University of Rhode Island

DigitalCommons@URI

Open Access Master's Theses

1975

The Ethics of Ambiguity: A Critical Analysis of the Moral Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir

Valerie Kamph Taylor

University of Rhode Island

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Taylor, Valerie Kamph, "The Ethics of Ambiguity: A Critical Analysis of the Moral Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir" (1975). *Open Access Master's Theses*. Paper 1534.
<https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/theses/1534>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons-group@uri.edu.

THE ETHICS OF AMBIGUITY: A CRITICAL
ANALYSIS OF THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY
OF SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

BY

VALERIE KAMPH TAYLOR

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
IN
PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

1975

THESIS ABSTRACT

This study will critically examine the moral philosophy of one of existentialism's leading exponents, Simone de Beauvoir, as set forth in The Ethics of Ambiguity. The problem of the nature and status of moral values and moral imperatives arises in Beauvoir's ethics when she denies the existence of objective moral values. The questions are: Why does Beauvoir deny objective values? How does Beauvoir understand the concept of objective values? And, finally, does Beauvoir actually succeed in her attempt to offer an ethical philosophy in spite of her denial of objective values?

In the Introduction, the distinction between hypothetical and unconditional imperatives is drawn and the ambiguity of the word 'value' is examined. Objective value is defined and it is claimed that Beauvoir does acknowledge the existence of objective values defined in this sense.

The Exposition presents an interpretation and critical analysis of Beauvoir's ethics and traces the development of her dialectic. Beginning with the Sartrean definition of man, Beauvoir proceeds to discuss ambiguity, freedom and existence, disclosure, subjective attitudes chosen in regard to one's own freedom and oppression. Each of these topics is examined and shown to be essential to understanding Beauvoir's views concerning moral values and imperatives.

The Conclusion is addressed to the questions of why Beauvoir rejects objective values, what kinds of things she understands objective values to be and argues that in spite of her denial of objective values, Beauvoir does succeed in offering a moral philosophy. Finally, Beauvoir's significance as a moral philosopher is discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my great indebtedness and gratitude to the following persons for their kind help, advice, interest and encouragement in the preparation of this thesis: my Major Professor and Advisor, Dr. Fritz Wenisch and the members of the thesis committee, Dr. Donald Zeyl, Mr. James P. Glasson and Dr. Jean Hyland. I wish also to mention my gratitude to my friends and former professors at Roger Williams College in Bristol, Rhode Island: Dr. Martin M. Jones, who inspired my initial interest in philosophy as an undergraduate student; also Mr. Thomas Kowall, Mr. Robert Blackburn and Dr. Rudolph Hebert, all of whom sustained and encouraged that interest.

And, of course, I am most indebted to Simone de Beauvoir whose writings I have found to be both inspirational and unsettling, both provocative and appeasing, both admirable and debatable but never dull.

Finally, no words can adequately express the great appreciation I extend to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Waldemar Kamph; to my husband, Bill and to our children Stephen, Bruce, Stacy and Kirsten for their constant patience and encouragement but most of all for their recognition of and genuine respect for transcendence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I INTRODUCTION	1
II EXPOSITION	9
A. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SARTREAN DEFINITION OF MAN	9
B. AMBIGUITY	14
C. FREEDOM AND EXISTENCE	18
D. DISCLOSURE	24
E. SUBJECTIVE ATTITUDES	28
F. OPPRESSION	32
III CONCLUSION	41
BIBLIOGRAPHY	46

I INTRODUCTION

The difficulties involved in understanding Simone de Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity may be considerable for those unfamiliar with Sartre's phenomenological ontology as set forth in Being and Nothingness. Many of these difficulties are due to the rather unusual way in which existentialists use many terms. A certain familiarity with Sartre's philosophy and the technical language he employs to express his views is therefore highly desirable for gaining insight into Beauvoir's moral philosophy.¹

In the final chapter of Being and Nothingness Sartre raises many provocative questions concerning the relation between freedom and values. He leaves these questions unanswered and concludes:

"All these questions which refer us to a pure and not an accessory reflection, can find their reply only on the ethical plane. We shall devote to them a future work."²

Unfortunately, Sartre's promised work in ethics has not been forthcoming. In La Force des choses Beauvoir states that by 1950 Sartre had given up the idea of putting forth a systematic work of ethics.

¹While it is not possible to offer an explanation of every term, the reader may find references to the glossary included in the Barnes translation of Being and Nothingness to be most helpful, pp. 799-807. See Bibliography.

²Ibid., p. 798.

Hazel Barnes speculates that Sartre believes that such a project would be not only irrelevant but also impossible. She quotes Sartre's statement made in an interview in 1964.

"It is necessary first for all men to be able to become men through improving the condition of their existence if they are going to be able to formulate a universal ethics. If I begin by telling them 'Thou shalt not lie,' political action is no longer possible. What matters first is the liberation of man."³

Although the problems of morality occur throughout Sartre's work, he has not published an ethics and it is sad to read of Sartre's recent announcement that his writing career is over because he is nearly blind.⁴

Simone de Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity however takes up where Sartre left off in Being and Nothingness. Her moral philosophy is based on Sartre's phenomenological ontology and she carries it to its logical consequences on the moral plane. She readily acknowledges her debt to Sartre. Following a concise but coherent explanation of his description of man's being she states:

"It is only in the last pages (of Being and Nothingness) that he opens up a perspective for an ethics."⁵

Her work therefore is the ethical development of Sartrean ontology and is fundamentally based on it. Although her analyses do not differ from his in major respects, her originality is evidenced in her

³Barnes, An Existentialist Ethics, p. 30.

⁴Associated Press, Paris: News Release, June 23, 1975.

⁵Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 11.

dialectical development of the concept of man's failure to be in Sartre's philosophy. She states:

"The failure described in Being and Nothingness is definitive but it is also ambiguous."⁶

This statement is of crucial importance for it provides Beauvoir with the starting point for the development of her moral philosophy. Her ethics is built around three key terms; definition of man, ambiguity and freedom. Sartre's definition of man is essential to her concept of ambiguity which in turn is essential to her concept of freedom and freedom becomes the final theme of her moral philosophy.

Although, according to Beauvoir, ambiguity has been recognized by other existentialist philosophers,⁷ Beauvoir's use of the concept is unique and certainly far more elaborate than that of other existentialists. Her emphasis on the existentialist concept of ambiguity confirms her place in this philosophy but it also confirms her originality as an existentialist philosopher. As Camus has used the existentialist concept of the absurd not as a final statement of the human condition but as a starting point for the development of his philosophy, so Beauvoir employs the concept of ambiguity in the same way. While Camus has often been regarded as the philosopher of the absurd, Beauvoir may be regarded as the philosopher of ambiguity.

Simone de Beauvoir has presented a moral philosophy which denies objective values. Her ethical theory belongs to ethical systems denying

⁶Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 11

⁷Although Kierkegaard, whom Beauvoir mentions in this context uses the concept of ambiguity, his use is neither similar to not as developed as Beauvoir's notion of ambiguity.

that it is possible to base moral norms on something objective.⁸ Here we encounter immediately one of the main problems we will be dealing with in this thesis.

It has been claimed that any ethical system which denies explicitly that it is based on something objective is incapable of offering any unconditional imperatives⁹ and it therefore either ceases to be a moral system at all or it is self-contradictory because it tacitly presupposes what it denies.¹⁰ One of the aims of this thesis will be to critically investigate this claim with respect to Beauvoir's ethical views. However, what has been stated above is still in need of explanation.

Unless a work of ethics implies unconditional imperatives, either explicit or implicit, which tell us how one ought to live a moral life, it cannot be considered an ethics. That this is so, is evident from the following considerations. Kant was the first to make a distinction between unconditional imperatives and hypothetical imperatives.¹¹ The unconditional imperative states:

'One ought to live a moral life and to live a moral life, one must (or must not) act in such and such a way.'

⁸ Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 11.

⁹ I use the term 'unconditional' in order to avoid confusion with Kant's categorical imperative. While Kant's categorical imperative is also an unconditional imperative, I avoid the term categorical because in the context of this thesis I do not necessarily prescribe to the precise content as that formulated by Kant.'

¹⁰ Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, Ethics, Chapters 8, 9, 16.

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals.

The hypothetical imperative states:

'If one wants to live a moral life, one should act in such and such a way.'

It is possible to attempt to offer a set of guidelines based on hypothetical imperatives. But this imperative implies only that we should act in such and such a way provided that we really want to reach a certain goal. But whether we actually do act in this way is up to one's individual choice. One can always ask "Why should I live a moral life?" The merely hypothetical imperative cannot answer this question. Thus, in the final analysis, hypothetical imperatives do not tell us that we ought to lead a moral life and therefore cannot properly provide the basis for ethics. While it is possible to formulate hypothetical imperatives without reference to objective values in the sense defined below, it is not possible to formulate unconditional imperatives without reference to objective values. Therefore, a system which denies objective values cannot formulate unconditional imperatives. A system is an ethics only if it is based upon unconditional imperatives and unconditional imperatives necessarily imply objective values.

In her denial of objective values, Beauvoir accordingly claims that moral imperatives are always hypothetical and cannot be defined a priori¹². On the basis of this explanation it would seem to follow therefore that Beauvoir does not offer an ethic at all. But it is the aim of this thesis to show that despite her denial of objective values

¹²Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 134

and unconditional imperatives, Beauvoir nevertheless does succeed in presenting an ethic.

Beauvoir succeeds in her effort to put forth a moral system because there are three possible ways in which an ethical system can be related to what is expressed in the statement, 'There are objective values.' First, the proposition is explicitly acknowledged as true. Second, a moral system may be developed without explicitly affirming or denying objective values but the system implicitly presupposes them. Third, the system may explicitly deny objective values but the system implies the truth of what it denies. Here we have an inconsistency between what is explicitly stated by a system and what is tacitly presupposed by it.

It is this third possibility which applies to the moral system developed by Beauvoir. She denies objective values and along with them unconditional imperatives without really explaining what is meant by a morality based on objective values. But the word 'value' is itself ambiguous and so some clarification is here indicated. In one meaning 'value' is ordinarily used in relation to one's opinions on norms. According to ordinary usage one may attribute value to things which one deems desirable or useful. In a second meaning, value may be accorded to things which one thinks are important or worthwhile. In the third meaning, however, the word 'value' is used in a more strict sense. Something is said to be a value because it has a positive and definite importance in itself¹³ and independently of

¹³ Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, Ethics, "The Categories of Importance", pp. 34-63.

anyone's opinions, desires, convictions, decisions, recognition or actual practice.

When one claims that values are objective he means that something is said to have value if it is better that it exist than not exist, regardless of anyone's opinions. Objective values have a character of importance which is independent of man's whims, desires, aims or acknowledgement. Objective values affirm that some states are rationally to be preferred to other states regardless of anyone's whims, opinions or practice. For example, justice is to be preferred to injustice whether individual persons believe so or not and whether they are in practice just or not. Objective values are not absolute substances in themselves as Beauvoir seems to understand them to be but rather they are qualities of real things or states. The emphasis is not on their total independence of man. (Whether there are values which are totally independent of man in every respect is not of concern for the present context.) Rather, the emphasis is on their independence of man's opinions, desires and decisions (in the sense that it is not the case that something has a value because man decided that it shall have a value.)

There are several different kinds of ethical systems based on something objective. However, in the general context of value ethics the objective value is the basis for ethical norms. Ethical theories based on objective values may disagree in many respects but all share a formal similarity in that they agree to the proposition: 'There are objective values.' ('Value' to be understood in the third meaning of this term discussed above.) They may disagree with respect to which

kinds of values do exist or with respect to which kinds of things actually do have value. Thus, to the logically prior question 'Are there objective values?' objectivists agree that there are. To the subsequent question 'What kinds of things are objective values or have objective value?' objectivists may disagree among each other without ceasing to be objectivists. The formal similarity of ethical theories based on objective values therefore is constituted by an agreement to the existence of objective values. It is possible, however, that there may be disagreement concerning which kinds of things have objective value.

In sum, an ethical system is classified as based on objective values if it bases its norms on states which are implicitly or explicitly acknowledged as being better than others and are to be preferred to other states. It is possible however that an ethical system explicitly denies this basis but implicitly presupposes it.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to prove either the existence or source of objective values but to show that Beauvoir implicitly acknowledges objective values in the sense defined and affirms unconditional imperatives although she denies the first and does not offer a justification for the second. But it is this very acknowledgement and affirmation which makes her work a system of ethics.

In order to furnish a basis for examining this claim, a critical exposition of her moral views follows.

II EXPOSITION

A. The Importance of the Sartrean Definition of Man

Although some philosophers might argue that Sartre would not presume to define Man since according to his philosophy Man defines himself by his actions, Beauvoir nevertheless attributes to him a fundamental definition of man:

"that being whose being is not to be, that subjectivity which realizes itself only as a presence in the world, that engaged freedom, that surging of the for-oneself which is immediately given for others"¹⁴ and "a being who makes himself a lack of being in order that there might be being."¹⁵

Beauvoir accepts this definition of man and the Sartrean definition of man becomes the first step in the development of her dialectic.

Man is understood by both Sartre and Beauvoir to be a being which lacks being. Being is understood to be a pure positivity, a totality, the synthesis of the for-itself and in-itself, God. But according to Sartre, such a synthesis is logically impossible.¹⁶

Consciousness is always consciousness of an object. It includes its object but always remains separate and at a distance from

¹⁴ Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 10.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁶ Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 400.

the object. But what separates consciousness and its object is nothing. For this reason both Sartre and Beauvoir claim that man carries nothingness at his heart and it is man who brings nothingness into the world.¹⁷ Further, man himself is originally a nothingness. The argument which establishes man as a negativity fundamentally progresses in the following way. Presupposed is the idea of a complete and fixed totality, the synthesis of the for-itself and the in-itself, a being which perfectly coincides with itself, God. Due to the nature of consciousness however such a synthesis is impossible and therefore there is no God. Because man is consciousness, man is not complete being.

That which is incomplete is a lack

That which lacks (complete being) fails (to be complete).

That which fails is a negativity.

That which is a negativity is nothing.

Thus, for Sartre and Beauvoir:

Incomplete implies lack
Lack implies failure
Failure implies negativity
Negativity implies nothingness

It may be pointed out that this thesis is a very shaky one since one might argue that the jump from failure to nothingness is highly questionable. Simply because something fails to be Z does not preclude the possibility of its being X and Y and if so it cannot be said to be nothing. However, man defined as a "being whose being is not to be" and a "being who makes himself a lack of being in order

¹⁷ Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 31 and p. 56

that there might be being" has important implications for Beauvoir's thesis.

First, the movement by which man makes himself a lack of being is the movement which confirms man's power to choose; his very freedom is affirmed. Second, by making himself a lack man distinguishes himself as separate from the world. This movement which is the original movement of subjectivity not only distinguishes man as a free and separate existent, it is also the movement by which man discloses the world. Of these two implications more will be said as this thesis progresses but it is the following implication which for present purposes, I would like to emphasize. Third, according to Beauvoir, man defined as a lack of being is the necessary condition for ethics. If man is defined as a being having a fixed and given nature, there would be no possibility for him to become moral. She points out that "without failure, no ethics."¹⁸ To the objection that existentialism is a philosophy of the absurd and despair, Beauvoir replies that even the most optimistic ethics must acknowledge that man fails to be perfect.

"One does not offer an ethics to a God."¹⁹

According to existentialist ontology man can never surmount his failure to be. If man could become being, a pure positivity, he would no

¹⁸ Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 10

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 10

longer be man but thing. But in his striving to be, man exists as man²⁰. Having-to-be that which he is not and can never be affirms the tension which exists between the lack of being and being but it is a necessary tension for it sustains human existence. The hyphens are intentional for they indicate the dynamic movement, the projection toward the future by which man transcends his immanence.

Much of Beauvoir's thought is concerned with man's lack-of-being, his having-to-be, his transcendence and his possibilities for becoming. She is convinced that originally man is a negativity and only because he is a negativity is it possible for him to become moral.

Beauvoir criticizes other ethical systems for failing to adequately account for the possibility of an evil will. She claims that classical metaphysics of transcendence fail because evil is reduced to error. Humanistic ethics fail because man is defined as complete in a complete world. Kantian ethics fail also. It is difficult, Beauvoir claims, to account for an evil will in Kant's system since it is difficult to understand why man would reject the law he gives to himself. Beauvoir claims that this problem is due to the fact that Kant defined man as a pure positivity.

Having refuted other ethical systems on the basis of their definitions of man, Beauvoir then goes on to make three rather startling

20

It is of interest to note at this point that the existentialist theory of existence is more than merely reminiscent of the Heraclitean doctrine of the strife of opposites. According to the existentialists, Being is a pure positivity, Nothingness is of course a pure negativity and Existence is the strife or "tension" which prevails between these two polarities.

claims. First, existentialism is the only philosophy in which ethics has a place.²¹ Second, existentialism is the only philosophy to give a real role to evil.²² Third, existentialist ethics appears as the only proposition of salvation which one can address to men.²³

These are indeed very strong claims and Beauvoir's rationale for making them is based on the Sartrean definition of man. Only because "man is first defined as a negativity,"²⁴ because he is "perpetually playing with the negative"²⁵ is it possible for him to have an evil will.²⁶ These claims will be examined in greater detail as this thesis progresses. But for now it is enough to notice the importance of the Sartrean definition of man for Beauvoir. She rejects other ethical systems because she disagrees with their definitions of man. She accepts Sartre's definition as the only correct one and her acceptance of it provides her with the foundation on which she supports her own moral philosophy.

²¹Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 34.

²²Ibid., p. 34

²³Ibid., p. 159

²⁴Ibid., p. 33.

²⁵Ibid., p. 33.

²⁶Ibid., p. 33.

B. Ambiguity

When she claims that man's failure is definitive but it is also ambiguous²⁷ Beauvoir has in mind the idea of man as an original negativity but who has the capacity to attain some positivity.

By ambiguity Beauvoir means two things; that which has dual aspects and that which is non-final. Thus, Beauvoir's notion of ambiguity is itself ambiguous. In the sense of duality, ambiguity has to do with the being of a thing. Man for example, is aware of the dual aspects of his being. He experiences himself as both a subjective presence and an objective presence in the world, an internality and an externality, mind and matter, significant and insignificant, invulnerable and vulnerable, treated as a means by others and yet an end in himself, a being which is an immanence in the present and yet a being which transcends himself toward the future. The ambiguity of man's being which Beauvoir claims is implied by his failure to be means that man is not one thing at one time and another at another time. Man is both at one and the same time. The dual aspects of man's being is the "tragic ambiguity of the human condition."²⁸ It is universal and irreducible.

In the second sense of meaning, ambiguity refers to that which is not final, fixed or determined. Beauvoir clearly explains the

²⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

distinction between the existentialist notions of the absurd and the ambiguous.

"The notion of ambiguity must not be confused with that of absurdity. To declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must constantly be won."²⁹

Thus, when Beauvoir asserts that man, the human condition, freedom, the will, human action, existence and ethics are all ambiguous, she means: (1) that they have dual aspects and (2) that they are not determined, fixed or final.

Two further points in regard to Beauvoir's notion of ambiguity should be made at this point. First, ambiguity applies to those things which pertain to man and to human states. It does not apply to objects. It would be a misuse of Beauvoir's notion of ambiguity to say for example that an object such as a tree or a stone is ambiguous.

"... the in-itself is, and negation has no hold over this being, this pure positivity."³⁰

To say of something that it is ambiguous is to say that it is an active principle of movement and as such it has the capacity for change.

Secondly, those things which are ambiguous in the sense of duality have two aspects of being, positive and negative, which are

²⁹ Ibid., p. 129

³⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

irreducible. The negative aspect of a thing is its nothingness, a void, an emptiness without content. But in its positive aspect, the thing does have content. Both aspects however are dynamic principles of movement.

Now, originally ambiguous things are negativities. They are empty and devoid of meanings. Positivity is attained or in Beauvoir's terms "won". But positivity does not cancel out negativity completely. Negativity always remains. Because things are ambiguous in the sense that they are not final, the negative aspect is the necessary condition whereby a thing has the capacity to attain more content, win new meanings. Thus, no matter how much content an ambiguous thing acquires, no matter how many meanings are won, no matter how much a thing is positivized, because the negative aspect always remains, the capacity for future positivity is possible. Positivity and Negativity are therefore dual aspects of one and the same thing which make possible the dynamic capacity for future acquisition through movement.

This movement is not to be understood as the Hegelian act of surpassing by which opposition is raised up, canceled out or synthesized, however. According to existentialist conversion, the movement of the positive aspect toward an object is constructive. The object is taken up and converted to the negative but the negative never becomes totally positive. It may be considered in one sense as a sort of repository which gains positive content but never itself becomes positive. But the negative aspect is not merely passive. Both positive and negative aspects are active and while the movement

of the positive is constructive, the movement of the negative is of course the opposite, rejection.

In sum, when Beauvoir claims that something is ambiguous, she asserts that (1) it is an active principle of movement and change and as such it is never fixed, determined or finalized and (2) it has dual aspects which are opposed and irreducible.

Ambiguous things (man and his states) never become fully positive. At the start they are negativities and acquire some positivity. To become a pure positivity would reduce something to an in-itself. But Beauvoir charges that philosophies and religions have tried to mask ambiguity. They have tried to reduce mind to matter, or to reabsorb matter into mind, or to merge them within a single substance. They have denied death or denied life.³¹ They have tried to eliminate ambiguity by emphasizing one aspect and ignoring the other or they have attempted to synthesize them. Beauvoir considers attempts to evade the fundamental ambiguity of man and his states to be dishonest and cowardly. Ambiguity is and it is irreducible. Man must honestly face it and assume it for only then can he live a genuinely moral life.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 7 and 8.

C. Freedom and Existence

Beauvoir's discussion of freedom tends to be rather complex. Her analysis of freedom (which, as already stated, becomes the final theme in her moral philosophy) is both metaphysical and practical and often she makes no clear distinction between the two. Further, like Sartre, Beauvoir often speaks of freedom as something which acts itself without the acknowledgement of an agent. It is sometimes somewhat curious to read that freedom wills itself, freedom engages itself or freedom grounds itself, etcetera. But this is partly due to an idiosyncrasy of writing style and partly due to the fact that for both philosophers, freedom is an active principle of movement and of course subjectivity is presupposed.

Perhaps in a spirit of practical wisdom Sartre saves the following definition of freedom for the very last page of Being and Nothingness:

"A freedom which wills itself freedom is in fact a being-which-is-not-what-it-is and which-is-what-it-is-not and which chooses as the ideal of being being-what-it-is-not and not-being-what-it-is." ³²

If one is able to follow an Ariadne's thread through this verbal labyrinth, one sees that freedom, like man, is also a lack

³²
Being and Nothingness, p. 798.

of being. Beauvoir shares with Sartre this same concept of freedom but she defines it more simply as the ability "to surpass the given toward an open future."³³ For both Sartre and Beauvoir, freedom is neither a thing or a quality. Freedom is an active principle of movement which constantly projects itself beyond itself. It is ambiguous because it is both an immanence and a transcendence.

Man defined as "a being who makes himself a lack of being" affirms for Beauvoir that man freely chooses to distinguish himself as a separate existence in the world. This movement has three consequences: (1) subjectivity is confirmed, (2) freedom is confirmed and (3) the world is disclosed. To attain clarity in this matter it may be helpful to attempt to trace the movement of freedom in accordance with Beauvoir's analysis.

Man casts himself into the world in a spontaneous way. The original spontaneity of freedom is purely negative, that is to say freedom at this point is without content. It is empty, a void, a nothingness. But freedom is by nature an active principle of movement and necessarily projects itself ahead of itself. The original spontaneity of freedom is not however a meaningless transcendence projecting itself randomly in any and all directions. Freedom is always directed toward something external to it. Using a physical analogy to help clarify this point, one might consider the act of

³³ Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 91.

sight. The eye has the capacity to see but without something to see, the eye remains content-less so to speak. The eye is necessarily projected toward something external to it and this externality is something which one chooses to direct the eye toward. The original projection of vision is then grounded by the external object. As sight is a relation between eye and object, so freedom is a relation between itself and an externality. Of the many possible externalities open to freedom, the subject must choose those particular objects toward which to direct freedom and ground it. At this point the original spontaneity of freedom is converted to willed freedom. Freedom then engages itself with its object and in a sense literally takes up the object. The object then becomes a part of freedom and freedom has "won" some content. It has justified itself and given itself a reason to be. It is no longer a pure negativity. Freedom becomes positivized by the acquisition of content but because man's freedom is infinite according to Beauvoir, the void is never completely filled. There always remains a part of freedom which is empty, a nothingness. No matter how much content freedom acquires, no matter how many meanings are won, freedom is never totally positivized. For this reason Beauvoir claims that man's freedom is never fulfilled.³⁴ Thus freedom is ambiguous since it has both positive and negative aspects neither of which cancels out the other. But the negative aspect is

³⁴ Ibid., p. 130

the necessary condition for the acquisition of further content. If it were possible for freedom to become totally positive, freedom would no longer be freedom, an active principle of movement, but instead would be reduced to an in-itself, a thing as all pure positivities are.

Beauvoir's notion of ambiguity applied to freedom means therefore that freedom has both positive and negative aspects which are irreducible and because freedom is both infinite and active it is never finalized. Freedom in both its aspects is active. In its positive aspect freedom is a constructive movement transcending itself and creating new meanings. In its negative aspect freedom also creates meanings but it does so in a negative way, by rejection. Construction and rejection therefore are the two acts whereby freedom acquires content and justifies itself. Further, in both construction and rejection freedom commits itself in a positive way by engaging itself with the object. This same movement also confirms the supreme independence of freedom over object according to Beauvoir since the subject can either affirm or reject it.

There are some philosophers who have argued that the existentialists have merely substituted freedom for essence. But Beauvoir's analysis of the ambiguity of freedom is, I believe, clearly an attempt to refute this charge. Applying her notion of ambiguity to freedom, she attempts to show that originally freedom is a pure negativity in the sense that it is totally without content. This means of course that originally freedom is nothing. Therefore, to say that the existentialists have substituted essence with freedom is to say they have substituted essence with nothing. And this is exactly what the existentialists do say. Man originally has no essence, not even freedom.

Beauvoir's analysis of the ambiguity of freedom and her emphasis on the distinction between original spontaneity ("a so to speak natural freedom") and willed freedom serves to answer this charge and also the related criticism that it is contradictory to claim that man wills his freedom if in fact he is free at the start. Beauvoir answers that the original movement of spontaneously casting oneself into the world is converted to willed freedom because freedom is always projected toward something external to it but the externality must be chosen. Freedom thereby becomes engaged and its chosen engagement effects the transition from original spontaneity to willed freedom, from nature to morality. When man wills the engagement of his freedom in a particular and chosen object, man thereby commits himself and is responsible for his choice. For this reason, Beauvoir insists that "the moment of choice is the moment of morality."³⁵

Man's passion to be is universal. Every man strives to attain being but necessarily and logically fails. Because he is a consciousness, man can never be that which he is not. He can never be one with an object. But in his very act of striving to be, man exists. Existence is the tension which prevails between the lack of being which is man and the in-itself. But this tension is necessary for it sustains existence. Although man strives to attain being and fails, as he strives, he acts, he exists and through his actions he gives his freedom content and justifies his existence. Thus, Beauvoir claims

35

Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 23.

that freedom is a movement which merges with existence. Freedom and existence in her philosophy are two metaphysical principles which are logically distinguishable but they are not distinguishable in fact.

D. Disclosure

Man defined as a "being which makes himself a lack of being in order that there might be being" is not only the movement which confirms subjectivity and freedom, it is also the movement by which man discloses the world. Beauvoir states that man does not create the world and she is not particularly concerned with who does. Man however does disclose the world. Disclosure of the world is a basic theme in Beauvoir's ethics. Although she does not precisely explain the notion of disclosure, this concept is woven throughout her thought and it ties in with her notions of original spontaneity, passion, freedom and especially the interdependence of freedoms.

Man's acts are manifestations of his choice to ground his freedom in a particular way. As man acts carrying out his particular projects, he "incribes himself in matter."³⁶ In and through his projects man raises new objects in the world. If one writes a book or sculpts a statue, one has contributed something to the world and has succeeded in disclosing a new meaning. Each person in and through his own particular and freely chosen projects makes his own unique contributions to the world. He discloses it in a new and different way. Each person therefore helps define the world and the given world is

³⁶ Sartre. Cf. Barnes, An Existentialist Ethics, p. 239.

a world defined by men freely expressing themselves in their projects. To restrain freedom, either one's own or that of another, is not only to restrain one's existence, it is also to deprive the world of meanings. Rather than being enriched, the world remains a lesser world than it might otherwise have been. For this reason the freedom of each person must be respected. If a freedom is oppressed, then the individual and the world are limited. Each person helps disclose the world for others. The world disclosed to me is a world defined for me through the efforts and projects of others and their world is also a world which I and others help define for them. Therefore all freedoms are inter-dependent and through freedom, which is universal, each man shares a bond with all others. The freedom of each man must be allowed both by himself and by others to project itself toward an open future since the world disclosed for all men is a world disclosed by and through the projects of each individual person.

All men, Beauvoir claims, have a passion to be but there are two types of passion. In the case of maniacal passion the person wishes to entrap the object but this is impossible since subject and object always remain separate. Man can do no more than disclose the object but maniacal passion believes that it alone can disclose the object and wishes to disclose it only for oneself. Maniacal passion is therefore a selfish passion. Generous passion on the other hand strives to disclose the object (thing or person), but not to entrap it. It agrees to remain separate from the object and the object, therefore, is open to the engagement of the freedoms of others also. This type of passion is considered by Beauvoir as a

genuinely moral passion since the person acts in love to generously disclose the world not only for himself but also for others.

Even if man's efforts fail, even if his projects are dismal failures and his efforts abortive, he still succeeds in disclosure. He has still contributed something in the very effort by engaging his freedom in a positive way. Unsuccessful meanings are still meanings nevertheless. A book may be poorly written, a painting may be a terrible painting but they remain books and paintings although they are poor ones. They are concrete objects open to the engagement of the freedoms of others. The positive aspect of their freedoms may affirm the object and on the basis of it go on to construct new meanings or, in its negative aspect, may reject it, but, in either case, the object is open to the positive engagements of freedoms. So even in man's failures there is an element of success.

The genuinely moral man is the man who generously discloses new and concrete meanings in the world for himself and for others. Thus, Beauvoir's concept of disclosure is not a question of disclosure to but rather it is a question of disclosure for.

In sum, other men through their freedom disclose the world for me as I through my freedom disclose the world for them. The world in which each person must exist and act is a world which is defined by persons transcending their immanence and contributing new meanings through their projects. If transcendence is cut off, the person is reduced to a pure contingency, an immanence, a thing and the world is deprived of those meanings it could have had if freedoms had been allowed to surpass themselves. In cutting off transcendence one not

only limits the individual, one also limits the world. Each individual contributes meanings within his own particular situation and the world and others are enriched by the particular, unique and concrete contributions of each man. For this reason, Beauvoir believes that all freedoms are inter-dependent, that through freedom each shares a bond with all and therefore the freedom of every man must be respected. The genuinely moral person is the person who recognizes and adheres to the demands of freedom. Beauvoir, insists, therefore "to will oneself free is to will others free"³⁷ and "The me-others relation is as indissoluble as the subject-object relation."³⁸

³⁷Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 73.

³⁸Ibid., p. 72

E. SUBJECTIVE ATTITUDES

In keeping with the traditional existentialist view, Beauvoir holds that man faces his freedom in anguish. Since his acts are definitive and he alone is responsible for them, man must decide what he is to do with this freedom he faces and cannot deny. Beauvoir offers an analysis of the various possible subjective attitudes one might assume in dealing with one's own freedom. She begins with the universal and unchosen situation of childhood. The child's world is a given world. It is a world in which meanings and values have already been set up by others and the child accepts it as quite independent of him and indifferent to his presence in it. He submits to the rules and to the authority of others and remains unaware of his freedom. Beauvoir believes that it is not until adolescence that the child becomes aware of the demands of his freedom. It is at the point that one begins to question and doubt the rules and those who enforce them that one reaches moral maturity. This is the time when one must leave the security of the infantile world and assume the responsibility for one's own choices. There are however some persons who never outgrow the infantile world. As an example Beauvoir cites the situations of women and slaves. They continue to live in a world governed by others. They are unaware of the ambiguity of their freedom and do not realize that by engaging the negative aspect of their freedom, they can reject their situation. Such persons can live a

moral life within the limits prescribed for them by others because they are ignorant of the possibility to transcend these limits. What must be done according to Beauvoir is to bring the oppressed slaves and women to an awareness of their freedom so that they can then choose their own liberation. But it is not enough merely to enlighten the oppressed. They should also be provided with the means and instruments with which they can actualize their freedom. Once one reaches moral maturity, either naturally or by enlightenment, one must assume the demands of freedom honestly by engaging it in objects of one's own choosing. But, according to Beauvoir, since the demands of freedom are so overwhelming, man often tries to escape it.

Among the various attitudes of escape which Beauvoir describes are those of the sub-man, the serious man, the nihilist, the adventurer and the maniacally passionate man. While these various attitudes differ in many respects they all share the following common features:

- (1) All are internal states of consciousness and concern how one confronts his own freedom.
- (2) All are freely chosen attitudes.
- (3) All are attempts to evade the demands of freedom.
- (4) All are dishonest because they are evasive.
- (5) All imply evil. Since all freedoms are interdependent, to be dishonest in dealing with one's own freedom is also to be dishonest in dealing with the freedoms of others and to treat the freedoms of others dishonestly is evil.

Beauvoir's descriptions of these various attitudes, therefore, play a significant part in her moral philosophy. But what really interests Beauvoir is the attitude of the "serious man" because it is the most common due to the fact that all men were once children. The serious attitude is a carry-over of the indoctrinations of childhood. Like children, the "serious" do not question but accept "values" as absolutes which have already been set up. The serious man attempts to escape his subjectivity by submerging his freedom in an external object. He subordinates himself to the importance of things and prefers the object to himself because it allows him to lose his subjectivity in it. What primarily concerns the serious man is not the nature of the thing but the fact that its objectivity provides for him the necessary factor in which he can engulf his transcendence. By subordinating himself to the object, the serious man believes that the importance of the object confers importance on him. But Beauvoir holds the serious man is dangerous. Dishonestly evading the importance of his own subjectivity, he does not recognize the importance of the subjectivity of others. Consequently, he subordinates persons to things, placing the value of things over the value of individuals. He then readily sacrifices individuals in favor of the Thing.

Beauvoir cites many examples of the abstract Forms to which the serious man subordinates himself and others: the Nation, the Empire, the Union, the Future, the Cause, the State, the Church, the Party, the Army, the Economy, the Production, the Revolution, etc. For the "serious" there is being only in the Form. It alone is the object

which has significance and in relation to It, man is insignificant and therefore expendable. But Beauvoir argues these Forms are human constructions and have value not in-themselves but only insofar as they serve man.

"We (existentialists) repudiate all idealisms, mysticisms, etcetera which prefer a Form to man himself."³⁹

³⁹ Ibid., p. 145

F. OPPRESSION

As has already been stated, Beauvoir accepts Sartre's ontology. For both philosophers, consciousness is an activity and the activity of consciousness is negation. Subjectivity distinguishes itself from the object of consciousness by negating the object, (i. e. subjectivity asserts that the object is other than itself; that the object is not subjectivity itself). Every subject distinguishes himself as separate and distinct from others by negating the other as an object. However, if one also negates the other as a subject as well, this act constitutes an act of oppression. It is on the basis of this existential analysis of the activity of consciousness that Beauvoir asserts the three startling claims for existentialism mentioned in Part II-A of this thesis.

Beauvoir claims that "oppression" applies only on the human level. Man is never oppressed by things, only by other men. Although things offer resistance, this resistance sustains human action by providing the tension necessary for existence. The thing is an obstacle and there is a risk of not conquering it but this is not a denial of freedom. The object is the necessary condition opposed to freedom by which freedom transcends itself and discloses the world.⁴⁰

⁴⁰
Ibid., pp. 81-82.

The negating activity of consciousness and the inter-dependence of freedoms explain why oppression is possible. Beauvoir further elaborates this point by employing the Hegelian theory that each consciousness competes with other consciousnesses for being. But if a consciousness "were everything, there would be nothing beside it; the world would be empty. There would be nothing to possess and I myself would be nothing."⁴¹ Thus, all men depend on others for existence and since freedom merges with existence, all freedoms too are inter-dependent.

The ambiguity of human life is that it is both an immanence and a transcendence. If a life is reduced to only an immanence by having its transcendence cut off, then "living is only not dying."⁴²

But there are some men who cut off the transcendence of others. This is due to the fact that they do not recognize the requirement for universal freedom. They dishonestly recognize their own transcendence but refuse to recognize the transcendence of others and reduce them to mere immanences. This is the "real role to evil" which Beauvoir claims only existentialism does recognize and is able to account for. This claim is based on her analysis of individual freedom and the inter-dependence of freedoms and also on Sartre's claim that existentialism is the only theory which does not reduce man to an object.⁴³ Because freedom is ambiguous, both

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 71.

⁴² Ibid., p. 83.

⁴³ Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions, p. 37.

immanent and transcendent, both negative and positive, both autonomous and interdependent, is it possible to account for an evil will. Because man is "perpetually playing with the negative"⁴⁴ it is possible for him to act on the freedoms of others in a negative way, enslavement. There is according to Beauvoir only one solution to oppression, rejection; the negative aspect of freedom which returns to the positive by giving itself content through action, revolt.

Beauvoir believes that the oppressed must be awakened to the truth of his oppression and brought to an awareness of his freedom to reject it. When the oppressed is brought to this awareness of the possibilities open to the engagement of his freedom, he will then choose his own liberation.

Beauvoir also believes that for a liberating action to be a thoroughly moral action, it would have to be achieved through the conversion of the oppressors as well as the oppressed. By this she means that the oppressor should be made aware of the inter-dependence of freedoms. He should be made aware that the master in his dependence on the slave for his existence and identity is himself a slave, that by limiting others, he limits not only the individual but also the world. Of the conversion of oppressors, however, not enough is said and Beauvoir dismisses the enlightenment of the oppressor as "utopian reveries."⁴⁵ And indeed she must, in order

⁴⁴Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 33

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 97

to be consistent with her claims that tension is necessary for existence, that without oppression there could be no liberating movement, that the world has always been at war and always will be and this is not an abnormal situation.⁴⁶ She further argues that the only justification for oppression and tyranny is the fact that they are opposed to freedom and through them freedom is manifested.

"Without crime and tyranny, there could be no liberation of man; one cannot escape that dialectic which goes from freedom to freedom through dictatorship and tyranny."⁴⁷

According to Beauvoir, therefore, oppression is evil and yet it is a necessary condition for freedom. Further, it seems not only extremely unfair but also contradictory on Beauvoir's part to contend throughout her work for the enlightenment of the oppressed on the one hand and yet on the other hand she is unwilling to grant enlightenment to the oppressor. Twice Beauvoir recognizes the necessity for the conversion and re-education of oppressors and those who serve them and both times she dismisses the possibility; first as "utopian"⁴⁸ and again as impractical.

"The desirable thing would be to re-educate ... But the urgency of the struggle forbids this slow labor."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 155.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 97.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

I find myself somewhat impatient with Beauvoir's attitude. All men are free but only some are free to be educated. The oppressed must be enlightened but she claims the oppressors must be fought."⁵⁰

Beauvoir attempts to justify violence toward oppressors in two ways: First,

"A freedom which is occupied in denying freedom is itself so outrageous, that the outrageousness of the violence which one practices against it is almost cancelled out."⁵¹

Secondly,

"Since we can conquer our enemies only by acting upon their facticity," (their subjectivity by definition escapes us)
"by reducing them to things, we have to make ourselves things." ⁵²

Thus, according to Beauvoir, in violent confrontations we have a situation of object versus object. But she evidently thinks this is excusable because reduced to an immanence, a pure contingency, man is nothing. Further, it is difficult to see how we can make ourselves things in order to do violence since Beauvoir has argued that due to the nature of consciousness, the elimination of subjectivity is impossible. Beauvoir concludes however that

"Violence is justified only if it offers concrete possibilities for freedom. ⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 136.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 97.

⁵² Ibid., p. 99.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 137.

In her discussion concerning the problems involved in moral decisions, Beauvoir argues that the ultimate end of every moral action is freedom. The freedom of each individual man is more important than the value of relative goods. Since relative goods are subordinate to man's freedom, we should prefer freedom over relative goods. But the real moral problem is how to choose between freedoms. Beauvoir considers two basic criteria for choice. First, numerical considerations. It is preferable to choose the salvation of the greater number, but such decisions are generally abstract and rare. Other considerations, says Beauvoir, are usually taken into account, for example, the social functions of those between whom one must choose. She considers as a principle of selection those who are the most useful to preserve. But utility has no absolute meaning in itself according to Beauvoir. Things are useful only insofar as they serve man, and, therefore, "useful" requires the complement "man". But since man is a transcendence as well as an immanence, she adds another complement, "future". Man's justification is never fulfilled but always to come. Therefore, Beauvoir concludes:

"A choice (between freedoms) is therefore possible in the light of the future."⁵⁴

This is Beauvoir's reply to how we are to choose not between man and object, but between individuals. In claiming that the choice should be made in light of the futures open to individuals' freedoms, she

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 143.

presents more problems than she solves.

Although she has argued throughout that man is his future, that by his projects man justifies his existence, that to reduce man to an immanence is to reduce him to no more than an objective presence in the world, that cut off from his transcendence man is merely a thing, Beauvoir's claim that the salvation of persons should be decided on the basis of their individual futuricities is a claim made without perspectives. The more important question is what constitutes the criteria by which freedoms are to be evaluated and decided. Do we judge freedoms qualitatively or quantitatively? Beauvoir seems to imply the latter in her example of the married couple living in a hovel.⁵⁵ If they cannot be persuaded to change their life-style; "they must be allowed to follow their preference."⁵⁶ But if they have children, then the situation changes because "freedom and the future are on the side of the latter."⁵⁷ Although she admits that due to the complexity of particular situations, analysis is necessary before one can make an ethical choice,⁵⁸ Beauvoir's assertion that choices be made in light of individual futuricities has dangerous and morally unacceptable implications. Pushed to its logical consequences and without additional criteria, her claim implies the sacrifice of the old

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 143.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 143.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

for the young, the sick for the healthy, etc. Unfortunately, she does not consider these implications, but instead goes on to analyze the meaning of The Future. She discredits what she terms the "Future Myth" by arguing that past, present and future are not separate and distinct entities in themselves but rather all comprise a single temporal form. But this argument does not answer the problem Beauvoir raised concerning moral choices between freedoms beyond her initial recommendation of "in light of the future."

Thus it is clear that Beauvoir believes every moral action aims at the freedom of man. Opposed to the various dishonest attitudes which necessarily imply evil (oppression) Beauvoir describes the attitude of her moral ideal, the "genuine man".⁵⁹ The genuine man is the genuinely free man. He honestly faces the ambiguity of freedom and assumes it. He does not try to escape the demands of his freedom nor dishonestly evade his responsibility. He is aware that his freedom wills itself toward the future through the freedoms of others. He therefore recognizes the fact that the freedoms of others must be respected. This recognition imposes limits on the genuine man, but in his self limitation, he finds his own law. He is autonomous, but the law he gives himself is universal.

"An ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny a priori that separate existents can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all."⁶⁰

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 14, 60, 61.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 18.

Beauvoir is careful to point out that freedom is not licence. Man is not free to do anything at all. Dostoevsky's famous formula "If God does not exist, everything is permitted" has been acknowledged by Sartre as the very starting point of atheistic existentialism.⁶¹ But Beauvoir claims that the meaning of this formula has been abused. God's absence does not authorize all licence but rather, she claims, God's absence makes man responsible for himself and for his world. It may also be pointed out that "permitted" is also ambiguous. It may mean 'allowed' or it may mean 'possible.' It is in this latter sense that Beauvoir understands the term. Everything is certainly not allowed. Oppression, evasion, dishonesty and the abuse of other's freedom are not allowed but they are possible. And because they are possible, the genuinely moral man will fight against them. Beauvoir is convinced that abstention is complicity and therefore the moral man is the man of action. The task of ethics, she holds, is to work for the cause of universal freedom, to enlighten and educate the ignorant and the oppressed, to critically oppose oppression and injustice and to make the facile difficult.

⁶¹ Existentialism and Human Emotions, p. 22 (Sartre).

III CONCLUSION

As has already been stated in the Introduction, if a moral philosophy is properly to be considered a system of ethics, it must offer unconditional imperatives, and unconditional imperatives necessarily refer to objective values. Since Beauvoir denies objective values and along with them unconditional imperatives, it would seem to follow that her Ethics of Ambiguity is not really an ethic at all.

But due to a happy inconsistency Beauvoir does succeed in offering an ethics in spite of her denial. She does tell the reader what one ought to do in spite of his opinions, wishes, desires and tendencies to evade moral responsibilities.

Beauvoir understands objective values to be unconditioned absolutes and she rejects them, I believe, for two reasons.

First, her atheism: Without God to guarantee man's existence "man will refuse to believe in unconditioned values."⁶² She presupposes God to be the only source of objective values. But since God does not exist, she reasons, there are no objective values. At this point we have to distinguish two arguments. First,

- P₁ Values are dependent on God.
- P₂ God does not exist.
- C Values do not exist.

⁶²Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 14.

However, for this argument to be a proof, it would have to be proven that values depend on God. Since a proof of this premiss is not offered by Beauvoir, all we can use are the following two premisses:

- (1) If God existed, values and all else would depend on Him.
- (2) God does not exist. But these premisses do not yield the conclusion, Values do not exist. (We are not at all concerned with the proof for the second premiss. All we want to show is that even if one grants the truth of the second premiss, the non-existence of values is not established.)

Secondly, Beauvoir's refusal to believe in unconditioned absolutes "which would set themselves athwart his (man's) freedom like things,"⁶³ implies that objective values would somehow limit man's freedom. Yet Beauvoir in her discussion on oppression claims that things are not oppressive to man's freedom, only other men are. Things offer resistance but this resistance sustains human action. The object is an obstacle and there is a risk of not conquering it but this is not a denial of freedom. The object is the necessary condition opposed to freedom by which freedom transcends itself and discloses the world.⁶⁴ Beauvoir therefore emphatically acknowledges that things are not oppressive and yet she seems to think that objective values would be. However, one might argue in accordance with Beauvoir's own thesis that objective values are not oppressive

⁶³ Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 14

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 81-82.

to man's freedom. Although they offer resistance, this resistance sustains moral action. Objective values are challenges to one's freedom and there is a risk of not meeting the demands of objective values but this is not a denial of freedom. The objective value is the necessary condition opposed to moral freedom by which moral freedom transcends itself and discloses moral action. Objective values therefore may be seen as challenges to one's freedom, not as limitations on it. One is not forced to respect them. One has the freedom to decide to acknowledge them, to accept them or to reject them.

It is not however the aim of this thesis to prove whether or not there are objective values but to show that Beauvoir acknowledges objective values in the sense defined in the Introduction. In her denial of objective values on the one hand, Beauvoir tacitly reintroduces them on the other. While Beauvoir explicitly denies objective values and unconditional moral imperatives, her system implies what it denies. And this implication, although it involves a contradiction, is what justifies her work as an ethics.

It is important to note those "absolute values" Beauvoir cites as examples; the Church, the Highway, the Cause, the Party, the State, the Army, etcetera. She rightfully claims that these Forms are human constructions which have no value in themselves but only insofar as they serve man. Many of those who believe that values are objective would readily agree with Beauvoir. These Forms are not bearers of objective values. Throughout her ethics she points out false substitutes for moral values and rightfully attacks them.

While she goes too far in that she rejects together with some sham examples of objective values, the whole category of objective values, Beauvoir implicitly appeals to true objective moral values as the very foundation of the genuinely moral life;

the value of the individual
the value of honesty
the value of respect
the value of generosity
the value of love and compassion
the value of enlightenment and education
the value of freedom

She openly acknowledges the disvalue (evil) of oppression, dishonesty, tyranny, ignorance, contempt, injustice, cruelty, hatred and evasion. She tacitly acknowledges the existence of these values and disvalues and affirms their independence of man's recognition. Her ethics is devoted to pointing out the existence of these objective moral values and disvalues and she tacitly acknowledges their independence of man's opinions or acknowledgement. Of course, one could critically ask whether the way Beauvoir speaks of evil does not imply a similar contradiction to her denial of values and disvalues as is committed by her formulating of unconditional imperatives.

Although Beauvoir claims that ethics does not offer "recipes" and its imperatives are hypothetical, she nevertheless does offer unconditional imperatives. Morality requires that:

- (1) "the freedom of other men must be respected and they must be helped to free themselves" (p. 60)
- (2) "Man must realize himself morally" (p. 70)
- (3) "Man must furnish the ignorant slave with the means of transcending his situation by means of revolt, to put an end to his ignorance" (p. 86)

- (4) "we must end by abolishing all suppression"
(p. 89)
- (5) "we must treat each man as an end" (p. 135)
- (6) "we must fight evil" (p. 136)
- (7) "we must treat others as a freedom so that
his end may be freedom" (p. 142)

Note that all of these imperatives would become meaningless if one were not to acknowledge that the states which they "prescribe" is to be preferred to other states regardless of our wishes, desires or decisions, i. e. that these states must be acknowledged as objectively valuable as defined in the introduction.

Beauvoir's significance as a moral philosopher rests in her demasking of what one might call "false" moral values. She has explicitly denied false substitutes for morality and in the effort she has replaced them with true ethical values without, of course, openly acknowledging their objectivity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barnes, Hazel E. An Existentialist Ethics. Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, New York, (c) 1967.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. A Very Easy Death. Translated from the French by Patrick O'Brian, Putnam Press, New York, 1966 (c) 1965.
- _____. Force of Circumstance. Translated from the French by Richard Howard, Putnam Press, New York, (c) 1965.
- _____. The Ethics of Ambiguity. Bernard Frechtman, translator. The Citadel Press, Secaucus, New Jersey, (c) 1948 by Philosophical Library.
- Greene, Norman N. Jean-Paul Sartre: The Existentialist Ethic. First edition as an Ann Arbor Paperback, 1963. (c) by The University of Michigan, 1960.
- Hildebrand, Dietrich von. Ethics. Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, (c) 1953; New edition Franciscan Herald Press, 1972.
- Kant, Immanuel. Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals. Translated and analysed by H. J. Paton. Harper Torchbooks, The Academy Library, Harper and Row, New York (c) 1964.
- Marks, Elaine. Simone de Beauvoir: Encounters With Death. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, (c) 1973 by Rutgers University.
- Nielsen, Kai. Ethics Without God. Pemberton Books, London and Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York, (c) 1973, Pemberton Books.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology, translated and with an Introduction by Hazel E. Barnes. Washington Square Press, a Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York, (c) 1953 by the Philosophical Library, Inc.
- _____. L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, Les Editions Nagel, Paris, (c) 1968.

_____. Existentialism and Human Emotions. The Wisdom Library. A Division of Philosophical Library New York, Citadel Press, Inc., Secaucus, New Jersey, (c) 1957.

Wild, John. The Challenge of Existentialism. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, (c) 1955.

Young, William. Hegel's Dialectical Method: Its Origins and Religious Significance. The Craig Press, (c) 1972, University Series: Philosophical Studies, Gordon H. Clark, Editor.