant. To some extent, then, technology is portrayed as having liberating potential. However, we also learned that the mediation of woman's biology which could result from different attitudes and values is much less prevalent in de Beauvoir's theory than she often leads us to expect. That is to say, the negative features which de Beauvoir thinks are naturally associated with woman's reproductive role are bound too closely with some of her own absolute values. So far we have examined this only with reference to such matters as weakness, immanence and physical dependency. However, the values inherent in de Beauvoir's theory become much more prevalent as we begin to look at the two other negative features of woman's biology - alienation and organic resistance.

In The Second Sex there is a definite idea that women feel alienated or unhappy in their reproductive role not because of the particular condition of women in patriarchal society but because there is what may be termed an ontological conflict between femininity and humanisation. Thus despite de Beauvoir's statements that "it is the social context that makes menstruation a curse" (p.340) and that although biology is of great importance what gives "these facts ... weight is woman's attitude towards them" (p.353), a dominant theme in The Second Sex is that the negative features of woman's biology do not simply spring from woman's particular situation and her attitude towards it, but from the generic feminine condition. Even allowing for the possibility that many of the negative features of woman's reproductive role could be changed by technological and economic innovations, according to de Beauvoir's perspective there would still be reasons for woman's organic resistance and feelings of alienation. Let us look more closely at the factors involved.

To some extent it can be maintained that de Beauvoir believes woman experiences her sexuality in a negative way since she is not in control of her body. If, however, she was more aware of the process and more able through contraception and abortion to control her fertility she would feel less at the mercy of external forces. However, even with birth control there is still another factor which de Beauvoir links to woman's alleged feelings of hostility and alienation which could not be so easily mediated by human change. And that is de Beauvoir's notion that "life cannot be mastered through the use of tools: one can only submit to its secret laws" (p.609). In other words, because in ovulation, menstruation, conception and pregnancy, woman's body

becomes "the theatre of a play that unfolds within her" (p.60), she will never feel entirely at home in, or in control of, her body, for at such times it will always be something "other than herself" (p.61). Becoming, as it were, life's "passive instrument" (p.513) her body is invaded by the species and her individuality is strictly limited. Moreover, the dependency woman experiences during pregnancy is, according to de Beauvoir, magnified during labour when she needs help in the delivery of her child. For all these reasons, then, de Beauvoir maintains that "even if the woman deeply desires to have a child, her body vigorously revolts when obliged to undergo the reproductive process" (p.315).

Thus we see how in de Beauvoir's theory there will always be negative elements attached to feminine biology as long as reproduction is accomplished in a natural manner. That is to say, as long as women become pregnant and undergo physiological changes outwith their control, then they will not feel at home in their bodies and will feel "alienated." But in order to grasp more fully the significance of de Beauvoir's use of the concept of alienation one must recall the rudiments of its use in Hegelian and existentialist thought. Thus, bearing in mind the discussion undertaken in Chapter Three, we see that de Beauvoir, like Sartre and Hegel, but in complete opposition to Marx, identifies alienation as part of human existence in the natural, sensuous world. In Being and Nothingness, although Sartre accepts the essentially Hegelian definition of alienation, he refutes the philosophy which would permit its elimination: he rejects Hegel's "ontological optimism" and the notion that alienation will be overcome by the elimination of objectivity. Thus we find in Sartre's thought the notion of despair

and the permanent futility of human endeavour. However, even though de Beauvoir accepts an essentially Hegelian concept of alienation, which means in this instance that she simply locates the source of alienation in something inextricably linked with our existence in the natural world, she is not ultimately faced with the choice of accepting the terms of Hegelian elimination or portraying alienation as a permanent facet of woman's existence. It is possible that in preference to maintaining that alienation will always be a feature of femininity, de Beauvoir should conclude that alienation may be overcome if the terms of femininity itself are suppressed. In short de Beauvoir could argue that in order to eliminate alienation as part of woman's experience of biological femininity, it is necessary to remove as much as possible of woman's reproductive role. But is this what de Beauvoir actually argues in The Second Sex?

In answering this question we must realise that de Beauvoir is never defeatist about woman's body always acting as a prison nor evoking feelings of estrangement. In other words, de Beauvoir does not state that such negative aspects of feminine existence are fixed and unchangeable, and in her conclusion she is optimistic about woman's future as an equal and unoppressed existent. / ^{But} as de Beauvoir's theory incorporates the idea that woman's body profoundly adds to, if not actually causes, woman's oppression, in her own terms woman's liberation must involve the elimination of woman's reproductive role. Indeed it is because de Beauvoir believes there to be such conflict between biological femininity and human freedom that she maintains it is the menopausal woman who feels most at home in her body. In other words, it is the woman who has no role to play in reproduction who feels herself to be a human being.

It must be understood, however, that this conclusion can be deduced from de Beauvoir's theory, but we cannot find a passage in The Second Sex which explicitly upholds this position. Thus although we can illustrate how de Beauvoir never manages to synthesise woman as a procreative and a human being, and that in her own terms liberation must involve the suppression of biological femininity, we can never find a statement to this effect. Like Judith Grether, we can only indicate how in de Beauvoir's theory, test-tube babies may be seen as a pre-requisite for the emancipation of all women. Indeed, since in de Beauvoir's theory much of woman's inferior physique emanates from the burdens of maternity and the organic resistance to the processes associated with her reproductive role, only the removal of pregnancy, and concomitantly of ovulation and menstruation, would bring woman total relief.

Having outlined de Beauvoir's theory of sexual bifurcation we have thus arrived at the conclusion that the logic of such a theory is for woman's reproductive role to be replaced by artificial methods of reproduction.¹³ The subject of what is popularly called test-tube babies is, however, a contentious one. It evokes in many people's minds Aldous Huxley's Brave New World;¹⁴ that is, a society where such technology is not used to extend women's freedom but to introduce selective breeding for political purposes. Indeed by removing the right to decide whether or not to have a child from the individuals concerned, and by giving scientists the task of reproduction, such technology immediately raises questions of political control. As de Beauvoir does not openly advocate artificial methods of reproduction, she does not address herself to these issues. However, let us ignore the matter of political control and decide whether or not we should see the elimination of woman's

reproductive role as a pre-requisite for her liberation. As this question involves the logic of de Beauvoir's theory it leads us to leave the terms of the present discussion and evaluate de Beauvoir's entire theory of sexual bifurcation.

IV

In evaluating de Beauvoir's theory of woman's biology at this stage of our inquiry, we are immediately confronted with a problem. The problem is that de Beauvoir's theory is closely bound up with her notions of human development and woman's historic role, and so cannot be fully discussed until these have also been examined. In effect this means combining biology and history in an appraisal of de Beauvoir's theory of the origins of woman's status as "the second sex." And this we cannot undertake until her theory of woman's role in history has been outlined. All we can do therefore is summarise de Beauvoir's position, and then assess why de Beauvoir adopts this perspective and whether or not we should follow her in this respect.

When analysing the significance of biology in The Second Sex, de Beauvoir attempts in Hegelian fashion simultaneously to affirm and deny things their importance. She tries to show that man is not a "natural species" but a "historical idea"; that while the body is the physiological basis of existence - "our grasp on the world" - it does not establish a fixed or inevitable destiny. Thus de Beauvoir hopes in the course of her study to show that while woman's body may naturally limit her activities, biology may be overcome by human endeavour - that "woman's ovaries do not condemn her to live forever on her knees" (p.735). However,

de Beauvoir's view of how biology in its natural state affects woman is couched in such strong terms that her attempt to overcome in dialectical fashion the significance of such biology falls short of what is required. We may concede that weakness may be rendered irrelevant by technology, that reproductive limitations may be minimised by contraception, that much of the significance of woman's biology depends on her attitude towards it; yet in de Beauvoir's theory an element of negativity in woman's biology still lingers on. If de Beauvoir had argued that woman's alienation in her reproductive role stemmed from the nature of patriarchal organisation, then arguments dealing with changes in social and economic structure would have allowed, in Marxian fashion, for such alienation to be removed. But instead de Beauvoir portrays alienation and other negative aspects of woman's reproductive role to be due to a conflict between individualisation and femininity. Thus it seems that while benefits could arise from different structural arrangements, alienation would still result from woman's experience of her, albeit minimal, procreative role. Therefore, the notion of femininity as an alienating and negative mode of existence will remain in de Beauvoir's theory as long as she does not allow for the necessary adjustment to what she sees as a root cause of woman's alienation and curtailment - feminine biology itself. To this extent, in de Beauvoir's theory woman's liberation means becoming more like man. It entails the assumption of that harmonious, non-alienated condition which de Beauvoir believes to be characteristic of male biology.

De Beauvoir's preference for masculine biology, and her determination to make woman man, owes more to existentialism than to any biological or anthropological theory. Her masculine preference is grounded in the existentialist veneration of individuality which is

itself a reflection of the experience of Twentieth-century, middle-class Europeans. Pregnancy and child-rearing are inherently co-operative enterprises which cannot be accomplished by solitary individuals. Because de Beauvoir prefers such solitary figures she must suppress the activity which by its nature engenders co-operation. Indeed as the co-operation and interdependence of humans is nowhere more evident than in pregnancy, de Beauvoir reserves her harshest words for it, viewing the foetus as a "parasite" living at the mother's expense.

There is a striking resemblance between de Beauvoir's comments on the foetus in The Second Sex and the view attributed to Mathieu in Sartre's novel The Age of Reason,⁽¹⁹⁴⁵⁾ for this is how Sartre describes Mathieu's feelings when he finds out his lover is pregnant:

It seemed to him shocking and grotesque, like the sight of an old man kissing an old woman on the lips: ... "She's pregnant" - there was a little, vitreous tide within her, slowly swelling into the semblance of an eye. "It's opening out among all the muck inside her belly, it's alive."¹⁵

As we learned in Chapter Three that Sartre in Being and Nothingness generally displays a revulsion for the physical world and seems specifically disgusted with aspects of biological femininity, it is probably fair to assume that such an attitude is Sartre's own. Indeed bearing in mind the material presented in the chapter on Sartre, it seems that de Beauvoir's view of woman's reproductive role echoes Sartre's comments on the "sickly" and obscene nature of femininity. In other words, de Beauvoir views woman's reproductive role and sexuality not simply as the neutral foundation of her physiological existence, but more as part of the viscous - of the menacing world of the in-itself.

In echoing Sartre's distaste for reproduction, de Beauvoir is out of step with the usual love of Nature manifest in her writings.

Indeed Claire Cayron in her book La Nature Chez Simone de Beauvoir (1973) has sought to show the way in which de Beauvoir's writing differs profoundly from Sartre's on the very question of the natural world.¹⁶

In this instance, however, it seems that de Beauvoir's personal attitudes to reproduction predispose her to the Sartrian position. In The Prime of Life de Beauvoir tells us that as a young girl she found babies abhorrent because they were "red-faced, wrinkled, milky-eyed," and that childbearing seemed to her "no more than a purposeless and unjustifiable increase in the world's population."¹⁷ Such an attitude did not disappear with adolescence it seems for Mme. Nizan, a later acquaintance of de Beauvoir, claimed: "When de Beauvoir met me pushing my baby along in its pram she was appalled. She found the whole idea of children incredible and terrible."¹⁸

In evaluating de Beauvoir's view of woman's biology a number of points must therefore be borne in mind. First there is the fact that the situation and attitudes which de Beauvoir ascribes to "woman" must be understood not simply with reference to western culture, but more particularly with reference to existentialist ethics and ontology. If we also take into consideration that at points it appears to be de Beauvoir's own attitudes to reproduction which are elevated to those allegedly common to the female sex, we begin to see the limitations of her perspective on feminine biology.

The limitation of de Beauvoir's theory in this respect is apparent in the response her theory evoked from women. In a recent interview de Beauvoir tells us that while she received many letters from women gratified that she had written such a book, many were unsympathetic to her views on maternity. While the attitude of many men who attacked de Beauvoir for her views on this subject can be seen as potentially anti-feminist, in that it has been a common ploy to

glorify woman as mother so that her role in the universe may be restricted, we can infer from the response of women, otherwise sympathetic to her views, that de Beauvoir's theory of woman's reproductive role did not ring true. Like many recent feminists, such women readers reject the devaluation of woman's reproductive role in patriarchal society; a rejection which inevitably leads to a questioning of de Beauvoir's entire theory of woman's biology and the values on which it is founded. And it is the assessment of these values which is our task in the coming chapters. This requires illustrating how de Beauvoir links the biological oppression of woman with her status as "the Other." Some of these links have already been made in our discussion of the restrictions imposed by woman's reproductive role where we encountered the notion that woman's biology impedes her development as a human being. However, we must now develop the material already presented and face de Beauvoir's explanation for woman's emergence as "the second sex."

Chapter Six

History

In analysing woman's emergence as "the second sex," de Beauvoir evaluates the contribution which has been made to the discussion by psychoanalysis and historical materialism. Ultimately she concludes that we must reject both "the sexual monism of Freud" and "the economic monism of Engels" (p.91) and undertake a more complex analysis of the origins of woman's oppression. On the face of it, de Beauvoir's own analysis seems to be based on two factors: economics and what may be termed the ontological advantage of the male sex. On closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that the economic factors are subsidiary - that de Beauvoir too is monistic. In recent years de Beauvoir has emphasised the importance of economics to her theory of woman's oppression in The Second Sex¹ but from the material in this chapter it will become evident that it is ontology which is of primary importance in her theory. In order to make clear the role which ontology and economics play in de Beauvoir's theory, in this chapter we shall leave aside factors like private property, which have apparent economic significance, and concentrate on revealing how in de Beauvoir's theory man has managed to translate his biological advantage over woman into acts which ensured him a place in the universe as the human, hence historic, sex. The assessment of the economic factors will be the subject of Chapter Eight.

Although de Beauvoir does not specifically acknowledge the Hegelian master-slave dialectic as a source of inspiration for her ideas, it will also be shown in this chapter that de Beauvoir's notion of man's ontological advantage over woman can best be understood in the context of Hegelian principles of human development. Nevertheless while such principles allow us to understand the development of de Beauvoir's

argument, the concepts which she employs do not exactly correspond to Hegel's. The difference between de Beauvoir and Hegel in this respect will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Bearing in mind our discussion of de Beauvoir's views of feminine biology, we may be tempted to assume at the outset of this investigation that the ontological advantage of man in de Beauvoir's theory is just the simple product of his exclusion from the type of alienation and limitations experienced by woman in her reproductive role. In other words, that not being female is in itself an advantage. However while such an assumption is correct, it nevertheless misrepresents the nature of the relationship between masculinity and human development in de Beauvoir's theory. It is not some static quality or characteristic of biological maleness which de Beauvoir portrays as important in her theory of the origins of woman's oppression. On the contrary, de Beauvoir argues that it is male members of the race who are better equipped to enter the competitive and challenging struggle which she sees as constituting the process of humanisation.

In essence, then, to understand de Beauvoir's notion of male advantage one must understand her concept of humanisation; that is, her view of what raises man from animal life to human existence. For example, at the most basic level of sexual differentiation, de Beauvoir believes that males have an inherent ontological advantage over females in that male sexuality is a medium through which man can assert his sovereignty. Such assertion of sovereignty in sexuality, according to de Beauvoir, can be seen in man's relations with both males and females. With reference to his relationship with a female, de Beauvoir maintains that even when she is willing she is undoubtedly "taken" (p.53)

by the male and that her sexual subservience is symbolically expressed in her "naturally" supine position in coitus.² Indeed whereas the de Beauvoirian female is passive and "alienated" in the sexual act, man is active and assertive - able to use the situation for his own transcendence. Although de Beauvoir does not believe that the sexual act itself is necessarily based on violence or struggle between the partners, she does maintain that it provides the opportunity for males to gain confirmation of their sovereignty in a quasi-Hegelian way. De Beauvoir thus attempts to explain the aggression of rutting males as a "will to combat" in that "it might be said that before procreating, the male claims as his own the act that perpetuates the species, and in doing battle with his peers confirms the truth of his individuality" (p.56).

From this passage from The Second Sex we thus learn that the advantage attached to male sexuality in de Beauvoir's theory must partly be seen in the context of confirmation of sovereignty. As we have already learned how the notion of sovereignty in de Beauvoir's theory is related to the emergence of human consciousness, what must be demonstrated here is de Beauvoir's notion of the relationship between sovereignty and violence. Indeed as we may expect, from earlier comments on de Beauvoir's use of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, the significance of violence in her theory is not confined to an analysis of the aggressive nature of male sexuality but permeates The Second Sex.³

I

De Beauvoir's reasons for emphasising the importance of violence to human behaviour are threefold.⁴ At the most simple level, violence

is considered significant because it is a means of self defence - a way of resisting the transcendence of others. Thus de Beauvoir maintains that the aggression exhibited by men towards each other is important because it shows that "against any insult, any attempt to reduce him to the status of object, the male has recourse to his fists, to exposure of himself to blows" (p.354).

The question of self-defence, however, presupposes the importance and likelihood of attack: It only makes sense in de Beauvoir's theory with reference to her conception of violence as a lucrative means of attaining objective proof of one's self-aspirations. Thus it is when we realise that de Beauvoir claims: "each conscious individual through challenge, struggle and single combat can endeavour to raise himself to sovereignty" (p.67), that we simultaneously grasp the constant significance of violence in de Beauvoir's theory to man's interaction with his fellows. In other words, violence is an important aspect of behaviour for de Beauvoir because she views it as a way in which the individual can demonstrate his sovereignty and status as a human being.

Indeed this leads us on to the third reason for de Beauvoir's emphasis on violence: she believes it has significant existential content not just because it affects man in his interpersonal relations, but also because it is a precondition for the emergence of man as human being and hence historic force. In other words, in Hegelian fashion de Beauvoir argues that it is in risking one's life that humanity is asserted over animality - that violence, in giving human life meaning and dignity, raises it to the level of Existence.

The Hegelian principle of mastery, then, may be seen to underlie de Beauvoir's notion of the origins of self-consciousness; it is

violence which, for de Beauvoir, is a basis for historical development and an individual's attempt to gain a sense of self-esteem. And, as we are about to see, it is at both the individual and historic level that violence has profound implications for de Beauvoir's theory of the nature and origins of woman's oppression.

At the level of the individual, de Beauvoir believes that the benefits of violence, in terms of the confirmation of sovereignty, may be attained by males through their sexual activity. Thus males in competition for mates, and to some extent in the sexual act itself, forcibly assert their sovereignty. According to de Beauvoir's definition of female sexuality this is not, however, also true for women. Indeed de Beauvoir claims that woman's weakness and biological role mean that in no interaction with her peers has she been able to learn "the lessons of violence" (p.357).

The notion that woman has failed to benefit from an important process of humanisation becomes of special significance when we move from the realm of individual relations and begin to examine de Beauvoir's conceptualisation of wider sexual roles. Taking into consideration both de Beauvoir's belief in the ontological significance of violence and the traditional concept of labour which, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, clearly emanates from her dichotomy of male and female into maintaining-creating roles, it is not surprising that throughout The Second Sex de Beauvoir continually emphasises the dangerous aspects of man's traditional role. Thus de Beauvoir thinks it significant that in primitive society man "hunts, goes fishing and makes war" (p.100). Indeed de Beauvoir explicitly maintains that it is in his roles of hunter, warrior, explorer and inventor that man, encountering dangers and risking his life, gives human action positive meaning.

Likewise it comes as no surprise to find that as de Beauvoir continually emphasises the limitations imposed upon woman by her reproductive role, she latterly maintains that woman has been excluded from the humanising effects of such a risk of life. In other words, de Beauvoir claims that primitive woman, unlike her male counterpart who was daily engaged in dangerous, exciting activity, was confined to the boring safety of the home. Indeed in line with her belief in the necessity of asserting humanity over animality by risking one's life, de Beauvoir maintains that "the worst curse that was laid upon woman was that she was excluded from (man's) warlike forays" (p.95).

In The Second Sex the ontological disadvantage imposed upon woman by her biology is not offset in the context of a risk of life by de Beauvoir's belief in the dangers confronting woman in the fulfilment of her reproductive role. That is to say, the danger which de Beauvoir claims woman experiences in her childbearing function does not aid her development as a human being. This risk which woman knows is not the assertion of freedom and humanity but merely the result of a natural process outwith her control. It is the fusion of the notion of woman's exclusion from "warlike forays" with that of the uncontrollable and animal nature of reproduction which thus underlies de Beauvoir's claim: "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 which brings forth life but to that which kills" (pp.95-96).

The significance of de Beauvoir's use of the principle of mastery in her historical sections is thus that she claims violent, aggressive activity and its humanising effects to have been the prerogative of the male sex. This means that de Beauvoir's woman, not having gained the benefits of a risk of life, remained at a more primitive

level of development. Indeed it is this kind of assertion which seems to lead de Beauvoir, in one of the few explicit references to the master-slave dialectic in The Second Sex, to state:

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 this same risk. Whereas woman is basically an existent who gives life and does not risk her life ... (p.96).

In other words, de Beauvoir claims that in "confronting woman, man assumes mastery" (p.97) because by risking his life he introduces values which question the importance of maintaining simple animal existence - the very activity to which woman has been confined.

However, although de Beauvoir's definition of the male-female relationship may, in her terms, correctly lead to the notion that man's consciousness becomes that of the master's while woman's consciousness does not even attain the level of the slave's, her interpretation of the Hegelian scenario is questionable. While it is certainly the case that both master and slave were locked in deadly combat the significant differentiation between them emerged only because the slave was not finally prepared to risk his life fighting for an ideal. De Beauvoir is, however, probably well aware of this point and seems to have emphasised that master and slave share an identical risk so she may claim that woman's failure to participate in the battle for recognition means that her consciousness in this period of early history remained more slavish than the slave's.

But de Beauvoir need not have resorted to such an argument in the attempt to give weight to her idea that woman's consciousness and condition at this stage of history were of an essentially abased nature,

for if we leave the subject of violence and examine the other aspect of the Hegelian dichotomy we shall see that, according to de Beauvoir, man not only used the principle of mastery to consolidate his raw biological advantage over woman, but also that of slavery - creative labour.

II

The significant existential content of creative labour in The Second Sex, like that of violence, can best be understood within the context of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. Thus de Beauvoir believes creative labour not only to be a means of affording man recognition of his sovereignty, but also a way in which he could develop and discover his individuality. It is for essentially Hegelian reasons, then, that de Beauvoir claims:

... man in the experience of hard and productive labour (was enabled) to discover himself as creator; dominating nature, he was no longer afraid of it, and in the fact of obstacles overcome he found courage to see himself as an autonomous active force, to achieve self-fulfilment as an individual (p.87).

The significance of labour in de Beauvoir's theory is not confined to the fact that it is an efficient means of objectifying one's self-consciousness and attaining recognition. It also involves the notion that in teaching man science and technique it allows him to dominate Nature and become master of his own fate. Thus de Beauvoir thinks it important that man "furnished support for the group, not in the manner of worker bees by a simple vital process, through biological behaviour, but by means of acts that transcended his animal nature" (p.95).

The important aspect of creative labour in the context of de Beauvoir's theory of the origins of woman's oppression is, however, that like violence it is seen as being the prerogative of the male sex. The assumption that man has been historically involved in this process and that woman has been excluded is not an incidental aspect of de Beauvoir's theory but is rooted in her very concept of the basis of sexual division. That is to say, in de Beauvoir's theory it is the very nature of woman's biological role which confines her to the non-creative aspect of existence. As we have already seen, de Beauvoir believes that the basic role of woman as mother and producer has been that of maintaining the species - repeating the same life in more individuals - and this is what she stresses throughout the history sections of The Second Sex. Referring to woman in primitive agricultural societies, for example, de Beauvoir writes: "In no domain whatever did she create; she maintained the life of the tribe by giving it children and bread, nothing more" (p.105).

According to de Beauvoir, then, historically women have been insignificant producers and creators whose main contribution to society has been confined to reproduction, care of children and the routine chores of cooking and cleaning within the home. Although these activities are necessary for the continuation of life, in de Beauvoir's terms they do nothing to elevate the status of human existence.

By illustrating de Beauvoir's use of the principles underlying the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, in the course of this chapter we have been able to advance the contention that for de Beauvoir man is the ontologically advantaged sex. Now, however, we must consider how, according to de Beauvoir this has affected the development of woman's subordination.

III

As de Beauvoir argues that woman has never taken part in significant human activity, she maintains that historically it was only through her procreative function that she could hope to gain any dignity or respect. This was not always possible however, for de Beauvoir argues, it depended on socio-economic organisation. In Nomadic times, for example, when the tribe lived only for the moment, infanticide was commonly practised and woman's reproductive role was little valued. Giving birth was not seen as an act of creation or value but was merely viewed as an additional burden on the tribe. Imprisoned in the maintenance of biological existence when human life had little value, women were thus deprived of finding, in de Beauvoir's terms, adequate justifications for existence. Indeed de Beauvoir maintains that the tragedy of woman's situation is that although she has been biologically destined for the reproduction of life, woman realises that Life in itself has no inherent justification. Thus as man became more brave and creative in his activity - woman enslaved as ever to her biological role - she was forced to acknowledge that it is man alone who can create reasons for human existence. And it is because de Beauvoir believes this, that at one point she maintains:

In setting himself up as sovereign he (man) is supported by the complicity of woman herself. For she, too, is an existent, she feels the urge to surpass, and her project is not mere repetition but transcendence towards a different future - in her heart of hearts she finds confirmation of the masculine pretensions (p.96).

In essence, then, de Beauvoir claims that because maternity and the other tasks to which woman was confined have no inherent justification

or value, she was prepared to acknowledge the supreme human value attained by man in his creative activities.

The notion that woman, in aspiring to male values, acknowledged the sovereignty of the male sex is what de Beauvoir calls "the key to the whole mystery" (p.96) of the origins of woman as "Other." However, woman's complete acceptance of her devaluation (as the corollary to her recognition of the sovereignty of the male sex), although important in de Beauvoir's theory, neither marks the actual beginnings of woman's oppression nor constitutes the entire reason for the subordination of women. Indeed in de Beauvoir's theory woman's recognition of man's sovereignty appears only to create the foundation for a sexual hierarchy for, paradoxically, during the period between woman's recognition and her complete subjugation, she was elevated to a position of supreme importance in the primitive group. But to understand why this was the case we must return to the historical significance of woman's maternal function.

De Beauvoir argues that the Nomadic period in which woman's reproductive role was little valued gave way to agricultural communities based on communal land ownership. Given the importance of posterity and continuity to this kind of social structure, the community thus sought identity in its children and this, coupled with ignorance of the male's part in procreation, led to maternity being revered as sacred and to a matrilineal society in which descent and communal property passed through the mother's line.

However, according to de Beauvoir, the existence of such matrilineal societies in which the Mother Goddess is revered as sacred indicates neither the prior existence of matriarchal societies nor a period of sexual reciprocity. Indeed de Beauvoir argues that although

woman's status improved in such societies, the existence of Mother Goddess was based simply on the importance and the mysteries of maternity. In short, feminine deities do not reflect a situation in which women have real social or economic power. Following a Feuerbach-like theory, de Beauvoir thus maintains that the worshipping of the Mother Goddess exhibits little other than the workings of the male mind. Indeed de Beauvoir claims that in primitive societies woman's reproductive role is so closely associated with the existence of a hostile and dreadful Nature that man, "terrified by the dangerous magic of woman ... sets her up as the essential, it is he who poses her as such and thus he really acts as the essential in this voluntary alienation" (p.104).

In arguing that the period of woman's elevation as Mother Goddess was closely associated with man's subservience to and fear of Nature, de Beauvoir also argues that it was irrevocably tied to "the reign of agriculture, the reign of irreducible duration, of contingency, of chance, of waiting, of mystery" (p.107), and thus, in her terms, to a primitive level of development. In fact de Beauvoir not only argues that the reign of Mother Goddess was a negative period in history, but also that She had to be dethroned before mankind as a whole could progress. "The devaluation of woman represents a necessary stage in the history of humanity" writes de Beauvoir, "for it is not upon her positive value but upon man's weakness that her prestige is founded" (pp.106-7).

As the question of woman's elevation in primitive society is linked to man's fear of Nature, it is not surprising that in discussing how the reign of woman is replaced by patriarchy, de Beauvoir concentrates on those factors which allow him to conquer such fear. And it is in raising the subject of the development of man's consciousness that we begin to examine the vital stage in the process which de Beauvoir argues led to woman's complete subordination to man.

As de Beauvoir emphasises throughout The Second Sex the importance of creative labour to the development of man's consciousness of himself as a sovereign individual, she maintains that it was the introduction of the bronze tool which had profound implications for the relationship between the sexes. In essence she claims that as husbandman man was subject to the vicissitudes of Nature, but that as workman, wielder of the tool, he became master of his own fate. Thus in the context of science and technique, and in the ensuing conquest of Nature, man was able to rid himself of the fear which originally led him to worship both Nature and woman.

With woman dethroned, humanity entered the reign of Homo faber which, for de Beauvoir, means "the reign of time manageable as space, of necessary consequence, of the project, of action, of reason" (p.107). In de Beauvoir's Manichean conception of the world, the fall of Mother Goddess and the subsequent "triumph" of the "male principle" marked simultaneously the prevalence of "Spirit over Life, immanence over transcendence, technique over magic and reason over superstition" (p.107). Indeed de Beauvoir considers such a take-over so important to the subsequent development of human progress that she maintains: "The people who have remained under the thumb of the Goddess mother, those who have retained the matrilineal regime, are also those who are arrested at a primitive stage of civilisation" (p.108).

However, although the use of the bronze tool may explain in de Beauvoir's theory the demise of the Mother Goddess and the triumph of the male principle, she claims it still leaves unsolved the problem of woman's oppression. That is to say, the triumph of patriarchy need not have led to woman's subordination to man, but could have led to "friendly association" (p.88) between the sexes. In de Beauvoir's theory,

then, there are some other factors involved in the development of woman's oppression. And it is these which we shall now consider.

According to de Beauvoir, the use of the bronze tool was not merely important to the origins of woman's subordinate status because it allowed man to dethrone woman, but was also significant because woman's weakness prevented her from being man's accomplice in the use of the tool and in the subsequent exploitation of Nature. As the interpretation which de Beauvoir places on this fundamental sexual division of labour involves ontology, it sets her in opposition to a historical materialist approach.⁵ Thus whereas Engels would argue that woman's failure to participate in creative and productive labour meant she was disadvantaged as a result of changes in "the equilibrium of the forces of production" (p.107) de Beauvoir claims that woman was disadvantaged because her consciousness remained essentially the same. In other words, for de Beauvoir the unfortunate implications of the bronze tool were that woman in "not becoming a fellow workman with the labourer ... was also excluded from the human Mitsein" (p.109). Indeed not only did woman fail to benefit from the use of the tool, but also, because she "did not share (man's) way of working and thinking" - remaining in "bondage to life's mysterious processes" (p.109) - man was unable to recognise her as a fellow human being. Woman's previous disadvantage was therefore consolidated - no longer afraid of her mysterious powers and yet still having the qualities of "the Other," man according to de Beauvoir "could not be otherwise than her oppressor" (p.110).

The inevitability of man's oppression of woman is further compounded in de Beauvoir's theory by her continual insistence on what she calls "the imperialism of the human consciousness" (p.89). That is to say, de Beauvoir argues that man would always have wanted to

dominate woman and so concentrates attention on what objective situation would have facilitated the realisation of his desires. It is for this reason, then, that de Beauvoir states: "If the human consciousness had not included the original category of the Other and the original aspiration to dominate the Other, the invention of the bronze tool could not have caused the oppression of women" (p.89).

The discovery of bronze is, however, linked to yet another ontological explanation in de Beauvoir's theory of the origins of woman's oppression. And that is the idea that the use of the tool stimulated man's desire for private property and, in the economic imbalance which ensued, allowed some individuals to impose their will on their fellows; to realise the omnipresent desire for domination which, according to de Beauvoir, is usually kept in check by a natural equality between individuals and groups. ⁶ Indeed de Beauvoir seems to maintain that with the development of private property man was not only more likely to succeed in his attempt "to fulfil himself by reducing the other to slavery" (p.171), but also as the economic system developed, his incentive to enslave increased. Thus de Beauvoir claims that man in his attempt to exhaust the possibilities afforded by the new techniques resorted to slavery - used other people in his "project for enrichment and expansion" (p.88).

For de Beauvoir the significance of slavery to the oppression of women lies in the fact that at this stage in man's development "the master found a much more radical confirmation of his sovereignty" in his relation to the slave "than in the limited authority he had over woman" (p.110). In other words, de Beauvoir maintains that at this point in history, man's lingering fear of woman and her procreative powers not only led him to seek the recognition he desired in the enslavement of his fellow man, but to some extent also meant a reciprocal relationship between the sexes:

... being other than man and having the disturbing character of the other, woman in a way held man in dependence upon her, while being at the same time dependent on him; the reciprocity of the master-slave relation was what she actually enjoyed and through that fact she escaped slavery (p.110).

In other words, de Beauvoir, apparently maintaining nothing more than the interdependence of both moments of the dialectic, claims that there was at one stage some kind of reciprocal relationship between man and woman. But in so doing, she contradicts a more important tenet of her thesis - that reciprocity between the sexes has never existed.

Such reciprocity as existed between the sexes was nevertheless, according to de Beauvoir, shortlived for the changes wrought in man's consciousness by his mastery led to woman's gradual decline. That is to say, in gaining confirmation of his sovereignty man was able to cast off his dependence on woman. Thus "everything he gained he gained against her, the more powerful he became, the more she declined" (p.110).

However, as we know the master-slave relationship is of a transitory nature as the slave, coming to sense himself as the essential, will eventually fight for recognition. Thus, although de Beauvoir has previously argued that man finds "a much more radical confirmation of his sovereignty" in the relationship with a slave than in his relationship with a woman, she now claims, presumably as a result of conflict, that it is through her that man hopes to escape "the implacable dialectic of master and slave":

... 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... (p.172).

These then are the major aspects of the process which de Beauvoir claims underlies the development of woman's subordinate role. For de Beauvoir successive historical development as regards the position of the sexes has been merely the consolidation of these early gains. Ideology and all forms of organisation have been put in harmony with the reality of male dominance and, according to de Beauvoir, provide a mechanism for its perpetuation. Political, economic and legal debilities are thus, for de Beauvoir, symptoms and not causes of woman's inferior status.

A main conclusion to the sections on history in The Second Sex is that "the whole of feminine history has been man-made" (p.159); that it is man who has shaped woman's destiny. Indeed de Beauvoir is so sure that women have never been significant historical actors that she maintains that even previous outbursts of feminism have not been due to genuine demands for autonomy but have only been actions in accordance with "masculine perspectives" (p.160). Thus de Beauvoir claims that even those reforms which have benefited woman - contraception for example - have not been the result of woman's independent actions but have simply been the product of changes in masculine ideology.

Throughout this chapter, then, we have seen how de Beauvoir argues that man became superior to woman because he was able to assert his humanity through violent and creative acts. Now, however, we must begin to assess de Beauvoir's portrayal of the role each sex has played in history.

Chapter Seven

Critique of De Beauvoir's Historical Account

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate de Beauvoir's historical account. This evaluation will be undertaken from three different perspectives. First we shall compare de Beauvoir's and Hegel's use of violence in human progress; second we shall ask if de Beauvoir can justifiably maintain that women were historically excluded from creative labour; and lastly, we shall reveal the assumptions and values underlying de Beauvoir's account of the origins of woman's oppression. In order to explicate further de Beauvoir's idea that man's advantage over woman was partly due to his ability to compete, an alternative theory of human development will be outlined.

I

At the beginning of Chapter Six it was argued that de Beauvoir's reasons for viewing man as the ontologically superior sex can best be understood within the context of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. But it was also suggested that de Beauvoir's use of such ideas does not exactly correspond with Hegel's. Later in this study Hegel's notion of the link between the master's self-assertion and human development will be questioned. However, accepting at this stage, as de Beauvoir does, that such a link can be made, it is possible to criticise de Beauvoir because she does not adequately define the context in which

violence has ontological significance. In short, she does not illustrate properly why violence would make man more "human" than his feminine counterpart.

The most important difference between Hegel's and de Beauvoir's emphasis on violent activity is that whereas Hegel defines precisely the situation in which aggressive activity has significant human potential, Simone de Beauvoir does not. For Hegel the Fight takes place between two self-consciousnesses at a certain stage of their development and, to have meaning, must engender a master and a slave. It is a life and death struggle for recognition on which the fighter's entire human status depends. For de Beauvoir, however, the significance of violence is not limited in any way and she tends to elevate all events involving physical aggression. As we have seen, de Beauvoir eulogises the rutting male and extols activities such as hunting, but there are other instances in The Second Sex where de Beauvoir indiscriminately portrays violence as a human act. For instance, de Beauvoir continually emphasises how fortunate boys are in being able to fight with their companions and approvingly claims: "... many kinds of masculine behaviour spring from a root of possible violence" (p.354).

From the last chapter we know that de Beauvoir asserts: "Each conscious individual through challenge, struggle and single combat can endeavour to raise himself to sovereignty." However de Beauvoir does not defend her position when she states it, for she gives no comprehensive explanation for this assertion. Thus, leaving aside the notion of a risk of life, in the last chapter we had to piece together from occasional statements why de Beauvoir considers violence to be important. Subsequently it was argued that for de Beauvoir violence

is existentially important because it is a means of self-defence and a way of gaining objective proof of one's sovereignty. However, de Beauvoir's notion of how objective proof of sovereignty is achieved differs radically from Hegel's:

Violence is the authentic proof of each one's loyalty to himself, to his passions, to his own will; radically to deny this will is to deny oneself any objective truth, it is to wall oneself up in an abstract subjectivity; anger or revolt that does not get into the muscles remains a figment of the imagination (p.354).

This position contrasts with Hegel's, for whom the proof of sovereignty was the recognition granted by the slave to the master. According to de Beauvoir the individual's sovereignty is confirmed in violence simply because he is prepared to act to prove his subjectivity. Thus de Beauvoir claims: "On every street corner squabbles threaten; usually they flicker out; but for a man to feel in his fists his will to self-affirmation is enough to reassure him of his sovereignty" (p.354, emphasis added). The irrelevance of another individual's response is also illustrated by de Beauvoir's comments on the relationship between girls and their dolls, for de Beauvoir writes: "... (the girl) exercises upon it (her doll) her sovereign authority, sometimes even tears off its arms, beats it, tortures it. Which is to say, she experiences subjective affirmation and identification through the doll" (p.310). The act of kicking a wall thus seems to have as much significance in de Beauvoir's theory as confronting an opponent in a bloody fight. By playing down the exaction of recognition - recognition necessary in Hegelian terms to obtain objective proof - de Beauvoir is able to underline the importance of violence without simultaneously positing the inevitability of inequality. Inequality leads to dominance and as

such is at odds with de Beauvoir's emphasis on freedom and the importance of reciprocity.

For Hegel the fight between Self and Other is significant for two reasons: on the one hand it shows that man is prepared to risk his life for an idea; on the other, through recognition, it allows man to gain objective proof of his sovereignty. So far we have shown that de Beauvoir does not elevate man to master using the idea of recognition, but now we should see if she uses the idea of a risk of life as an explanation for male supremacy in a way which is closer to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. Since de Beauvoir does not portray the aggression between individuals as a matter of life or death, essentially this means inquiring about the significance man's hunting role would be given in Hegelian philosophy.

In the foregoing chapter it was shown that de Beauvoir emphasises the significance of hunting to man's emergence as a human being. Superficially in Hegelian terms, hunting could benefit the hunter in that such an activity involves a risk of life and may confirm sovereignty. The second of these reasons, however, can be immediately dismissed. After all, if confirmation of sovereignty cannot be gained in the Hegelian master-slave dialectic by the death of one's opponent, it certainly cannot be attained in hunting by the death of a mere animal. Therefore, for de Beauvoir to make hunting significant, in Hegelian terms its humanising significance must be based on the idea that it entails a risk of life. However, as the significance of the risk of life in Hegelian philosophy is that it shows man risking his life for an idea, it is impossible to see how hunting - part of a simple project to survive - can be interpreted in such a way. Indeed, given the

existence of natural predators, it could be argued that hunting, far from being an activity which demonstrates man's status as human being, underlies his specifically animal nature. Thus when de Beauvoir states that it is in hunting and fishing that man "proved dramatically that life is not the supreme value for man, but on the contrary it should be made to serve ends more important than life itself" (p.95), she cannot expect the backing of Hegel.

So far, then, we have seen that de Beauvoir's notion of violence is different from its Hegelian equivalent in a few fundamental respects. But the important point to be grasped is that de Beauvoir fails to define precisely why she considers violence to be a human act. Thus she elevates acts ranging from hunting to street corner brawls simply because they are based on physical aggression. In many cases de Beauvoir's notion of combat between two individuals corresponds to what Hegel expressly dismisses as "duelling." Indeed Hegel, anxious that some might misinterpret the Fight, specifically states: "Duelling must definitely not be confused with the fight for recognition which constitutes a necessary moment in the development of a human spirit." In short, Hegel does not want to give significance to violent acts which, "like the barbarism of the Middle Ages," merely demonstrate "the shamefulness of a desire, which, in spite of its vileness, was ambitious for outward honour." This is because such acts do not involve a life and death struggle for recognition on which the fighter's human status depends.

From a comparison between de Beauvoir and Hegel we thus see that a major aspect of her theory is simply stated and not justified. We never fully know why de Beauvoir believes violent, life-risking acts make man superior to woman, and accordingly de Beauvoir's whole theory of the origins of woman's oppression is in doubt.

Before evaluating de Beauvoir's use of creative labour in her historical account we should note an intriguing feature of de Beauvoir's use of violence. Although violence is an important aspect of the process leading to woman's subordination, de Beauvoir never argues that the relationship between the sexes has involved physical aggression. Thus the confirmation of sovereignty man acquires from violence is gained from male opponents, from hunting and from woman's recognition of his achievements. But his advantage over woman was not obtained because he beat her in combat. This is what underlies de Beauvoir's assertion that "the couple is an original Mitsein" in as much as this is premised on the idea that unlike the relations between men, the sexes do not have an urge to dominate one another, to become engaged in combat.

In arguing that violence between males and females has been insignificant in the origins of woman's oppression, de Beauvoir differs from many feminist theorists. Man's ability to dominate women physically is often advanced as the main reason for woman's oppression and the mechanism which perpetuates such subordination. For example, Susan Brownmiller in Against Our Will argues that rape was man's first act of dominance over woman and the way in which such dominance is maintained:

... rape became not only a male prerogative, but man's basic weapon of force against women, the principal agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate ³ test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood.

Brownmiller subsequently adds: "(rape) ... is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear."⁴ It is interesting to compare Brownmiller's view with de Beauvoir's. The former apparently believes that such sexual violence

confirmed man's sovereignty while de Beauvoir argues that in the early dawn of civilisation, the significant violence in the sexual act was between "rutting males" and not between the sexual partners.

In place of the idea that man came to oppress woman because he is physically stronger, de Beauvoir argues that "the key to the whole mystery" of the origins of woman as "the Other" is that she voluntarily recognised man and accepted her own devaluation. However, having done so, it was the bronze tool which permitted this devaluation to be transformed into subordination. In other words, in de Beauvoir's theory man's exclusive participation in creative labour led to woman's oppression. It is de Beauvoir's idea that woman was excluded from the use of the bronze tool which will now be assessed. It is useful to bear in mind that the criticism which will be advanced against de Beauvoir's use of creative labour is quite different from that against her use of violence. We did not dispute her idea that the sexes were differentially involved in violent pursuits but in the following section we shall question whether de Beauvoir can justifiably maintain that women have historically been excluded from creative labour.

II

Unfortunately de Beauvoir is not as consistent on the subject of woman's labour as our examination in the previous chapter may have suggested. The general conclusion of de Beauvoir's survey of women's work in primitive societies is that "in/^{no}domain whatever did she create: she maintained the life of the tribe by giving it children and bread, nothing more" (p.105). But only a few pages earlier de Beauvoir makes

a contradictory claim. Referring to the role of woman in early agricultural societies she maintains that even though woman's maternal function more or less restricted her to a sedentary existence, she was nevertheless able to take an active part in agricultural production. Moreover, de Beauvoir even claims that women were not only the main cultivators but also that they were at the heart of domestic industry:

They wove mattings and blankets and made pottery. Frequently they took charge of barter; commerce was in their hands. Through them, therefore, the life of the clan was maintained and extended; children, flocks, crops, utensils, all the prosperity of the group, depended on their labour and their magic powers; they were the soul of the community (p.102).

This is not the only statement on the subject of woman's work which opposes her general line of argument. For example, her claim that women in post-feudal society "played an economic and social part of real importance" (p.133) cannot be squared with her general historical conclusion that women have never "brought their influence to bear upon technique or economy" (p.162).

The major criticism of de Beauvoir's account of the history of woman's labour is not, however, that she contradicts herself but that the general line of argument is weak. That is to say, de Beauvoir's minority references to the work undertaken by women - references which emphasise the important and productive nature of such work - may be borne out empirically while her main argument may not. Indeed while anthropologists disagree about the universality of patriarchy, there is nevertheless common agreement that in primitive societies women's labour is economically necessary and awards them some social esteem. ⁵

The economic and social importance of women's activities is but an extension of de Beauvoir's notion of a rigid sexual division of

labour. That is to say, if we accept her assumption that man's traditional role is one where he goes hunting and fishing and makes war, then we must simultaneously assume that his absence from home means that women are the ones mainly responsible for all other forms of social and economic organisation. This indeed is the kind of argument employed by anthropologists such as Evelyn Reed, but instead of it leading in Reed's account to a denigration of woman's activities, it means an emphasis on the productive and creative labour traditionally undertaken by women.

Reed, for example, in her book Woman's Evolution: From Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family, maintains that in primitive agricultural societies it was the women as vegetable gardeners, armed with their "digging sticks" who were the main providers of the staple diet of the group: a diet which was very occasionally supplemented by the meat gained by men in their hunting expeditions.⁶ Moreover, Reed maintains that in collecting, preparing and later cultivating vegetables, certain collateral equipment and techniques were required and that it was in the use of fire, the baking of bread, the conservation of food, and activities like the making of vessels - all activities of women - that we must locate the basis of human production and the origin of science and technique. Reed also argues that other articles made by women in their domestic and agricultural functions - textiles, cordage, leather-goods, pottery and so on - combined with the tradition of women as both house-builders and "medicine men," gave them significance and status in the primitive social group.

However, although most anthropologists, even those in the dominant patriarchal school, acknowledge the extent of women's labour

in primitive societies, this acknowledgement may go hand in hand with the notion of the dominant male and subservient female. Often the tendency to minimise the status of woman's labour, despite its magnitude, stems from its domestic character. Again as Evelyn Reed points out,

The impressive labour record of women is obscured by the usual description of it as "household" work. This gives the impression that primitive women, like housewives today, were preoccupied with the small chores of individual homes, isolated from one another and having no part in social production.⁷

There is, however, another major reason why some anthropologists simultaneously accept the importance and volume of such women's labour but maintain it has little social standing. And this is to be found in the prevalent tendency to glorify man's hunting role; to concentrate on the flamboyant activities and ceremonies often associated with hunting and to see the work of women, despite its importance, as drudgery.⁸ Indeed it is sometimes argued that even though women in such societies are the main producers, this is not through choice but because men appropriate the dangerous, exciting activities leaving the hard, uninteresting work to the women. This interpretation is based on the notion of female inferiority, and as this notion is itself based on the idea of woman's economic dependency on man, it does not square with the evidence that suggests women were once the most productive sex. Much more interesting arguments can, however, be made regarding de Beauvoir's tendency to denigrate woman's labour.

It is difficult to believe that de Beauvoir is simply ignorant of the nature of women's lives in primitive societies and of the weight of evidence accumulated against her description and conclusion. Indeed, when we take into consideration the passages in which she contradicts

her own conclusion and the fact that she summarises Engels' theory - a theory in which woman's economic role is emphasised - then it does seem that, despite the labour record of women, de Beauvoir decided that such labour was neither economically significant nor of real human value. While some anthropologists may come to similar conclusions, there seems to be little justification in de Beauvoir's own philosophical terms for adopting such an approach.

For example, anthropologists may emphasise the importance of hunting in a primitive society because this is the activity which the inhabitants say has real value and dignity. However, de Beauvoir rarely accepts things as they appear but, on the contrary, she tries to analyse them according to their essential and inessential elements. Thus de Beauvoir later claims that even when the male in modern society seems to be dominated by the female, it is she who is really the inessential and the slave in this relationship. De Beauvoir is not likely to accept that hunting makes man more significant just because this is what hunting society believes. Following Hegel, she may attempt to demonstrate that the apparently dominant mode of existence is presently supported by its inferiors and is also about to be surpassed.

Moreover, even if we accept the idea that man historically forced woman to do the work he himself did not want, this should not, in de Beauvoir's terms, automatically lead to a denigration of woman's role. It would mean that woman occupied the position of Hegel's slave - forced to take part in labour. Such a perception would be confirmed by the fact that the kind of labour reputed to be traditionally undertaken by women satisfies the requirements of Hegelian creative labour in that it yields products which externalise the consciousness of their creator

and teach the important lessons of science and technique. In this light we can see the sense of Evelyn Reed's belief that, given man's preoccupation with hunting and related occupations, through their "manifold labour activities, the minds of women developed at a more rapid pace than those of the men."⁹

It is possible that de Beauvoir, anxious to forestall such a conclusion, deliberately equates creative labour in her theory with the use of the bronze tool. She thus rules out the possibility that activities like pottery, weaving, leathermaking are creative acts which humanise the labourer and, when listing these as the activities of women, associates them with woman's "magic powers" and not with science and technique. Indeed it is almost possible to believe that de Beauvoir latches on to the bronze tool as the beginnings of creative labour proper, and hence, the dawn of civilisation, only so that she can disassociate women from the process. That is, de Beauvoir chooses a labour activity from which she believes woman's weakness would naturally exclude her. However, even if we accept de Beauvoir's idea that it is the bronze tool which marks the era of creative labour and hence a new stage in human development, there is little reason for us to accept her claim that women would automatically have been excluded. The primitive woman of many anthropological texts certainly does not look too weak to use the bronze tool. In more recent times women have worked in coal mines and taken part in arduous agricultural labour.¹⁰

However, de Beauvoir does not seem too eager to establish her theory as verifiable. Although she states that her aim is to review relevant "data of prehistoric research and ethnography in the light of existentialist philosophy" (p.93) within five pages of such a review

she has come to definitive conclusions. Thus on the basis of scant evidence and little argument de Beauvoir maintains: "An existentialist perspective has enabled us, then, to understand how the biological and economic condition of the primitive horde must have led to male supremacy" (p.97). But it is the perspective rather than the data which lead to de Beauvoir's conclusion. Indeed there are a number of theoretical reasons why an existentialist should construct a theory of this kind - a theory in which it is man, not woman, who is seen as a more human being. And it is these which we shall now examine.

III

While looking at Being and Nothingness we saw that for Sartre man is a solitary being, in the sense of being imprisoned in his own subjectivity; he lives in a world in which all others are potential enemies to his desires. It is conflict, not Mitsein, which Sartre believes is the original meaning of being-for-others. Although Sartre later modified this aspect of his theory, he nevertheless retained the view that the Other is usually seen as an enemy and that it is the individual who must be taken as the starting point for any ontological inquiry. In short, Sartre's existentialism is individualistic and, by emphasising conflict, inevitably characterises human relations as based on a competitive struggle.

Although Sartre in Being and Nothingness did not attempt a metaphysical interpretation of being, in The Second Sex de Beauvoir is faced with the prospect of outlining how the for-itself acquires the consciousness and mode of existence which differentiates it from the

in-itself. Essentially it is this which she attempts to explain in her historical account. Using Sartre's ontology the process of humanisation for de Beauvoir is the process through which man becomes a complete and competitive individual. To this extent, de Beauvoir is able to latch on to Hegel's principles of human development for he too conceives of the origins of self-consciousness in terms of competition and individualisation. If we now relate this notion of humanisation to male and female roles we shall see why de Beauvoir, without any recourse to historical "facts," was led to denigrate woman and elevate man.

At one point in The Second Sex de Beauvoir maintains: "It is not as single individuals that human beings are to be defined in the first place; ... the couple is an original Mitsein and as such it always appears as a permanent or temporary element in a large collectivity" (pp.67-8). However, despite this statement de Beauvoir does discuss human development and the origins of woman's oppression in individual terms. Instead of outlining the significance of male and female biological roles in the context of a group, de Beauvoir discusses their significance only with reference to one man and one woman. For example, de Beauvoir uses the nuclear family as the model relationship between the sexes when she writes: "... it requires a male for every female to ensure the survival of the offspring after they are born, to defend them against enemies, to wrest from them the wherewithal to satisfy their needs" (p.68). Even though social organisation helps women to reduce, if not eliminate, the restrictions of reproduction and the dependency of young, de Beauvoir's individualistic starting-point makes such measures irrelevant. Not surprisingly we find no

place in her theory for discussion of such practices as communal childcare and lactation prevalent in primitive societies which allowed women as a group to defend and feed themselves and their offspring.¹¹ Thus because de Beauvoir, as an existentialist, does define human beings as individuals, and because individual man is not limited by the process of reproduction, his position is much preferred to individual woman's.

According to this existentialist perspective, woman's further disadvantage is that as an individual she must compete with other individuals and in this struggle feel herself to be a human being. Any restriction on her independent, self-affirming action - any barrier to competition - blocks her human development. Accordingly woman's maternal role keeps her at a more primitive level of existence in as much as it leads to dependence on others and co-operation. In this way she is more bound to animal life. This is not to say that de Beauvoir equates co-operation with animality, merely that she believes the distinction between humans and animals to involve individualisation and conceptualises individualisation in terms of conflict and struggle.

The notion that competition is the basis of human development is abstract and theoretical. De Beauvoir takes it as a starting-point because it is in harmony with her wider philosophy. Using a different set of definitions of "human" behaviour one could equally well begin from the assumption that it is co-operation which underlies human action, and in so doing come to a completely different conclusion on the nature of woman's role in human development. In Woman's Evolution the evolutionary anthropologist Evelyn Reed has indeed used this point of departure and not surprisingly her work contrasts sharply with de Beauvoir's.

By briefly comparing de Beauvoir's theory with Reed's it may be possible to explicate more clearly the values and assumptions on which each is based. Reed's theory is well suited for such a comparison because her emphasis on co-operation and the human nature of woman's reproductive role places her in opposition to de Beauvoir whose emphasis on aggression and individuality leads her to favour the male.¹²

IV

Like de Beauvoir, Reed emphasises the importance of the activities of the rutting male in animal life. However, Reed urges us to see that such rutting, far from illustrating the superiority of the male, demonstrates that masculine biology acts as a check on his potential for involvement in humanising pursuits. Reed maintains that the rutting male exhibits the violent nature of male sexuality which inhibits his ability to co-operate with his fellows. And as Reed argues that it is co-operation, not competition, which is the basis for human development, she claims that male sexuality confines males to an animal type of life.

Such aggression and individualisation is not, according to Reed, to be found in females who, because of their reproductive function and the dependency of off-spring are required to co-operate with young and at times with one another for the purposes of survival. Thus in comparison with the "combatitive sex" - a term which here has negative connotations - the co-operative features of femininity become in Reed's terminology "the starting point for the modification of animal traits and the development of new habits required for socialising the species."¹³

Drawing on a wide range of material Reed attempts to show that although in the animal kingdom males fight one another, they do not dominate the females; no sexual restrictions are placed on females and they copulate as and when they desire. Moreover, Reed argues that female dependency on males, a basic premise of de Beauvoir's work and those theorists positing the universality of the father-headed family, is not to be found in mammalian species. Indeed Reed maintains that females' contact with males is usually limited to copulation, for after the event the female separates herself from the males and maintains this segregation throughout pregnancy and the period of lactation. In monkey, ape and other animal species the father does not provide for mother or young and the female is totally independent of him. Reed argues, in fact, that the compulsive separation of females from males during and after the period of pregnancy is due to the aggressive characteristics of the male who will often injure and/or eat both mate and off-spring if in contact with them.

Thus, Reed maintains, within animal groups females and young are often preserved from the violent males by dint of their exclusion from them. Where contact does take place, it is not on the basis of equal numbers of adult males and females, for the latter far outnumber males in animal groups. In opposition to those who claim that the superior strength of the male is a sign of his dominance and worth, Reed maintains that male physical strength is rendered worthless in a natural environment because females "with a capacity for co-operation and collective action had a strength superior to that of any single individual."¹⁴

According to Reed's interpretation of animal behaviour, it is female animals who tend to band together in groups in co-operative

association while the males, as outsiders, fight for access to them during the mating season. The successful male may thus be allowed access to the female group to act as "stud" for them, while the weaker males are forced into a solitary existence. Without the protection of the group and often in violent competition to become the dominant male, their chances of survival are limited. The contrast between the picture of the male animal, epitomised in the description of the rutting male affirming his sovereignty through violence, offered us by de Beauvoir, and the unflattering portrait which emerges from Reed's work, could hardly be more stark:

At best he is a tolerated member of a female group; at worst he is an outcast relegated to a solitary life. Far from being the superior and ruling sex, as men are in our society, animal males are the secondary sex, the incidental sex, and, where males are too numerous, the expendable sex.¹⁵

Not only does Reed argue that women were the more co-operative and hence, in her terms, human sex, but also that they were able to evolve a social structure. In being ahead in this way, it was ultimately women who brought about the necessary socialisation of men. According to Reed this socialisation was accomplished once women had instituted the controls of totemism and taboo. Thus before males were admitted to the community of women and children, certain rules had to be observed. The aim of these rules was to preserve the unity of the group by forcing men to "hunt out" for both sex and food. In order to make the male members of the group "brothers" in close co-operation with one another - a prerequisite for the development of human economic and social life - they had to be prevented from fighting for sexual access to the women in the group. This meant that within the kin group sexual

relations between males and females were forbidden. This is not, Reed maintains, a taboo against incest as it covers relations between males and females not biologically related. Indeed throughout the book Reed argues that the incest taboo found in all societies, generally explained as the result of the knowledge of the "weakening" effects of in-breeding, is usually not an incest taboo at all but a rule promulgated to preserve the solidarity of the male members of the group.

According to Reed, it was the women who, having laid the foundations for human action, were originally most active in the development of social and economic life. As we know, Reed claims that it is in woman's activities of cooking, cultivating, making vessels and so on, that tools and techniques were first required. Concluding her survey of the productive record of primitive women Reed thus maintains:

They were, so to speak, the first farmers and industrialists; the first scientists, doctors, nurses, architects, and engineers; the first teachers, artists, linguists, and historians. The households they managed were not merely kitchens and nurseries; they were the first factories, laboratories, and social centers.¹⁶

In support of her claim that co-operation, not competition, is the basis of human development, Reed illustrates the co-operation which underlies the social and economic structures of civilised societies and shows that there is an important distinction to be made between the highly individualistic competition institutionalised in our society and that competition and individualisation instinctively based in "Nature's Jungle." She urges us to see that "long before men could become enmeshed in their own social competition, they first had to win total liberation from the competitive struggles characteristic of animals and become social."¹⁷

It is interesting to note how de Beauvoir's and Reed's different assumptions lead to radically different theories of the significance of woman's reproductive role. Though they agree that maternity is somewhat limiting to woman's activities and that there is something inherently aggressive in animal males' sexuality, these theorists endow woman's biological role with different historical meanings. Thus Reed sees woman's maternal function as the bridge between animal and human behaviour in as much as it leads to the co-operation of mother and child and engenders socially based co-operation between females. Reed also maintains that male aggression and rivalry, romanticised by de Beauvoir and such defenders of male supremacy as Desmond Morris and Robert Ardrey, are barriers and not means to humanisation.¹⁸ De Beauvoir, on the other hand, sees woman's biological role as a handicap in the process of humanisation in as much as it restricts her ability to compete.

Chapter Eight

Materialism

In the last two chapters it has been argued that even though de Beauvoir does not rigorously or accurately apply Hegelian concepts, her theory of the origins of woman's oppression can, nevertheless, be best understood in the light of the master-slave dialectic. In order to bring out this Hegelianism, however, it has been necessary to underplay the other ideas bound up in de Beauvoir's theory. This emphasis on de Beauvoir's Hegelianism is at odds with her own assertion that woman's oppression is based on economic necessity; with the claim: "Woman was dethroned by the advent of private property, and her lot through the centuries has been bound up with private property" (p.43). How are we to come to terms with this apparent contradiction between de Beauvoir's Hegelianism and such "historical materialism"?

It is tempting to assume that de Beauvoir simply tries to combine the two elements. This is the position of Juliet Mitchell who, in her book Woman's Estate maintains: "Concurrent ... with the idealist psychological explanation, de Beauvoir uses an orthodox economist approach."¹ But the temptation to take this road must be avoided, for the fusion of the two bases is not a meeting of equals: in relation to ontological "facts," economic factors are not given equal weight. It is only when de Beauvoir has outlined what she, as an existentialist, believes is the structure of human existence, that secondary factors, such as economics, are introduced into her account.

This is why we elaborated de Beauvoir's theory of the origins of woman's oppression without recourse to her notion of the role of economic factors. With the knowledge gained from the preceding analysis of de Beauvoir's theory we are now in a good position to examine the context in which she thinks economic factors like private property important. We begin this assessment of de Beauvoir's "historical materialism" by summarising Engels' theory of woman's oppression and de Beauvoir's criticisms of it.

I

Engels' Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, as its title suggests, is not exclusively about women.² His theory of the origins of woman's oppression is undertaken with reference to the development of the state and class society. And it is this grounding in the development of economic and political factors which makes Engels' theory of women's oppression "historical materialist." A basic premise of Engels' work is that woman's oppression is not natural but is the result of an historical event. Engels argues that early societies were matriarchal; that the transition to patriarchal society was induced by economic factors such as the development of private property. To understand this transition it is necessary to understand Engels' conception of the sexual division of labour in primitive societies.

Engels maintains that in primitive societies man was responsible for hunting and fishing and that woman was engaged in gardening and household tasks. Each sex was supreme in its own sphere and owned the instruments and tools for its labour. As the economy developed

and there was an increase in the areas of production, notably livestock, undertaken by man: "to him belonged the cattle"³ and all the ensuing wealth. At this stage women may have shared the enjoyment of such surplus, claims Engels, but did not own or control it. Engels argues that as man was now responsible for the most important aspects of production he was elevated to the status previously held by woman.

Engels also argues that man's wealth did not simply raise him above woman but also "created a stimulus to utilize this strengthened position in order to overthrow the traditional order of inheritance in favour of his children"⁴ Thus man abolished "mother-right"⁵ (descent and inheritance reckoned through the mother) and introduced monogamy so that he could bequeath his property to children of "undisputed paternity"⁶ It is this transition in society which Engels refers to as: "... the world historic defeat of the female sex."⁷ Man subsequently took charge of household affairs and, with woman reduced to servitude, she soon "became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children"⁸ In Engels' theory the oppression of women is something which arose from the development of productive forces. As the oppression of woman coincided with the transition from communal to private property, it also coincided with the appearance of social classes.

From this summary it is possible to see a number of factors common to de Beauvoir and Engels. There is, for example, in both their theories an emphasis on woman being naturally weaker than man but a simultaneous rejection of the idea that this is enough to explain the origins of woman's oppression. Both theorists claim that we must look outside of Nature to explain why woman came to be oppressed. For

Engels this explanation is found in the significance the sexual division of labour came to have as productive forces developed and the institution of private property emerged. For de Beauvoir it is the bronze tool and the emergence of man as a sovereign individual which, among other factors, are important. In short, de Beauvoir emphasises ontology and Engels emphasises economics. And it is this difference in emphasis which underlies de Beauvoir's critique.⁹

In The Second Sex de Beauvoir claims that the very premise of historical materialism is inadequate; that it cannot deal with the problems of woman's oppression in as much as these "concern the whole man and not that abstraction: Homo oeconomicus" (p.87). In other words, de Beauvoir maintains that Engels overemphasises economic factors and consequently glosses over many problems. He cannot, for example, explain how private property, the pivotal factor in his theory, came about. Indeed de Beauvoir argues that a major shortcoming of Engels' theory is that he discusses private property only with reference to such factors as the division of labour and the surplus engendered by new techniques. Thus she takes issue with Engels because he deals with the subject only in terms of the mechanics of the economic system when, she claims, the real debate should focus on how we can account for the very idea of personal possession.

In The Second Sex de Beauvoir does not challenge Engels' emphasis on the link between woman's oppression and the development of property relations. Indeed de Beauvoir wants to retain this emphasis in her own theory but can do so only once this has been grafted onto a different philosophical base. Thus de Beauvoir aims to explain the rise of private property and its relationship to the oppression of women

not by concentrating on the economic factors involved in such a social transition, but by examining the development of subjectivity.

In the attempt to integrate the importance of private property with her own existentialist ontology, de Beauvoir maintains that personal possession implies an inherent desire for individuality on the part of the existent but that this desire may remain unfulfilled unless the objective conditions for individualisation are present. In his most primitive stages, de Beauvoir claims, man lacks such objective conditions; he is a universal creature, daring to think of himself only as a member of a tribe or group. However, as we know, following Hegel, de Beauvoir maintains that it is through creative labour that man can begin to differentiate himself from the mass and forge his own particular personality. The objective conditions which de Beauvoir believes necessary for creative labour and individualisation are arguably more materialist than is the case in Hegel's theory in that they are expressed by de Beauvoir in terms of techniques and do not refer to man's immediate inter-personal relations. Thus it is not the institution of slavery and forced labour which have profound significance in de Beauvoir's theory, but instead it is the discovery of bronze.

The link made by de Beauvoir between creative labour and individualisation on the one hand, and the drive for personal possession on the other, is made on the basis of Hegelian philosophy. Thus as de Beauvoir claims that the subject always strives to find the recognition of his sovereignty in the objects of his labour, she subsequently maintains: "... it is therefore understandable that he places upon them a value no less fundamental than upon his very life" (p.88). Indeed de Beauvoir implies that primitive communism may be an appropriate form of property-holding for the undifferentiated members of a tribe

but that once man as tool-user comes to find the truth of his subjective certainty of himself as a human individual in the products of his labour, he needs to claim such objects as his own.

Having established in her own philosophical terms why the institution of private property must be seen as an important stage in human development, de Beauvoir does not then adopt Engels' account of why this was a causal factor in the origins of woman's oppression. Instead she maintains that Engels fails to provide such an account; that we must not follow him and simply "deduce the oppression of woman from the institution of private property" (p.88). As we have already seen, in de Beauvoir's terms Engels' approach is inadequate because his analysis is restricted to the consideration of economic factors. At one point de Beauvoir claims that although Engels:

... saw clearly that woman's muscular weakness became a real point of inferiority only in its relation to the bronze and iron tool; ... he did not see that the limitations of her capacity for labour constituted in themselves a concrete disadvantage only in a certain perspective (p.88, emphasis added).

In the context of this criticism of Engels, de Beauvoir claims that it is only "because man is a being of transcendence and ambition (that)... he projects new urgencies through every new tool"; that is, it is only with the discovery of bronze that man's ambitions were spurred on, causing him to view woman and her labour activities as part of his "project for enrichment and expansion" (p.88).

But de Beauvoir claims that although this desire is significant, it is not in itself enough to explain why man was bound to become woman's oppressor. Indeed de Beauvoir believes that it is only when we take into consideration "the imperialism of the human consciousness"

that we can begin to understand why man would wish to exploit his powerful position vis à vis the opposite sex. In other words, de Beauvoir disputes Engels' theory partially on the grounds that it cannot explain why man's economic power did not, nevertheless, lead to "friendly association of the sexes" (p.89).

II

Leaving aside for the time being her notion of an inevitable desire for domination, let us trace the route taken by de Beauvoir from her ontological assumptions to her conclusion that "woman was dethroned by the advent of private property". Returning to those factors already encountered in Chapter Six, relevant to the origins of man's oppression of woman (i.e. not Nature's), we see that many of these indirectly relate to the development of private property. De Beauvoir's notion of the ontological advantage gained by males through creative labour (self-consciousness, recognition, domination of Nature and thus, by definition, woman) and the link between this and her emphasis on personal possession leads her ipso facto to the institution of private property and to the origins of woman's oppression.

This connection, however, is made even more explicit in the later sections of her historical account: the institution of private property becomes in itself a reason for man's desire for woman's subordination and ceases to be significant in de Beauvoir's theory only in as much as it is linked to man's ontological advantage. This direct link between private property and woman's oppression is made by de Beauvoir on the basis of her notion that as man progressed he became preoccupied with paternity and the inheritance system:

It is easy to grasp the fundamental importance of this institution (private property) if one keeps in mind the fact that the owner transfers, alienates, his existence into his property; he cares more for it than for his very life; it overflows the narrow limits of this mortal lifetime, and continues to exist beyond the body's dissolution - the earthly and material incorporation of the immortal soul. But this survival can only come about if the property remains in the hands of the owner: it can be his beyond death only if it belongs to individuals in whom he sees himself projected, who are his. To cultivate the paternal domain, to render worship to the names of the father - these together constitute one and the same obligation for the heir: he assures ancestral survival on earth and in the underworld (p.113).

Thus de Beauvoir maintains that to gain what he desired man not only had to deprive woman of the right to own and bequeath property, but also had to restrict woman's freedom so that he could be assured children of "undisputed paternity"¹⁰

This theory echoes Engels' claim that the overthrow of "mother-right" constituted "the world historic defeat of the female sex" But once again we must realise that Engels and de Beauvoir reach their shared conclusion via fundamentally different theoretical routes. Engels claims that it was the economic power and wealth enjoyed by man which in themselves created "a stimulus" to use his position in order "to overthrow the traditional order of inheritance in favour of his children." De Beauvoir holds that wealth and paternity confirm man's sovereignty but that they can hardly account for his ontological pretensions.

De Beauvoir is certainly able to point out that there is a missing link in Engels' theory between private property and woman's oppression in as much as he never manages to show convincingly that economic factors would in themselves be a "stimulus"/^{to man}to change the inheritance system and hence to dominate woman. And it is an attempt

to make the link in terms of ontology which de Beauvoir undertakes in The Second Sex. It is interesting to note, however, that de Beauvoir herself is open to a similar attack. The idea of "the imperialism of the human consciousness" is a pivotal factor in her theory, yet this is simply asserted and its origin is never discussed.¹¹

The difference between de Beauvoir's and Engels' theory of the relationship between private property and woman's oppression reflects the most basic opposition of idealism to materialism. In Engels' theory we are led to see the development of patriarchy and the subordination of women within the context of changes in the forces of production and the resultant shift in the balance of economic power. His is a theory based on economic and material factors of existence and it devalues the role of ideas in social change. The point of departure for de Beauvoir, on the other hand, is existentialist ontology - in which light, economic factors gain significance only within the realm of ideas. Transposed from a materialist to an idealist philosophical base, private property in de Beauvoir's theory is important not for economic reasons but because it confirms the individual's ontological pretensions. The significance of de Beauvoir's switch in emphasis from ontological to historical materialist factors is that ultimately she concludes that a socialist revolution - a change in the economic order - will lead to woman's liberation. In other words, de Beauvoir gives a materialist solution to something which she originally posed as an ontological problem.¹²

Nevertheless, in de Beauvoir's theory it appears that once woman has been dethroned, economic factors come to have great significance in the evolution of her role in history. That is to say, having outlined

the essentially ontological reasons for woman's emergence as "the Other," de Beauvoir subsequently emphasises the importance of economic factors like the inheritance system and the requirements for woman's labour to her historical role. She writes:

In human history the equilibrium between the forces of production and reproduction is brought about by different means under different economic conditions, and these conditions govern the relations of male and female to offspring and in consequence to each other (p.68).

It is only to the extent that de Beauvoir begins to portray changes in woman's situation as a "by-product of the economic evolution of the masculine world,"¹³ that Mitchell is correct in calling this aspect of de Beauvoir's analysis an "orthodox economist approach."

Part IV

CONTEMPORARY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SEXES

Chapter Nine

The Development of a Girl's Life

The foregoing chapters have been concerned with de Beauvoir's theory of woman's emergence as "the second sex". Now we must examine de Beauvoir's portrayal of the contemporary relations between the sexes. Our main purpose will be to look at de Beauvoir's theory of the development of a girl's life. In other words, we shall elucidate how de Beauvoir believes the oppression of women, founded in history, is maintained in contemporary society. In order to illustrate the originality of de Beauvoir's theory it is necessary to begin by indicating the usual feminist approach to the perpetuation of sex roles.

I

The use of biological reductionist explanations to account for the differences between males and females is not accepted by most feminists. They generally reject the idea that there are innate masculine and feminine urges which induce certain patterns of behaviour or attitudes in individuals. Instead most feminists maintain that men and women are socially conditioned into behaving according to rigidly defined sex roles. To this extent, many feminist books on the development of a girl's life concentrate on describing the various social processes which condition her into fulfilling a feminine role. Ann Oakley, for example, in an impressive survey of studies of sex and gender formation, tries to illustrate how sexual identity is formed through such things as toys, games and parental attitudes.¹ It is largely within the

framework of sociology and psychology that Oakley seeks to show how "children are transformed into adults who are not only conscious of their gender roles but have, through long years of learning, internalised them and made them part of their own personalities."²

There are various comments in The Second Sex which could be interpreted to mean that de Beauvoir too believes that females are quite simply "conditioned" into acting as women. Indeed one of the most frequently quoted passages of The Second Sex - the passage which opens Book Two - asserts such a view:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine (p.295, 3 emphasis added).

The notion that femininity is socially manufactured and then transmitted to girls, who are acted upon like mere objects in the process, is also the impression given by de Beauvoir elsewhere in The Second Sex. For example, she occasionally uses such words as "indoctrinate," "shape," "mould" (pp.296 ff) and claims that femininity far from being a "biological datum" is in "fact a destiny imposed upon (woman) by her teachers and by society"(p.307, ⁴ emphasis added).

In recent years de Beauvoir seems to have become even more attracted to the idea that women are conditioned into accepting their feminine role. In a recent interview with Caroline Moorhead she maintained that differences between the sexes begin at birth for "even such a ridiculous thing as choosing a pink or blue blanket means that that parents start discriminating.... By the age of one the little

boy has already been turned into a boy, the little girl into a girl." ⁵
 Recently de Beauvoir has also claimed that the current research which demonstrates the socially "conditioned" nature of sexual behaviour "proves" that one of the leading ideas in The Second Sex is "correct." ⁶
 In other words, it adds empirical weight to the notion advanced by her in 1949 that "one is not born but rather becomes a woman."

But despite de Beauvoir's later adoption of what may be termed a "sociological" approach to the development of sex roles, and despite the various comments which accord with this in The Second Sex, the main thrust of the argument in her book is contrary to such a view. If we bear in mind de Beauvoir's use of existentialist ontology we see that it is difficult for her, except in the most superficial way, to maintain that an individual's behaviour and attitudes are determined by the social situation in which he is placed while simultaneously upholding the notion of immutable subjectivity and freedom. Indeed the behaviourist element of the sociological approach, both in its implicit reduction of the individual to passive object and in its tendency to determinism, is basically at odds with the emphasis on freedom and subjectivity which lies at the core of Sartrean existentialist thought. ✓

For similar reasons de Beauvoir's existentialism is at odds with a psychoanalytic conception of individual development, but this she states quite clearly in The Second Sex. However, although de Beauvoir's existentialist ontology inevitably leads her, like Sartre, to reject the major premises of psychoanalysis, in the chapter she devotes to the subject she claims not to attack psychoanalysis head on. For example, she does not follow Sartre and criticise the concept of

the unconscious mind. She maintains that, instead of attempting to take issue with psychoanalysis as a whole, she merely hopes to evaluate its contribution to the study of woman's situation.

(1974)

Juliett Mitchell in her book Psychoanalysis and Feminism claims that in The Second Sex de Beauvoir does attempt to set up "a counter psychological philosophy". Indeed Mitchell is critical of de Beauvoir's treatment of psychoanalysis, claiming that de Beauvoir's attack on this "scientific method of investigation" is made from the standpoint of philosophical belief. Moreover, Mitchell claims that de Beauvoir, in her attempt to make existentialism and psychoanalysis "meet on the same terrain ... has confused Freudian psychoanalysis with Jungian metaphysics."⁷ Mitchell subsequently attempts to unravel the various strands of Freud, Jung and Adler which she claims merges in de Beauvoir's critique of psychoanalysis. However what Freud and other psychoanalysts "really" said is outwith the scope of our study. But Mitchell is correct to point out the philosophical nature of de Beauvoir's treatment of psychoanalysis; for despite de Beauvoir's claim that she is not going to attack psychoanalysis per se, she quickly leaves the evaluation of Freud on the subject of women and begins to make general philosophical objections to his method. Thus after describing in very superficial fashion the Oedipus complex, the Electra complex, the notion of libido and the clitoral and vaginal stages of female sexuality, de Beauvoir objects to Freud's method partly on the basis that he uses what is essentially a "masculine model" (p.73) to analyse woman's sexuality and situation.⁸ Moreover, de Beauvoir maintains that while it is true that girls are attracted to their fathers, this is based more on emotional attachment than sexual desire and emanates from

the nature of the father's sovereignty - a sovereignty which de Beauvoir claims is socially based. Indeed throughout this critique de Beauvoir accepts many of Freud's descriptions of woman's feelings and behaviour but disputes the interpretation placed on them, criticising Freud for his alleged failure to explain the origins of what he sees. Thus de Beauvoir accepts the existence of "penis envy," but only in as much as the penis has symbolic worth within a world of concrete male dominance. She believes Freud's thesis inadequate in that, by concentrating on anatomy, he fails to explain why male dominance has arisen.

In Sartrean fashion one of de Beauvoir's main objections to psychoanalysis is that it takes sexuality as an "irreducible datum" when in the existent there is "a more original 'quest of being', of which sexuality is only one of its aspects" (p.77). To make sense of this "quest of being" de Beauvoir explicitly refers to Sartre's thesis in Being and Nothingness but summarises it as man's aspiration "to be at one concretely with the whole world, apprehended in all possible ways" (p.77). For this reason, then, de Beauvoir claims:

To work the earth, to dig a hole, are activities as original as the embrace, as coition, and they deceive themselves who see here no more than sexual symbols. The hole, the ooze, the gash, hardness, integrity are primary realities; and the interest they have for man is not dictated by the libido, but rather the libido will be coloured by the manner in which he becomes aware of them (p.77).

De Beauvoir is thus arguing that the individual's erotic urges can be understood only with reference to what Sartre calls his "fundamental project"; that the erotic dimension of life can be understood only within this "unity of choice" (p.78).

For de Beauvoir the terrible weakness of all psychoanalytic systems is that in favour of "determinism" they systematically "reject the idea of choice and the correlated concept of value" (p.76).

De Beauvoir thus takes issue with psychoanalysis because it maps out the individual's existence; it sees life as the mere "interplay of determinate elements" (p.75) and portrays the individual as the prey of external forces. This leads to another reason why de Beauvoir rejects a psychoanalytic view of woman's situation. De Beauvoir claims that in eschewing an explicit acceptance of values, and concomitantly a definition of what constitutes "human" existence, psychoanalysis views any attempt made by woman to assert her sovereignty as "inauthentic" (p.83). In short, it sees woman's attempt to escape the mutilation and restrictions of femininity as a "masculine protest" and not as a way to become a more human being.

In place of the psychoanalytic tendency to portray the female child as divided between identifying with the mother or the father, de Beauvoir hopes to show that for the girl the problem is that she is "enticed by two modes of alienation" (p.82). On the one hand, she can assert herself as subject and play at being a man, which will inevitably be a source of frustration, or she can accept her womanly destiny by adopting the role of object and "Other." In this latter role she will also be frustrated since to accept oneself as such is, according to de Beauvoir, to go against one's original subjective aspirations. The most important point about de Beauvoir's scheme, however, is that she sees the girl's development to maturity as involving a number of choices and values; that it is acted out at a conscious level. This is amply illustrated by de Beauvoir in the statement that, contrary to psychoanalysis:

... I shall pose the problem of feminine destiny quite otherwise. I shall place woman in a world of values and give her behaviour a dimension of liberty. I believe she has the power to choose between the assertion of her transcendence and her alienation as an object; she is not the plaything of contradictory drives; she devises solutions of diverse values in the ethical scale (p.82).

Bearing in mind how de Beauvoir seeks to pose the problem for women, let us now examine how she outlines the development of a girl's life. In such a description of the development of the female child from birth to maturity there are two discernible phases which the child goes through. The first of these is outlined in the chapter entitled "Childhood"; the second in the chapter "The Young Girl" Let us look at the features of these two stages in turn.

II

De Beauvoir argues that up to about the age of three or four there is not much difference between boys and girls. "The dramas of birth and of weaning," writes de Beauvoir, "unfold after the same fashion for nurslings of both sexes" (p.295). The dramas to which de Beauvoir refers are essentially ones in which the infant, who originally feels immersed "in the bosom of the Whole" (p.296), comes to see itself as an autonomous subject. Bearing in mind de Beauvoir's idea that the subject finds himself in external objects, in Freudian fashion, she claims that the child at this stage of its development requires to see itself reflected in an image. Such an image can be achieved either through a mirror or through the objectification gained from relations with parents. Although the child comes to see itself as a separate subject, de Beauvoir claims that the very young child

attempts to deny such separation; to fight against this "original abandonment" Such denial tends to be manifest in two basic ways: either by clinging physically to parents or by gaining approbation from adults in order to feel justified.

At first, de Beauvoir claims, girls are privileged in this process. The "second weaning" - the withdrawal of intense body contact from the child - is less dramatic and brutal for girls than it is for boys and so to some extent she is protected from the "anguish of solitude" (p.298). However, according to de Beauvoir, the boy receives much compensation for this withdrawal of physical contact. By virtue of his possession of a penis, he is a member of the dominant group and so he soon comes to see himself as superior to girls.

Although de Beauvoir takes issue with Freud and maintains that the value of the penis is dependent on the value accorded to masculinity in patriarchal society, she nevertheless maintains that the penis always "incarnates" (p.79) transcendence. In other words, the possession of a penis gives man some ontological advantage. De Beauvoir's argument is based on the idea that because the subject always searches for himself in things, the boy is fortunate because he can regard his penis "as at once himself and other than himself" (p.79). That is to say, he has a double, an alter ego, which helps him assume a subjective attitude. Moreover, de Beauvoir claims that because the penis is:

... the very object into which he projects himself (it) becomes a symbol of autonomy, of transcendence, of power; he measures the length of his penis; he compares his urinary stream with that of his companions; later on, erection and ejaculation will become grounds for satisfaction and challenge (p.306).

It is because the penis represents transcendence that de Beauvoir believes men have a castration complex. In short, they fear the frustration of their transcendence.

Having no penis, girls do not have this double and so they find it more difficult to find themselves in a material thing which can act as an alter ego. Although de Beauvoir argues that this can lead the girl "to make an object of her whole self, to set herself up as the Other" (p.80), she more frequently maintains that it is the doll which can perform the function of penis for her. De Beauvoir's comments on the usefulness of the doll in this respect are, however, somewhat ambiguous. At one point de Beauvoir claims that the doll, "incarnating the promise of the baby to come" (p. 80), could, in a society not built on male-dominance, be more precious than the penis. Later, however, she seems to maintain that the doll will always be of less value than the penis in presenting the subject with an alter ego, for the doll represents the whole body and is also a "passive object" For these reasons, then, de Beauvoir writes: "the little girl will be led to identify her whole person and so regard this as an inert given object" (p.306). In short, identification with the doll tends to lead to narcissism and passivity in as much as in cuddling and dressing the doll the girl acts out how she herself wishes to be treated.

De Beauvoir vacillates between two views of the importance of
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 the penis for the boy. On the one hand, it is a simple representation of his value in patriarchal society and a convenient tool for reflecting his subjectivity. On the other hand, it has a more prestigious ontological value. Despite the ambiguity on this point in de Beauvoir's theory it is, however, clear that where girls do experience penis envy,

it is the result of restrictions and limitations placed on them in more important spheres of life. In other words, feeling thwarted in her human development the girl does not envy the penis per se but simply projects her frustrations onto her lack of a penis.

De Beauvoir does in fact describe the girl's "apprenticeship" as a time when she is constantly deprived of the opportunity to realise fully herself as an independent human being. In short, she is often prevented from indulging in self-affirming action and is therefore "oriented" towards a life of passivity. The passivity which is characteristic of the female sex is also, according to de Beauvoir, engendered in these early years by the fact that she is taught that "to please she must try to please" (p.308); that is to say, she quickly learns that her success does not depend upon self-affirming and independent action, but upon the presentation of her self as a charming, seductive object. Thus because girls are led to objectify themselves - become creatures who do not act but are acted upon by others - they find it increasingly difficult to reject the role of object which is held out as their feminine destiny.

The gradual abdication of sovereignty - the process which de Beauvoir describes as the child's route to femininity - is further encouraged by a number of other factors. At the most obvious level, there is the fact that mythology, history, religion and the contemporary relations between the sexes present her with an image of woman as "Other". In other words, by virtue of her sex, her future as an inessential object seems to have been "willed in heaven" (p.22).

De Beauvoir claims that at first the young girl may not understand the significance of her sexual status. For the young child it is

the mother who initially appears as the important sex. As the girl identifies with her mother and is encouraged to take part in domestic duties, for a while she may believe her gender bestows on her a certain authority. Later, however, she learns that the authority of the mother is more apparent than real; that it is males who are the dominant sex. From then on, the little girl attempts to feel justified through her father. It is in her relationship with him that she hopes to feel "fulfilled and deified" (p.315). It is in this way that de Beauvoir hopes to explain the Electra complex. Thus in opposition to Freud who interprets the girl's attitude to her father partly in terms of sexual desire, de Beauvoir maintains that it is through the approbation of the powerful father that the girl hopes to justify her existence. At the time when the girl is attracted to her father she is often in the process of revolting against her mother - for, sensing the completely dependent and inferior position which is in store for her, she rejects her mother who is an embodiment of this dreaded future.

So far we have covered the essential features of the first stage in the child's development towards her feminine "destiny" Before looking at how de Beauvoir describes the second stage of the process, it is important to emphasise one thing: although de Beauvoir claims that "throughout her childhood the little girl suffered bullying and curtailment of activity" she maintains that during the early period of "apprenticeship" the girl "none the less felt herself to be an autonomous individual" (p.360).

III

The point at which the girl makes the transition from stage one to stage two in her development is quite clearly defined by de Beauvoir -

it coincides with her entry into adolescence. The young girl acutely experiences this break with her childhood past in social and sexual ways. De Beauvoir suggests that the very young girl is aware of the chronic passivity and dependency which characterises her feminine future. However, while for the child it seems merely like a dream, the adolescent girl finds herself plunged into the midst of this reality. To some extent de Beauvoir describes the post-pubescent girl's situation as a more intense form of the restrictions imposed upon her as a child. But what is significant is that the two sexes are growing increasingly apart in this respect.

De Beauvoir maintains that it is particularly in puberty and early adolescence that boys are encouraged through "games, sports, fights, challenges, trials of strength" to view their bodies as a "means of dominating nature and as a weapon for fighting" (p.307). In short, they go through what in de Beauvoir's terms is an important "apprenticeship in violence" (p.353). Moreover, it is in these activities that boys learn to become competitive which, as we know, for de Beauvoir is an important existential component of the assertion of subjectivity.

Girls, on the other hand, are not allowed to learn "the lessons of violence" Thus de Beauvoir maintains that girls lack confidence in themselves because they lack confidence in their bodies. While boys become conscious of themselves as a force in the world, girls feel dependent and aware of the need for a masculine mediator. It is for these reasons that de Beauvoir claims the difference between adolescent boys and girls to be that whereas she feels passive and takes the world as something "fixed," "he can at any moment, rise up against whatever is; and he therefore feels that when he accepts it, he actively ratifies

it" (p.355). To a great extent, then, it is the notion that the female is at once deprived (and consequently does not feel able to make use) of any opportunities to engage in transcendent pursuits - to act upon and change the world - which underlies most of de Beauvoir's comments on the development of a girl's life. Thus it is partly these experiences which lead, according to de Beauvoir, to woman's desire to make the passive and dependent existence of marriage and motherhood her career. However, de Beauvoir maintains that while the girl is more and more oriented towards her essentially passive feminine destiny, she is aware of the "mutilation" (p.351 ff) this implies. In other words, the girl is aware of the acute conflict between being a "true" woman and asserting one's subjectivity. But before we can examine de Beauvoir's explanation for woman's acceptance of such mutilation, it is necessary to introduce the sexual aspect of the adolescent girl's development.

In the chapter on childhood de Beauvoir discusses the very young girl's attitude to menstruation and the first stirrings of sexuality. However, the difference between the child and the adolescent is that whereas the former simply "scents danger in her alienated flesh" (p.453), her mature counterpart comes to have a much more ambivalent and negative attitude towards her erotic role. Indeed, in her book Femininity as Alienation,⁽¹⁹⁷⁷⁾ Ann Foreman claims that de Beauvoir believes the onset of mature sexuality in woman to be a contributing factor to her passivity. Thus, Foreman writes that in The Second Sex de Beauvoir:

... considered the young girl who has not yet experienced sexual urges to be equal to boys of her age. She stressed the similarities between them in their ability to make rational choices and to act upon them. But with the onset of mature sexuality a qualitative change takes place. Instead of stressing the girl's potential for action, de Beauvoir stresses the woman's passivity.¹⁰

However, is Foreman right to claim that de Beauvoir puts so much emphasis on sexuality? In order to find out it is necessary to digress slightly and examine de Beauvoir's notion of the development of both male and female eroticism and how woman experiences her sexual role.

IV

De Beauvoir maintains that for man the transition from his infantile sexuality to his mature sexuality is a relatively simple process. It is a process which simply requires him to cease seeking sexual satisfaction within the confines of his own body and to project his erotic desires towards another person. In other words, his mature sexuality essentially involves reaching out towards the other and allows him to retain his sovereign integrity. Moreover, as we have already seen, the sexual act is one in which he can assert himself as subject. Indeed de Beauvoir maintains that "anatomically and conventionally" (p.401) it is always man who is the initiator of the sexual act and it is he who decides its form and duration. Thus for man intercourse is completed when he has an orgasm and although he may not be totally satisfied with this, nevertheless, "a definite act has been consummated and the man's body retains its integrity: his service to the species is combined with personal enjoyment" (p.393).

Feminine eroticism, on the other hand, is much more complex. According to de Beauvoir this complexity is the result of the "opposition" (p.393) of woman's two sexual organs - the clitoris and the vagina. The clitoris is the centre of infantile sexuality and although it remains of some importance to woman throughout adulthood, de Beauvoir maintains:

"(it is) only indirectly connected with normal coition, and it plays no part in procreation" (p.394). The vagina, on the contrary, only becomes an erotic centre in sexual maturity through relations with a male. Although de Beauvoir admits that there is not necessarily a difference between vaginal and clitoral orgasms, she maintains that vaginal pleasure is important for most women. To this extent, de Beauvoir claims that woman must make a "choice" between these two erotic centres: "one of which perpetuates juvenile independence while the other consigns woman to man and childbearing" (p.395).

As de Beauvoir maintains that the vagina becomes an erotic centre only through intercourse, the break with juvenile eroticism results only from penetration. And this penetration, according to de Beauvoir, "always constitutes a kind of rape" (p.394, emphasis added).¹¹ Moreover de Beauvoir explicitly maintains that "the normal sexual act in effect puts woman in a state of dependency upon the male" (p.395), for it is he who initiates and she who merely responds. Even if she is unwilling she may be "taken" at any time for, de Beauvoir points out, it is possible for man even to "copulate with a corpse" (p.395).

De Beauvoir maintains that not only is the "anatomic destiny" different for the two sexes, but so too is the "social and moral" (p.395) situation. For example, whereas a sexual encounter for a man is always seen as something which enhances his prestige, for woman it often represents her "fall" or loss of "honour." It is for these kinds of reasons then, that de Beauvoir maintains that "the environment, the climate, in which feminine sexuality awakens is quite different from that which surrounds the adolescent male" (p.397).

Having thus laid the foundation for de Beauvoir's notions of female sexuality, we must now examine how she accounts for the transition which most girls allegedly make between clitoral and vaginal eroticism. De Beauvoir maintains that the virginal young woman emerging from the sexually dormant period of childhood experiences sexual desire but is not completely sure of what she desires. To some extent, like the male, she wants to recreate the pleasurable childhood experiences of her mother's flesh. She wants to possess those soft, gentle things which are essentially part of a feminine world. In short, she wants "to possess a treasure like that which she gives the male" (p.423). It is for this reason that de Beauvoir maintains that the young girl confronting the male:

... feels in her hands and her lips the desire to caress a prey actively. But crude man, with his hard muscles, his rough and often hairy skin, his strong odour, his coarse features, does not appeal to her as desirable; he even seems repulsive (p.398).

De Beauvoir maintains, moreover, that if woman finds a man whom she does find attractive, she is unable to possess him carnally as he may possess her; not only will he be unlikely to accept a passive role but more importantly:

... she lacks the means for taking these treasures; her anatomy compels her to remain clumsy and impotent like a eunuch; the wish for possession is fruitless for want of an organ in which it is incarnated (pp.398-9).

For these reasons, then, the virgin who feels actively erotic either towards males or females is inevitably frustrated because she lacks the organ which will allow her to express her sex-hunger.

The "normal" young girl, however, is one who comes to desire a passive role. But this desire is always ambivalent for, de Beauvoir claims, the girl "simultaneously longs for and dreads the shameful passivity of the willing prey" (p.346). To some extent, it is longed for because it appeals to the narcissistic tendency which is often prevalent in girlhood, yet despised because she does not see herself as a thing to be taken. At any rate, the young woman reaches her first sexual encounter with an ambivalent attitude towards her sexual role. Although de Beauvoir maintains that the nature of woman's first experience of intercourse depends very much on the man's attitude and behaviour she, nevertheless, tends to describe it as quite a traumatic experience. The traumatic aspect of defloration for de Beauvoir is not due to any pain the woman may experience but to the fact that she feels "trespassed" (p.405) upon by the male. Moreover in the passive role assigned to her in the sexual act she "feels she is an instrument" (p.406); man "takes" his pleasure from her in the act of intercourse and the pleasure she experiences is "given" by him. Thus de Beauvoir is led to conclude that the sexual act is essentially a relationship not based on reciprocity.

According to de Beauvoir, passivity and dependency are the ingredients of woman's role in intercourse and it is experienced by her as such. Thus not only does the girl in the process of transition from clitoral to vaginal eroticism require the male to reveal her body to her, but even at the height of her sexual desire she feels herself to be passive. Indeed, although de Beauvoir maintains that woman may experience more intense sexual desire than man and that her "sex hunger is in a sense active" (p.399), it is interesting to note how de Beauvoir compares male and female sexual desire; for it is reminiscent of Sartre's portrayal of the viscious nature of female sexuality:

Feminine sex desire is the soft throbbing of a mollusc. Whereas man is impetuous, woman is only impatient; her expectation can become ardent without ceasing to be passive; man dives upon his prey like the eagle and the hawk; woman lies in wait like the carnivorous plant, the bog, in which insects and children are swallowed up. She is absorption, suction, humus, pitch and glue, a passive influx, insinuating and viscous: thus at least she vaguely feels herself to be (p.407).

Woman may experience other negative feelings in her sexual encounter with man. For example, even though the young girl may have narcissistic tendencies, she often feels ashamed to reveal her body to the gazes of a man; she resents the fact that she will be judged. There is also the fact that women may be terrified of impregnation. This often leads to mistrust and resentment of men.

De Beauvoir, however, maintains that some of the negative aspects of woman's sexual initiation could be removed if it happened in a much more spontaneous and natural way than is often the case. That is to say, if it happened without the ritualistic formality of the nuptial bed. Moreover, it can be rid of many of its negative aspects if the woman can feel herself subject in the midst of her objectivity - in other words, if it is she who makes herself a carnal object. Thus while giving herself to him she can seek satisfaction of her own pleasure and, instead of abdicating her sovereignty, she can simply transcend herself towards another. But de Beauvoir believes this is possible only if the male both desires and respects the woman. "If he lusts after her flesh while recognising her freedom," writes de Beauvoir, "she feels herself to be the essential, her integrity remains unimpaired the while she makes herself object". And thus, adds de Beauvoir, woman "remains free in the submission to which she consents" (pp.421-2).

However, it seems quite apparent from this statement that de Beauvoir believes even quite a "liberated" sexual relationship

between man and woman would involve for woman an element of submission and passivity. This goes some way to justifying Foreman's emphasis on the importance of sexuality to woman's experience of passivity and dependency in de Beauvoir's theory. However, Foreman goes too far when she tries to make out that this is the crucial feature of woman's development in The Second Sex. It may be of permanent concern in as much as one can plausibly infer that it can never be removed, (and as such is a permanent feature of woman's biology) but it is subsidiary to other factors in de Beauvoir's theory.

V

The post-puberty phase of woman's development is so important in de Beauvoir's theory not simply because it marks her sexual maturity, but because it coincides with the beginnings of psychological maturity. Thus to understand fully de Beauvoir's notion of the development of woman's life from birth to maturity, the most significant thing to be borne in mind is that the girl child sees herself, albeit dimly, as a sovereign subject but is encouraged to abdicate in favour of the male sex; to abandon this position and accept herself as the inessential object. It is thus the reason for abdication which de Beauvoir must outline in the pages of the second volume of The Second Sex. At the very beginning of the book de Beauvoir lays the foundation for her subsequent argument that it is woman who consents to her position. There she maintains that "along with the ethical urge of each individual to affirm his subjective existence, there is also the temptation to forego liberty and become a thing" (p.21). In Sartrian terms, this simply means that everyone is tempted to deny his freedom and live in

bad faith; to turn his back on the fact that he is really a for-itself and pretend he is either only an in-itself or totally for-others.

Having accounted for the fact that the individual, although sovereign and free, may be tempted to reject this fact, de Beauvoir must still explain why woman, more than man, is led in this direction.

One of the major explanations advanced by de Beauvoir for woman's resignation has substantially been encountered in previous material. For drawing on the argument that females throughout their lives are deprived of acting - that "for a great many women the roads to transcendence are blocked" (p.288) - de Beauvoir maintains that it is extremely difficult for them not to renounce their freedom. It is for this reason that de Beauvoir writes that for the young girl "a vicious circle is formed; for the less she exercises her freedom to understand, to grasp and discover the world about her, the less resources she will find within herself; the less she will dare to affirm herself as subject" (p.308).

De Beauvoir also maintains that a vital difference between the oppression of women and that of blacks, for example, is that whereas the latter have nothing to gain from their oppression and submit "with a feeling of revolt" (p.325), women are bribed into complicity:

To decline to be the Other, to refuse to be a party to the deal, this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste. Man-the-sovereign will provide woman-the-liege with material protection and will undertake the moral justifications for her existence ... (p.21).

Thus de Beauvoir argues that the economic security and moral justification provided by man appeal to women not only because there is in every

existent "the longing" for such resignation and escape, but also because the prohibitions against women's assertion of their freedom are so great. Thus because women find it too difficult to become transcendent - to use their freedom in a positive manner - they are "more fatally bound to yield" (p. 325) to the temptation of an inauthentic existence than is the case with their male counterparts.

By emphasising the idea that it is woman who, for whatever reason, abdicates in favour of the male, de Beauvoir reiterates the kind of argument she advances in the historical sections. There is a definite parallel to be drawn between the woman who in the dawn of history accepted her own devaluation and the contemporary woman who likewise makes a conscious choice to accept the mutilation implied in femininity. The major difference in de Beauvoir's approach is that whereas she believes that prehistoric woman had to make this choice she argues that now such a sacrifice is unnecessary. Indeed in de Beauvoir's theory, this sacrifice constitutes a barrier to the establishment of reciprocal relations between the sexes and thus to the further progress of humanity.

VI

De Beauvoir's emphasis on woman's conscious acceptance of her inferior position gives rise to a number of significant points. On the one hand, such an emphasis is a direct result of de Beauvoir's existentialist ontology; that is, of the notion of immutable freedom and subjectivity of the individual. Thus man may want woman to be object, he may even make it very difficult for her to refuse the role

which is offered her, but it is ultimately woman who consciously decides to make herself Other. Indeed throughout the section on adolescence de Beauvoir describes the young girl as hesitating between accepting and rejecting this role. She may make various symbolic protests and vacillate between "desire and dread" (p.379) of the fulfilment of her feminine role but, according to de Beauvoir, "she does not choose in spite of everything, really to repudiate her feminine destiny" (p.377, emphasis added).¹² Thus de Beauvoir ultimately presents us with the following picture of the act which marks the girl's entrance into womanhood: "The young girl slowly buries her childhood, puts away the independent and imperious being that was she, and enters submissively upon adult existence" (p.388, emphasis added).¹³ In other words, she enters it freely, if with resentment, conscious of what it implies.

In arguing this de Beauvoir echoes Sartre's work. As we know, in Being and Nothingness Sartre portrays the individual's life as the product of his free choices. As it was this aspect of Sartre's theory which led Marcuse to claim that this ontology is an "insult" to the oppressed, we should inquire if this is also true of de Beauvoir's ideas. Certainly there are points in The Second Sex where de Beauvoirian woman appears more as a martyr than the victim of oppression. But de Beauvoir differs from the Sartre of Being and Nothingness in one fundamental respect; unlike him she shows how an individual's situation - in this case woman's - may deprive her of the opportunity to act and thus of making authentic choices. As de Beauvoir illustrates how modern woman is deprived in this way, she is able to show how woman, although involved in the process, is oppressed. The major difference

between de Beauvoir and early Sartre is thus that she is able to show how an individual's situation may radically curtail his freedom.

By concentrating on revealing how "situation" may limit woman, de Beauvoir also escapes the idea that the existent is fully "responsible" and therefore to be blamed for her life. In their early work both Sartre and de Beauvoir implicitly blamed the oppressed for their inauthentic existence.¹⁴ The change introduced by the use of a more developed concept of "situation" can be seen clearly if we compare The Ethics of Ambiguity with The Second Sex.¹⁵ In the earlier work de Beauvoir maintains that woman's life is but a reflection of her "choice." Indeed in this book de Beauvoir's existentialist ethics even lead her to castigate woman for this choice: as she maintains that women have the understanding and opportunity to reject their subordinate role, she claims that their "resignation of freedom ... implies dishonesty and ... is a moral fault."¹⁶ In The Second Sex, however, de Beauvoir has dropped much of this moralising and chastising tone and is less critical of the fact that most women accept a subordinate, inauthentic kind of life. Indeed even though she elsewhere emphasises the idea that women are conscious of what they do, when discussing the fact that women are often deceptive, cowardly, emotional and so on de Beauvoir claims that woman is often "baffled" and not a totally "clear-headed person" (p.273). Thus she maintains that although feminine characteristics may be faults "they are sufficiently accounted for by the situation in which women are placed" (p.273). In this way, then, de Beauvoir is less insulting to the oppressed than either she or Sartre had been in earlier works.

In an article on de Beauvoir Colin Radford argues that her "minimisation" of female acquiescence to subordination means that

17

de Beauvoir herself runs the risk of bad faith. However, de Beauvoir does not actually minimise the extent of woman's compliance; she simply excuses woman for such submission. But what is true is that de Beauvoir apportions blame to man; it is he who creates woman's situation and who therefore leads her to make inauthentic choices. Thus de Beauvoir writes that woman "does wrong in yielding to the temptation" of inauthenticity but that "man is in no position to blame her, since he has led her into the temptation" (p.730). Indeed as Sartre and de Beauvoir developed an existentialist ethic and sympathised with the vanquished, they shifted the blame and responsibility from the oppressed to the oppressor. Thus, for example, in Anti-Semite and Jew it is the Jew whose situation is used to explain and excuse his life, but the anti-Semite whom Sartre holds morally to blame for his "free" choice; a choice apparently undetermined by his situation.¹⁸

This leads us to question another aspect of de Beauvoir's theory in The Second Sex - does she discuss the constituent parts of man's situation? The answer is no. De Beauvoir accounts for the development of a girl's life from birth to maturity but she does not give us a parallel account of man's development. We do not know, for example, if there are pressures on man which restrict his choices, and what these may be. But de Beauvoir is largely justified in omitting this discussion; she sees man's life as harmonious with subjectivity, therefore his development is the norm and there is nothing peculiar about it. What is noteworthy about woman's development in de Beauvoir's theory is that she comes to accept a life which is at odds with her subjective aspirations; as the boy is encouraged to be transcendent his development is less complicated and poignant. Moreover, as we shall

see, de Beauvoir does not have to account in detail for what man tries to attain in his relationship with woman since she also explains this with reference to existentialist ontology and ethics.

Although de Beauvoir portrays man's situation and attitudes as normal, there are points when, discussing how men would actually benefit from woman's emancipation, she argues that his situation is not actually what he desires. In such circumstances, however, there is little he can do: "... a man could not prevent himself from being a man ... culpable in spite of himself and labouring under the effects of a fault he did not himself commit" (p.732). In short, de Beauvoir claims man's situation may not be what he desires. However, since she predominantly argues that man's position arises from fundamental human aspirations, and not from socio-economic structures, its constitution remains ill-defined in de Beauvoir's theory. All that is clear is that like Sartre's anti-Semite, it is a product of his free choice and so something for which he is responsible.

But to return to the factors of significance in de Beauvoir's portrayal of woman's situation, we see that, as in her historical account, there is a certain tension between the notion that woman "is" a human being and the idea that she only comes to be one through certain humanising acts. In other words, at points woman is portrayed as a human being who acts in full consciousness of events, fully experiencing herself as subject, whereas on other occasions she is shown as not in full possession of such awareness. It is because she lacks such awareness that she is easily led into a position of dependence. What is consistent in both perspectives, however, is that woman's situation creates a feminine consciousness which is different in many respects from masculine consciousness.

But despite the tension and ambiguity inherent in de Beauvoir's theory of woman's development, she provides a more convincing explanation than do many feminists. In using conventional sociological and psychological explanations, which are largely devoid of explicit assumptions about human behaviour other than it is learned, such theories are crudely behaviourist. They implicitly conceptualise human consciousness as passive and base their explanation of the development of boys and girls on such processes as parental identification, role-play and reinforcement. While these certainly contribute to woman's acceptance of a secondary role, one strength of de Beauvoir's theory is that she does not begin from behaviourist assumptions. She argues that there are certain preconditions of proper human development. We need not accept de Beauvoir's emphasis on individualisation and competition to see the strength of her argument that to become confident, active human beings, children must come to see themselves as a force in the world; they must be able to translate their aspirations and intentions into reality. Thus, leaving aside criticisms of de Beauvoir's view of human development, we see how she may help us evolve a theory of how woman comes to be passive and see herself as an object acted upon by others.

There is one very dubious aspect of de Beauvoir's theory of a girl's development, however, and that is the way in which she uses sexuality as something which reinforces woman's feelings of passivity. Certainly one can argue that at present woman's sexuality is defined as passive and that it does not lead woman to assert herself. But de Beauvoir's argument involves the idea that woman's sexual role is essentially passive. Echoing Sartre's equation of femininity and

viscosity and "gaping holes," de Beauvoirian woman feels unable to assert herself in coitus. In arguing this de Beauvoir has accepted wholesale the way in which woman's sexuality is represented by men. But the question of de Beauvoir's masculine perspective will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.¹⁹

Bearing in mind the kind of development undergone by girls let us now look at how, in de Beauvoir's theory, woman attempts to justify and compensate for the "mutilation" involved in the assumption of a feminine destiny.

Chapter Ten

Justifications and Compensations for Woman's Oppression

In the previous chapter we saw how de Beauvoir, in her account both of history and the development of a woman's life, emphasises that it is woman who ultimately consents to her subordinate position. In the historical section this was bound to the idea that woman accepts man's values; that she realised the necessity for her own devaluation. Although de Beauvoir believes such martyrdom is no longer required of women, she does nevertheless maintain that they still subscribe to the values of the masculine world. Thus she states:

In truth women have never set up female values in opposition to male values. ... Men have presumed to create a feminine domain - the kingdom of life, of immanence - only in order to lock up women therein. But it is regardless of sex that the existent seeks self-justification through transcendence...
(pp.96-7).

In other words, de Beauvoir claims here that woman has never sought to see the feminine domain to which she is confined as a source of value; that she has always turned towards the masculine world to find justification for her existence. But although this notion is a dominant theme in The Second Sex de Beauvoir does, however, at points contradict herself. For example, she claims of some women that they are "in league to create a kind of counter-universe, the value of which will outweigh masculine values" (p.556). De Beauvoir is also later to claim that the difference between modern woman and her predecessor is that whereas the latter rejects man's values and wants to drag him into the prison of immanence, the former accepts man's values and wants to enter his world so she may act in accordance with them.

To some extent the contradiction in de Beauvoir's argument may be explained by the idea that woman, although ultimately accepting her feminine destiny, does so nevertheless with a feeling of resentment. Such resentment may in some way spill over into a rejection of men and the male universe. More commonly, however, according to de Beauvoir women turn against themselves and their relations contain an element of hostility. Indeed because women are so dependent on men and because their success depends on appearing as an attractive object, women are destined to become competitive with one another for men's attentions. Moreover, to the extent that women are rarely engaged in common transcendent pursuits they seldom know the "joys of comradeship" (p.556) On the other hand, because they are not so dependent on each other for existence women, de Beauvoir claims, are often more truthful with one another than they are with men. They may even feel a certain solidarity, although this is often precarious since it is always the male who they see as their liberator and so their friendships with one another are in this way incidental or contingent.

What is at stake in de Beauvoir's discussion of woman's attitude to values is two fundamental points. The first is that man's values are human values. Woman, confined to the realm of the immanent and incidental, is thus not able in this domain to find anything which could challenge these values. This leads to the second point. Woman, as a human being, does not seek to challenge man's human values. Instead she seeks either to use others as intermediaries in the transcendent world or to find in her own world something equivalent to what man attains in his. For example, woman can attempt to find in her home some fulfilment. In entertaining, decorating her house according to her

taste, she can attempt to express her individuality and establish herself as a person. Indeed de Beauvoir maintains that because woman does not manage to attain self-realization in her pursuits she often tries to do so in what she "has". Moreover, in surrounding herself with attractive objects which appeal to her feminine sensibility, woman often tries to find the sensations of which, as a woman, she is deprived. That is to say, she hopes to find in her possessions the kind of pleasures which she gives to man and which, in being doomed to passive eroticism, she is herself unable to take. "Thanks to the velvets and silks and porcelains with which she surrounds herself," writes de Beauvoir, "woman can in some degree satisfy that tactile sensuality which her erotic life can seldom assuage" (p.469).

In essence de Beauvoir maintains that woman hopes to find in her home the world which, in assuming her feminine destiny, she has foregone in favour of man. However, for reasons that will become more apparent later, in her domestic work woman is not able to achieve the fulfilment which she desires. Although she may be continually engaged in tasks, her mind is never fully occupied - she finds no real aim. Indeed de Beauvoir maintains that even if woman takes up activities in her spare time which are often beneficial to man - reading and water colours, for example - her frame of mind is still a barrier to their significance for her. That is to say, engaging in sporadic action only to eliminate boredom, such activities are unable to "extend her grasp on the world."

De Beauvoir describes a number of other ways in which woman attempts to justify her existence. The first to be examined here is what woman seeks in the relationship with her child. As we have covered elsewhere woman's attitude to pregnancy and the foetus what we shall discuss here is the relationship which develops after the child is born.

I

According to de Beauvoir, woman's attitude to the birth of her child and the relationship which follows is dependent on a number of factors - her relations with her own mother and the father of the child, her economic and social situation, her own attitude to herself and life in general are all involved. Indeed de Beauvoir does describe "woman's" attitude to her child as highly variable. There are nevertheless a number of factors which she mentions which have general applicability.

De Beauvoir maintains that "unless the circumstances are positively unfavourable the mother will find her life enriched by her child" (p.526). Such enrichment, however, it seems in de Beauvoir's theory, merely compensates for her previous disadvantaged position vis à vis the male. Indeed although de Beauvoir does not exactly follow Freud on this point, she maintains that for a woman a baby can be "equivalent to a penis" (p.527). The child's function of penis for woman in de Beauvoir's theory is basically twofold.

In Chapter Nine it was shown that de Beauvoir argues that although young girls desire to possess another carnally, their hopes for such possession are inevitably frustrated because they lack the means to make manifest such active eroticism. In short, they suffer a sense of frustration because they lack a penis. De Beauvoir subsequently maintains that woman does not envy man his penis (the tool which enables him to possess) but "the prey he takes possession of" (p.527). Thus because the baby represents, like woman does for man, "an other, combining nature and mind, who is both prey and double," de Beauvoir maintains that through her child woman manages to possess "the mistress whom she relinquishes to the male" (p.527).

The second way in which the infant functions as a substitute penis for the mother is less clearly defined by de Beauvoir yet linked to a central idea of what woman hopes to gain in her relationship with a child. And that is the notion that for the mother "the child is a double, an alter ego" (p.528). In other words, de Beauvoir defines the baby as she defines the penis for the male. However, whereas for man such alienation in an external object has only beneficial effects, it is this attitude which can lead to a complex and dangerous relationship between mother and child.

Through her baby, woman seeks to find herself in another being who is really independent; though he may appear as an extension of her he is really a sovereign subject with a mind and a will of his own. If she is "tempted to project herself entirely" on to him then the child, who may seem at one point a "treasure", is destined to become latterly "a tyrant" (p.528). In other words, she projects herself onto an individual who through time is destined to rebel, to act independently, and in so doing shatter her hopes for self-realization. This situation may lead woman to a number of "cruel devices" (p.529), claims de Beauvoir. For example, she may restrict the child's liberty, deny its subjectivity or, in "masochistic devotion" (p.529), she may attempt to tie the child to her through feelings of guilt.

De Beauvoir argues that the woman's attitude to her child is also dependent on its sex. If it is male her attitude towards him is much less ambiguous and complex than it is towards a daughter. As males are the dominant sex she hopes to become transcendent through his transcendence: "he will give her the houses she has not constructed, the lands she has not explored, the books she has not read" (pp.531-2).

However de Beauvoir claims there is an unsolved paradox in this attitude; because it is "through him she will possess the world" (p.532) it is essential that she possess her son. Thus in the attempt to keep him she is led to deny him the opportunity for transcendence - the very thing which she hopes to obtain through him. Despite the mother's attempts, however, de Beauvoir maintains that at most her activities are simply "injurious" to the boy; that he is usually able to escape since he is encouraged in other ways to assume a masculine, hence independent, way of life. The mother thus knowing what a struggle is in store for her usually resigns, consoling herself with the proud notion that she has "engendered one of her conquerors" (p.532).

According to de Beauvoir, the relation between mother and child is much more dramatic when it is a daughter; not only is the girl "given over to her mother" much more than the boy, but more importantly "in her daughter the mother does not hail a member of the superior caste; in her she seeks a double" (p.532). In other words, it is the child of the same sex who is more likely to attract the mother to see in it an alter ego. Moreover the ambivalence and resentment which de Beauvoir claims all women have to their situation is projected by the mother on to her daughter. Thus, for example, de Beauvoir claims some women achieve the bitter pleasure of "self-recognition in another victim" (p.533). The conflict also tends to increase as the girl becomes older and potentially more independent, for her mother "cannot bear to have her double become an other" (p.534); she becomes jealous of the girl's relationships and irritated by the bodily changes which mark the start of her child's maturity.

De Beauvoir claims therefore that because the vast majority of women do not gain satisfaction independently in their activities, they

seek justification and self-realization through their children. And it is precisely this which, de Beauvoir claims, gives maternity its dangerous aspect. From the woman's point of view it is not beneficial to her because it can never provide the kind of things she seeks from it. De Beauvoir maintains:

Even when the child seems a treasure in the midst of a happy or at least a balanced life, he cannot represent the limits of his mother's horizon. He does not take her out of her immanence; she shapes his flesh, she nourishes him, she takes care of him. But she can never do more than create a situation that only the child himself as an independent being can transcend; when she lays a stake on his future, her transcendence through the universe and time is still by proxy, which is to say that once more she is doomed to dependency (p.539).

In short de Beauvoir claims that maternity can never be the raison d'être of a woman's life; vicarious existence is no substitute for authentic action.

As we have seen already, de Beauvoir argues that the present intense relationship between mother and child is also not advantageous to the child. It is for this reason that de Beauvoir frequently paints a very pessimistic portrait of the relationship which is formed between them. Such a view is epitomised in the following statement:

When it is realized how difficult woman's present situation makes her full self-realization, how many desires, rebellious feelings, just claims she nurses in secret, one is frightened at the thought that defenceless infants are abandoned to her care ... A mother who punishes her child is not beating the child alone; in a sense she is not beating it at all: she is taking her vengeance on a man, on the world, or on herself. Such a mother is often remorseful and the child may not feel resentment, but it feels the blows (p.529).

For this reason, then, de Beauvoir maintains that for the child's sake it is better if the mother is an "unmutilated" person, able to work

and find self-realization in her own independent pursuits. Thus what must be substituted for the intense involvement between mother and child at present is a system whereby children spend more time with each other and with other adults with whom the bonds would be "impersonal and pure" (p.539).

It is interesting that de Beauvoir in the section called "The Mother" is consistently optimistic about the possibility of a good relationship being formed between mother and child if it were not her only raison d'être. Thus while she maintains that at present motherhood is "usually a strange mixture of narcissism, altruism, idle day-dreaming, sincerity, bad faith, devotion and cynicism" (p.528), she nevertheless believes that some women who are fulfilled in other ways can love their children in their generosity and in their strength. Their relationship with their off-spring is thus not based on demands or the need to restrict the child's freedom. It is for this reason that de Beauvoir claims:

... the 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. To be sure, the child is an enterprise to which one can validly devote oneself; but no more than any other enterprise does it represent a ready-made justification; and it must be desired for its own sake, not for hypothetical benefits (p.537).

To this extent de Beauvoir believes it possible to have a good relationship between mother and child. However, even though de Beauvoir mentions here that in certain circumstances it is valid to devote oneself to this relationship, elsewhere she seems to argue that in authenticity it can ever only be seen as an addition to a woman's life. Thus she maintains that through maternity, woman does not "become the actual equal of man" (p.540).

In The Second Sex de Beauvoir outlines woman's role as mother in the section entitled "Situation," but in the next section called "Justifications" she describes a number of ways in which women individually attempt to "justify their existence in the midst of their immanence" (p.644). In other words, she illustrates how a woman may sometimes try "to transform her prison into a heaven of glory, her servitude into sovereign liberty" (p.639). As we shall see, these attempts are essentially modes of bad faith; what Sartre would call "avenues of flight." The first to be examined is contained in the chapter entitled "The Narcissist."

II

De Beauvoir claims that whereas man is able to find himself in his engagement in the world, woman is often "forced to find her reality in the immanence of her person" (p.642). In other words, because her actions do not produce objects of value, she may turn in upon herself and view her own person as a valuable object. Moreover, the woman who embarks on this project of self-love tries to find in herself "a double" in which she can reach herself. Narcissism, then, according to de Beauvoir, is a "well-defined process of identification" (p.642). It is a process, however, which may often lead narcissistic women into insanity: feeling themselves to be lovable, beautiful and so on such women may believe this is the way they are actually perceived. But there is often a gap between their perception and reality. Believing themselves to be the centre of the world, their illusions of grandeur can, as de Beauvoir documents, easily pass into the opposite - delusions of persecution.

But even if narcissism does not lead women into the realms of insanity it is inevitably experienced with frustration. The narcissistic woman will often attempt to have her views of herself confirmed and so she tries to ensnare men on whom she will later be totally dependent. That is to say, like the master she is dependent on the Other for recognition. She also tends to become dependent on what de Beauvoir calls "the tyranny of public opinion" (p.652). For a number of reasons, then, de Beauvoir claims that the narcissistic woman inevitably experiences the failure of her project:

... the woman who does nothing makes nothing of herself and is burning incense to a non-entity. Her misfortune is that, despite all her insincerity, she is aware of this nothingness. There can be no real relation between an individual and her double because this double does not exist. The narcissist encounters a fundamental frustration. She cannot envisage herself as a totality, she is unable to keep up the illusion of being pour-soi-en-soi (p.651).

The second avenue of flight described by de Beauvoir is "love." In some respects de Beauvoir's analysis of love is similar to Sartre's in Being and Nothingness. However, it seems that what de Beauvoir writes is complementary to Sartre's thoughts. That is to say, despite the inherent male bias in Sartre's descriptions, he attempts to analyse love in a general way. Thus we are not explicitly led to believe that what he writes applies to one sex more than another. De Beauvoir, on the other hand, openly states that "love means different things for both sexes" (p.652). Thereupon she seems to extract from Sartre's analysis of love certain elements and claims these to be characteristic of either man's or woman's attitude.

De Beauvoir maintains that the man in love never forfeits his sovereignty. He may see woman as a value and wish to possess her but

what he desires is to integrate his love for a woman into his existence, and not simply to abdicate his life and sovereignty to it. For woman, on the other hand, "to love is to relinquish everything for the benefit of a master" (p.653).

The essential ingredient of de Beauvoir's analysis of love is the notion that because woman is deprived of acting she attempts to seek justification for her existence in a male; in a member of the sex who appears to her "the Absolute.". Instead of accepting passively her life as an inessential object, through her love for a man she comes actively to choose and value her dependence. In serving him, for example, she feels "she will be integrated with his existence, she will share his worth, she will be justified" (p.660). In essence, then, de Beauvoir maintains that the woman in love is one who freely gives up her transcendence to the Other "to whom she makes herself vassal and slave" (p.661).

De Beauvoir also maintains that for woman love is a "desire for annihilation" (p.659) and may thus sometimes be confused with masochism. Indeed de Beauvoir, after quoting a definition of masochism from Being and Nothingness, claims that there is a fundamental difference between these two attitudes; whereas the masochist is fascinated by her own objectivity and desires to be humiliated, the woman in love "abandons herself to love first of all to save herself" (p.660). That is to say, for de Beauvoir woman's love appears simply as a more radical expression of what Sartre describes in Being and Nothingness in as much as it is an attempt to justify one's existence through becoming the raison d'être of another's freedom. Moreover, unlike the masochist who desires to experience herself in a degraded condition, the woman in love wants to lose herself completely in the loved one: it is a dream of "ecstatic union" (p.660). Thus through love "woman," writes de

Beauvoir, "thinks she is the incarnation of her loved one, his reflection, his double: she is he" (p.663).

Again like Sartre, de Beauvoir maintains that this attitude, this avenue of flight, contains the seed of its own destruction and is doomed to failure. For example, although the man whom she loves is simply human and therefore filled with anxiety, she wants to treat him as a God. Thus when she discovers his weakness, his human frailty, she may despise him: "if he is no longer adored," writes de Beauvoir, "he must be trampled on" (p.665). Moreover, in making herself totally dependent on man, woman "creates a kind of hell for herself" (p.654). Thus in seeking to justify her existence through a man for whom she is really inessential, woman must attempt to possess him. In short, she becomes his "jailer" (p.668). Imprisoning man, robbing him of his transcendence, is what woman often attempts but what she knows is doomed to failure and frustration. Like Sartre's lover, woman attempts the impossible - the possession of freedom as freedom. However, unlike Sartre's lover, de Beauvoir's woman is conscious of the futility of her project; that is, woman knows "very well that this attempt is foredoomed to failure" (p.668).

Instead of woman finding in love the security, warmth and justification which she desires, de Beauvoir believes that she may often experience the opposite. That is to say, instead of the union which she desires, she may find herself before a free being who "holds her destiny in his hands" (p.678). Thus in place of the desired co-operation and union with the Other she may experience "the most bitter solitude there is" (p.678). She may find herself confronting a man on whom she has made herself totally dependent and in place of "ecstatic union" she experiences "struggle and not seldom hate" (p.678). Moreover

whereas man often seems to want women to give herself, in reality he often does not want to accept the gift. Thus woman may be "left in embarrassment with her useless offerings, her empty life" (p.679). The self loathing which often results may indeed tempt woman into masochism.

De Beauvoir later describes another way in which woman may attempt to deal with the situation in which she is placed. It is "mysticism" and is more or less a variation on the woman in love. De Beauvoir claims that if woman is very particular or denied love for any reason, she may seek love in God himself. That is to say, in place of a human man who will adore her and justify her existence, woman may turn to God. Like secular love, in divine love woman attempts to annihilate herself to find herself in her lover. In the mystic such annihilation often takes brutal and masochistic forms. Like love, as a mode of salvation, mysticism is doomed to failure.

To return, however, to the "woman in love," it must be pointed out that de Beauvoir believes the frustrations inherent in the loving woman's situation may be dispelled if woman is able to love "not in her weakness but in her strength" (p.679). In other words, she will benefit from love if she ceases to see it as a "mode of salvation" and views it simply as an enriching human interaction. Such strength would be gained only by woman accepting herself as subject and justifying her existence, not vicariously through man's, but in her own independent acts. Indeed through these sections of The Second Sex de Beauvoir maintains that "authentic" love is possible. It must be distinguished from inauthentic love by the fact that it is founded on "the mutual recognition of two liberties" (p.677), where both lovers experience themselves simultaneously as self and other. Thus de Beauvoir not only sees authentic love as

possible but also describes it as that mode of interaction explicitly dismissed by Sartre in Being and Nothingness as "ontological optimism."

In another context de Beauvoir describes lesbianism as the way in which woman may attempt to come to terms with her situation. De Beauvoir views lesbianism as having no relation to an individual's "anatomical fate" (p.424) and claims that there are lesbian tendencies in all young girls. Indeed de Beauvoir maintains that women are attracted to other women in as much as it is an easy way "to reconcile her autonomy with the passivity of her flesh" (pp.426-7). Thus the characteristic mark of a lesbian is not an attraction to other women but a dislike of men. De Beauvoir's attitude to lesbianism is, however, somewhat ambivalent. It is certainly the case that de Beauvoir does not tend to follow Sartre and maintain that sexuality has nothing to do with reproduction and it is heterosexuality which underlies her concept of "normal" sexuality. Moreover, although de Beauvoir claims that an assessment of lesbianism can only be made within the context of a particular woman's life - that is, with reference to its "authenticity" - she nevertheless tends to portray it in a negative light. Thus, for example, she talks of ^{the} lesbian being both "unfulfilled as a woman," and yet "impotent as a man" (p.432). In other words she is unable to find any satisfaction in a passive sexual role and yet unable to assert herself in masculine fashion because she lacks the tool necessary to appropriate the sexual object she desires. Furthermore, because lesbianism is often the result of resentment and bitterness at men, it is rarely an attempt to live one's love in a genuine and authentic fashion. Indeed de Beauvoir claims that lesbian behaviour is often the result of "empty playacting" and that "nothing gives a darker impression of narrow mindedness and of mutilation than these groups of emancipated women" (p.443).

One reason why de Beauvoir is led to denigrate lesbianism in this way is that in the act of avoiding intimate relations with men, such women do not come to terms with their feminine situation. That is to say, they do not authentically confront the situation in which they are placed and attempt to transcend its limitations. Indeed, de Beauvoir like Sartre tends to maintain that one must fully assume one's situation before one can transcend it. Thus de Beauvoir argues the authentic woman is one who does not deny the passive eroticism of her femininity, but who attempts to "remain free in the submission to which she consents" (p.422).

De Beauvoir's conclusion about woman's avenues of flight is essentially that "there is only one way to employ ... liberty authentically and that is to project it through positive action into human society" (p.687). In short, there is no escape for woman since attempts to seek justification in men, children, domestic life and so on are doomed to failure/^{and} since there is no substitute for independent, transcendent action. De Beauvoir frequently maintains that women are aware of this - that they realise the mutilation their feminine condition contains and that they daily experience the frustrations of it. Moreover, while not openly rejecting man's values or wanting to annihilate him, women do nevertheless feel resentful at their position. Indeed de Beauvoir claims this is natural since "resentment is the reverse side of dependence" (p.618). In fact de Beauvoir argues that the brooding hostility - the "impotent revolt" (p.619) - of women is manifest in the frequency of hysterical scenes, tears and suicide attempts in which they indulge.

Because de Beauvoir argues that woman cannot escape the frustrations inherent in a life of inaction and her status as "Other," she claims: "the only road forward for women is to claim their sovereignty"

(p.639). But for the de Beauvoirian woman this is easier said than done. Indeed, as we shall see more fully below, woman's emancipation constitutes a fundamental problem for de Beauvoir. Before we can consider de Beauvoir's blueprint for change, however, we must look at what man gains from his relationship with woman, "the Other."

Chapter Eleven

What Man Wants from Woman

In The Second Sex it seems that de Beauvoir tries to fuse Hegelian and Sartrian analyses of what man seeks and what he attains in his relationship with woman. This fusion is largely successful for, although they constitute two discernible strands in de Beauvoir's theory, both are based on the idea that woman is the "Other." Moreover in her use of both these theoretical perspectives, de Beauvoir attempts to show that although the relationship between the sexes is structured primarily according to man's desires, he can never be a satisfied man. Thus de Beauvoir tries to demonstrate in both Hegelian and Sartrian fashion that the seeds of frustration are contained in the relationship itself in as much as man never manages to attain his original goal. But although de Beauvoir presents an interesting and at points enlightening description of what man hopes to gain in his relationship with woman, she nevertheless fails to convince us that the inherent frustrations require dialectical resolution. This point is of crucial significance to de Beauvoir's later theory of woman's liberation and will be of central concern in the following exposition.

I

Although de Beauvoir adopts the Hegelian notion that the subject can be posed only in being "opposed" by the Other, she translates this into Sartrian terms. That is to say, she claims that it is in a relationship of opposition that the subject is revealed since "the inwardness

of the existent is only a nothingness and because he must project himself onto an object in order to reach himself" (p.217). De Beauvoir, following Sartre, also maintains that man's existence is contingent and that the nothingness at the heart of his being means he always exists at a distance from himself. Relying on Sartrean ontology to support her case, de Beauvoir also argues that it is through woman that man hopes to attain the impossible synthesis of for-itself-in-itself. An impossible synthesis which, as we have seen, for Sartre constitutes the goal of man's fundamental project. In other words, although de Beauvoir deviates from Sartre's notion that man attempts to become God, from a knowledge of Being and Nothingness we can interpret de Beauvoir's comments to mean that it is through his possession of woman that man hopes to found his own being:

Appearing as the Other, woman appears at the same time as an abundance of being in contrast to that existence the nothingness of which man senses in himself; the Other being regarded as the object in the eyes of the subject is regarded as en-soi, therefore as a being. In woman is incarnated in positive form the lack that the existent carries in his heart, and it is in seeking to be made whole through her that man hopes to attain self-realization (p.173).

De Beauvoir claims that woman is well-equipped for this task for, although a conscious existent, she is nevertheless closely tied to animal life. In other words, she appears to man as the possible being through whom he can reconcile the two aspects of his existence - transcendence and facticity.

De Beauvoir, however, points out that although man seeks self-realization through woman, he does not actually wish to be woman. His search for fulfilment through her is merely due to the fact that "he dreams of unfolding within him all that exists" (p.204), including

therefore the sex which he is not. Moreover, because de Beauvoir argues that the subject "succeeds in finding himself only in estrangement," (p.88) she maintains that man, in his attempt to find self-realization through a woman, projects on to her all that he is not, so that he can reach himself in his subsequent possession of her. However, precisely because woman "is everything he is not and that he longs for, his negation and his raison d'être" (p.175), de Beauvoir maintains that man's attitude to woman is fundamentally ambivalent. Paradoxically, because woman is to contain all that is not within him, she represents both what man desires and fears. Thus he is simultaneously attracted to and repelled by this creature whom he has set up as the Absolute Other.

In the ensuing pages de Beauvoir seeks to show how in masculine mythology the Eternal Feminine assumes a number of contradictory guises; that man's essentially ambivalent attitude to woman means that she is unable to represent any "stable" concepts. Thus mythology portrays woman as both Good and Evil; black and white; life and death. She is both preying mantis and Mother Goddess; Virgin Mary and whore. Christianity which considers woman as flesh and temptation also considers her morally superior to man. In Sartrian fashion de Beauvoir claims that although a fundamental project of man has been to appropriate woman as Other, it is according to the particular nature of his choice of being that the form of appropriation occurs. That is to say, we can explain an individual man's particular attraction to the many-sided myth only with reference to the "special idea he has of himself" (p.282) and to the way in which he generally asserts his freedom and transcendence.

The ambivalence inherent in man's attitude to woman in de Beauvoir's theory is further increased by a number of other factors, the most important of which is the connection between Nature and woman.

De Beauvoir claims that woman's procreative functions mean that she is closely identified in man's mind with Nature and thus with something which in itself inspires him with contradictory feelings. Thus Nature which not only furnishes man with his life, but also deprives him of it, appears, no matter how much he attempts to exploit it, as an alien and hostile force carrying the imminence of his death. For man, then, woman too is seen as both a generative and destructive force: what he "cherishes and detests above all in woman," writes de Beauvoir, " - loved one and mother - is the fixed image of his animal destiny" for, she adds, woman represents "the life that is necessary to his existence but that condemns him to the finite and to death" (pp.197-8).

According to de Beauvoir, such fears of woman can be seen in the aura of taboos which often surround her and in the various myths of womankind prevalent in all patriarchal societies.¹ Woman is often seen as a very dangerous creature. Not only will contact with her menstrual blood ruin crops and man's potency but, like the Harpes and Sirens, she may lure man to destruction and death. In Christian ideology woman is the incarnation of all the temptations of the world - flesh and devil - and in her role of witch or temptress she may use her evil powers to the detriment or downfall of the male community. It is no coincidence then, according to de Beauvoir, that it was the mythical first-born of the feminine species - Eve and Pandora - who let loose all the sufferings of humanity.

The importance of the link between femininity and Nature to man's ambivalent attitude is also to be seen in man's erotic attraction to the female sex. It is in embracing a young, pure woman that man feels he possesses all the riches of Nature. Thus, writes de Beauvoir, for man woman is: "the whole fauna, the whole flora of the earth; gazelle

and doe, lilies and roses, downy peach, perfumed berry, she is precious stones, nacre, agate, pearl, silk, the blue of the sky, the cool water of springs, air, flame, land and sea"(p.187). However, de Beauvoir claims that it is "restrained" Nature which man wants woman to represent, thus forcing her to use artifice to disguise the inevitable deterioration of her flesh. And it is this which de Beauvoir claims is woman's "first lie, her first treason," for life "though clothed in the most attractive forms, is always infested by the ferments of age and death" (p.192). It is for this reason that de Beauvoir maintains that man's erotic attraction to a woman is doomed to fail for, because he desires a fresh young maiden, he latterly has "to support a heavy matron or a desiccated hag for life" (p.219).

De Beauvoir maintains that in setting woman up as the "Absolute Other" man inevitably condemns her to wear "a double and deceptive visage" (p.229). Deprived of acting, and thus of establishing herself completely as an individual subject, there is a mysterious essence of femininity but, claims de Beauvoir, it is the mystery of nothingness in as much as there is precisely nothing to conceal. In one of the most powerful and persuasive passages in the book, de Beauvoir takes us through a number of different aspects of the inevitable ambivalence of the Eternal Feminine:

She is all that man desires and all that he does not attain. She is the good mediatrix between propitious Nature and man; and she is the temptation of unconquered Nature, counter to all goodness. She incarnates all moral values, from good to evil, and their opposites; she is the substance of action and whatever is an obstacle to it, she is man's grasp on the world and his frustration: as such she is the source and origin of all man's reflection on his existence and of whatever expression he is able to give to it; and yet she works to divert him from himself, to make him sink down in silence and in death.

She is servant and companion, but he expects her also to be his audience and critic and to confirm him in his sense of being; but she opposes him with her indifference, even with her mockery and laughter. He projects upon her what he desires and what he fears, what he loves and what he hates. And if it is so difficult to say anything specific about her, that is because man seeks the whole of himself in her and because she is All. She is All, that is, on the plane of the inessential; she is all the Other. And, as the other, she is other than herself, other than what is expected of her. Being all, she is never quite this which she should be; she is everlasting deception, the very deception of that existence which is never successfully attained nor fully reconciled with the totality of existents (p.229).

The frustration experienced by man in his relationship with woman in de Beauvoir's theory is not just confined to the ambivalence of the attitude which stems from her role as the Other. It is not just the product of his vacillation for it also results from his desire to possess her. De Beauvoir maintains that the mystery and danger of femininity, the very thing which man is attracted to, disintegrates with her enslavement and domestication. Thus once man has woman under his control "her magic is dissipated rather than transformed; reduced to the condition of servant, she is no longer that unconquered prey incarnating all the treasures of nature" (p.219).² Indeed de Beauvoir frequently maintains that man, by enslaving woman and confining her to a world of immanence, has robbed her of her original attraction as prey. Thus, although the thought of woman may make "man dream", in reality she "represents the everyday aspect of life; she is silliness, prudence, shabbiness and boredom" (p.219).

De Beauvoir is at pains to point out that there is a great tension between what man desires in his relationship with woman and how he hopes to achieve it. Thus she claims that for man the difficulty is that he wants woman as both slave and enchantress. De Beauvoir

argues that throughout history man in his relation to woman has pursued that "chimera, a companion half-slave, half free" (p.623).

De Beauvoir also maintains that man has sought to solve this problem by attempting to clothe woman, one of his possessions, in some dignity so that she appears to be something more than a mere thing. It is for this reason that she has been elevated, put on a pedestal and, we shall see, given the role of judge, arbiter of male actions.

To some extent it is possible to trace in de Beauvoir's comments on how man's relationship with woman betrays his original desires a resemblance to Sartre's work. In Chapter Three, for example, we saw how love is doomed to failure because it is not possible to possess freedom as freedom. Likewise we find in de Beauvoir's theory the notion that man cannot possess woman as consciousness or as mysterious Nature for in both instances such qualities disappear if woman is enslaved. Moreover, although de Beauvoir does not go into an analysis of sexual relationships along strict Sartrian lines, she does nevertheless maintain that there is an "ambiguity" in man's carnal situation. Thus de Beauvoir claims that what man desires in carnal union with woman is to possess her - to "brand" her so that she will forever be his. However, such dreams of possession can never be fulfilled for, according to de Beauvoir, in "authentic possession the other is abolished as such" whereas in carnal possession "woman survives man's embrace and in that very fact she escapes him" (p.195). In short, there is always the possibility that she may be possessed by another man. Indeed de Beauvoir also maintains that man, instead of realising his dreams for possession, may in fact feel that he himself is possessed by his mistress. It is a "mysterious" force which attracts him to his lover - which forces

his general sexual desire on to a particular feminine body. Thus, far from feeling in total control in the sexual act, man may find himself ensnared by his mistress.

Man's desires for possession of woman both carnally and in other ways are frustrated for another Sartrean reason: man is never fully able to grasp woman in her subjectivity. In Sartrean fashion de Beauvoir expounds the immutable subjectivity of the individual and maintains that woman, even at her most masochistic and enslaved, illustrates her subjectivity:

Therein is (woman's) original treason; the most docile, the most passive is still a conscious being: and sometimes the fact that in giving herself to him she looks at him and judges is enough to make him feel duped (p.626).

Thus we see that in The Second Sex de Beauvoir, although arguing that man wants through the possession of woman to find self-realization, nevertheless maintains that this project is doomed to failure; it is not simply that his attitude to woman is too unstable and ambivalent and that the position of servant to which she is confined robs her of her original attractiveness, for there is also the fact that it is not possible actually to possess another.

II

Along with this explanation of what man hopes to attain in his relationship with woman de Beauvoir outlines another argument which can be best understood within a more Hegelian theoretical perspective. The major aspect of this Hegelian ~~stand~~ ^{stand} has already been encountered in the summary of de Beauvoir's historical account for there we learned

that she argues that it is in his relationship with woman that man has sought to escape "the implacable dialectic of master and slave" (p.171). In other words, because de Beauvoir argues that each conscious being "tries to fulfil himself by reducing the other to slavery" (p.171), she maintains that man has hoped to escape this conflict in his relationship with the opposite sex. As we know de Beauvoir believes that woman is well-suited for this purpose; despite the biological restrictions imposed upon her - restrictions which have prevented her from fully asserting her subjectivity - she is nevertheless a conscious being. In acknowledging her own inadequacies for assertive, creative action, woman has thus given man recognition of his worth without being led to demand recognition in return. Thus de Beauvoir portrays woman as the Other who gives man objective confirmation of his sovereignty but, unlike the slave, her situation has not historically raised her to the position where she also lays claim to her sovereignty.

Using the Hegelian concept of recognition when discussing the relationship between man and woman, de Beauvoir elaborates why woman has been necessary to man. Thus de Beauvoir maintains that woman is particularly useful to man in this respect for, unlike his peers who are too busily engaged in projects to act as publics for one another, woman is always there, ready to recognise his successes and achievements. Indeed not only can woman confirm man's objective worth in the same way that men can do for each other but also, according to de Beauvoir, she can recognise some of those qualities which cannot easily be displayed in such an all-male forum. He can reveal to her "the special merits" (p.216) of his very being - his virile, seductive, tender qualities, for example, can only be displayed and valued with reference to her.

De Beauvoir also claims that as woman not only declines to compete with man but also accepts his values and his laws, she herself is able to become the symbol of man's success - simultaneously occupying the role of both judge and prize.³ Thus de Beauvoir claims:

Treasure, prey, sport and danger, nurse, guide, judge, mediatrix, mirror, woman is the Other ... who opposes him without denying him, she is the Other who lets herself be taken without ceasing to be the Other, and therein she is so necessary to man's happiness and to his triumph that it can be said that if she did not exist, men would have invented her (p.218).

In the master-slave scenario the recognition of the Other is likewise so essential to the consciousness destined to be master, that he is prepared to die in order to achieve it. However, as we know, this recognition, although passionately fought for by the master, is ultimately rendered worthless for, far from being recognised by another human being, he is recognised by a slave - a mere animal or thing. Although the master had wanted to assert himself as an autonomous being his position of master is dependent on the slave's recognition. In The Second Sex de Beauvoir, it seems, also tries to portray the male female relationship as undergoing these kinds of changes but, as we shall see, de Beauvoir is not as convincing as Hegel.

In de Beauvoir's theory there is certainly the notion that enslavement contradicts the original reason to enslave. However, this notion refers more to the concept of possession and does not actually affect the recognition which man attains in his relationship with woman. In other words, de Beauvoir never explicitly shows that the recognition which woman gives man is worthless. To some extent this is in harmony with de Beauvoir's reiterated insistence that despite the fact that woman is confined to immanence, she is nevertheless a human being. And

as such, a being whose recognition is important. However, even if de Beauvoir had maintained that woman's recognition is worthless to man, this would not have led to the drama of the Hegelian scenario. Hegel's master attains objective confirmation of his worth only through the slave's recognition but de Beauvoir's man does not acquire recognition of his sovereignty only in his relationship with woman for, like the slave, he also attains it independently through his labour.

This notion of independence leads us to question what de Beauvoir does, in fact, make of the idea that the master comes to be dependent on the slave. Here we find that despite de Beauvoir's continued attempt to show that unlike the dependent condition of femininity, man is an independent being, she does try to make some parallels between man and master. Thus she claims that "the dialectic of master and slave here finds its most concrete application: in oppressing, one becomes oppressed. Men are enchained by reason of their very sovereignty" (p.499). However, in claiming this de Beauvoir cannot actually find parallels in Hegel's master-slave. In Hegel's theory the disadvantaged position of the master comes from the fact that the recognition which sustains him as master is obtained from a mere thing, and that because his needs are catered for by the slave he does not take part in creative labour. Thus the master is arrested at a primitive level of development and is unable to become a full human being. The oppression of man to which de Beauvoir refers is linked to neither of these things. It refers simply to the idea that as woman is morally and financially dependent on man, he may be required to act in accordance with her needs and demands. In other words, in enslaving woman he has laid the foundations of his own responsibility for her. Moreover, what de Beauvoir calls oppression in this context, is little more than what she elsewhere refers to as

"irritation" (p.500). Unlike the master, man's position in de Beauvoir's theory does not retard his human development or keep him at the level of the "inessential means" (p.635). It is merely a position of responsibility; responsibility which, in the light of de Beauvoir's own ontology and ethics, he is ultimately free to reject.

Thus we can say that although de Beauvoir tries to show how the relationship between man and woman is dialectically transformed so that it betrays his desires, the weight of her general argument is not convincing. As de Beauvoir claims that man is able to confirm his sovereignty in his labour, and as for Hegel this constitutes a higher stage of confirmation, de Beauvoir's man has avoided the impasse of the master and escaped the problems of dependency engendered by recognition gained only from a slave. Moreover, as de Beauvoir has not introduced us to the idea that man is prevented from fully affirming his humanity, she is unable to convince us that man's oppression of woman constitutes his own oppression.

According to de Beauvoir's perspective, then, man may feel frustrated, cheated, irritated and bored in his relationship with woman but never actually oppressed. Indeed it is important to remember that despite some of its negative, frustrating features, de Beauvoir maintains that man benefits ontologically from his relationship with the opposite sex. In other words, in recognising him, in incarnating Nature and the Other, woman's subordinate status suits man's "ontological pretensions". In fact de Beauvoir actually argues that woman's role is so important to "man's happiness and his triumph" (p.218) that he created her specially to fulfil his needs.

Leaving aside the ontological aspects of the relationship there are other reasons why man benefits from his oppression of woman. For

example, de Beauvoir claims that whereas human existence always contains immanent and transcendent qualities, man has appropriated the latter and confined women to the world of the "given." Thus he has managed to escape completely the negative, animal aspects of life. Moreover, in confining woman to such a world he assures himself of a haven to which he can escape:

When he comes home in the evening, he is once more at anchor on the earth; through his wife the continuity of his days is assured; whatever may be the hazards he confronts in the outer world, she guarantees the recurrence of meals, of sleep; she restores whatever has been destroyed or worn out by activity, preparing food for the tired worker, caring for him when he is sick, mending, washing. And into this conjugal universe that she sets up and keeps going, she brings the whole of the vast world: she lights fires, puts flowers about the house, domesticates the emanations of the sun, water, and earth (p.209).

Despite the fact that de Beauvoir never manages to portray man as oppressed in his relationship with woman and indeed claims that he benefits greatly from it, she nevertheless maintains that man would profit from woman's emancipation. "He would be liberated in her liberation" (p.729), writes de Beauvoir. This argument is based on the notion that man would find his relationship with woman enriched if she were an equal; that woman's liberation would, in fact, lead to more dramatic relations between the sexes as each would then be seen as Other. However, of much more significance than this is de Beauvoir's idea that reciprocal relations between individuals and groups are imperative for ethical reasons. But in order to understand how likely man is to accept or desire woman's emancipation, it is necessary to examine in some depth de Beauvoir's view of reciprocal relations and, within the terms of her theory, whether such relations are likely to come about.

III

In previous chapters it has been shown that throughout The Second Sex de Beauvoir uses Hegelian and Sartrean concepts to analyse the male-female relationship. At times the use of these two theoretical perspectives is quite compatible. But there are occasions when there is a tension, if not a basic incompatibility, in such a use of Sartrean and Hegelian ideas. And, as we shall see, this is most acutely demonstrated in de Beauvoir's theory of conflict and its resolution.

In The Second Sex de Beauvoir follows Hegel and maintains that at a certain stage of development, man senses himself to be a subject, but that he is driven to have this confirmed by a consciousness which is separate from yet identical with his own: "Each conscious being aspires to set himself up alone as sovereign subject. Each tries to fulfil himself by reducing the Other to slavery" (p.172). According to de Beauvoir, however, this desire although necessary to human development underlies "the tragedy" of the human situation.

De Beauvoir not only shares with Hegel this belief in a fundamental hostility between Self and Other but also like him maintains that such conflict may be resolved. In Hegel this reconciliation is ultimately effected by the obliteration of objectivity and the synthesis of both moments of the dialectic in the form of the Absolute. And it is this which, as we have seen, in our inspection of some of Sartre's ideas leads him to accuse Hegel of "ontological optimism." Thus Sartre, while accepting the notion of an original struggle between consciousnesses, nevertheless opposes Hegel on the grounds that the conflict and separation of consciousnesses is a permanent feature of human existence. In short

Sartre rejects Hegel's optimism in favour of a theory in which conflict is cyclical and the essence of the relationships to which we are all doomed.

De Beauvoir, however, writing The Second Sex after the publication date of Being and Nothingness, amends this aspect of Sartrean existentialism and yet retains the notion of a fundamental conflict between individuals intact. In other words, in the aftermath of war and in the wake of the development of a socially committed philosophy, de Beauvoir claims an elimination of conflict is possible. Thus in The Second Sex we find an ontology which posits an "a priori" struggle of consciousnesses hand in hand with a concept of obtainable reciprocity. However, such a synthesis is not justified, or even discussed, in theoretical terms and de Beauvoir simply uses both arguments in the course of her study.

As we have already seen in previous chapters, de Beauvoir believes that the desire to enslave the Other - "the imperialism of the human consciousness" - is a fundamental aspect of human existence. So fundamental in fact that de Beauvoir never feels it necessary to justify her notion that man would have wanted to dominate woman. This does not mean, however, that in de Beauvoir's theory relations between men are always ones of oppressor and oppressed, for it would appear that, if a certain equality between individuals or groups already exists, then a reciprocal relationship between them may develop:

... when two human categories are together, each aspires to impose its sovereignty upon the other. If both are able to resist this imposition, there is created between them a reciprocal relation, sometimes in enmity, sometimes in amity, always in a state of tension. If one of the two is in some ways privileged, has some advantage, this one prevails over the other and undertakes to keep it in subjection (p.93).

In other words, de Beauvoir claims that although the desire to dominate the Other is fundamental and irresistible, it may be kept in check if a certain equality between the protagonists already exists. Thus for example where there is no obvious difference in strength between opposing forces, recognition may seem preferable to those concerned to total and unceasing conflict. However de Beauvoir's notion of the possibility of reciprocity and her hope for harmonious relations between individuals in the future is not based on the idea that man's desire for domination is tempered by reason or pragmatism. On the contrary de Beauvoir's belief in the possibility and importance of reciprocity is firmly rooted in her notion that reciprocal relationships place humanity on a higher existential plane:

It is possible to rise above this (fundamental) conflict if each individual freely recognises the other, each regarding 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 (p.172).

However, although from this passage we learn quite clearly the status and definition of a reciprocal relationship in de Beauvoir's theory, we do not learn the conditions under which such "friendship" and "generosity" flourish. We do not, for example, know how men either en masse or as individuals manage to temper their fundamental desire for domination and reach this higher state. However, even if de Beauvoir had discussed these points it does not seem possible that she would have been able to reconcile the ontology on which her analysis is

based with the essentially ethical notion that the resolution of conflict is both desirable and possible.

De Beauvoir's notions of conflict and reciprocity become more complicated, when we examine them within the context of the relationship between man and woman. Thus, for example, although de Beauvoir maintains that it is an ontological "fact" that each individual tries to assert his sovereignty through enslaving the Other, this is not applicable to the female sex. In other words, de Beauvoir's ontological "facts" have relevance only to half the human race! Thus in claiming that women, both historically and contemporarily, have not stood up "before" the world and felt "unique and sovereign" - that they have abdicated in favour of men - de Beauvoir contradicts her earlier claim that individuals always try to fulfil themselves by "reducing the Other to slavery." Of more importance, however, than the fact that woman's behaviour contradicts de Beauvoir's "ontology"; is the way in which she conceptualises the relations between the sexes.

Although de Beauvoir is not always consistent on the question of whether or not reciprocity between the sexes has ever existed, a dominant theme of The Second Sex is that women have always been subordinate to men - that the relationship between the sexes has not been reciprocal - and that it has been structured according to man's desires. However de Beauvoir is inherently ambivalent about the relevance of "the imperialism of the human consciousness" to man's relationship with woman. Thus de Beauvoir simultaneously maintains that man would inevitably want to dominate woman, and that "the couple is an original Mitsein" (p.67). In other words, although de Beauvoir takes it as axiomatic that man would want to dominate woman, elsewhere

she maintains that despite the fact that human relations are not based on "mitsein," the couple relationship is one based primordially on co-operation and harmony. Thus it appears that in this instance the relationship between man and woman and man and his fellows is one of inversion. That is to say, the conflict between men is ontological but, according to de Beauvoir, may be replaced by reciprocity if man can manage to raise himself and assume this authentically human attitude. The raw, unmediated relationship between the sexes, on the other hand, is apparently one of "unity" and it is historical progress, and to a lesser extent ontology, which have determined man's desires to oppress. In other words, historical progress has meant the oppression of woman but allowed the possibility of reciprocity between men. As de Beauvoir argues that woman's status as "Other" is not compatible with truly reciprocal relations - with the existence defined by her as "man's true nature" - she believes it now constitutes a barrier to real human progress.

Part V

DE BEAUVOIR'S POLITICS

Chapter Twelve

Woman's Liberation

According to Simone de Beauvoir woman's full emancipation depends on women acting en masse to assert themselves and thus to redefine the concept of "femininity." This is not to deny that individual women may, from time to time, assert her humanity but in our patriarchal society this assertion can only be purchased at the cost of this woman's femininity. Neither is this to deny that de Beauvoir occasionally lapses into speaking of some women who "have never had to sense in (their) femininity an inconvenience or an obstacle" (p.27). Still less is it to imply that de Beauvoir thinks emancipation will come easily. The general run of de Beauvoir's argument is clear: woman's emancipation must be "collective" (p.639).

The snares which await any attempt at emancipating woman are considerable. There is, first of all, the lack of any common work or interest which might bring women (as it has in the case of the proletariat or oppressed ethnic groups) together. The success of each woman depends on her getting and keeping a single male. Thus women are forced to compete for the favours of men. At the same time women "live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition and social standing to certain men - fathers or husbands - more firmly than they are to other women" (p.19). Thus dispersed women have little chance of developing a "we" feeling. Moreover de Beauvoir believes that the sexes are naturally interdependent so that women can hardly dream of "exterminating males" (p.19) and this restriction makes it difficult for women to think of men as "the Other." But woman's "passivity" is the biggest bar to her liberation in de Beauvoir's

theory. To explicate the passive nature of woman's consciousness we need to see how the foundation, having been laid in girlhood, is reinforced in woman's domestic labour.

I

In the historical sections of The Second Sex de Beauvoir defines the superior nature of man's labour in terms of its creativity. Thus it is with reference to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic that we understand why man was able to assert his sovereignty through the use of the bronze tool. In the contemporary sections of the book de Beauvoir still expresses the superiority of men with reference to the creativity of their labour. But de Beauvoir begins to combine a Hegelian emphasis on labour with one which has Sartrian roots. Thus in some instances in The Second Sex it is productive labour which is of special significance to man, not simply because it affords him recognition of his human consciousness but because it gives him that materialist conception which for Sartre is necessary for an authentic perspective on the world and one's place in it. Bearing in mind these two views of the potential significance of labour, let us look at the way in which de Beauvoir describes woman's domestic work and the consciousness which results.

Using the essentially Hegelian idea that creative labour is significant to the labourer if it externalises his consciousness, de Beauvoir argues that woman's household tasks have little human value since they rarely produce anything durable and bring no lasting satisfaction to the creator. Thus even though cooking can be creative and requires certain skills, it does not produce objects of permanence and so woman derives little benefit from it. But it is particularly housework,

likened at one point to "the torture of Sisyphus" (p.470) which de Beauvoir sees as a mindless, repetitious chore which neither gives woman sense of her human status nor allows her to know the pride of creation.¹

De Beauvoir's objection to household chores is not confined to the fact that such tasks are unsatisfying and of little benefit to the labourer. More importantly she maintains that such activities are technically rudimentary. Even though some technique may be involved in such operations, de Beauvoir claims that they are subject to their own laws: "One must obey the fire, the water, wait for the sugar to melt, for the dough to rise, and also for the wash to dry, for the fruits to ripen on the shelf" (p.609). De Beauvoir argues, therefore, that woman's tasks are "too monotonous" to teach her "the laws of mechanical causation" (p.610). De Beauvoir also claims the converse; namely that as woman's activities are not based on technique, they appear to involve "magic" or "sorcery" (p.472ff). Moreover, according to de Beauvoir, woman further experiences this lack of technique in her reproductive role; for the reproductive process cannot be expressed in a "mathematical equation" and, obeying its own laws, it is a process which "no machine can hasten or delay" (p.609).

The importance of de Beauvoir's conception of the labour activities of women is to be seen in the profound consequences which she believes such labour has on the nature of feminine consciousness. This is expressed most succinctly by de Beauvoir's claim that because woman does not do technical work her "mentality perpetuates that of agricultural civilisations which worshipped the magic powers of the land" (p.610). It is this lack of technical knowledge and experience

which means in de Beauvoir's theory that woman is unable to think of herself as a creator or to appreciate the "masculine logic" (p.610) with which man has learned to conquer and create his physical environment. Thus de Beauvoir argues that woman is unable to understand the nature of action necessary to change the world and feels lost in Nature - "at the heart of an immense, vague nebula" (p.610). Furthermore unlike man, who de Beauvoir portrays as forever sharpening his analytical tools, woman is "content ... with extremely vague conceptions, confusing parties, opinions, places, people, events." In short, "her head is filled with a strange jumble" (p.611).²

Woman's lack of technical training means that she feels powerless and, like Sartre's anti-Semite (who is also defined as a non-productive worker), tends to see the world as something "fixed"³ In fact de Beauvoir argues that one of the distinguishing features of the sexes is that whereas woman feels "powerless against things: volcanoes, police, patrons, men" (p.613), man takes responsibility for the world he lives in. In contrast with man "who knows that he can develop different institutions, another ethic, a new legal code" (p.612), woman's feelings of powerlessness give rise to feelings of resignation. Indeed de Beauvoir claims that while such resignation may inspire patience and tenacity, it also "engenders a sterile prudence" (p.613) - a frame of mind which means that she is "always trying to conserve, to adapt, to arrange rather than build anew" (p.614). Ultimately de Beauvoir even concludes that the consciousness of women is such that they "prefer compromise and adjustment to revolution" (p.614).

Thus irrespective of whether de Beauvoir emphasises the importance of work for essentially Hegelian or Sartrean reasons, she portrays

the consciousness which woman attains in her domestic work as passive. In short, for de Beauvoirian woman "everything influences her to let herself be hemmed in, dominated by existences foreign to her own" (p.721). As such, woman's consciousness is not that requisite for a struggle for liberation. The significance of this, however, can be best understood in the light of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic.

II

As we have seen, de Beauvoir envisages man's historic and contemporary role as allowing him to assert his humanity by means of mastery and slavery. De Beauvoirian woman, however, is similar only to the negative features of the Hegelian master and slave. Thus, although there are parallels between woman and some aspects of slavery and between woman and master, no analogy can be made between woman and creative slave. It is particularly this fact which does not bode well for woman's emancipation.

If we bear in mind the historical and contemporary role which de Beauvoir ascribes to woman, it appears that woman's consciousness is similar to that of Hegel's slave in the immediate aftermath of the Fight; that is before labour has transformed his consciousness. Indeed woman's consciousness, as described by de Beauvoir, is similar to the slave's at this stage in his development and yet more backward than it. This backwardness results from de Beauvoir's claim that as woman has never been engaged in battle - never learned "the lessons of violence" - she has not had the opportunity to contemplate her own death, to confront the contingency of human existence. We do not have to accept

de Beauvoir's idea that master and slave share the same risk, to see that in her theory, woman, even more than the slave, represents the dependent consciousness of given being who has never demonstrated an ability to overcome an animal attachment to life.

The notion that because woman has never been engaged in battle, her consciousness is more slavish than the slave's, is further borne out when we take into consideration her lack of fear. The fear experienced by the slave in the Hegelian scenario is crucial to his future development; the fear which the slave first experienced in his combat with the master continues as part of his servitude and forces him to grasp the meaning of existence. Indeed Hegel maintains that if consciousness "has not endured absolute fear, but merely some slight anxiety" - if "its natural consciousness has not tottered and shaken" - then it cannot get "beyond the attitude of bondage."⁴ Thus, as de Beauvoir claims that the continuation of woman's oppression is based on the economic and ontological enticements to complicity and that woman accepts man's values, woman cannot be seen as having been "shaken" to the core of her being.

The fact that de Beauvoir's woman has never been prepared to fight, nor has experienced the contingency of human existence, keeps woman largely at the animal, bestial level of early slavery. But following on from Hegel, we may be tempted to assume that although man, like the master, has laid the foundations for mankind's progress, it is ultimately the oppressed woman who, by asserting her autonomy and demanding recognition, will create a truly human society based on reciprocity. However de Beauvoir's theory prevents her from invoking the dialectics of the original Hegelian scenario.

An intriguing feature of de Beauvoir's theory is that her woman is also comparable to Hegel's master in that her exclusion from creative labour means that like him she is steeped in Universality, realising none of her individuality and representing only certain biological roles - mother, daughter, sister - within the family. Woman's and master's exclusion from creative labour not only precludes them from becoming proper individuals, but also ^{means} that if the principles of mastery or femininity were to reign supreme, nothing would change. The first fight would merely be replicated indefinitely in wars of prestige and woman's maintaining role would result in the mere repetition of the same life in more individuals. Indeed it is because de Beauvoir equates the principle of femininity with stagnation, that she argues that woman's devaluation was a necessary stage in human progress.

Thus the de Beauvoirian woman, like the Hegelian master, is in an impasse. In the Hegelian scenario, oppression is dialectically overcome by the slave but the situation of de Beauvoir's woman does not contain the germ of her liberation. Having been excluded from the type of meaningful or dangerous activity which could furnish her with the objective conditions necessary for her to claim her sovereignty, she is unable to fight for her liberation. It seems that having accepted the status of "Other," in a moment of historical exigency, without being beaten in combat, de Beauvoir's woman is unable to reject it once the situation no longer merits such a sacrifice. In other words, the maintaining, untranscendent role to which she is confined insulates her consciousness so that she is unable to escape. Master and woman, then, in comparison to slave and man, represent the static aspect of the dichotomy - an aspect, which in woman's case, theoretically belies the oppressed's liberating role.

One may be tempted to assume that the stagnation in the male female relationship could be overcome by man for, after all, in de Beauvoirian theory he not only inculcates some aspects of the principles of mastery and slavery, but he would also be realising his "true nature" if he initiated a reciprocal relationship with woman. Furthermore, as we learned in Chapter Eleven, de Beauvoir's theory leads us to the conclusion that although man, like the master, is in a situation he desired, he can never attain satisfaction. In enslaving woman he has robbed her of her original attractiveness; she has been confined to a world of immanence where her previous magic and mystery have been replaced by mediocrity. Leaving aside for the moment whether in de Beauvoir's theory man would want to liberate woman, would this in fact be a plausible scenario for emancipation?

III

Central to most theories of liberation is the idea that the oppressed cannot be liberated; that they must be the subject, not the object of the verb.⁵ Thus the struggle for liberation is frequently portrayed as possessing cathartic qualities in as much as it is in this revolutionary activity that the oppressed fully cast off the mentality of subordination. If the oppressed neither struggle nor rebel - if liberation is not the result of their own activities - then the mentality of subordination will remain. The necessity for the oppressed to be at the heart of the liberating action is illustrated by the master-slave dialectic. If the master, for whatever reason, decided to give the slave his freedom, the slave would remain an animal or thing for he has not asserted his humanity over his animal-like fear of death.

Moreover, a slave freed voluntarily by his master would be so feeble that he could easily be enslaved by another master. In other words, the structure of the oppressive relationship might be altered from above yet the consciousness of dominance and subservience remain the same.

Frantz Fanon also illustrates this point with reference to blacks. In Black Skin, White Masks he writes: "Historically, the Negro steeped in the inessentiality of servitude was set free by his master. He did not fight for his freedom." And so, adds Fanon: "The Negro is a slave who has been allowed to assume the attitude of a master. The white man is a master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table."⁶ Paulo Freire in The Pedagogy of the Oppressed likewise argues that the oppressed must be the actors in the struggle for liberation in as much as "the liberation of the oppressed is the liberation of men, not things."⁷ Accordingly Freire argues: "Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift."⁸

Such views assert the necessity for human action and the immutable subjectivity of the individual and so they are in harmony with existentialist ontology. Indeed the emphasis on the oppressed's role accords with statements in The Second Sex. It is the notion that emancipation is dependent on a change in consciousness and not simply on the outward trappings of freedom which underlies de Beauvoir's comments on the emptiness of abstract rights for women and her statement that in our society the nature of woman's consciousness is such that "she is a slave even when she behaves with apparent freedom" (p.500).

However, despite this underlying notion de Beauvoir insinuates at points that woman can be liberated by the activities of others. Thus not only does she write about society "restoring" (p.740) woman's

sovereignty but also, quoting Rimbaud, of man "letting" woman "go free" (p.292). Consider her most important statement on this question:

Oppressors cannot be expected to make a move of gratuitous generosity; but at one time the revolt of the oppressed, at another time the very evolution of the privileged caste itself, creates new situations; thus men have been led, in their own interest to give partial emancipation to women: it remains only for women to continue their ascent, and the successes they are obtaining are an encouragement to do so. It seems almost certain that sooner or later they will arrive at complete economic and social equality which will bring about an inner metamorphosis (p.738 , emphasis added).⁹

Even here de Beauvoir mentions the activity of the oppressors as having significance for liberation. However, although de Beauvoir portrays man's activity as the catalyst of the process leading to woman's emancipation, it is not simply a question of man giving woman her emancipation. Let us examine in depth the various factors involved.

In Chapter Eleven we learned that de Beauvoir maintains that man derives many benefits from his relationship with woman, "the Other." Moreover despite de Beauvoir's ethics and notion that man would morally benefit from woman's emancipation, the logic of her theory is that man gains from his oppression of woman and is unlikely to relinquish this position of dominance. De Beauvoir even states this in the conclusion when she maintains that man "is very well pleased to remain the sovereign subject, the absolute superior, the essential being; he refuses to accept his companion as an equal in any concrete way" (p.726). In short, de Beauvoir cannot paint a convincing picture of man actually renouncing his position.

However, if we look again at de Beauvoir's programme for woman's emancipation we see that man is to become catalyst of the process because it is in his interests to change woman's situation and not

because he would be acting in accordance with his "true" nature. In other words, man's economic interests lead him to desire woman's productive labour and he unintentionally activates the process which de Beauvoir at one point believes will lead to sexual equality. In her terms, woman's emancipation is linked to the "economic evolution of the masculine world," and so the change in the economic order will awaken a new consciousness in women. But is de Beauvoir being consistent with her own theory here, and is she being realistic?

IV

Throughout The Second Sex de Beauvoir continually emphasises that through his labour an individual can establish his sovereignty. So it is not surprising that her conclusion on the future of woman's liberation should portray work as vital to this process. De Beauvoir simultaneously maintains that woman's lack of meaningful employment is intrinsic to her oppression and that this must be changed if she is to cast off her role as Other. "The curse that is upon woman as vassal," writes de Beauvoir, "(is) the fact that she is not permitted to do anything." However, she adds optimistically that when woman "is productive, active, she regains her transcendence" (p.638). A good part of the optimism of de Beauvoir's conclusion is dependent on this notion of the importance of work to woman's liberation, for she maintains that technology now guarantees women entry into productive work. De Beauvoir even claims that in the age of the machine and with woman "now protected from the slavery of reproduction", woman is in a position to assume the economic role "which is offered her and which will assure her of complete independence" (p.152, emphasis added).¹⁰

In de Beauvoir's theory the liberating nature of work for women appears to be based on two things: her material and psychological independence of men. In short, work would eliminate the parasitical nature of feminine existence:

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. Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator (p.689, emphasis added).

Elsewhere, however, she notes that a job often does not allow her to become independent of men. As de Beauvoir points out, women are often forced into low-paid work and even where they do the same job as men, they often do not receive equal pay. Thus she claims: "The majority of women do not escape from the traditional feminine world; they get neither from society nor from their husbands the assistance they would need to become in concrete fact the equals of man" (p.690). Indeed de Beauvoir argues that although some women benefit from the feeling of self-sufficiency which working may give them, for many women it is simply a "double servitude" (p.690) for, not finding in their work the means to become economically independent of men, many women become servants both to their job and their "protector." In other words, de Beauvoir argues that women are exploited as a pool of cheap, unorganised labour and that their unrecognised status in the job market leads them to see their jobs and their economic position as unimportant. Therefore, de Beauvoir cannot, and for the most part does not, claim that for the vast majority of working women, a job automatically ends their dependent and parasitical existence. Their work leaves them materially dependent on men and they often see their

job as unimportant - as something to fill in the period before marriage or as a way to earn "pin money," So even these working women retain a psychological dependence on men.

The material dependence on men which is retained by the majority of women by virtue of their low paid work disappears for women who enter the professions or the arts. But, according to de Beauvoir in her chapter entitled "The Independent Woman," for these women too the psychological dependency remains. For despite the fact that de Beauvoir pins her hopes for liberation on women entering productive work, she herself remains sceptical of the relevance of employment to woman's emancipation.

To some extent, such scepticism emanates from the notion that women can find no individual salvation and that genuine emancipation depends not simply on getting a good job, but on working within a world in which changes have been made to woman's total situation. For example, although the woman who works may "refuse to confine herself to her role as female, because she will not accept mutilation" de Beauvoir adds that "it would also be mutilation to repudiate her sex" (p.691). De Beauvoir subsequently advises the "woman who has no wish to shock or devaluate herself socially" to live out her "feminine situation in a feminine manner" (p.692). In effect, then, de Beauvoir is saying that repudiating one's sex absorbs time and energy, and only succeeds in making one a freak, and so it is actually preferable to attempt to harmonise femininity with more human pursuits. But as this will always dilute woman's commitment to her job, since she will have to find time to maintain her feminine appeal, de Beauvoir argues that as long as femininity is not redefined even women who work will find it very difficult to become equal to men.

It appears that while an individual woman in de Beauvoir's theory cannot find emancipation in her work, nevertheless it is only when women begin to work that they will lay the foundations for collective action; that work is a prerequisite for the redefinition of femininity which, in the final analysis, will constitute woman's emancipation. For this reason, the influx of women into productive labour is seen by de Beauvoir as a period of transition (p.292). However, de Beauvoir does not convince us that even women who work in jobs which allow them to become creative and transcendent, can cast off their psychological dependency. Speaking specifically of women in the professions and the arts, de Beauvoir maintains: "... the independence she has won through work is not enough to abolish her desire for a glorious abdication" (p.704). Indeed de Beauvoir argues quite clearly that access to transcendent pursuits is not enough to eliminate "the myth of the liberating saviour-hero":

She would have had to be brought up exactly like a boy to be able easily to overcome her adolescent narcissism; but as it is, she continues into adult life this cult of the ego towards which her whole youth has tended. She uses her professional successes as merits for the enrichment of her image; she feels the need for a witness from on high to reveal and consecrate her worth. Even if she is a severe judge of the men she evaluates in daily life, she none the less reveres Man, and if she encounters him, she is ready to fall on her knees (p.704).

In short, through employment woman may gain the opportunity to be transcendent, but she still dreams of completely foregoing such transcendence and becoming subservient to man.

The orientation to passivity engendered in girlhood is so strong that even the adult woman finds it difficult to shake off; she is not able to adopt a masculine attitude to work and creation. De Beauvoir

suggests that woman is too busy in search of herself and, in her attempt to become a fascinating object, too prone to narcissism to obtain the forgetfulness of self which is a prerequisite for artistic activity and general success. Indeed de Beauvoir claims that Rosa Luxemburg's achievement, for example, was partly due to the fact that she was "ugly" - not tempted to "wallow in the cult of her own image, to make herself object, prey, trap" (p.721). Moreover, echoing Sartre in Anti-Semite and Jew, de Beauvoir maintains that because woman's place in the human world is not assured, she is not able to raise general questions about the contingency of existence. In other words, like Jews and other oppressed groups, women are so preoccupied with the attempt to establish themselves as human beings that they are not able to contemplate generally the meaning of life - to experience "anguish." Although woman may experience uneasiness she is not, as Sartre would say, in a position "to raise questions about the place of man in the world and his ultimate destiny." ¹¹ And it is the asking of such questions which, according to de Beauvoir, tends to underlie works of lasting importance.

For a variety of reasons, then, ranging from feeling insecure about being in a world to which she has so recently been admitted, to being obsessed by herself and her own image, woman is unlikely to become fully absorbed and creative in her work. Thus de Beauvoir, talking even of women who are involved in the expressive arts, writes: "Woman is ready enough to play at working but she does not work" (p.714). Thus the line of argument, which underlies most of de Beauvoir's comments on woman's failure to become absorbed in her work and place a value on it, is the notion that as long as she has "to struggle to become a human being, she cannot become a creator" (p.723). This argument conflicts

with the Hegelian aspects of her theory. It contradicts the notion in Hegelian philosophy, which at other points de Beauvoir seems to accept, that it is in his labour that the slave simultaneously becomes a human being and a creator - that the act of creation constitutes his humanisation and prompts him to fight for recognition.

However, in some respects de Beauvoir is on strong ground when she makes a distinction between woman and the slave; for whereas the latter's labour is forced, "paradises of idleness and delight" (p.169) are flashed before woman's eyes. That is to say, although woman may, for whatever reason, feel compelled to work, this society continually urges her to see her success in other terms; it constantly invites her not to take work seriously and to seek recognition of her worth through marriage to a successful man. Thus de Beauvoir claims that woman will continually be demoralised and undermined if she can gain recognition and support through becoming a parasite. It is for this reason that de Beauvoir maintains:

As long as the temptation to convenience exists - in the economic inequality that favours certain individuals and the recognised rights of woman to sell herself to one of these privileged men - she will need to make a greater moral effort than man in choosing the road of independence (pp.168-9).

De Beauvoir subsequently concludes that marriage must be "prohibited as a 'career' for women" (p.500). In other words, woman must be forced to labour. But even if woman was forced to take work seriously - to treat it as the main aspect of her life - would it create the circumstances in which she would become equal to man?

V

The problem for de Beauvoir here is the extent to which women, having been socialised in patriarchal society, are able to become emancipated through productive work. Is this simple transformation in woman's life enough to bring about an "inner metamorphosis"? At times de Beauvoir indicates that woman's entry into productive labour is almost in itself enough to emancipate women. Thus as women are more and more becoming gainfully employed, sexual equality is coming rapidly into view. Elsewhere, however, even when discussing women who work in jobs which are well-paid and stimulating, de Beauvoir maintains that the weight of woman's past experience, and the ever-present temptations to abdication, prevent work from making woman man. De Beauvoir sees that a pre-requisite of woman's emancipation - a change in consciousness - is not likely to emanate from a haphazard development of productive forces but from a much more systematic attempt to obliterate the pressures on woman to abdicate in favour of man. Nothing short of revolution will do. Thus man's role as catalyst seems limited. De Beauvoir is unable to demonstrate that the other changes required for woman's emancipation - the completely equal treatment of children throughout childhood and the prohibitions of marriage and motherhood as a career for women, for example - are also likely to be features of man's evolution within the existing socio-economic order. In the conclusion de Beauvoir apparently attempts to get round this problem by linking the emancipation of woman to the establishment of a different kind of economic system and concomitantly a different moral and social order:

We must not believe ... that a change in woman's economic condition alone is enough to transform her ... but until it has brought about the moral, social, cultural and other consequences that it promises and requires, the new woman cannot appear (p.734).

In short, in The Second Sex woman's emancipation is ultimately posed as the result of a socialist revolution - a revolution which, given the current passivity of women, will be made by men.

Recently de Beauvoir stated that in The Second Sex she "stopped at the point of affirming a vague confidence in the future, in the revolution and in socialism."¹² This vague confidence allowed her to skip over all the more difficult problems of strategy and tactics for woman's emancipation.¹³ But in so doing she falls into the same trap she had herself pointed to for the artistic or professional woman: she is rescued from her difficulties by a "liberating saviour-hero" - the male revolutionary who, in overthrowing capitalism, also (conveniently) overthrows sexism. Moreover de Beauvoir's optimism is buoyed by an almost Whigg belief in inevitable human progress. She repeatedly asserts that man "will" be led to recognise woman as a fellow human being:

He loves her to the extent that she is his, he fears her in so far as she remains the other, but it is as this fearsome other that he seeks to make her more profoundly his - and this is what will bring him to elevate her to the dignity of being a person and lead him to recognise in her a fellow creature (p.201, emphases added).¹⁴

In short, recognition will come inevitably. Into this uplifting history de Beauvoir smuggles a hint of struggle, for she says that "the existent (in this case woman) who is regarded as inessential cannot fail to demand the re-establishment of her sovereignty" (p.726, emphasis added).

Similarly she maintains that "there is no other way out for woman than to work for her liberation" (p.639, emphasis added).¹⁵ But these small protestations do not surmount the main difficulty: de Beauvoirian woman would be given her freedom and against this gift we can but recall Freire's notion that freedom must be fought for to be real.

In the introduction to The Second Sex de Beauvoir asks: "How can independence be recovered in a state of dependency?" (p.29).¹⁶ This is the central political question of her work and yet she can find no satisfactory answer to it. Her woman is passive and hence awaits the socialist prince charming, the revolutionary hero, to release her from her slumber. Productive labour looked like providing a way out, but even on her own account this just leads to "double servitude": in capitalist society it merely serves to reinforce woman's oppression, for the truly creative and productive work is kept for men, and women get the repetitive jobs which fetch low pay. Her final resort to a socialist revolution is little more than a deus ex machina.

Chapter Thirteen

The Socialism of "The Second Sex"

Recently de Beauvoir has claimed that she was a socialist when she wrote The Second Sex. There is no question that the conclusion has a socialist element. But we may doubt that this element arises from the argument which precedes it. We have previously seen that The Second Sex makes bows in the direction of historical materialism without taking that philosophy seriously. We must now consider whether the socialism of the book is any more profound than its historical materialism.¹

There are notoriously many definitions of socialism, but we are fortunate in this instance as we have a definition, acceptable to de Beauvoir herself, of a socialist theory of woman's oppression. In All Said and Done, the most recent volume of her autobiography, de Beauvoir not only claims that Juliet Mitchell in Woman's Estate "gives a very good description of the divergence between radical feminism and abstract socialism" but also that "some years ago I would have upheld precisely these abstract socialist positions."² Although it is not explicitly spelled out in this statement, from other sources it is apparent that the "some years ago" refers to the position adopted by de Beauvoir when she wrote The Second Sex.³ In order to examine whether de Beauvoir undertakes a socialist analysis, or indeed could be broadly defined as a socialist, in this book we shall outline Mitchell's classification scheme.⁴

Radical FeministsAbstract Socialists

Men are the oppressors.

Men are not the oppressors: it's the system.

All societies have been male supremacist.

Capitalism oppresses women.

It starts with a psychological power struggle - which men win.

It starts with private property.

Socialism has nothing to offer us.

We've got to discover 'our relationship' to socialism.

Socialist countries oppress women.

The scene isn't too good in socialist countries for women - but that's because women's liberation wasn't part of the revolutionary struggle.

What we want, is all women to unite against men and male-dominated society.

It's most necessary to convince men of the importance of our struggle. They are oppressed by their roles too.

We want to liberate women from male oppression

All people are alienated under capitalism, we want to liberate everybody to become 'whole people'.

The basic issue at stake in each of these seven points is how one conceptualises the relationship of woman's oppression to the economic system. As many of the points overlap, we shall not systematically take each point in turn but merely use the classificatory scheme as a guide to the kind of questions we should ask and to the way in which we should classify the replies. Whether de Beauvoir's theory can be described as "abstract socialist" depends on what kinds of answers are given in The Second Sex to the following sets of questions:

1. Is woman's oppression merely an aspect of capitalist society, its origins to be found in the development of private property, or is it rooted in other factors, such as biology, which make it a more universal feature of human societies?
2. If it is the economic system (rather than man) who is the enemy, to what extent are men also oppressed under capitalism and how

likely is it that they will overthrow the system in which woman's oppression has its roots?

3. If it is agreed that men are economically exploited and so potential revolutionaries, is it, nevertheless, true that they may want to perpetuate sexism because it is beneficial to them, or are they also oppressed by their sex roles and therefore will gain from woman's liberation?

I

In The Second Sex de Beauvoir does not portray the oppression of woman as stemming from the particular nature of capitalist society. She not only rules out the possibility that woman has ever been equal to or superior to man but, in line with her evolutionary approach, also maintains that such oppression was a necessary stage in humanity's rise above the given life of the in-itself. Moreover, it could be maintained that in de Beauvoir's theory, capitalism has some advantages for women; the technological advances wrought by this economic system, by eradicating certain features of woman's reproductive role, can provide the basis for the future liberation of women.

If we broaden our question and ask if in de Beauvoir's theory it is private property, and not necessarily capitalism, which introduced the oppression of woman, we are forced yet again to return to de Beauvoir's notion of the inevitability of woman's oppression. Such inevitability is based on both biological and ontological factors. Thus, as we have seen, although the creation of private property is something of a watershed in de Beauvoir's theory of the origins of woman's subjugation,

it cannot be treated as the actual starting point of such oppression. All that can be argued is that private property is important in de Beauvoir's theory because it is the first material manifestation of man's domination of woman. If we take into consideration both the physiological and ontological advantages attributed to males in de Beauvoir's theory and translate this into what Mitchell calls a "psychological power struggle" won by man, we find that in Mitchell's classification scheme, on all the points relating to the origins of woman's oppression, it is radical feminism and not abstract socialism which approximates to the theoretical position of The Second Sex.

As de Beauvoir's theory rules out the possibility that capitalism, or private property, is the cause of woman's oppression, we may be led to assume that there is no need for us to continue our inquiry; that the other questions need not be asked unless de Beauvoir sees woman's oppression within the context of the economic system. But, as we have seen, although de Beauvoir's analysis of the origins of woman's oppression is more radical feminist than socialist in orientation, as her historical account progresses, de Beauvoir does link the oppression of woman to the economic system. Ultimately she even states that a socialist revolution is necessary to liberate woman.

II

In Mitchell's classificatory scheme, sexism can be seen either as the principal cleavage in society or viewed as part of a generalised system of oppression. A basic difference between these two analyses of woman's oppression lies in the fact that radical feminists tend to claim

that the male-female opposition is the most important social division and, where they do recognise the existence of other types of domination, may also maintain that it is the prototype of all other forms of oppression. On the other hand, socialists tend to argue that it either "coincided" with or developed from the emergence of class society. In order for us to decide which of the two positions of the classification scheme is nearest to The Second Sex, we must know if de Beauvoir portrays woman's subordination as unique and primary or as part of a generalised system of oppression. Then we shall be in a position to know whether de Beauvoir's analysis leads to the conclusion that both men and women have an incentive to revolutionise the socio-economic order; to replace capitalism with an egalitarian and inoppressive economic system.

Throughout The Second Sex de Beauvoir gives very little indication that she is aware of the existence of social class. This point is neatly epitomised by the fact that in the twenty page index to the book there are fewer than five references to social class, most of which refer to incidental comments made by de Beauvoir and ^{not} to points structurally integrated with her argument. This almost complete failure to acknowledge the existence of social and economic inequality is the outcome of a fundamental aspect of de Beauvoir's theory.⁶

De Beauvoir's theory - in her own words - is "Manichean"; it portrays the world as polarised into two groups - male and female - where masculine represents "the good" and feminine "the bad." In The Second Sex the dichotomy which de Beauvoir most commonly uses to convey her Manicheism is maintaining-creating. As de Beauvoir concentrates in this dichotomy on the nature of the tasks allotted to each sex, the most significant factor she uses to differentiate men from women is a sexual division of labour.⁷ Since de Beauvoir uses work to differentiate "man"

from "woman", and since de Beauvoirian man has appropriated the positive aspects of existence, for her notion of sexual bifurcation to be meaningful she must assume that all men by virtue of their sex are creative and transcendent and that for women the converse must be true. Normally this perspective leads de Beauvoir to ignore hierarchies or inequalities which are not linked to sex but which are nevertheless rooted in labour. Thus, as we shall see below, de Beauvoir cannot develop a class analysis. Even when other hierarchies are acknowledged, as in the master-slave dialectic, they are not integrated into the structure of her argument. Moreover, de Beauvoir identifies "man" with the superior male in the hierarchy and analyses the impact that this had on the male-female relationship from his perspective. Thus it is the fact that the master gained recognition which de Beauvoir considers important in archetypal man's relationship with woman, and not that recognition was given by man, the slave.

De Beauvoir's tendency to equate man's existence with the existence of the dominant group of males and to see work and related activities as things which distinguish men from women, but not men from one another, is carried over into her analysis of the present. Thus de Beauvoir maintains that a basic inequality between the sexes still lies in the fact that unlike woman, man finds "concrete realisation in work and action" (p.498), and that even today "the male is called upon for action, his vocation is to produce, fight, create, to transcend himself towards the totality of the universe and the infinity of the future" (p.466). This is so strange a view of the nature of work in the present highly industrialised and automated epoch that de Beauvoir's continuing use of work as the source of male superiority over women becomes increasingly questionable. She ignores or at least seriously

underestimates the extent to which men are unequal in their access to creative and transcendent pursuits. Reviewing The Second Sex on publication in America, C. Wright Mills took issue with de Beauvoir on this point. He claims:

She tends to impute to all men what is in fact true only of very few of them: a transcendent flight, a life of accomplishment. It is true that she at times recognises that this is not so but she does not take it into systematic account as she compares "the" situation of men with "the" situation of women.

Since de Beauvoir defines masculinity in terms of positive human activity, she hardly questions the economic role played by men in contemporary society. It is man as scientist, engineer, explorer, writer who seems to serve as a model for de Beauvoirian man and not the majority of men who, in a subsidiary and uncreative role, do little more than execute the plans for this privileged, educated elite. For de Beauvoir, then, work is a source of transcendence and fulfilment for man and as such it is not portrayed as something which gives rise to alienation.

Not only does de Beauvoir fail to argue that work is the source of alienation for most men, but she also does not convey its role in class divisions. As labour is used as a crucial factor in expressing an individual's place in the sexual hierarchy, and as this is the only hierarchy systematically recognised by de Beauvoir, it cannot be used to locate an individual's place in the labour process or to assign him to a social class. The existence of classes may on occasion be referred to by de Beauvoir, but their delineation cannot be undertaken within the context of her existentialist theory. Even where she subscribes to socialism there is an immense gap between her position and theirs, for the rock of socialist theory is the notion that labour is the source of the worker's exploitation and alienation.

De Beauvoir's lack of a class analysis is much more apparent in her portrayal of man's existence than of woman's. As we have seen there is often a startling contrast between de Beauvoir's ideas of man and the condition of the vast majority of men. With woman, on the other hand, there is less potential for a dramatic contrast between archetype and the condition of most women. This arises from the fact that de Beauvoir maintains that woman's existence had intrinsically negative features. Thus the difference between de Beauvoir's model of womanhood and the actual conditions to which women are confined is narrower than for man. Moreover, because de Beauvoir sees woman's situation as one of oppression, she can more easily admit the existence of social and economic inequality within the feminine condition. Thus the only section of the book which contains any significant class analysis is that dealing with the condition of women from the institution of patriarchy proper up until the present day. De Beauvoir is able, for example, to discuss the exploitation of woman's labour in the early period of industrialisation and contrast this with the different forms of oppression within other social classes. This does not amount to an integration of class into de Beauvoir's general theory, simply that here she is more aware, or at least more ready to admit, the existence of class differences between women.

De Beauvoir is sometimes prepared to describe how woman's oppression varied between social classes but her general analysis exhibits a middle-class bias. Thus, unless de Beauvoir tells us that she is discussing women who work in factories or who lives in conditions of poverty (by no means frequent references), her archetypal woman is recognisably a member of the French bourgeoisie. For example, when

de Beauvoir writes of "woman's" social life she claims that this is marked by such matters as her "relations with dressmaker and milliner"; (p.550) and that in conventional terms her success is dependent on her organisation of parties and receptions at which "the table is laden with fine food and precious wines" (p.553). The affluence of de Beauvoir's woman is continually apparent. Thus de Beauvoir talks about "the gleam of diamonds in her necklace" (p.544) and frequently describes her physical environment as one in which she "surrounds herself" with 'silk,' 'velvets,' 'porcelain,' 'pearls,' 'brocades,' 'bouquets'... (p.544ff). The middle-class nature of the world in which de Beauvoirian woman is ensconced seems reinforced, if not derived from, the fact that, when substantiating her arguments, de Beauvoir has a tendency to use material and quotations from bourgeois novelists such as Flaubert, Baudelaire and Eliot. This does not mean that de Beauvoir embraces the life-style of the bourgeoisie, on the contrary she despises it.⁹ It means that like most of us de Beauvoir has a tendency to generalise from the conditions she knows best - in this case, the existential conditions of French bourgeois women.

De Beauvoir's credentials as a socialist are thus doubly in doubt. She writes from the perspective of the French bourgeoisie - not the proletariat - and she paints such an attractive portrait of the role of men in capitalist society that the reader is left wondering why they should ever want to make a socialist revolution. Her "man" is left with no reason to want to end the oppression of woman from which he benefits so overwhelmingly.

III

We must also question whether the socialist revolution she urges will liberate women. Even if we accept that the present form of society is oppressive to men and that the proletariat will overthrow it, how likely is it in de Beauvoir's theory that such revolutionaries will desire to break down the rigid sexual differentiation in which woman's oppression has its roots?

Mitchell's classificatory scheme indicates that within radical feminism is the notion that man is the enemy; that it is he who has established the present relationship between the sexes and who benefits directly from it. Woman's liberation thus depends on overthrowing male domination. As this is contrary to man's interests, it must be undertaken in battle with him; as the enemy, man must be either eliminated or subdued in this struggle for liberation. Abstract socialists, on the other hand, see the capitalist system as oppressive; it is the system, not man, which is woman's enemy. Man may be nominally dominant within the sexual relationship but, it is claimed, both sexes are oppressed. According to abstract socialists, sexism, in the rigid assignment of secondary sexual characteristics such as aggression and passivity, artificially restricts an individual's potential for free expression and development. One aim of women's liberation is to break down these barriers; by ridding society of oppressive, stereotype sex roles to allow both sexes the opportunity to become "whole" people. Implicit here is the notion that human characteristics are split at present between the two sexes and that the future liberated human being will be able to express her/himself in both male and female ways. Humanisation

means the individual being able to combine in his/her personality and behaviour the positive characteristics currently associated with both masculinity and femininity. In short, abstract socialists maintain that it is also in men's interests to end rigid sexual stratification.

De Beauvoir's theory does not correspond to a socialist analysis, as defined by Mitchell, since de Beauvoir does not maintain that men are not "whole" people. However, in as much as de Beauvoir claims that the continued oppression of woman prevents man from becoming a completely authentic and moral individual, she maintains that he would benefit from woman's liberation. In so arguing de Beauvoir is also in opposition to radical feminism, in that she maintains that it is possible to enlist men's support for woman's liberation. Thus, de Beauvoir's argument that men would gain morally from woman's liberation corresponds more to the liberal or utopian socialist traditions than to the kind of Marxist, materialist analysis contained in Mitchell's classificatory scheme. De Beauvoir's theory echoes John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women as it reaches the notion that men and women would benefit from a sexual revolution via an abstract ethical route. Once again therefore, we return to the idea that for de Beauvoir, the liberation of woman, even assuming a mutual interest of the sexes, has little relevance to the need for revolutionary socio-economic change.

There is a further reason why we should question the idea that in de Beauvoir's theory/the male revolutionary would become woman's liberator. In Chapter Eight it was demonstrated that in de Beauvoir's theory the roots of woman's oppression are to be found in ontological factors; that is, those factors which lead to the confirmation of man's sovereignty and which fired his desire to dominate woman. It is

only within this context that economic factors become important. Private property, for example, in de Beauvoir's theory is significant as we have seen, because it is a vehicle for man's ontological pretensions. In the later sections of The Second Sex, however, de Beauvoir claims: "The evolution of woman's condition is to be explained by the concurrent action of these two factors: sharing in productive labour and being freed from the slavery to reproduction" (p.152). Here we see de Beauvoir maintaining that the most significant factors involved in woman's oppression and, therefore, in her emancipation, are materialist factors. However, in so saying she glosses over the fact that a change in the economic system will not eliminate the desires which she claims originally prompted man to dominate woman. Indeed Mitchell, who classifies de Beauvoir's theory in The Second Sex as "abstract socialist", indicates this problem when she writes -

But interestingly socialism emerges as a curiously contingent solution at the end of the work, in a muffled epilogue ... It is not easy to see why socialism should modify the basic "ontological" desire for a thing like freedom which de Beauvoir sees as the motor behind the fixation with inheritance and the property system or the enslavement of women which derived from it.¹¹

As Mitchell sees, de Beauvoir poses socialism as the solution to something which she did not originally define as the nub of the problem. Indeed it is interesting to note that Mitchell reaches this conclusion even though she gives a much more materialist interpretation of de Beauvoir's account of the origins of woman's oppression.

In Force of Circumstance de Beauvoir acknowledges indirectly the incompatibility of the ontology in The Second Sex with the adoption of a conventional materialist/socialist approach. Thus writing of how

she currently sees this work, de Beauvoir states that nowadays:

I should take a more materialist position ... in the first volume. I should base the notion of woman as other and the Manichean argument it entails is not an idealistic and a priori struggle of consciousnesses, but on the facts of supply and demand. ... This would not necessitate any changes in the subsequent development of my argument.¹²

De Beauvoir acknowledges that the ontology of this work would have to be changed to bring it into harmony with a properly materialist perspective. In saying this, however, de Beauvoir underplays the extent to which such a change would profoundly modify her argument. After all, "the idealistic and a priori struggle of consciousnesses" is no small factor in The Second Sex as it underlies much of her theory. Moreover, it is by no means clear that de Beauvoir could convincingly make the connection between the essentially philosophical notion of woman as Absolute Other and "the facts of supply and demand."¹³ Of much more significance, however, to our present investigation is the extent to which de Beauvoir's entire theory is compatible with an orthodox socialist approach. Removing the notion of "a priori" conflict may help her here, but there are other aspects of her philosophy which do not seem to combine well with such a political perspective.

It is the compatibility of existentialism and socialism which is in question. Such a question is not new. Indeed there have been various attempts to show how existentialism is more in harmony with the values of a capitalist society than with those usually inherent in socialist thought. Herbert Marcuse, writes of Sartre's early work: "... behind the nihilistic language of Existentialism lurks the ideology of free competition, free initiative and equal opportunity ... Everybody is master of his own destiny."¹⁴ The same essentially

anti-socialist values have been attributed to de Beauvoir's life and work. In a review of one of de Beauvoir's volumes of autobiography René Girard remarks:

This is an excellent definition of that modern spirit competitive and puritanical which erects philosophical systems as well as industrial empires. However much we admire this valorious feat, we must not exaggerate the scope of the revolution.¹⁵

Indeed Girard subsequently maintains that what de Beauvoir desires is to turn everything "into a competitive examination ... and everybody try to run away with first prize."¹⁶

In Chapter Three we saw that Sartre's early socialism was little more than an abstract commitment to the idea of revolution and was not an outcome of his theory.¹⁷ Likewise in de Beauvoir's work, the socialist conclusion is tacked on. Not only does the way in which she conceptualises the male-female dichotomy inhibit the development of a class analysis and the use of such notions as alienation and exploitation, but also the values embodied in her philosophy are individualistic and at odds with collectivist socialism. Thus she is ultimately unable to convince us either that people would or could work together for socialism or that this would be desirable. Indeed de Beauvoir at her most optimistic is only able to suggest that harmonious relations with the Other are possible if individually we keep our desire for domination in check and treat each other as equals. The "revolution" is thus essentially one which must be waged individually in the existent's consciousness. To this extent, woman's emancipation seems to have more to do with existentialist ethics than socialism. As such we are led to conclude that a more logical outcome of de Beauvoir's theory of woman's liberation is the idea, ascribed to radical feminism in

Mitchell's scheme, that "socialism has nothing to offer us."

When de Beauvoir wrote Force of Circumstance in 1963 she claimed that now she would undertake a more materialist analysis of woman's oppression, but that she was pleased that in The Second Sex she had "avoided falling into the trap of 'feminism'." She maintained that she had never believed woman's emancipation could be achieved "independently of a revolution in production."¹⁸ Indeed since it is the socialist revolution which is of primary importance, she never thought that this book would, or should, make women want to struggle for independence. Nevertheless, de Beauvoir did hope that it would make women more conscious of their oppression.

More than ten years later, in 1972, de Beauvoir's position on this matter had completely changed. It is precisely this non-feminist aspect of The Second Sex which she now repudiates. One published interview with de Beauvoir appeared under the heading: "Today I've changed, I've really become a feminist."¹⁹ Currently de Beauvoir argues that whereas The Second Sex is a socialist book, now she is a conventional feminist. In other words, nowadays she believes in the necessity for an independent struggle of women and does not think that a socialist revolution - a change in production - enough to liberate women. It seems that de Beauvoir partly arrived at this latest position because of the oppressed condition of women in "socialist" societies. In this interview she claimed:

Marx's dream of a socialism which would change man has not been realised anywhere. They have changed the relations in production; but we realise more and more that changing the relations of production is not enough to effect a real change in society, to change mankind. And as a result, in spite of the different economic system the traditional roles of men and women would remain the same.²⁰

Moreover in All Said and Done de Beauvoir also claims that when she wrote The Second Sex she believed "the class-war should take precedence over the struggle between the sexes" and that currently she now thinks they should be carried out together - that relations between the sexes is as "primary" as the economic relations in society and should not be seen as a secondary issue.²¹ This does not mean that de Beauvoir believes the overthrow of capitalism irrelevant to woman's emancipation, simply that it is not sufficient.

But would changing the conclusion of The Second Sex so that an independent struggle of women is seen as vital to woman's liberation be enough to make this a "feminist" work?

Chapter Fourteen

The Feminism of "The Second Sex"

The Second Sex has been hailed as "the Bible of feminism" but its author claims that it is a non-feminist work. The reasons for de Beauvoir's assertion have already been covered - at this time de Beauvoir did not believe that women's autonomous, albeit collective, activity is necessary to ensure their emancipation. She argued that the elimination of woman's subordination would be an inevitable by-product of the creation of a socialist society. De Beauvoir is certainly right to maintain that this theoretical perspective makes The Second Sex different from what is nowadays considered a "feminist" theory. However, there is another major aspect of de Beauvoir's theory in The Second Sex which distinguishes it from modern feminism - the nature of de Beauvoir's vision of woman's emancipation.

I

In Mitchell's classificatory scheme we saw that it is difficult to make generalisations about "feminist theory," as such a generic term covers divergent views. Nevertheless, there is one major factor which distinguishes contemporary feminism from the feminism of the suffragette movement - woman's emancipation is no longer seen as imitating man. Writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill and the ideologues of the suffrage movement wanted to claim women's rights in a man's world; this is the aim of a minority in the

current women's liberation movement. Groups like the National Organisation of Women in the United States under the leadership of Betty Friedan, may gain the support of feminists in their attempt to extend women's equality with men, but nevertheless a major thrust of feminist ideology is an attack on the masculine world.² Germaine Greer in her book The Female Eunuch (1970) succinctly expresses such a view when she writes: "If women understand for emancipation the adoption of the masculine role then we are lost indeed."³ Using one of de Beauvoir's concepts, we could say that the difference between modern feminism and its predecessor is that the former no longer operates within a "masculine perspective."

Fundamental to most feminist theories, then, is a rejection of masculinity; to be male is not to be identified with humanity. Hand in hand with such a devaluation, but not always complete repudiation, of masculinity is an upgrading of feminine characteristics. For different reasons such upgrading of femininity emanates from both the "abstract socialist" and "radical feminist" strands of feminist theory. In the former the elevation of femininity does not necessarily mean that femininity per se is extolled: women live in a mutilated condition, but a condition which gives rise to positive ways of behaving. Thus, such feminists claim that although women are oppressed - confined artificially to a domestic world - in fulfilling their feminine role, certain modes of behaviour such as being caring, gentle, open, and unselfish are cultivated and valued. Therefore, women's liberation should not be seen in terms of imitating men. Although critical of the independent and aggressive aspects of masculinity, such feminists believe both sexes have positive features; that we should encourage everyone to express themselves in "masculine" and "feminine" ways.

The radical feminist strand of feminist thought, however, is more critical of masculinity and accordingly tends to elevate femininity. In its extreme forms it begins from the notion that woman is essentially different from man and better than him. Valerie Solanis, for example, in her S.C.U.M. (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto (1967) refers to man as a "walking abortion"⁴ and Elizabeth Gould Davis in The First Sex (1975) argues that man is a "genetic mutation."⁵ It is these ideas which underlie feminist separatism and even prompt some feminists to see boys as "contaminated" by masculinity and therefore to be avoided. There is, then, in this theory an underlying notion that biological femininity is something to be revered. In view of the dubious essentialism involved in such a theory, and the unnecessary rejection of anything "male," such ideas are rightly not something which de Beauvoir would accept. However, as we shall see, a weakness of de Beauvoir's own theory is that she differs also from the "socialist" strand of feminism in as much as she generally idolises man and sees woman's liberation in terms of her assumption of masculine characteristics. This perspective is not incidental to de Beauvoir's theory but, as will become clear, is rooted in some of the major assumptions on which it is based.

II

It has already been asserted that de Beauvoir's theory is, in her own terms, "Manichean." Margaret Walters in her essay entitled "The Rights and Wrongs of Women" aptly describes such Manicheism when she writes:

(de Beauvoir's) ... cool, unhesitating authoritative prose sets up a whole series of absolutely rigid oppositions - masculine vs feminine, culture vs nature, human vs animal, production vs reproduction, activity vs passivity. The first term is always good, the second bad.⁶

But Walters fails to point out that masculinity and femininity represent all the oppositions which she outlines. It is the male in de Beauvoir's theory who represents culture, humanity, production and activity; and the female who incarnates the opposite of such terms. Thus in such a scheme man represents all that is "good" and woman all that is "bad."

It is de Beauvoir's theoretical perspective which leads her to convey the world in this way: because she sees the process of human development involving individualisation and transcendence of biology, woman's reproductive role means that her existence has inherently negative features. Woman is therefore associated with such aspects of life as magic/superstition/immanence/stagnation. Conversely, de Beauvoir portrays man as a noble creature. He is posed as a powerful, transcendent force - risking his life to affirm his sovereignty or attaining his ideals and through his projects creating a human world of techniques and values. It is he who has brought human society to its elevated heights - it is he who, in de Beauvoir's theory, has been responsible for all acts of creation: thus art, philosophy, literature, science, medicine, have been exclusively his achievements.

For de Beauvoir man's values are equivalent to human values. This leads her to assert that historically woman was prepared to recognise man and that, although she may sometimes want to negate the masculine world, she still does not aim to elevate the feminine domain. In The Second Sex de Beauvoir thus rejects the idea that there has ever been properly "feminine" values but she has articulated this idea more

clearly in recent years. It seems that de Beauvoir has clarified her position on this matter since the question of the positive attributes of femininity is an issue in the feminist movement. In order to understand better de Beauvoir's position in The Second Sex her recent arguments will be outlined.

In 1972, in an interview with Alice Schwartz, de Beauvoir claimed that whereas "Rimbaud imagined that liberated women would bring something entirely different into the world," she does not believe this would be the case. To substantiate her position de Beauvoir maintained: "... culture, civilisation and universal values were all made by men since it was they who represented universality."⁷ In other words, in a society in which the sexes were equal, women would not dispute man's values, perspectives or tools but would adopt them as their own. However, de Beauvoir added that things created by men may be contaminated by masculinity but she did not make clear what such taint involves. What is clear, however, is that over the past few years de Beauvoir has continually maintained that to believe woman's emancipation will bring "new values" is to postulate a feminine nature or essence and thus to believe in something which she has always sought to repudiate.

Specifically de Beauvoir has taken issue with the brand of feminism which emphasises the positive nature of woman's reproductive role. Thus in one interview she claimed that while it is better for women to be no longer ashamed of their bodies "one must not make too much of it."⁸ Indeed de Beauvoir argued that if too much is made of the feminine body it may lead to the idea that the female body gives a "fresh vision of the world," and so to "descend to the level of the

irrational, the mystical and the cosmic." In this interview de Beauvoir also claimed: "A woman has no special value, a priori, because she is a woman." To believe this is the case, she added, "would be the most retrograde biologism totally contrary to everything I believe in."⁹ However, while de Beauvoir clearly rejects such "biologism," to all intents and purposes her previous theory in The Second Sex is similar. Thus although de Beauvoir does not have a rigid notion of a masculine or feminine "essence" - some immutable Eternal Feminine for example - she nevertheless describes both man's and woman's experience of their body in sexuality and in reproduction as giving rise to a certain perspective on the world. De Beauvoirian man feels himself to be transcendent, independent, and sovereign in the fulfilment of his biological masculinity while woman is dependent and feels "hemmed in." De Beauvoir actually explains woman's belief in magic partially in terms of her sexual experience. De Beauvoir states:

Her passive eroticism makes desire seem to her not will and aggression but an attraction akin to what that which causes the divining rod to dip; the mere presence of her flesh swells and erects the male's sex; why should not hidden water make the hazel rod quiver? (p.619).

In short, de Beauvoir believes that woman's body gives rise to a certain consciousness. As this consciousness woman acquires is more backward than man's, in de Beauvoir's theory man's body is such that he is a specially privileged being; he is the ontologically advantaged sex. Thus the feminist notion that woman has a "special value" is not so much at odds with de Beauvoir's theory in The Second Sex because it is opposite to what she argues, but because it emanates from assumptions contrary to her own.

Although de Beauvoir argues that the emancipated woman will not introduce "new values" into the world, she believes that her emancipation will effect a change in human relationships. She accepts the strand of feminist thought which elevates femininity because there are certain positive characteristics which emanate from woman's situation. She now maintains that certain feminine qualities should be communicated to man. Emancipation, she thus claims, must combine "the best of man and the best of woman."¹⁰ However, this notion is most undeveloped in The Second Sex. Only on a couple of occasions does de Beauvoir maintain that woman's position gives her admirable characteristics. For example, at one point de Beauvoir writes that girls have more "psychological insight than boys" (p.383). At another juncture she claims that woman lives her life in a more "genuine" fashion because man "hesitates to see himself fully as flesh" (p.423). However, when de Beauvoir claims of women: "It is precisely because they are oppressed that the best of them avoid the defects that disfigure their oppressors" (p.270), she is out of harmony with the general tenor of her argument. Indeed it is only if "the best of them" refers to very few women, that this fits in with the predominant notion in de Beauvoir's theory that woman's situation deprives her of manifesting "the loftiest human attitudes" (p.635).

On the publication of The Second Sex Albert Camus complained that de Beauvoir had made the French male look "ridiculous," but in reality de Beauvoir denigrates and ridicules women more than men. Individually de Beauvoir may criticise men for their attitudes or behaviour but as a sex males are portrayed in a flattering light. Although de Beauvoir is critical of the petit bourgeois male - ensnared in

the spirit of seriousness - it is particularly the women of this class who are attacked for, de Beauvoir tells us: "Their vain arrogance, their radical incapability, their obstinate ignorance, make them the most stupid non-entities ever produced by the human species" (p.638). The general picture to emerge of the sexes in de Beauvoir's work is man, noble and human, wanting to elevate woman to dizzy mystical heights, and woman representing the base, mundane aspects of life. To the extent that de Beauvoir claims: woman is "silliness, prudence, shabbiness and boredom" (p.219), she echoes Tolstoy, for he said: "Regard feminine society as an inevitable evil of social life, in so far as you can, avoid it."¹²

In Force of Circumstance de Beauvoir writes that although she was often accused of being anti-men in The Second Sex,¹³ subtler readers concluded that I was a misogynist and that, while pretending to take up the cudgels for women, I was damning them." Although de Beauvoir's use of the word "subtle" suggests that this is a slightly more accurate assessment of her position, she maintains that this is "untrue." She argues that while she did not unconditionally praise women and indeed "atomized all those defects engendered by their condition," she also showed "their good qualities and their merits." However, while de Beauvoir does this only on the rarest occasions, it is nevertheless true that for the most part she shows how woman's cowardly and inauthentic existence results from her situation. Thus at one point in The Second Sex she maintains: "It is not mysterious essence that compels men and women to act in good or in bad faith, it is their situation that inclines them more or less towards the search for truth" (p.27). Thus it is woman's situation which must be changed before she can become man's equal.

De Beauvoir's view of the negative features of feminine biology combined with her notion that the characteristics of femininity engendered by her situation are on the whole inferior to man's lead, as C. Wright Mills argues, to the solution of the man-woman problem for de Beauvoir being: "the elimination of woman as we know her."¹⁴ This is succinctly expressed by de Beauvoir in her conclusion for, instead of arguing that the sexes should be brought up the same, she states: "... the little girl ... must be brought up the same as her brothers" (p.735, emphasis added). A further example, of such male bias is contained in de Beauvoir's statement about the "battle of the sexes" for she maintains that such a battle will continue as long as each protagonist fails to recognise each other as equal; that is, "as long," she adds, "as femininity is perpetuated as such" (p.728). Moreover, given this perspective, it seems no accident or simple misuse of terminology that the concluding sentence of The Second Sex urges men and women to affirm "their brotherhood" (p.741, emphasis added).¹⁵

In arguing that woman's emancipation involves her becoming like man, de Beauvoir not only breaks with most feminist theory, but also with some of the classic literature on oppression and liberation. In most theories of this kind there is the notion that the oppressors, in treating others as things, are retarded or "dehumanised" by their role. In Hegelian philosophy there is the notion that the characteristics of human consciousness are split between master and slave. Thus it is in breaking down this division - the creative slave risking his life and acquiring aspects of his master's consciousness - that the fully human being will emerge. In The Pedagogy of the Oppressed Paulo Freire also writes: "Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity

has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human." 16

As de Beauvoir sees woman's emancipation in terms of her becoming man, there is a parallel to be drawn between de Beauvoir's attitude and that of oppressed groups; for, again as Paulo Freire points out, frequently the oppressed go through a stage in which liberation - "being a man," or a "human being" - means becoming like the oppressor. 17

De Beauvoir's theory, then, simply leads to the idea that the emancipated woman is man modified in some unimportant and unspecified way by the possession of a different body. From The Second Sex it appears that de Beauvoir's new woman will, like her male counterpart, undergo "a real apprenticeship in violence" and extend her grasp on the world by asserting herself in creative and transcendent acts. In order to make sure that women do assert themselves and are not tempted to "abdicate," marriage will be "prohibited" as a career for women and childcare will be a communal responsibility.

Once assertive and sovereign woman will be able to choose her own destiny. This in itself will create the circumstances in which "the relation of the two sexes is ... a relation of struggle" (p.223). 18
In such an atmosphere, de Beauvoir claims, the sexual relationship will not lose its spice but will in fact become more dramatic and exciting. In short, when each sex genuinely sees the other, as "the Other," then ecstasy and passion will flourish. 19

The notion of struggle is not simply the logic of de Beauvoir's theory of sexual relations but also applies to all domains of human existence. "The world is not a harmony" de Beauvoir writes, and so one must always struggle for one's position in it. This struggle for

existence will not just be waged in the battle between free beings but is also manifest in mankind's relation to Nature. De Beauvoir indeed believes that Nature is hostile to man's existence and must be overcome. Such a perspective is less the result of de Beauvoir's observations on Nature than of her philosophy of transcendence. Even if we could, we should not live in tranquility or harmony with our natural surroundings for, de Beauvoir argues: "... to conserve and continue the world as it is, seems neither desirable nor possible" (p.466). Indeed she openly attacks the largely feminine aspiration for contentment and happiness - a state of existence which de Beauvoir calls: "A gilded mediocrity lacking ambition and passion, aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose ..." (p.466). /e

For similar reasons Margaret Walters can with justification point out that "the emancipated woman" in de Beauvoir's work "sounds just like that familiar 19th century character the self-made man." Walters goes on to question if the model at the heart of all de Beauvoir's philosophising is not:

Early capitalist man, dominating and exploiting the natural world, living to produce, viewing his life as a product shaped by will, and suppressing those elements in himself - irrationality, sexuality - that might reduce his moral and economic efficiency. 20

In painting such a picture of the "human" being and hence the emancipated woman, de Beauvoir could hardly be further from modern feminists; neither abstract socialists nor radical feminists would see the self-made man as their model. Indeed even leaving aside feminists, it is unlikely that the majority of women would want to emulate such male existence.

III

One of the major weaknesses of The Second Sex is that there is an inherent male bias in de Beauvoir's theory; she often argues from a male perspective. The notion of woman as "the Other" is a persuasive analysis of the way in which woman is seen in patriarchal society and the way in which she defines herself. However, in many instances it is de Beauvoir who argues that we should see woman in this way. She argues that one of the consequences of woman as "Other" is that, whereas man's body is seen as an objective instrument with which to think and act, woman is seen as immersed in subjectivity, confined within the limits of a distinctly "feminine" perspective. But to all intents and purposes is this not how de Beauvoir portrays feminine biology in The Second Sex? When de Beauvoir argues that woman's "passive eroticism" gives rise to a belief in magic and so an inauthentic outlook, is she not postulating a distinctly feminine perspective which is inferior to its masculine counterpart?

De Beauvoir's "masculine" perspective on woman is further epitomised in her discussion of sexuality. At no point in The Second Sex does de Beauvoir question our perception of sexuality and how it might be coloured by man's perception of coitus. Thus in the "objective" sexual act, applicable to humans and higher primates alike, the male is active, the female passive; he penetrates her, she is penetrated. De Beauvoir never asks if such a view emanates from male ideology - if the sexual act could be perceived quite differently. For example, de Beauvoir does not inquire whether, in a different culture in which women were not dominated by men, that we could see sexual intercourse in terms of the male being "enclosed" by the female. Moreover, de Beauvoir

continually describes man's sexual behaviour using terminology of conquest. When analysing man's fascination for virginity, for example, de Beauvoir claims: "... in the irrevocable act of defloration he makes of that body unequivocally a passive object, he affirms his capture of it" (p.186). De Beauvoir also maintains as we have seen, that man's penetration of woman always constitutes a kind of "rape."

However in 1972 de Beauvoir claimed: "It shocks me when people claim that all coitus is rape. I don't believe that. When they say that they are reproducing male myths like a man's penis is a sword, a weapon."²¹ Nevertheless this is the position which predominates in

The Second Sex.

De Beauvoir's theory is not simply fashioned according to man's perspective, but also she accepts what we may also call the "male myth"; that it is man, not woman, who is a more fully human being. The only difference between de Beauvoir and the proponents of patriarchy is that de Beauvoir does not believe woman's inferiority to be insuperable or desirable. She argues that the reasons for the differences between man and woman can be overcome.

In accepting man as the human being, de Beauvoir implicitly accepts that competition, violence, assertion, dominance are characteristic of human action. Indeed de Beauvoir posits an ontology premised on a fundamental and "a priori" conflict between individuals in which each desperately tries to assert his sovereignty. "The temptation to dominate," writes de Beauvoir, "is the most truly universal, the most irresistible one there is" (p.483). However de Beauvoir never shows that women have this desire to dominate or to assert their sovereignty in an aggressive way. She posits an ontology and exempts women from it.

Indeed, as we shall see, de Beauvoir even outlines an alternative mode of behaviour for women; a pattern of behaviour which indicates a different type of human act.

In her account of history de Beauvoir argues that in becoming a conqueror and a creator, man asserted his humanity. Woman, however, was not able to do likewise. Nevertheless, woman subsequently accepted her own devaluation because she accepted man's worth, and not because of intimidation or blind fear. In other words, her devaluation was not similar to Hegel's slave in as much as she was not ignobly beaten in combat. Thus de Beauvoirian woman made a courageous choice; she became a martyr for human progress by putting the good of the collectivity before her own "ontological pretensions." In so doing, one can argue, that in de Beauvoir's theory, woman made a conscious, undetermined choice to accept man's values; that she made a free choice and hence a human choice. Thus even if one accepts some aspects of de Beauvoir's theory of the origins of woman's oppression and the values which underlie it, it is nevertheless possible to pick up on the positive aspects involved in such a historical martyrdom of women. Along with the idea that humanity is involved in risking one's life and creative labour, de Beauvoir might have developed the idea that it is also human to co-operate, to put the collectivity before immediate self-interest. Without eulogising women, from that perspective de Beauvoir could claim that woman's lack of assertion has its positive attributes; that it contributes to human development and might, as Reed argues, even underlie it.

De Beauvoir's failure to accommodate the nature of woman's existence and behaviour into her ontology leads to a distorted picture

of the human being and his/her relations with other people. It is a distortion caused by her construction of the world from a masculine perspective. Jean Baker Miller in her book Towards a New Psychology of Women (1976) illustrates how such a starting point leads to "strange theories about 'human nature'":

It is clear that the large element of human activity that involves doing for others has been separated off and assigned to women. When this is combined with the fact that what women do is generally not recognised, we end up with some strange theories about the nature of human nature. These strange theories are, in fact, the prevailing theories in our culture. One of these is that "mankind" is basically self-seeking, competitive, aggressive, and destructive. Such a theory overlooks the fact that millions of people (most of them women) have spent millions of hours for hundreds of years giving their utmost to millions of others. While this fact has important consequences for women, in an ultimate sense it has equally serious implications for men and for the dominant culture's theories about the nature of human beings.²²

De Beauvoir's "strange" concept of the human being and his/her relations with others emanates from her philosophy. It is both Hegelian and Sartrean perspectives which lead her to posit fundamental conflict and to see human acts in terms of domination and sovereignty.

As long as such philosophies are used we shall come to see women as inferior to man. In Chapter Seven we saw this with reference to existentialism. There we learned that de Beauvoir's existentialist ontology and ethics are individualistic and lead us to see any limitations on woman's ability to compete and struggle with the Other as barriers to full human development. De Beauvoir's use of Hegelian concepts intensifies the view that man is a privileged existent. Indeed any theory of human development based on the idea that self-consciousness and human characteristics evolve from a struggle with the

Other and from essentially individual acts, leads us to see woman as less equipped to enter such a struggle. Thus, because woman is usually identified more closely than man with her reproductive role and because this limits her potential for aggressive, individual action, it is difficult to imagine her becoming either equal or superior to man. We end up seeing woman as more bound to "animal" life and basing our concept of humanity on the activities of men.

The Hegelian and Sartrian theories which underpin de Beauvoir's analysis in The Second Sex are its strength and its weakness. They allow de Beauvoir to develop the concept of woman as "the Other," but give rise to the idea that anything feminine is animal and second-rate. Thus we must be selective in our use of Hegelian and Sartrian concepts. We must redefine why woman is "the Other." The idea of a hostile, threatening Other is not "a fundamental category of thought," but the product of an individualistic and competitive culture. In a patriarchal society which values assertive, domineering subjects, woman's oppression is characterised by her relegation to the status of object and "Other." As Berger illustrates, woman learns to cultivate her "objectivity" so she will be attractive to man. Thus woman's status as "Other" is more cultural than de Beauvoir is prepared to admit. As we have seen, in recent years de Beauvoir acknowledged this unsatisfactory aspect of her theory, saying that now she would link woman as "Other" to the laws of "supply and demand." However, to resolve this problem in de Beauvoir's theory, more radical changes are required.

As an existentialist, de Beauvoir is a doyenne of individualistic values and aspirations but, as a woman, she also knows that such values

conflict with "feminine" success. It is because she understands such tension that she is able to reveal the poignant nature of woman's experience. It is not fortuitous that de Beauvoir's philosophy allows her to convey so powerfully the nature of the contemporary relations between the sexes. It is "the woman in love," "the narcissist," and the "career woman" who testify to de Beauvoir's skills as an analyst of the plight of modern woman. Conversely, it is the historical, "factual" sections which illustrate the limitations of de Beauvoir's theory; they show how she is locked in an individualistic philosophy. As the entrepreneur serves too readily for her "human being," the oppression of woman is that she is a self-made man manqué. Thus it is only when de Beauvoirian woman realises this, that she feels nauseated and alienated, resenting the limitations of her reproductive role.

In the last few pages of The Second Sex de Beauvoir begins to reassess the values of her culture. She writes of the necessity of a socialist revolution to liberate women. But this arbitrary commitment to a new economic order is not based on a genuine appraisal of human values. The male revolutionary is still an aggressive, assertive subject and in the struggle for a more egalitarian society woman is to become his apprentice. Indeed de Beauvoir's portrayal of the sexes is such, that in the project of becoming more "truly human," woman has nothing to teach man.

Certainly for generations it has been all too common for men to glorify femininity, yet confine woman to domesticity. We must recognise the aridity and claustrophobia of women's lives. But we must also recognise the human values of co-operation, tenderness,

openness, and passivity which have resulted from the sexual division of labour. This is precisely what de Beauvoir's theory fails to do in The Second Sex, and it is this which constitutes its fundamental flaw. In the words of Margaret Walters: "(De Beauvoir) ... made a powerful attack on the masculine ideology of femininity - but at the cost of adopting that ideology herself."²³

APPENDICES

Appendix One

A Note on Terminology

Woman In The Second Sex de Beauvoir writes about "la femme" when she wants to make general points about feminine existence. For the most part "les femmes" is used only to discuss a deviation from archetypal woman or the experience of a particular group. Thus de Beauvoir talks of "les femmes frigides." In harmony with de Beauvoir's terminology, "woman" is used in this thesis in preference to "women."

Man De Beauvoir also uses the singular ("L'homme") when discussing the particular nature of masculine existence and this has been followed here. However, when discussing Hegelian, Sartrean and de Beauvoirian theory "man" is also used to designate the human being. In Words and Women (1976) Casey Miller and Kate Swift argue: "The use of man to represent the human species reinforces the erroneous notion that the species is male or at least that the male is more representative than the female."¹ But it is precisely because there is a male bias inherent in this use of man, that this term has been chosen; for such a bias in favour of the male is inherent in these philosophies.

Other When discussing Hegelian and Sartrean thought, the separate consciousness existing in opposition to Self is written: the Other. In The Second Sex de Beauvoir uses this notion of Self and Other ("L'Autre"), but she also uses the notion that in relation to man, woman is "the Other." Thus when de Beauvoir's notion of woman's position vis à vis man is used, it is written: "the Other."

Work/Labour Hannah Arrendt in The Human Condition makes a distinction between "work" and "labour".² However, in The Second Sex de Beauvoir makes no distinction between these two kinds of activity, and uses terms such as "travail" and "oeuvre" interchangeably. Similarly in this thesis no distinction has been made.

Appendix Two

De Beauvoir's Work Prior to "The Second Sex"

When de Beauvoir wrote The Second Sex she had already published three novels and several philosophical essays, and was firmly established as an author. When discussing de Beauvoir's thought prior to 1949, three main periods are distinguishable and each is represented by one of her three early novels.¹

I

As de Beauvoir points out, the first period in her development encompassed the years from 1929-1939.² Starting from her first meeting with Sartre, it embraces the time she spent teaching in the provinces, the threesome relationship with Sartre and Olga K. which provides the theme of her novel She Came To Stay (1943), and the beginnings of her life as a writer.³

She Came To Stay, de Beauvoir's first published novel, opens with an Hegelian epigraph, "Each conscience seeks the death of the Other," which locates it in this 1929-39 period when her writing concentrated on the relationships between individuals. It is essentially a metaphysical novel in that the drama unfolds in a featureless, ahistorical world where the conflict in human relations, a central theme in the book, illustrates the difficulties of co-existence when each one claims his place at the centre of the world. There are noticeable connections between Sartre's philosophy and de Beauvoir's literary theme and this has led Hazel Barnes to claim that the novel's inspiration lies quite simply in "de Beauvoir's decision to show

how Sartre's abstract principles could be made to work out in 'real life'." ⁴
 However, despite its aim to transpose existentialist ontology into everyday life, we learn from de Beauvoir's memoirs that most of this book was based on personal experience and partly resulted from Sartre's advice to put more of herself into her writing. The personal dimension is apparent in two ways. In the first place, the philosophical theme of the novel, the conflict between Self and Other, was something de Beauvoir had acutely experienced:

The existence of Otherness remained a danger for me, and one which I could not bring myself to face openly. ... I had settled the anomaly of Sartre by telling myself that we formed a single entity, placed together at the world's centre. Around us other people circled, pleasant, odious, or ridiculous; they had no eyes with which to observe me: I alone could see.⁵

However, the plot of the novel, a mature couple's relationship with a young girl who comes to wreak havoc in their lives, is based on the close involvement both she and Sartre had with Olga. Thus what might appear an abstract philosophical novel is a fictionalised account of de Beauvoir's personal experience, informed by an ontology which starts from the assumption that there is a dramatic conflict between individuals.

Françoise, the protagonist of She Came To Stay, epitomises the egotism of a sovereign subject who sees the rest of the universe and its inhabitants as subsidiary to her consciousness of them. But this perspective does not mean that Françoise experiences the inevitable solitariness of the Sartrian for-itself, for in her relationship with Pierre, she believes a shared existence possible. The mode of being for-itself-for-others, where both relinquish claims to individual self-importance, seems to have been attained by this couple; for them "we" has become more important than "I". Thus neither appears as an object or an Other for, in a union based on absolute sincerity and freedom, they seem to have a dual consciousness, whereby they

are together even whilst apart. In confronting the world they have a shared understanding. Pierre sums this up in his comment to Françoise: "You and I are simply one. That's the truth, you know. Neither of us can be described without the other." ⁶

The reciprocity which appears to have been established between Françoise and Pierre is not, however, the basis of human interaction portrayed by de Beauvoir in this novel. Françoise's sovereignty still requires to be confirmed in a series of possessive and domineering relationships. She invites a young girl called Xavière to live with her and Pierre, not out of generosity but because what she found particularly delightful "was to have annexed this insignificant, pathetic little being into her own life! ... Xavière now belonged to her. Nothing ever gave Françoise such intense joy as this kind of possession." ⁷ Thus Françoise epitomises the Satrian subject in that she uses others as means and not as ends.

Françoise finds confirmation of her sovereignty in domineering relationships, but Pierre finds his in inconsequential love affairs. Thus he wants to seduce Xavière so that she will come to love and recognise him as the essential reality of her life. It is as single individuals that these two attempt to possess Xavière and so, as we shall see, estrangement between the two partners ultimately ensues.

Pierre's attempt to seduce Xavière into wilful submission to his mastery and Françoise's desire for domination lead to conflict in their relationship. But such difficulties are heightened by the nature of Xavière's consciousness and desires. She is a subtle form of the Satrian sadist in as much as she is determined to retain her sovereignty, no matter what the cost. Thus not only is Françoise unable to make Xavière into the

desired object for annexation but also, in face of Xavière's determination, any hopes for reciprocity are likewise doomed. Françoise can only acknowledge Xavière as an alien and hostile will. But just as Françoise is becoming more repelled by Xavière, Pierre is growing more fascinated and more eager to seduce her. This couple believed they had a joint perspective on the world and its inhabitants, but now the presence of this third person destroys their unity. Françoise becomes aware of their potential estrangement and realises that "the only way she could bring herself nearer to Pierre was by joining Xavière and trying to see her through his eyes."⁸

These attempts to accept Xavière do not, however, lead to peaceful co-existence and, paradoxically, begin the destruction of Françoise's entire world. In opening her relationship with Pierre to the scrutiny of another, their dual consciousness becomes the object of scornful attack. The basis of a relationship, previously taken for granted, is now open to question. Moreover, not only is Françoise's liaison with Pierre beginning to appear contingent, but also her own view of herself, formally solid and unquestioning, is now in the process of disintegration. She begins to sense herself as an object for the Other and as this Other is Xavière, an essentially alien and hostile will, she sees this as a threat to her very existence:

Day after day, minute after minute, Françoise had fled the danger: but the worst had happened, and she had at last come face to face with this insurmountable obstacle which she had sensed, behind a shadowy outline, since her earliest childhood. At the back of Xavière's maniacal pleasure, at the back of her hatred and jealousy, the abomination loomed as monstrous and definite as death. Before Françoise's very eyes, and yet apart from her, an alien conscience was taking up its position.⁹

As it is this "alien" conscience which Pierre finds so attractive it is not simply their potential estrangement which Françoise must now accept, for she must also come to terms with the facet of existence which they had previously sought to overcome. Thus it is only with her estrangement from Pierre that she understands what Sartre calls "the scandal of existence" - that "to be separate is to live out the separation alone."¹⁰

When the relationship between Pierre and Xavière eventually goes sour, Françoise sees this as a triumph. However, this feeling of triumph is shortlived for she is forced to contemplate the image Xavière holds of her. As Henri Peyre points out, an image of "a domineering, mean woman, prosaically jealous of a younger person, lying to herself in spite of all her claims to utter sincerity."¹¹ Françoise had thought that she had rid herself of this "alien" Other, reduced her to an insignificant aspect of her life, but Xavière's freedom cannot be denied - her very existence constitutes a threat. Françoise is no longer prepared to compromise, she will not be an object for Xavière and it is hate which motivates her subsequent act of annihilation. It is an act for which she alone is responsible and which gives her so much pleasure: "'It is I who will it.' It was her own will which was being accomplished, now nothing at all separated her from herself. She had at last made a choice. She had chosen herself."¹²

Thus it is with Françoise's murder of Xavière, a murder which is contrived to look like suicide, that the conflict between these two women ends. And so de Beauvoir here gives literal and dramatic expression to Hegel's "each conscience seeks the death of the Other." It is, however, an expression which even de Beauvoir admits is unconvincing. Nevertheless

de Beauvoir chose this ending because she maintains:

Françoise has given up looking for an ethical solution to the problem of co-existence. She endures the Other as an inevitable burden, and then defends herself against this invasion by accomplishing an equally brutal and irrational act herself: murder. ¹³

This may constitute an irrational act but it is this which, as Maurice Cranston points out, forms the moral of She Came to Stay in that to make a conscious choice is in itself ethical. ¹⁴

De Beauvoir's portrayal of human relationships in She Came to Stay is more Sartrean than Hegelian in that the conflict between consciousnesses is not dialectical; it is merely a battle, in this case to the death, from which there is no resolution. It is the consciousness of opponents in combat which underlies de Beauvoir's philosophy of human interaction; de Beauvoir allows no possibility for co-existence. However, Carol Evans believes that if we put the conflict between Françoise and Xavière aside and examine the relationship between Françoise and Pierre, we shall find that co-existence may be difficult but not impossible, for the basis of an authentic reciprocal relationship between these two does exist. ¹⁵ But Evans' argument is not convincing in the light of existentialism. Françoise and Pierre, although not acting in bad faith - deliberate self deception - do not acknowledge what Sartre calls the ontological "fact" of separation. When Xavière appears they see her in different ways and their previous notion of a mutual perspective or joint consciousness is shattered. Pierre's "we are one" utterance is soon shown to be no more than "ontological optimism." Even before Xavière appeared, Françoise's relationship with Pierre did not illustrate the possibility of reciprocal relationships, the eradication of conflict, but merely replaced "I versus Others" with "We versus Others." The "imperialism" of the human

consciousness is not obliterated in these two individuals who are supposedly capable of co-existence, but simply suppressed in their interaction with one another and aggressively directed towards the rest of the world. Thus even if the relationship between Françoise and Pierre had been successful, this would not have solved the problems of co-existence but simply placed two, and not one, at the centre of the world in conflict with all others.

An interesting feature of She Came to Stay is that de Beauvoir applies the ontology of Being and Nothingness to relationships between women. The "fundamental attitudes" outlined by Sartre are predominantly played out in this novel in the relationship between Françoise and Xavière. De Beauvoir's portrayal of these women is not totally unrealistic, yet there is something unconvincing about their relentless egotism. Unconvincing in as much as it belies "feminine" characteristics such as acquiescence, receptiveness, passivity. By the time she wrote The Second Sex de Beauvoir had developed a notion of woman as object and "Other." This does not mean that de Beauvoir refuted the idea that the consciousness she attributes to both Françoise and Xavière is impossible for women; indeed de Beauvoir would never argue this since it is, after all, an autobiographical novel. Thus Françoise and Xavière might still continue to act out some of the Sartrean attitudes, but since there is also another process involved - woman as "the Other" - the relationships would be more complex than she had originally allowed. But before de Beauvoir became interested in the particular experience of women, she devoted her time to discussing ethical questions.

II

The change which took place in de Beauvoir's thought after 1939 was inextricably linked to the political situation; a situation which ultimately culminated in the outbreak of war. Prior to this period de Beauvoir, and to a lesser extent Sartre, took little interest in politics. She tells us that at this time she was so concerned with maximising her own happiness that she refused to take account of external events which might clash with her individual goals. Despite increasing fascist provocations it was not until 1939 that de Beauvoir believed that attempts to counter fascist assaults were not merely necessary, but the only justifiable course of action. It was this kind of realisation which de Beauvoir has in mind when she tells us in The Prime of Life:

... there is no doubt that the spring of 1939 marked a watershed in my life. I renounced my individualistic, anti-humanistic way of life. I learned the value of solidarity. ... History took hold of me, and never let go thereafter. ...¹⁶

As we have seen, Sartre's thought also underwent such changes. He decided that he could no longer refuse to become politically involved and devised the rudiments of a morality based on the notion of the "genuine man" in which each individual is required to shoulder the responsibility for his own and others' existence. De Beauvoir, now realising the necessity for this perspective, "rallied to his point of view immediately."¹⁷

The change in de Beauvoir's thought is clearly manifest in the writings of this period. Her short philosophical essay Pyrrhus et Cinéas (1944)¹⁸ and her second novel The Blood of Others (1945)¹⁹ are based on a philosophy of responsibility and a commitment to political action.

By contrasting the epigraphs of the first and second novels we can see the dramatic change in de Beauvoir's thought; for the Hegelian epigraph, which suggests implacable conflict between independent subjects, is in direct opposition to Dostoyevsky's "each one of us is responsible for everyone and to every human being" which serves as the epigraph for the latter work. Before writing The Blood of Others de Beauvoir set out her ideas for its theme:

I would like my next novel to illustrate one's relationship with other people (autrui) in all its real complexity. To suppress one's awareness of the Other's existence is mere childness. The plot must be far more closely linked to social problems than in the first novel. It should culminate in some sort of action, with a social dimension - though this is hard to find. ²⁰

Be Beauvoir decided eventually to use the Resistance as a social setting in which her ideas could unfold. Thus although the book on publication was hailed as a "Resistance novel" the use of the Resistance was only the backcloth and did not effect its main theme.

As Hazel Barnes points out, Jean Blomart, the principal character of The Blood of Others, represents a true existentialist hero in the sense that he is honest with himself, recognising his responsibility for his own life and the necessity of respecting the freedom of others. ²¹ However, Blomart has not always been such an authentic individual and the novel's main concern is with his growing awareness of what has been termed "the curse of existence" - the problem of reconciling one's own freedom with others'.

The son of a wealthy printer, Blomart experiences his privileged position with feelings of rebellion and guilt. He joins the Communist Party and, in the fervour of political action, persuades a friend to take part in a demonstration at which the friend gets killed. Out of self-

recrimination and guilt, Blomart attempts to remain totally detached from others' existence, and seeks refuge in political neutrality and evasion of emotional involvement. But, on both historical and personal fronts, he realises that he has set himself an impossible task:

I cannot blot myself out. I cannot withdraw into myself. I exist outside myself and everywhere in this world. There is not an inch of my path which does not trespass into the world of someone else: there is no way of living which can prevent me from overflowing from myself at every moment. This life, which I spin from my own substance, presents a thousand unknown faces to other men; it flows impetuously through their fate. ... 22

Politically this realisation, and the dilemma of action which results, stems from his awareness of the fascist activity in Spain and the increasing persecution of the Jews. By not acting he is allowing these atrocities to continue, but action would necessarily imply fighting violence with violence - intervention would mean that he was paying with "the blood of others" for the instigation of his values.

On a personal level, Blomart's realisation that he cannot remain aloof from others' lives, stems from his meeting with a young woman called H el ene and the relationship which follows. In the early stages of the book, H el ene epitomises a certain type of woman, apparent in most of de Beauvoir's novels, who attempts to use her love for a man as a justification for her existence.²³ Blomart is repelled by such a prospect and withdraws but, in the messy abortion which results from their affair, learns that by refusing love he is also influencing another's life and that he must ultimately accept responsibility for its effect.

In face of this failed love affair, H el ene takes refuge in indifference. She regards herself as independent of current events and watches the ascendancy of fascism and the German occupation of Paris with

impartiality. However, various events shake her out of this attitude and she finally becomes involved in the Resistance movement. What H el ene "was to learn in the course of her development," writes de Beauvoir, "was the meaning of solidarity. ... In the generous atmosphere bred by comradeship and action she finally won through to that 'recognition', in the Hegelian sense of the word, which preserves man from mere immanence and contingency." ²⁴ In the light of events Blomart too is forced, after years of pacificism, to accept that in certain circumstances violence is the only way to give meaning to life. As Victor Brombert points out, neither the philosophical awareness which Blomart gains, nor his political involvement, can "cure ... (him) of his sense of alienation or cleanse him of his guilt." ²⁵ Blomart never manages to resolve the problem of becoming a barrier to the freedom of others, nor does the mutual involvement in the Resistance help him transcend the separateness of human existence and the alienation which this implies. De Beauvoir herself remarks that Blomart's development "did not bring him peace of mind, but peace of mind he no longer aspired to; he resigned himself to a life of mental agony." ²⁶

From even this brief look at The Blood of Others we see how apt it is for de Beauvoir to call this her "moral period." ²⁷ At the end of She Came to Stay the reader is prompted to conclude that one ought to be true to oneself by choosing and taking responsibility for one's decisions, but from the ending of this novel a more definite conclusion is urged. But this conclusion is still unclear, for beyond that of becoming politically involved we do not know what each one of us must do to become a truly moral being. "Each one of us is responsible for everyone and to every human being": de Beauvoir illustrates this theme but is unable to tell us how we must live

a life commensurate with such a reality.

In her philosophical essay Pyrrhus et Cineas de Beauvoir elaborates some of the points raised in the novel. She attempts to show how our lives inevitably encroach on the freedom of others and that we have to face up to the responsibility this implies. But de Beauvoir confides in her memoirs that, having reached this conclusion in both these works, she found that though aware of her responsibilities, she nevertheless felt herself wholly incapable of action.²⁸ Such feelings of impotence emanate from her abstract ethics and a call to action which glosses over many social issues and problems. And it is these feelings which de Beauvoir expresses in her subsequent novel, All Men Are Mortal (1946).²⁹

III

In discussing the main themes and philosophical points of All Men Are Mortal two problems immediately arise: on the one hand, we are faced with an immortal character and a story which presents historical events as the material for the development of his consciousness; while on the other, there is no single theme. De Beauvoir states that in this novel she was:

... trying to say no more than the story I invented... Human enterprise is neither the finite nor the infinite but the indefinite: this word cannot be fixed within and given limits, the best way of approaching it is to explore its possible variations. All Men Are Mortal is an organised version of such an exploration; its themes are not theses, but points of departure for uncharted wanderings.³⁰

For the sake of simplicity and clarity, let us leave aside the themes of time and death, which are of great concern to de Beauvoir but of little relevance to our study, and briefly examine the change which took place in her thought; a change which de Beauvoir later claimed means that All Men

Are Mortal is a "complement" to her first novel but the "antithesis" of her second.

In Force of Circumstance de Beauvoir tells us that in L'Expérience Interiure George Bataille asks: "How can one consent to not being everything?"³¹ And that although this question had been one of the themes of She Came to Stay she decided to develop it more fully in her third novel. Fosca, the protagonist of All Men Are Mortal is portrayed in the first part of the historical narrative as an ambitious envious individual who, in fighting for the glory of the city state Carmona, chooses to drink an elixir which will make him immortal and thus allow him to realise his ambitions. However, immortality, far from bringing success and fulfilment, brings growingly dramatic realisation of the futility of his goals. Through a long series of events he becomes involved in an undertaking to unite the world and thus confirm the happiness of its beings. However, faced by the countless deaths and the endless misery this project entails, he begins to doubt its validity. When he comes to contemplate the universe he seeks to unite he finds only individual liberties: "There are only men, men forever divided."³² Moreover, like a god he was seeking to define "Universal Good" and, in its imposition, deny that man must create his own values and shape his life accordingly. Fosca was thus engaged in a project which, if successful, robbed man of his freedom and condemned him to exist in a ready-made world where the only real choice open to him would be suicide. It is for this reason that Fosca declares that men do "not want happiness they want to live. There is nothing one can do for them, there is nothing one can do against them. There is nothing one can do."³³ It is this pessimistic declaration which, although slightly modified in later sections, could almost serve as an epigraph for the novel. De Beauvoir tells us

that she deliberately set Fosca's realisations of the futility of action in the Middle Ages: "Stupid wars, a chaotic economy, useless rebellions, futile massacres, population increases unaccompanied by any improvement in the standard of living, everything in this period," she writes, "seemed confusion and marking time. ..." ³⁴

De Beauvoir admits that the conception of history which emerges from this section of the novel is "resolutely pessimistic" but argues that it does not imply cyclical movement, merely that historical development does not mean progress. It is, however, this sort of existentialist conception, and the interrelated notion of the futility of human action, which, as we have seen with reference to Satre's work, leads to difficulties in integrating existentialism and Marxism. Perhaps this explains why de Beauvoir was later at pains to point out that the pessimistic tone is to some extent corrected in the later stages of her novel, where she recognises the "truth" of "the victories won by the working class since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution." ³⁵ Yet this optimism is not visible to Fosca. After centuries of political inaction he becomes involved and is subsequently imprisoned for revolutionary activity; but even so, he is unable to rejoice in the victories of the struggle in which he has been involved. He believes that "if one lives long enough, one sees that every victory sooner or later turns to defeat." ³⁶

In his long trek through history Fosca learns, however, that one good does exist - to act in accordance with one's conscience. Thus echoing the conclusion of She Came to Stay de Beauvoir expresses the view that one must accept responsibility for one's choices but does not tell us what these

choices ought to be. Unlike The Blood of Others there is no implication that one ought to engage in political action; this remains only one possibility and only so if it is what one's conscience dictates. Moreover the futility of action which emerges as a dominant theme in this book, is in complete opposition to the conclusion of The Blood of Others, where one is morally obliged to become politically involved, and it is in this sense that it carries an antithetical message.

De Beauvoir's thought appears to have come full circle up to this point. It began with the notion that one should be true to oneself; moved to a morality which bids each individual to take responsibility for the society in which he lives; and then back to the idea that above all else one must act in accordance with one's conscience. However, although de Beauvoir's thought is in this respect circular, it has also progressed. She began with a completely ego-centred world view where the Other merely constitutes a threat to one's existence, but subsequently realised that Others do exist and with as much right as oneself. At one point this recognition led de Beauvoir to some moral positions. The idea of a commitment to the Other persisted, but de Beauvoir realised the difficulty involved in devising an ethical system. Our lives hopelessly intertwine, yet apart from living as our conscience dictates what else can we do?

Thus we see that like Sartre, de Beauvoir's thought stumbles on the question of ethics. Yet it is a problem which existentialists must face; for if man is free to create his own values on what criteria must he base his choices? This problem was later made redundant for Sartre by his acceptance of Marxism and a concomitant stress on political involvement. But in the intervening period, Sartre and de Beauvoir realised that existentialist ontology could not in itself allow one to differentiate

between different forms of political organisation. Thus they tried to differentiate between ontological freedom and soci-political freedom. It was in distinguishing between these two conceptions of freedom that de Beauvoir contributed most to the formulation of existentialist ethics.

IV

Being and Nothingness provides the underlying theory of de Beauvoir's work, The Ethics of Ambiguity. She begins from the notion that man has a nothingness at the core of his being; a nothingness which gives him the chance to become something - to make himself. As his own creator, man is a "useless passion." But de Beauvoir refines Sartre's theory and argues that the absence of absolute values does not mean that everything is "absurd," that nothing is justifiable, for it is man's responsibility to create his own values. It is he who must establish criteria to differentiate the "useful" from the "useless." It is because man must create values in relation to his own life, that de Beauvoir claims his being is "ambiguous." Such ambiguity must not, however, be "dispelled" for it is man's "task" to realise it.³⁷ Accordingly, de Beauvoir maintains that despite popular belief, existentialism is not a philosophy of the absurd and of despair. On the contrary, it is a philosophy which can give rise to ethics:

The most optimistic of 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-incidence with himself, in a perfect plenitude, the notion of having-to-be would have no meaning. One does not offer an ethics to a God. It is impossible to propose any to man if one defines him as nature, as something given.³⁸

Dostoyevsky once claimed: "If God does not exist, everything is permitted."³⁹ But de Beauvoir, following the Sartre of Existentialism and Humanism, argues that the opposite is true for it is only in the absence of an absolute being, a creator of the universe, that man is responsible for everything and must justify everything he does. Thus every individual must create his own values and make his own choices. The "genuine man" is one who realises this; who abandons "the dream of the inhuman objectivity."⁴⁰ However, de Beauvoir argues that there is in fact a foundation for individual choice and action: freedom. She claims that freedom is not a universal value in itself but is a prerequisite for all values and a justification for all human existence. "To will oneself moral and to will oneself free," writes de Beauvoir, "are one and the same decision."⁴¹ This does not mean that we are not free but that we must establish a genuine political freedom on "the original upsurge of existence";⁴² we must overcome the constraints which block our transcendence.

De Beauvoir thus attempts to distinguish between ontological and political freedom and define what may serve as a basis for moral evaluation. Subsequently she argues that one can will oneself not free and in so doing constitute oneself as an inferior mode of being; fail to realise one's human existence. And it is in allowing man the possibility to err in this way that de Beauvoir claims existentialism is able to introduce the concept of ethics.

But having established the possibility for unethical action, de Beauvoir must account for it. She must explain why some individuals choose to live an inauthentic existence or why they want to enslave others. In explaining such behaviour she cannot fall back on essentialist notions, for

existentialism rejects the idea of essence. Nor is she able to explain such behaviour in terms of an individual's experience and subsequent character formation for, as we shall see, de Beauvoir argues that these are never so definite as to rule out the possibility of change. How, then, does de Beauvoir attempt to explain an individual's particular choice and consequent way of relating to the world?

Quoting Descartes' statement that "man's unhappiness ... is due to him having first been a child,"⁴³ de Beauvoir claims that it is only on the basis of childhood experiences that we can explain why most men in adult life make unfortunate choices about their existence. As the child finds himself in a ready made world it appears to have an absolute quality to which he must submit. He accepts adults as the source of absolute knowledge and sees them as solid substantial beings. Accordingly, he accepts himself as a completed being. Moreover, he feels happily irresponsible for himself and his acts for they are insignificant in the face of such a completed universe. However, this state of serene acceptance rarely continues beyond adolescence. Cracks begin to appear in the perfection of adults and their world: "Men stop appearing as if they were gods, and at the same time the adolescent discovers the human character of the world about him. Language, customs, ethics, and values have their source in these uncertain creatures."⁴⁴ The crisis of adolescence is that the adolescent must assume his subjectivity, he must take responsibility for his actions and the social situation in which he finds himself. In Blomart's words: "I didn't create the world but I create it again by my presence at every instant."⁴⁵ Thus it is at the crisis of adolescence that the individual must decide his attitude to freedom - it is the moment of his moral choice. This decision may be changed in the future but, de Beauvoir

argues (although not explaining why), as time passes this becomes more difficult. However, as man's freedom is always there, no choice is so unfortunate that it cannot be altered.

When de Beauvoir discusses the impact of childhood on this process of choosing it is not clear exactly what she has in mind. It is not the way in which the child is socialised which is relevant in de Beauvoir's view, since socialisation is too deterministic to be accepted by existentialists. Thus it appears that "the misfortune which comes to man as a result of the fact that he was a child is that his freedom was first concealed from him and that all his life he will be nostalgic for the time when he did not know of its exigencies."⁴⁶ However, this does not explain anything about individual differences; in view of the fact that everyone has been a child and has had his freedom concealed, how can we understand why one individual confirms his freedom and adopts a moral attitude while another does not? De Beauvoir offers us no explanation.

De Beauvoir gives some examples of situations which are analogous to the child's, such as slavery and the position of women in some civilisations. What characterises these groups is that they 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.⁴⁷

Thus the slave who has not yet gained consciousness of his slavery accepts the world of his masters, and women in some societies are so ignorant that they can only submit to the world and the values created by men. Such submission is also characteristic of some women in our society, but de Beauvoir argues that what distinguishes Western women from the child is that

their condition is not imposed upon them but chosen or at least consented to. Negro plantation slaves and Mohammedan women, for example, do not have the education and understanding to allow them to attack their oppression, "but once there appears a possibility of liberation, it is resignation of freedom not exploit the possibility, a resignation which implies dishonesty and which is a positive fault." ⁴⁸

Thus de Beauvoir implicitly blames contemporary women for their oppressed position. Existentialist ontology leads de Beauvoir to argue that if women are degraded objects, it is because they themselves have consented to this situation. As they are able to analyse their position, if they do not revolt then it is because of "dishonesty" or "fault." The social reasons for woman's acceptance of her passive role do not figure here, but a little leniency does creep in as de Beauvoir takes a fleeting regard for social constraints. She states that woman's restricted social and economic activity means that she is more likely to see the world as given. But de Beauvoir, a relentless moral critic, adds:

There is often laziness and timidity in their resignation; their honesty is not quite complete; but to the extent that it exists, their freedom remains available, it is not denied. They can, in their situation of ignorant and powerless individuals, know the truth of existence and raise themselves to a properly moral life. ⁴⁹

But if woman's revolt is often hindered by "laziness" and "resignation" why is she more prone to such faults than man? If there is no essence and if socialisation is too deterministic a theory to be given much credence in existentialism, how can de Beauvoir explain the fact that passivity is a common trait of the female sex? It is apparent here, as elsewhere in Sartre's and de Beauvoir's thought, that existentialism fails to explain differences in human attitudes and conditions. Moreover, in

holding the oppressed, in this case women, responsible for their situation, de Beauvoir is open to Marcuse's charge that such a theory is an "insult" to the oppressed. Indeed since de Beauvoir actually apportions blame, her theory suggests that those few women, like herself, who have asserted their freedom are morally superior beings.

But to return to de Beauvoir's concept of freedom, we see that she argues that for human existence, and the freedom which underlies it, to be meaningful man must be in relationship with other people. To live a moral life involves the realisation that while others are potential threats to one's projects and possibilities, the world would be empty without them. "To will that there be being is also to will that there be men by and for whom the world is endowed with human significations. ... To make being 'be' is to communicate with others by means of being." ⁵⁰ Although the meaningfulness of existence depends on freedom and transcendence, there are situations where this is restricted; where man is not permitted free expression and is cut off from his goals. And it is this which de Beauvoir defines as oppression. Oppression, in de Beauvoir's terms, is only possible as a result of the actions of other men for the limiting forces of the in-itself - pestilence for example - do not constitute natural oppression but simply the material for man's projects. De Beauvoir's definition of oppression is important to note since it serves as a basis for her analysis of the plight of women in The Second Sex:

... my freedom, in order to fulfil itself, requires that it emerges into an open future: 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 to 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 not only dying, but human existence is indistinguishable from absurd vegetation. ...⁵¹

For the oppressed there is only one solution: to prove their subjectivity and freedom in revolt. Echoing Hegel, de Beauvoir claims that if the revolt is successful then it is the oppressed who realise positive freedom and the tyrant who, in opposing freedom, becomes a thing. Those individuals who are neither oppressors nor oppressed have not simply every right to intervene in this struggle, but are morally obliged to do so: "Abstention is complicity, and complicity in this case is tyranny."⁵² As the cause of freedom does not belong to any individual or group, but is "universally human," in failing to become involved in a liberation struggle one is implicitly aligning oneself with tyranny and against freedom. One cannot argue against this view by saying that the oppressed positively desire their oppression for, according to de Beauvoir, the slave "merely abstains from not wanting it (freedom) because he is unaware of even the possibility of rejection."⁵³ De Beauvoir does, however, argue that the urgency of liberation is not exactly the same for everyone. Contradicting Marx, she claims that it is moral exigency, and not literal necessity, which is the determining force. The material conditions of a worker make him a likely candidate for revolt, but like any other man he may reject his freedom and accept various philosophical justifications for not fighting.

De Beauvoir argues, therefore, that as freedom is the foundation of man's human existence anything that denies this must be overcome. An authentic individual is one who regards this struggle as part of his own individual struggle for human existence and who aids those in the process of liberation. However, by refusing the oppressor the right to treat people

as things, this struggle between oppressor and oppressed inflicts one group's will on another. "In order for a liberation action to be thoroughly moral action," writes de Beauvoir, "it would have to be achieved with the consent and conversion of the oppressors." ⁵⁴ But de Beauvoir argues that to believe this possible is Utopian reverie. She maintains that it is therefore justifiable to prohibit oppression since "a freedom which is interested only in denying other freedom must be denied." ⁵⁵

De Beauvoir admits the complexity of the question of liberating action. One may accept that oppressors may have to be prohibited by violence but such violence will also be meted out to others who are not so culpable. Thus she claims that we are faced with a "paradox": "... no action can be generated for man without its being immediately generated against men." But later she adds:

... it would be absurd to oppose a liberating action with the pretext that it implies crime and tyranny; for without crime and tyranny there could be no liberation of man; and one cannot escape that dialectic which goes from freedom to freedom through dictatorship and oppression. ⁵⁶

However de Beauvoir argues that liberation must not harden into its opposite, for violence is only justifiable as a means to an end; that is, in the struggle for freedom from oppression. In this struggle there must be no sharp distinction between present and future, means and ends. It is the individual who must be constantly seen as one of the ends at which our action must aim. Thus, for example, the abstract goal of socialism cannot be used to justify the deaths of numerous individuals; only the fact that the struggle is directed towards their imminent liberation is permissible.

In outlining the ideas contained in The Ethics of Ambiguity those relevant to our study have been concentrated on at the expense of others. It may also be said that the section of the book dealing with the ethics of liberation struggles is the best and the one dealt with least in our study. However, in general it is a weak book and it is not surprising that de Beauvoir finds this her most "irritating" work. The reasons for this are given in Force of Circumstance:

The fact remains that on the whole I went to a great deal of trouble to present inaccurately a problem to which I then offered a solution quite as hollow as the Kantian maxims. My descriptions of the nihilist, the adventurer, the aesthete, obviously influenced by those of Hegel, are even more arbitrary and abstract than his, since they are not even linked together by a historical development; the attitudes I examine are explained by objective conditions; I limited myself to isolating their moral significance to such an extent that my portraits are not situated on any level of reality. I was in error when I thought I could define a morality independent of a social context. ⁵⁷

This is accurate self-criticism for, as we saw with reference to women, in this work de Beauvoir cannot account for the mechanism of oppression, or for differences between individuals and groups.

The problem for de Beauvoir in this and other works, is that she has no theory of the impact of such matters as class, sex, race, religion on an individual's life and so on his "choice" of being. De Beauvoir expresses the problem, and gives a reason for it, in The Prime of Life:

... in reaction against my father's ideologies, I objected when people talked to me about Frenchmen, Germans, or Jews: for me there were only individuals. I was right to reject essentialism; I knew already what abuses could follow in the train of abstract concepts such as the "Slav soul", the "Jewish character", "primitive mentality", or das ewige Weib. But the universalist notions to which I turned bore me equally far from reality. What I lacked was the idea of "situation", which alone allows one to make some concrete definition of human groups without enslaving them to a timeless and deterministic pattern. ⁵⁸

This was also a problem for Sartre. He developed the concept of "situation" to overcome it. In Anti-Semite and Jew, for example, he used "situation" as a way to analyse the relation of oppressor to oppressed. De Beauvoir's first systematic attempt to apply "situation" came in The Second Sex. This Sartrian concept enabled her to extricate herself from some of the conceptual problems of her earlier fictionalised and ethical works. Thus we see how de Beauvoir's analysis of woman's oppression fits into the general development of her thought.

Appendix Three

Sartre's "Anti-Semite and Jew"

Sartre wrote Anti-Semite and Jew in 1944 during the peak of the atrocities of Nazi Germany. He begins his study of anti-Semitism by maintaining that it is not an opinion, but rather a mode of being in the world freely chosen by the existent. Thus Sartre claims that the reasons for anti-Semitism cannot be found in economic, historical, or political factors. Although certain actions of the Jews may at one time have given rise to antagonistic feelings, these in themselves could not create anti-Semitism because, Sartre argues, this requires the anti-Semite to desire the belief in a "Jewish" essence. It is for this reason that Sartre maintains: "It is therefore the idea of the Jew that one forms for himself which would seem to determine history, not the 'historic fact' that produces the idea."¹ Thus Sartre hopes to refute mechanistic, deterministic explanations of human behaviour by demonstrating the existent's ability to choose how he will live his life. Accordingly, what Sartre intends to show in the course of this essay is that anti-Semitism, far from being conditioned or determined by "external factors," is a "free and total choice of oneself, a complex attitude that one adopts not only towards Jews but toward men in general, toward history and society."²

Sartre's analysis of anti-Semitism is an attempt to illustrate what kind of life an anti-Semite chooses. We learn that it is a choice which, in existentialist terminology, is characterised by bad faith. The anti-Semite is not only a coward but also a person who has chosen to "reason falsely"; he has a basic fear both of himself and of truth.

According to Sartre the anti-Semite chooses his relation to the world and in this process also "makes" the Jew.³ That is to say, in defining a Jewish essence the anti-Semite forces the Jew into a situation in which he acquires the consciousness of being a "Jew." In the terminology of Being and Nothingness, we could say that the Jew is alienated because he is robbed of his transcendence and defined as existing in the mode of the in-itself. Sartre claims that the personality which the anti-Semite attributes to the Jew is experienced by the latter as a "phantom personality, at once strange and familiar, that haunts him and which is nothing but himself - himself as others see him."⁴ While Sartre claims, on the one hand, that this is simply "the expression of our fundamental relation to the Other," he nevertheless claims: "the Jew has a personality like the rest of us, and on top of that he is Jewish. It amounts in a sense to a doubling of the fundamental relationship with the Other. The Jew is over-determined."⁵ It seems, therefore, that Sartre maintains that the anti-Semite defines the Jew as a fixed and determinate object. As this object is also seen as being dedicated to the work of Evil, the Jew is more alienated in his relation with the Other than is normally the case. In other words, the Jew's being-for himself is hideously and totally transformed in the encounter with the anti-Semitic Other.

In Sartre's analysis, the "inauthentic Jew" is one who denies or tries to escape from his condition as Jew. That is to say, instead of openly confronting the realities of his situation, the inauthentic Jew attempts to flee it. In explaining "the avenues of flight" open to the Jew, Sartre thus describes how in masochism, rationalism, and the adoption of an "inferiority complex" for example, the Jew inauthentically lives out his Jewish condition.

The authentic Jew, on the other hand, has a "true and lucid consciousness of the situation" and also assumes "the responsibilities and risks it involves."⁶ The authentic Jew is thus one who accepts his Jewish condition; it is within the constraints of his situation that he chooses how to live his life. Thus Sartre claims "the authentic Jew makes himself Jew, in the face of all and against all."⁷ In saying this, however, one must understand that although the authentic Jew is a Jew, as an authentic human being he will no longer share the traits of other Jews; traits which stem from these Jews' "common inauthenticity."⁸

Central to Sartre's idea of the Jew is thus a "Jewish situation." It is this which, although not determining the Jew's choice of himself, is the material from which his choices must be made and which is such that he is unlikely to choose to lead an authentic existence. He is, according to Sartre, a "haunted man, condemned to make his choice of himself on the basis of false problems and in a false situation, deprived of the metaphysical sense by the society that surrounds him. ..." ⁹ In short, Sartre argues that the Jew's awareness of his ontological freedom is less likely to develop because of the situation in which he finds himself. As a result the Jew is more likely to adopt an inauthentic attitude to his own existence.

The situation of the Jew may, in Sartre's terms, adequately explain the inauthentic choices he makes but how are we to understand the inauthentic choice which Sartre posits as the foundation of anti-Semitism? In other words, why does an individual choose the passionate life of anti-Semitism, eschewing in the process a more rational and authentic interpretation of the world and his existence in it? The answer is difficult to find in Anti-Semite and Jew. However much Sartre maintains

that the Jew's inauthentic choice may be explained by his situation, he continually emphasises that the anti-Semite must be held morally accountable for his choices. Indeed as Sartre rules out the possibility that anti-Semitism is a response to objective economic and political factors it is only to the individual anti-Semite that we are able to apportion blame.

Although Sartre argues that anti-Semitism is based on a totally free choice of oneself, he nevertheless outlines certain external conditions which are likely to lead to such a choice. For example, at one point he discusses how the nature of one's work can influence one's conception of the world:

Each man judges history in accordance with the profession that he follows. Shaped by the daily influence of the material world he works with, the workman sees society as the product of real forces acting in accordance with rigorous laws. ¹⁰

In this way Sartre tries to account for the fact that anti-Semitism is more a petit-bourgeois than working-class phenomenon. Thus Sartre claims that the materialist analysis of the world which workers tend to acquire, leads them to reject the notion of a "metaphysical essence"; a notion which Sartre maintains is central to the Manichean conception of the anti-Semite. Moreover Sartre argues that the working class are not only more likely to see the enemy in terms of class, but also that they are less likely to single out Jews as objects of their hate.

Sartre does not simply argue that the bourgeois' lack of productive activity means that he fails to see the world in such a materialist light, but also that the nature of his business leads him "to explain collective events by the initiative of individuals." In other words, because personalities influence the course of their business they

believe that this is what "determines the course of the world"; and it is precisely this type of mentality which, in focussing on "essence," is more likely to lead to anti-Semitism. ¹¹

Sartre is not a determinist; he merely outlines a set of factors which may influence the individual's outlook on the world. But even so, Sartre has introduced a concept which is at odds with his main theory. Given the fact that individuals are not totally free to choose which occupation to enter, (as this is largely dependent on external factors such as qualifications, geographical location, social background and the objective economic climate which determines the nature of the work available), Sartre's claim that work influences one's view of the world means that "external factors" do have an affect on anti-Semitism. The recent decline in the productive sector and the increase in tertiary sectors of employment for example, could mean that the employment experience of individuals could lead them to "judge" history in such a way that they were more likely to become anti-Semitic.

It is understandable that Sartre, writing during the Second World War, would want to blame anti-Semites for their actions. Nevertheless there is a theoretical problem in this work; namely that Sartre accounts for the situation of the Jew, and hence his "inauthentic" choices, but is not prepared to discuss the situation of the anti-Semite in similar terms. This bias is prevalent in Sartre's other works. Maurice Cranston illustrates the bias in Sartre's novels and biography:

Thus we see the sheep divided from the goats: on the one hand, Genet, Gide, Ronquentin, artists all, if not all of equal merit, and all unequivocally anti-bourgeois; on the other hand, Baudelaire and Fleurier, one an artist, the other not, but both on the side of the bourgeoisie and Fascism. The final criterion is thus, strictly speaking, neither literary nor psychological: it is political. ¹²

Cranston's comment about the political bias involved in Sartre's apportionment of blame leads us to question the politics of Anti-Semite and Jew. Sartre argues that while individual Jews can make "moral decisions" which help on "the ethical level," nevertheless these decisions do not provide political solutions. The political solution to which Sartre refers is contained in a throw-away line toward the end of the conclusion. "What is there to say," Sartre writes, "except that the socialist revolution is necessary to and sufficient for the suppression of the anti-Semite."¹³ Given the idealistic nature of Sartre's analysis of anti-Semitism, this conclusion on the necessity of a socialist revolution is an adjunct; it has been tacked on to an analysis which does not point in a socialist direction. As Anti-Semite and Jew was written in the mid 1940s at the beginning of Sartre's flirtation with Marxism, it further illustrates Aron's point that at this stage in his development Sartre's commitment to socialism was superficial; that it was more suited to "rhetoric than action."

De Beauvoir's project in writing The Second Sex is similar to Sartre's in Anti-Semite and Jew, for it too is an analysis of an oppressed group and its relations with the oppressors. As she uses Sartrian theory to analyse woman's situation many of the faults inherent in his work are replicated in hers. Thus she does not account for the situation of the oppressors and, with little theoretical justification, concludes on a socialist note.

Appendix Four

A Note on Differences Between Men in "The Second Sex"

De Beauvoir argues in The Second Sex that work makes man transcendent and ensures his superiority to woman. However, at one point she recognises that this is not always the case:

There are many men who like women, are restricted to the sphere of the intermediary and instrumental, of the inessential means. The worker escapes from it through political action expressing a will to revolution; but the men of the classes called precisely "middle" implant themselves in that sphere deliberately. Destined like women to the repetition of daily tasks, identified with ready-made values ... the employee, the merchant, the office worker, are in no way superior to their accompanying females (pp.635-6, emphasis added).

But although this statement shows us which sections of the male population de Beauvoir believes gain no advantage from their work, the reasons for this are not clear. If we bear in mind that de Beauvoir argues that to be male is to "ratify" the world, then the exemption of "the worker" makes little sense. De Beauvoir's emphasis on man's continual ability to change what is not to his liking renders her notion of "political action expressing a will to revolution" (emphasis added) a nonsense; for if being male means being able to transcend what is, then man's "will to revolution" automatically means revolution and in face of the continuation of the status quo such a "will" cannot exist.

It seems, therefore, that de Beauvoir's wish to exempt workers from her attack on middle-class men contradicts her theory. This is also true of the other main occasion when she restricts her comments to the petit bourgeoisie. Following on from the statement in which she expressly exempts "the worker," de Beauvoir makes some observations on the nature of

"the office universe" in which she ultimately concludes that housewives are potentially more free and able to express themselves in their daily routine than this particular group of middle-class employees. Yet, with minimum alteration, this statement on the restrictions imposed on these men in their work, and the contrast to be made with the relative freedom of housewives, can be made relevant to most workers:

All day long he must obey his superiors, wear a white-collar, and keep up his social standing; she can dawdle around the house in a wrapper, sing, laugh with her neighbours; she does as she pleases, takes little risks, tries to succeed in getting results (p.636).

In other words, if we take into consideration the hierarchical nature of most employment and the control particularly exerted by management over workers in factories by such means as time-clocks and measured work, then it is not clear why de Beauvoir does not portray most, if not all, jobs as restrictive. Indeed from de Beauvoir's comments on the restrictive nature of work in the office universe, it seems justifiable to infer that men in other occupations are able to spend their time singing, laughing and generally doing as they please!

In de Beauvoir's terms, however, there is one occasion when she seems justified in making a distinction between middle-class men and "workers" in a way that would favour the latter. She argues that the petit bourgeois male often "lets himself be smothered by his career and his 'front'; he often becomes self-important, serious" (p.636). In other words, this type of man is more likely to be drawn into a universe of purposeless formalities and, instead of seeing his project as a product of his choice, of his own values, he believes it to have some kind of "absolute" justification. He becomes in essence what Sartre defines as "the serious man."

So far we have seen that in The Second Sex de Beauvoir offers little explanation for her attack on petit bourgeois, male occupations. However, from a knowledge of Sartre's work it is possible to furnish an explanation for such an attack. In "Materialism and Revolution" Sartre emphasises the importance of work; this emphasis does not overtly emanate from a Hegelian notion of creative labour but from other factors: first, work liberates the slave from the "caprice" of the master and second it allows him to develop a materialist view of the world. However, Sartre is not precise about the circumstances in which one benefits from labour, except that it must involve material production. There are little benefits to be gained therefore from petit bourgeois employment. Indeed Sartre claims that because the bourgeois "does not produce" but "directs, administers, distributes, buys, sells," his activity is based on a "constant commerce of men."¹ And this means that such a man is likely to choose to explain history and society as a result of individual wills; a view which leads to essentialist conceptions of history and thus to various forms of bad faith.

Relating Sartre's crude emphasis on productive labour and its implicit glorification of the worker to de Beauvoir's comments, we thus see why she would want to attack the work undertaken by middle class men. However, this attempt to differentiate between men in The Second Sex is superficial; it does not emanate from her theory and adds little to her analysis of the male-female relationship. In a word, it is little more than ideology.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Chapter One

1. John Berger, Ways of Seeing (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1972), p.47. The picture by Trutat is Reclining Bacchante.
2. In accordance with de Beauvoir's usage, "man" and "woman" are used in this thesis in preference to "men" and "women." However, as in conventional usage, "man" is also used to denote the human being. See Appendix One for a discussion of this and other terminology.
3. Berger, p.46.
4. Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. H.M. Parshley (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1972); hereafter cited as S.S., Throughout this thesis the year given in brackets after a book title refers to first publication in its original language. For full bibliographical details of de Beauvoir's works, see section 1(a) of the bibliography.
5. See Appendix One for an explanation of the varied usage of the term "Other" in this thesis.
6. S.S., p.29.
7. John Berger also discusses this topic in his article, "The Social Presence of Women," New Society, 22 Jan. 1970.
8. Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York : Washington Square Press, 1973); hereafter cited as B.N.. This aspect of Sartre's theory is outlined on p.37 ff below.
9. G.W.F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J.B. Baillie (London : Allen & Unwin, 1966).
10. G.W.F. Hegel, The Philosophy of Right, trans. T.M. Know (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1940), Zusatz, para. 166, pp.263-4.
11. For an analysis of the way in which philosophers have traditionally defined women, see Michèle le Doeuf, "Women and Philosophy," Radical Philosophy, 17 (Summer 1977)..
12. See Alice Schwartzer's comments in her interview with de Beauvoir, "Talking to Simone de Beauvoir," Spare Rib, 56 (Mar. 1972), p.7.
13. In feminist ideology there is the idea of woman as "sex-object" but this seems more indebted to R.D. Laing's existential psycho-analysis (The Divided Self : An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness, Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1965; Self and Other, Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1969), than to de Beauvoir's S.S.. For a discussion of the theories which have influenced modern feminism see Juliet Mitchell's Woman's Estate (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1974), pp.19-75.

14. For publication details see section 1(a) of the bibliography.
15. Appendix Two outlines de Beauvoir's main work prior to S.S.
16. "Facticity" is a term used by Sartre in B.N. to refer to the "given" nature of our existence (e.g. such factors as age, class, historical background). The use of this concept in Sartre's work is outlined on p.28 ff below.
17. Simone de Beauvoir, Force of Circumstance, trans. Richard Howard (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1975), p.195 ff. Hereafter cited as F.C.
18. Simone de Beauvoir, The Prime of Life, trans. Peter Green (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1973), p.572. Hereafter cited as P.L.
19. De Beauvoir began the research for S.S. in October 1946 and completed writing it in June 1949.
20. S.S., p.13.
21. S.S., p.27.
22. S.S., p.28.
23. F.C., pp.198-203.
24. Quoted in F.C., p.200.
25. "Lady with a Lance," rev. of S.S., Time, 23 (Feb. 1953).
26. Quoted in F.C., p.197.
27. F.C., p.200.
28. Laurent Gagnebin, Simone de Beauvoir ou Le refus de l'indifférence (Paris : Fischbacher, 1968), p.133.
29. Caroline Moorhead, "Simone de Beauvoir : Marriage is a very dangerous institution," The Times, 15 May 1974, p.9, col.2.
30. Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1972).
31. Mitchell's Woman's Estate gives a good summary of the development of the women's liberation movement.
32. Margaret Walters, "The Rights and Wrongs of Women," in The Rights and Wrongs of Women, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1976), p.351.
33. Quoted by Jean Prasteau in his interview with Lilar, "Suzanne Contre Simone, Lilar Contre Beauvoir," Le Figaro Littéraire, 29 Sept. 1969.

34. Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (New York : Doubleday, 1970); Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch (London : MacGibbon & Kee, 1970); Eva Figes, Patriarchal Attitudes (London : Panther, 1972).
35. Mitchell's Woman's Estate is the most significant exception to this but it only devotes a few pages to S.S.
36. Moorhead, The Times, 15 May, p.9. col. 2.
37. Schwartzter, Spare Rib, pp.8-9.
38. Sheila Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness, Man's World (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1974), p.21.
39. S.S., p.26.
40. Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen outline the major aspects of modern feminism.
41. For details see section 1(b) of the bibliography.
42. Suzanne Lilar, Le Malentendu du "Deuxième Sexe" (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), pp.126-7.
43. Suzanne Lilar, Aspects of Love in Western Society, trans. Jonathan Griffin (London : Panther, 1967).
44. Daniel Armogathe, Le Deuxième Sexe (Paris : Hatier, 1977).
45. Margaret Mead, "A Saturday Review Panel Takes Aim at The Second Sex," Saturday Review, 21 Feb. 1953.
46. S.S., p.182.
47. Fn. p.182 of S.S.
48. Albert Memmi, "A Tyrant's Plea," in Dominated Man (Boston : Beacon Press, 1971), p.142.

Chapter Two

1. Alexandre Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel : Lectures on "The Phenomenology of Spirit", assembled by Raymond Queneau, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols (New York : Basic Books, 1969).
2. For example, it has been claimed that Kojève overemphasises those aspects of the master-slave dialectic, particularly the slave's labour, which make it more compatible with Marxism. See George Armstrong Kelly, "Notes on Hegel's Lordship and Bondage," Review of Metaphysics, 19 (1965-66).

3. In F.C., (p.43) we learn that de Beauvoir was friendly with Raymond Queneau who assembled Kojève's lectures for publication. For a comment on the impact Kojève's lectures had on French intellectuals see Allan Bloom's editor's introduction to Kojève.
4. Kojève's existentialism is alluded to in Bloom's introduction to the book. Such existentialism is apparent in Kojève's reading of Hegel, in his emphasis on the freedom of consciousness.
5. Kojève, p.6.
6. Kojève, p.15.
7. When the term "Fight" is used to signify the Hegelian fight for recognition the first letter is capitalized.
8. Kojève, p.8.
9. Kojève, p.9.
10. Kojève, p.19.
11. Kojève, p.15.
12. "Work" and "labour" are used interchangeably in this thesis. For a discussion of this terminology see Appendix One.
13. Kojève, p.49.
14. Kojève, p.56.
15. Kojève, p.56.
16. Kojève, p.16.
17. Kojève, p.27.
18. Kojève, p.59.
19. Kojève, p.47.
20. Kojève, p.29.
21. Kojève, p.25.

Chapter Three

1. This is not to say that de Beauvoir's work did not make an original contribution to existentialism, simply that Sartre's works elucidate The Second Sex better than de Beauvoir's. For a summary of de Beauvoir's work prior to 1947, see Appendix Two.

2. Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism, trans. Philip Mairet (London : Eyre Methuen, 1973); hereafter cited as E.H..
3. In this chapter all page references to B.N. are given in brackets in the text. These page numbers refer to the Washington Square edition previously cited.
4. This is the kind of question Sartre discusses in his biographical works: Baudelaire (1947), trans. Martin Turnell (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1949); and Saint Genet : Actor and Martyr (1952), trans. Bernard Frechtman (London : W.H. Allen, 1964).
5. See Richard Schacht, Alienation (London : Allen & Unwin, 1970), for a discussion of different usages of the term alienation.
6. See Pietro Chiodi, Sartre and Marxism, trans. Kate Soper (London : Harvester, 1978) for a discussion of how Sartre, Hegel and Marx conceptualise the elimination of alienation.
7. As it is only "love" and "masochism" which are relevant to our study, only these are outlined here.
8. As we shall see in Appendix Two, p.268, this is what Pierre wants from his relationship with Xaviere in de Beauvoir's first novel.
9. John Passmore, A Hundred Years of Philosophy (London : Duckworth, 1957), p.478.
10. Wilfred Desan, The Tragic Finale : An Essay on the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre (Harvard : Harper Torchbooks, 1960), pp.89-90.
11. As we shall see in Appendix Two, p.270 it is hatred so defined which prompts Françoise to murder Xaviere in de Beauvoir's first novel.
12. See, for example, Hazel Barnes, An Existentialist Ethics (U.S.A.: Vintage Books, 1971), pp.29-49.
13. But although gender fits with Sartre's definition of facticity, he does not give it as an example.
14. The idea that the natural world threatens to engulf us is a theme of Sartre's first novel Nausea (trans. Robert Balkick, Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1973).
15. Maurice Cranston, Sartre (Edinburgh : Oliver & Boyd, 1970), p.111.
16. P.L., p.13.
17. Quoted by Claire Cayron in La nature chez Simone de Beauvoir (Paris : Gallimard, 1973), pp.227-8.
18. Cranston, p.111.

19. F.C., p.13.
20. Herbert Marcuse, Studies in Critical Philosophy (London : New Left Books, 1972), p.174.
21. P.L., p.434.
22. Marcuse, p.189.
23. For a discussion of the development of Sartre's thought and his attitude to ethics see Barnes, pp.29-49.
24. E.H., p.34.
25. E.H., p.30.
26. E.H., p.32.
27. E.H., p.44.
28. E.H., p.45.
29. E.H., p.47.
30. E.H., p.51.
31. E.H., p.51, emphasis added.
32. E.H., p.52.
33. E.H., p.56.
34. Quoted by Cranston, p.82.
35. Simone de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York : Philosophical Library, 1948); hereafter cited as E.A.. See Appendix Two for a summary of its main argument.
36. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," in Literary and Philosophical Essays, trans. Annette Michelson (London : Hutchison, 1969), p.230; hereafter cited as MR..
37. M.R., p.185 ff.
38. Raymond Aron, "Sartre and the Marxist-Leninists," trans. Helen Weaver, in Marxism and the Existentialists (New York : Clarion, 1970), p.25.
39. Friedrich Engels, Socialism : Utopian and Scientific (London : Allen & Unwin, 1950).
40. Aron, p.31.
41. For a good illustration of the sense of failure in existentialist thought, see the discussion in Appendix Two, p.279, of de Beauvoir's third novel.

- 42. M.R., p.211.
- 43. M.R., p.210.
- 44. M.R., p.211.
- 45. M.R., p.215.
- 46. M.R., p.223.
- 47. Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason I : Theory of Practical Ensembles, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London : New Left Books, 1976).
- 48. Aron, p.38.

Chapter Four

- 1. In the original French this is simply "alienée." All page references in subsequent notes for quotations from Le deuxième sexe refer to the Paris, Gallimard, 1955 edition (books 1 and 2).
- 2. In this and subsequent chapters all page references to the S.S. are given in brackets in the text. These refer to the Penguin 1972 edition previously cited.
- 3. The most significant exception to this in modern times has been in the "radical feminist" strand of the women's liberation movement as they have defined men as "walking abortions" and "genetic mutations". For details see p.247 below.
- 4. A summary of the main points of Anti-Semite and Jew is outlined below in Appendix Three.
- 5. Jean-Paul Sartre, Anti-Semite and Jew, trans. George J. Becker (New York : Schocken Books, 1976), p.78; hereafter cited as A.S.A.J..
- 6. A.S.A.J., p.79.
- 7. Claude Levi-Strauss' theory that women are "exchange objects" in primitive societies is outlined in Structural Anthropology, trans. Claire Jacobin & Brooke Grundfest Schoep (London : Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, 1968).
- 8. Appendix Two gives a summary of the development in de Beauvoir's thought and explains why she came to believe in the possibility and desirability of co-existence.
- 9. Judith Grether in "Existentialism on the Oppression of Women : What can we learn?" (The Insurgent Sociologist, Winter 1974, pp.25-40), gives a worthwhile analysis of de Beauvoir's indebtedness to Sartrian

- theory in the S.S.. However, as Grether only deals with Sartre's theory in B.N. she does not take into proper consideration the development in Sartre's thought up to 1947.
10. E.A., p.83.
 11. The process by which the subject "alienates" himself in order to become more fully conscious, is to be distinguished from the feelings of alienation which arise from the objectification affected by the Other.
 12. It is interesting to note that this is how similar existentialist works have been tackled. In A.S.A.J. Sartre, although less formally, analyses the Jew's situation in this way; and in Old Age (1970, trans. Patrick O'Brian, London : Andre Deutsch, 1972), de Beauvoir divides the subject matter in a similar fashion.

Chapter Five

1. P.L., p.367.
2. B.N., p.584 ff.
3. In the original French, maintenance and creation reads "maintenir et créer" (Book 1, p.56). De Beauvoir's ordering of the dichotomy has been followed in this thesis, although it is usually the first of these terms which designates the male (e.g. transcendence/immanence; active/passive; reason/superstition). De Beauvoir's use of these terms is discussed on p.249 ff below.
4. In the original French this statement reads: "... la femme comme l'homme, est son corps; mais son corps est autre chose qu'elle" (Book 1, p.66).
5. Although de Beauvoir frequently emphasises the dangerous and exhausting nature of pregnancy for woman at one point she adds: "True enough, pregnancy is a normal process which if it takes place under normal conditions of health and nutrition is not harmful to the mother" (p.62).
6. In each of these cases, however, de Beauvoir would find it difficult to justify her point. Indeed the translator indicates this in footnotes. He points out that in recent death statistics "there is no age at which the death rate for women is higher than for men" (fn. p.59). He also states that as far as nausea in pregnancy is concerned "these symptoms also signalise a faulty diet, according to some modern gynaecologists" (fn. p.62). Likewise many studies have shown that miscarriages are frequently due to the malformation of the foetus, and not to psychological causes. As much of what de Beauvoir writes on this subject of woman's organic resistance echoes Sartre's concept of "nausea," it is best seen as an ideological point.

7. Schwartz, Spare Rib, p.9.
8. Mead, Saturday Review.
9. In the original French this statement reads:
 "... si elle procréé librement, si la société vient à son aide pendant la grossesse et s'occupe de l'enfant, les charges maternelles sont légères et peuvent être facilement compensées dans le domaine de travail" (Book 1, p.96).
10. In the original French this statement reads:
 "Dans une société convenablement organisée, ou l'enfant serait en grande partie pris en charge par la collectivité, la mère soignée et aidée, la maternité ne serait absolument pas inconciliable avec le travail féminin" (Book 2, p.341).
11. Friedrich Engels, Origin of the Family, Private, Property and the State, trans. Robert Vernon (New York : Pathfinder Press, 1973); hereafter cited as "Origin."
12. Grether, p.36.
13. Other writers on woman's oppression have arrived at the conclusion that the emancipation of woman is dependent on the removal of her reproductive role. Shumalith Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex : The Case for Feminist Revolution (New York : Bantam, 1971), is the most comprehensive expression of this idea and it is dedicated: "To Simone de Beauvoir who kept her integrity."
14. Aldous Huxley, Brave New World (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1965).
15. Jean-Paul Sartre, The Age of Reason, trans. Eric Sutton (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1974), p.20.
16. Cayron, p.227 ff.
17. P.L., p.78.
18. Quoted by Caroline Moorhead in "Happiness is a snare when the world is a horrible place," (interview with de Beauvoir), The Times, 16 May, 1974, p.11. col. 2.

Chapter Six

1. See p. 140ff. below.
2. De Beauvoir clearly sees man being "naturally" on top during coitus, yet anthropologists have recorded that this is culturally determined. Some primitive people refer to this position as the "missionary" position since this is how Christian missionaries believe sexual

- intercourse should take place. For a discussion of the variability of sexual habits see Margaret Mead, Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1967).
3. In the ensuing analysis of de Beauvoir's account of woman's emergence as "the second sex," the Hegelian principles of mastery and slavery are expressed as "violence and creative labour." In Kojève's terminology the first of these principles is "fighting." However, violence has been used here since this corresponds to de Beauvoir's emphasis on "violence" in the S.S. yet is still close to the Kojévian original.
 4. In the following exposition of de Beauvoir's emphasis on violence only Hegelian philosophy is used. However, Sartre also emphasises the importance of violence. For example, in his preface to Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth (1961, trans. Constance Farrington, Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1972), he portrays violence as having cathartic qualities. But as Sartre does not make the connection between violence and human development, his theory does little to explicate the use of violence in de Beauvoir's account of history. For a discussion of the role of violence in Sartre's theory see Maurice Cranston, "Sartre and Violence," Encounter, Vol. XXIX, No.1, July 1967, pp.18-24.
 5. See Chapter Eight.
 6. See p.206 below.

Chapter Seven

1. For de Beauvoir, as for Sartre, "recognition" is of little importance in human relations. In the S.S. it is only in the male-female relationship that "recognition" acquires importance. See p.200 ff. below.
2. Hegel's Philosophy of Mind : being part three of the encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830) translated by William Wallace together with the Zusatze in Boumann's Text (1845) translated by A.V. Millar. Foreword by J.N. Findlay (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1971), para. 432, Zusatz, p.173.
3. Susan Brownmillar, Against Our Will : Men, Women and Rape (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1977), p.14.
4. Brownmillar, p.15.
5. See, for example, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Lousise Lamphere eds., Woman, Culture and Society (Stanford : Stanford University Press, 1974).

6. Evelyn Reed, Woman's Evolution : From Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family (New York : Pathfinder Press, 1975). See note 12 below.
7. Reed, p.124.
8. For a brief summary and critique of this ("Tarzanist") school see Elaine Morgan, The Descent of Woman (London : Corgi, 1974), pp.165-197.
9. Reed, p.126.
10. For a discussion of how the relative strength of men and women varies with culture and patterns of employment see Mead, Sex and Temperament.
11. For a short discussion of this point see Ann Oakley, Sex, Gender, and Society (London : Temple Hill, 1975), p.132 ff.
12. Reed's work is rejected by most anthropologists. While they may accept her observations on the extent of woman's work in primitive societies, they do not accept her evolutionary theory nor her belief in the prior existence of matriarchies. (See Rosaldo and Lamphere, p.3). However, this has little bearing on our comparison of de Beauvoir and Reed. In the first place we are dealing with a speculative theory of human origins which is not open to empirical verification. Coincidentally this is the point Sheila Rowbotham makes in her article "When Adam delved and Eve span ..." (New Society, 4 Jan. 1979), with reference to de Beauvoir and Reed. Writing on the speculative nature of any theory of the part woman played in human development, Rowbotham asserts: "... the need to distinguish between guess and actuality remains. Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that 'woman's lot was very hard in the primitive horde' is as much a hunch as Evelyn Reed's claim that women were the first potters" (p.11). Secondly, the purpose of our comparison of these two theories is to illustrate the values and assumptions on which each is based and is not concerned with whether they are "correct."
13. Reed, p.46.
14. Reed, p.73.
15. Reed, p.56.
16. Reed, p.128.
17. Reed, p.67.
18. Desmond Morris, The Naked Ape (London : Corgi, 1969); Robert Ardrey, The Hunting Hypothesis (London : Collins, 1976). It is interesting to note that Ardrey prefaces his book with the statement: "While we are members of the intelligent primate family, we are uniquely human even in the noblest sense, because for untold millions of years we alone killed for a living" - a statement which echoes de Beauvoir's claim that humanity has been accorded "not to the sex which brings forth life, but to that which kills."

Chapter Eight

1. Mitchell, Woman's Estate, p.82.
2. For a summary and critique of Engels, see Rosalind Delmar, "Looking Again at Engels' 'Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State'," in The Rights and Wrongs of Women, pp.288-304.
3. Origin, p.66.
4. Origin, p.67.
5. Origin, p.65 ff.
6. Origin, p.71.
7. Origin, p.68.
8. Origin, p.76.
9. De Beauvoir only criticises Engels on philosophical grounds yet his explanation of the transition from group-marriage to pairing-marriage - a key development in his theory - is based on the Victorian assumption that women would want this change because of their dislike of sexual relations with more than one man. For an exposition and critique of this point see Millett, pp.120-7.
10. De Beauvoir's theory apparently underlies Figes' claim in Patriarchal Attitudes : "... the motivation for male dominance over the female is intimately connected with the idea of paternity. ... the idea of personal continuity is born if man can only control his woman, (for) he becomes in a sense immortal" (p.39).
11. See p.208ff.
12. See Chapter Thirteen.
13. F.C., p.195.

Chapter Nine

1. Other examples are Elena Giann Belotti's, Little Girls : Social Conditioning and its effects on the stereotyped role of women during infancy (London : Writers and Readers, 1973); Sue Sharpe, Just Like a Girl : How girls learn to be women (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1978).
2. Oakley, Sex, Gender and Society, p.186.

3. In the original French this statement reads:
 "... c'est l'ensemble de la civilisation qui élabore ce produit intermédiaire entre le mâle et le castrat qu'on qualifie de féminin" (Book 2, p.13).
4. In the original French this statement reads:
 "... c'est un destin qui lui est imposé par ses éducateurs et par la société" (Book 2, p.26).
5. Moorhead, The Times, 15 May 1974, p.9, col. 7.
6. Simone de Beauvoir, All Said and Done, trans. Andre Deutsch (London : Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1974), p.449.
7. Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (London : Allen Lane, 1974,)p.318.
8. For information on psychoanalytic theories on women, see Jean Baker (ed.), Psychoanalysis and Women (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1974).
9. Although de Beauvoir usually portrays man's penis as a source of his superiority, at one point she claims that like woman's body it illustrates the immanence of his flesh: "Man is ambivalent about his penis - proud when transcendent; ashamed when it is passive flesh through which he is the plaything of the dark forces of life" (p.195). But as far as man's advantage over woman is concerned, this ambivalence is preferable to the way in which de Beauvoirian woman experiences her body.
10. Ann Foreman, Femininity as Alienation (London : Pluto Press, 1977), p.85.
11. In the original French this statement reads:
 "... l'intervention du mâle ... constitue toujours une sorte de viol" (Book 2, p.131).
 In the English translation H.M. Parshley translates "viol" as "violation" and not as "rape." This weakens the meaning of de Beauvoir's argument and so this translation has not been followed here. When de Beauvoir makes a more restricted point about the defloration of some young women Parshley translates "viol" as "rape" (p.461 and Book 2, p.218) and so it appears that "rape" is only an unacceptable translation of "viol" for Parshley when it is used to describe the general nature of coitus.
12. In the original French this statement reads:
 "Car elle ne choisit pas en toutes ces conjonctures de refuser authentiquement son destin" (Book 2, p.111).
13. In the original French this statement reads:
 "La jeune fille enterre lentement son enfance, cet individu autonome et impérieux qu'elle a été; et elle entre avec soumission dans l'existence adulte" (Book 2, p.124).

14. For a discussion of these points see Appendices Two and Three below.
15. De Beauvoir's comments on woman's subordination in E.A. are outlined on p.284 ff below.
16. E.A., p.38.
17. Colin Radford, "Simone de Beauvoir : Feminism's Friend or Foe?" Nottingham French Studies, Oct. 1967, p.89.
18. See p.295 ff in Appendix Three.
19. See p.254 ff below.

Chapter Ten

1. A.S.A.J., p.3.
2. De Beauvoir at points actually romanticises the couple relationship; a romanticism which contradicts some of the major premises of her theory. For example, she believes it desirable for the partners of a couple to seek "justification of their existence through one another" (p.273) when she is intolerant of other circumstances in which one tries to justify one's existence through another person. But she is pessimistic about the longevity of the carnal dimension of a long-term relationship. When discussing sexual attraction de Beauvoir maintains: "(It) dies almost ... surely in an atmosphere of esteem and friendship for two human beings associated in their transcendence, out into the world and through their common projects, no longer need carnal union; and because the union has lost its meaning they even find it repugnant" (p.465).

Chapter Eleven

1. For a short discussion of this topic see Figes, Patriarchal Attitudes.
2. But de Beauvoir contradicts the general drift of this argument when she maintains that through woman "man inveigles the obscure palpitations of life into his house, without this mystery being destroyed by possession" (p.208).
3. Francis Bernard Harrison in "Judgement and the Concept of Justice in the plays of Jean-Paul Sartre," (M.LITT thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1978) argues that the role of judge is assigned to women in Sartre's plays.

4. This is particularly true if we bear in mind the concept of oppression de Beauvoir uses in E.A., as it refers to a situation in which the existent is deprived of transcendence.

Chapter Twelve

1. For an analysis of housework from a feminist perspective see Ann Oakley, Housewife (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1976).
2. It is interesting to note, however, that de Beauvoir has been accused of such "confusion." In a review of de Beauvoir's travelogue America Day by Day (1948, trans. Patrick Dudley, London : Duckworth, 1948), Diana Trilling, in "America Through Dark Spectacles" (The 20th C, July - Dec. 1953), lists the vast number of factual inaccuracies which abound in this work.
3. See p.294 of Appendix Three.
4. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, p.240.
5. De Beauvoir made this point in an interview with Alice Schwartz (7 days, 8 Mar. 1972), when she said: "Women don't want to be conceded equality, they want to win it, which is not at all the same thing."
6. Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markman (New York : Grove Press, 1967), p.219.
7. Paulo Freire, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1972), p.42.
8. Freire, p.24.
9. In the original French these statements read:
 "... qu'on lui restitue sa souveraine singularité, ... (Book 2, p.576).
 "... l'homme ... lui donné son renvoi!" (Book 1, p.395).
 "... ainsi les hommes ont été amenes, dans leur propre intérêt, à emanciper partiellement les femmes : elles n'ont plus qu'à poursuivre leur ascension et les succes qu'elles obtiennent les y encouragent; il semble à peu près certain qu'elles accéderont d'ici un temps plus ou moins long à la parfaite égalité économique et sociale, ce qui entraînera une métamorphose intérieure" (Book 2, p.574).
10. In the original French this statement reads:
 "Soustraite en très grande partie aux servitudes de la reproduction elle peut assumer le rôle économique qui se propose à elle et qui lui assurera la conquête de sa personne tout entière" (Book 1, p.203).

11. A.S.A.J., p.133.
12. Schwartzner, 7 Days.
13. Such confidence can also be seen in de Beauvoir's and Sartre's early attitude to political events. In F.C. de Beauvoir claims: "Public affairs bored us; we counted on events turning out according to our wishes without any need for us to mix in them personally" (p.15).
14. In the original French these statements read:
 "Il l'aime en tant qu'elle est sienne, il la redoute en tant qu'elle demeure autre; mais c'est en tant qu'autre redoutable qu'il cherche à la faire plus profondément sienne: c'est là ce qui va l'amener à l'élever à la dignité d'une personne et à la reconnaître pour son semblable" (Book 1, p.273).
 "Il n'y a pour la femme aucune autre issue que de travailler à sa libération" (Book 2, p.455).
15. In the original French this statement reads:
 "L'existant que l'on considère comme inessential ne peut manquer de prétendre rétablir sa souveraineté" (Book 2, p.561).
16. However, in a sense this is a false question for de Beauvoir since she later argues (p.173 ff) that women have always been dependent on men.

Chapter Thirteen

1. In F.C. de Beauvoir tells us that on publication in France "The Second Sex was very badly received" (p.200) by the left. In the following discussion of whether this is a "socialist" book the reaction of the contemporary left has not been taken into consideration, for until the late 1960's the left tended to dismiss the "woman question" as a "bourgeois deviation." For a discussion of the left's attitude to this subject up until the new feminist wave, see Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness, Man's World, pp.12-25.
2. A.S.A.D., p.456.
3. De Beauvoir's interview with Alice Schwartzner appeared in 7 Days under the heading: "Today I've changed, I've really become a Feminist" and its main theme is that whereas de Beauvoir was a "socialist" when she wrote the S.S. she is now a "feminist".
4. Mitchell, Woman's Estate, pp.94-5. Mitchell gives as examples of "abstract socialist" analyses, Engels' Origins and August Bebel's Woman Under Socialism (1883, trans. Daniel De Leon, New York: Schocken Books, 1971). Firestone's Dialectic of Sex is given as an example of a "radical feminist" text. Interestingly, Mitchell discusses the S.S.

along with the socialist books (see p.240 below). Mitchell argues that these two analyses of woman's oppression "are possibly right together," but "both are certainly wrong apart" (p.95). Mitchell subsequently tries to fuse Marxist and feminist analyses of woman's oppression. Mitchell's work has been succeeded by a number of analyses of woman's oppression from a Marxist perspective which do not fall into the "abstract socialist" category. They attempt to use Marxist concepts, such as surplus value, to analyse how woman's reproductive and domestic roles interface with capitalist society. See, for example, M. Coulson, B. Magas and H. Wainwright "The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism - a critique," New Left Review, 89, pp.47-58.

5. F.C., p.202.
6. See Appendix Four for a discussion of the major differentiation de Beauvoir makes between men in the S.S.
7. It is interesting to note that de Beauvoir's conception of the difference between man and woman in this respect is similar to the distinction Hannah Arendt makes in The Human Condition (Chicago : Chicago University Press, 1958) between "work" and "labour"; between "Homo faber" and "animal laborans." The former, like de Beauvoirian man, "is master of himself and his doings." The latter resembles woman and "remains in dependence on his fellow man" (p.144).
8. C. Wright Mills, "Women the Darling Little Slaves," rev. of S.S. in Power, Politics and People (New York : OUP, 1963), p.343.
9. See p.32 ff of P.L. for de Beauvoir's description of how she and Sartre despised the bourgeoisie.
10. John Stuart Mill, The Subjection of Women (London : Dent, 1970) : "... the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the sexes - the legal subordination of one sex to the other - is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement" (p.219).
11. Mitchell, Woman's Estate, p.81.
12. F.C., p.202.
13. This reference to "the facts of supply and demand" echoes Sartre's assertion that "scarcity" is the cause of hostility in human relations. This idea was developed by Sartre after de Beauvoir had written the S.S. and he was more committed to Marxism. It gives a materialist explanation for the conflict between individuals and groups - conflict which could be overcome if scarcity could be eradicated. (See, Sartre's Critique.)
14. Marcuse, p.174. See also Georg Lukacs' essay "Existentialism" in Marxism and Human Liberation : Essays in History, Culture and Revolution (New York : Delta, 1973) where he writes of "the fetish of freedom" in Sartre's work (p.257).

15. Rene Girard, "Memoirs of a Dutiful Existentialist," Yale French Studies, 27, 1968, p.41.
16. Girard, p.45.
17. As we shall see in Appendix Three this is also true of Sartre's A.S.A.J..
18. F.C., p.202.
19. Schwartzter, 7 Days.
20. Schwartzter, 7 Days.
21. A.S.A.D., p.456.

Chapter Fourteen

1. Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792, London : Dent, 1970). For a summary of the aims and ideology of the suffrage movement see, for example, Trevor Lloyd, Suffragettes International (London : Lib. of 20th C., 1971).
2. For a brief summary of the aims of this organisation see Greer, p.296.
3. Greer, p.114.
4. Valerie Solanis, SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto (London : Olympia, 1971), p.3.
5. Elizabeth Gould Davis, The First Sex (London : Dent, 1973), p.35 ff.
6. Walters, p.356.
7. Schwartzter, 7 Days.
8. Schwartzter, Spare Rib, p.9.
9. Schwartzter, Spare Rib, p.10.
10. Quoted in Moorhead, The Times, 15 May, p.9, col. 8.
11. See Appendix Four.
12. Quoted by Figes, p.179.
13. F.C., p.199.
14. Mills, p.345.
15. In the original French this statement reads:
 "... hommes et femmes affirment sans équivoque leur fraternité"
 (Book 2, p.577).

16. Freire, pp.20-21.
17. Freire, p.22.
18. Although the notion of "struggle" is the logic of de Beauvoir's theory of woman's emancipation, at points she maintains that the male-female relationship will develop into a truly reciprocal relationship between the sexes. On the penultimate page de Beauvoir even describes a new relationship between man and woman involving "mutual recognition" in that each will simultaneously see him or herself as both subject and object.
19. De Beauvoir, however, contradicts this as she claims that sexual desire dies in a relation of esteem and friendship. See fn. 2 of Chapter Eleven.
20. Walters, p.357. There is no verb in the original.
21. Schwartzner, 7 Days.
22. Jean Baker Miller, Towards a New Psychology of Women (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1977), p.73.
23. Walters, p.377.

Appendix One

1. Casey Miller and Kate Swift, Words and Women : New Language in New Times (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1979), p.174.
2. Arrendt, pp.79-174. See fn. 7 of Chapter Thirteen.

Appendix Two

1. In this Appendix only the most important of de Beauvoir's early works will be considered. See section 1(a) of the bibliography for a full list of de Beauvoir's works.
2. P.L., p.367 ff.
3. Simone de Beauvoir, She Came to Stay, trans. Yvonne Moyse & Roger Stenhouse (London : Secker & Warburg, 1949); hereafter cited as S.C.T.S.
4. Hazel Barnes, The Literature of Possibility (London : Tavistock, 1961), p.227.
5. P.L., p.125.
6. S.C.T.S., p.21.

7. S.C.T.S., p.15.
8. S.C.T.S., p.142.
9. S.C.T.S., p.310.
10. S.C.T.S., p.168.
11. Henri Peyre, The Contemporary French Novel (New York : OUP, 1955), p.255.
12. S.C.T.S., p.431.
13. P.L., p.340.
14. Maurice Cranston, "Simone de Beauvoir," in The Novelist as Philosopher (London : OUP, 1962), ed. John Cruickshank, p.175.
15. Carol Evans, "Le Problème de l'Autre dans l'oeuvre de Simone de Beauvoir" (M.A. thesis, Cardiff : University of Wales, 1964).
16. P.L., p.359.
17. P.L., p.429.
18. Simone de Beauvoir, Pyrrhus et Cinéas (Paris : Gallimard, 1944).
19. Simone de Beauvoir, The Blood of Others, trans. Yvonne Moyses & Roger Stenhouse (London : Secker & Warburg, 1948); hereafter cited as B.O.O..
20. P.L., p.546.
21. Barnes, The Literature of Possibility, p.81.
22. B.O.O., p.109.
23. See Walters, p.372 ff.
24. P.L., p.542.
25. Victor Brombert, The Intellectual Hero : Studies in the French Novel 1880-1955 (London : Faber, 1961), p.194.
26. P.L., p.541.
27. P.L., p.547.
28. For a discussion of this point see Evans.
29. Simone de Beauvoir, All Men Are Mortal, trans. Leonard M. Friedman (Cleveland : World Publishing, 1955); hereafter cited as A.M.A.M..
30. F.C., p.70.

31. F.C., p.70.
32. A.M.A.M., p.201.
33. A.M.A.M., p.202.
34. F.C., p.72.
35. F.C., p.73.
36. A.M.A.M., p.13.
37. E.A., p.13.
38. E.A., p.10.
39. E.A., p.15.
40. E.A., p.14.
41. E.A., p.24.
42. E.A., p.25.
43. E.A., p.35.
44. E.A., p.39.
45. B.O.O., p.16.
46. E.A., p.46.
47. E.A., p.37.
48. E.A., p.38.
49. E.A., p.48.
50. E.A., p.71.
51. E.A., pp.82-3.
52. E.A., p.86.
53. E.A., p.87.
54. E.A., p.96.
55. E.A., p.91.
56. E.A., p.155.
57. F.C., p.76.
58. P.L., pp.165-6.

Appendix Three

1. A.S.A.J., p.16.
2. A.S.A.J., p.17.
3. A.S.A.J., p.69.
4. A.S.A.J., p.78.
5. A.S.A.J., p.79.
6. A.S.A.J., p.50.
7. A.S.A.J., p.141.
8. A.S.A.J., p.137.
9. A.S.A.J., p.135.
10. A.S.A.J., p.36.
11. A.S.A.J., p.37.
12. A.S.A.J., p.99.
13. A.S.A.J., p.150.

Appendix Four

1. A.S.A.J., p.37.

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