# On Moral Unintelligibility: Beauvoir's Genealogy of Morality in the *Second Sex*

**Abstract:** This paper offers a reading of Beauvoir's *Second Sex* as a genealogy of 'morality': the patriarchal system of values that maintains a *moral* distinction between men and women. This value system construes many of women's experiences under oppression (including abortion, rape, sex work, deceit or adultery under conditions of domestic abuse) as evidence of *women's* immorality, obscuring the agential role of the individuals, men in particular, who provoke such experiences. Beauvoir's examination of the claims to a biological or historical origin for this value system provides an important counterexample to the prevailing connection among scholars between historical necessity and genealogical vindication on the one hand, and historical contingency and debunking on the other. While the currently dominant moral system may have been historically necessary at certain stages in human development given the needs of early human societies, Beauvoir nevertheless debunks it: now, she suggests, only the value system itself remains, without its precipitating needs. Thus, Beauvoir's critique reveals what I call the *moral unintelligibility* of women's experiences of oppression: what makes it difficult for women to make sense of the harms wrought against them is that the operative value system obscures them as harms in the first place, instead construing *women themselves* as immoral. I conclude that Beauvoir's position can be squared neither with the prevailing construction of moral blame and responsibility, nor with the notion of hermeneutical injustice which collapses into it: Beauvoir's solution is instead the political virtue of *moral invention*, a virtue epistemic as well as moral, collective as well as individual.

## *Introduction*

Genealogical method plays a surprising role in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*: although Beauvoir proclaims her method to be one of "existentialist morality" (1949a: 33) focusing on the phenomenology of women's experience, her work is dedicated in large part to a series of genealogical investigations, to the "facts and myths" as she terms the first volume, that have structured women's 'situation' in contemporary Western Europe.

In Part I, Beauvoir contends with sexual difference in the biological taxonomy of natural kinds (and thus, implicitly, with the evolutionary genealogy of womankind), as well as with the (primarily European) history of gendered oppression and the construction of feminine "myths" in literary texts authored by men. These considerations are followed, in Part II, "Lived Experience", by what we might take to be a more straightforwardly phenomenological methodology, but this, too, takes a peculiarly genealogical form. Beauvoir's closest contemporary philosophical interlocutors, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, each proceed in their respective phenomenologies from abstract metaphysical considerations—from a

number of what might be understood as ontological 'first principles'—to more concrete, social phenomena. "Sensation", "the body as object", "the phenomenal field" (Merleau-Ponty 1945), "negation", "temporality" (Sartre 1943) precede accounts of lived experience as shared with others: "sexuality", "the world as a place of signification", "coexistence with others" (Merleau-Ponty 1945), "*Mitsein*", "the body-for-others" (Sartre 1943). Beauvoir's approach proceeds instead by considering the lived temporality, the life history or genealogy, of the contemporary French woman's life: beginning with childhood, she progresses through girlhood and sexual initiation to marriage, motherhood, and old age, concluding, finally, with the "justifications" women themselves offer for their complicity in their own submission—the mirror image of the "myths" constructed of women by men in the conclusion of Part I.

Thus, right from the outset, the *Second Sex* presents a reversal of structure: where Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenologies begin with the individual to arrive at the social, Beauvoir begins with the structural ("Facts and Myths") in order to get to the individual ("Lived Experience").[1] Moreover, the two parts of the *Second Sex* share a common method: in each case, we first have to undertake a genealogy—of biology and natural selection, of human history, of one's own past and mode of upbringing as a child—to understand the "mystifications" to which both men and women are prone. Part I employs this method in showing how the world has been constituted by men, while Part II takes up the question of how such a world is lived by women.

Beauvoir, then, may be the only example[2] of a genealogical phenomenologist or genealogical existentialist. Where Beauvoir has often been read in the literature in juxtaposition with famous white male philosophers—Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty—the genealogical aspect of *The Second Sex* is distinctive, casting into doubt the extent to which she can really be said to share the same method as the aforementioned thinkers.

Beauvoir's status as a genealogical thinker has recently become relevant to contemporary discussions of genealogy critique; for instance, Amia Srinivasan names her as a genealogy critic of our concept of sex (Srinivasan 2019: 142). Yet, with the exception of Sara Heinämaa's helpful analysis of the *Second Sex* as a "genealogy of subjection" in the vein of Nietzsche's genealogies (Heinämaa: 2003:

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[1] As Altman (2020) claims, "There is one sort of example Simone de Beauvoir never uses in *The Second Sex*. She never uses a hypothetical…. It is another 'swerve' from the Sartre of *L'être et le néant* ('Suppose I go into a café looking for my friend Pierre…,' 'Suppose a waiter asks me…,' etc.)… a way of thinking and writing in which Beauvoir became completely uninterested. She was looking for data" (43).

[2] Depending, perhaps, on how one reads Hegel and Husserl.

ch. 5),[3] the bulk of scholarly attention has instead been trained on Beauvoir's inheritance of the aforementioned 'system-builders'[4] whose method, as I just mentioned, she notably parts ways with.[5]

On the other hand, Beauvoir's method cannot readily be assimilated into other, more paradigmatic employments of genealogy critique, either. Indeed, her use of genealogy depart markedly from its employment by figures such as Nietzsche and Foucault on the one hand ('debunking' genealogists), or Bernard Williams and Miranda Fricker ('vindicatory' genealogists), who hold that to understand the current use of a given concept or practice (morality, imprisonment, truthfulness), we have to understand its past use or uses.[6] Debunking genealogy discredits its object by revealing its past contingency, while vindicatory genealogy legitimizes its object by showing its past necessity. But Beauvoir undercuts the very distinction by contesting the underlying connection between historical necessity and current justification on which it relies. I claim that Beauvoir undertakes a genealogy to demonstrate the *past necessity* of women's subjugation, while nevertheless *rejecting its current function*. Instead, Beauvoir insists on a more definitive break between empirical conditions and human agency, both epistemic (the *meanings* we give to those conditions) and practical (how we *react* to those conditions).[7] She concludes every series of genealogical considerations by reiterating the same point: empirical facts, including the ones that can be gleaned through genealogy, only take on a

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[3] See also stand-alone references in Garcia (2018: 221-222), Moi's "personal genealogy" of Beauvoir (2008: 29), and Daigle's (2011) discussion of Nietzsche and Beauvoir (albeit not genealogy).

[4] Beauvoir's self-differentiation from such 'system-builders' contributed to her lack of identification as a philosopher: "For me a philosopher is someone like Spinoza, Hegel, or like Sartre, someone who builds a grand system.... Sartre is a philosopher, and I am not" (Beauvoir 1979, cited in Simons 1986).

[5] See, e.g., Bauer's (2001) analysis of Beauvoir's appropriations of Descartes, Hegel, and Sartre and Webber (2018), who compares Beauvoir to Kant, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Fanon, as well as the numerous studies of Beauvoir's and Sartre's reciprocal influence and comparisons of their views (Le Dœuff 1980, 1989; Simons 1986; Butler 1986; Fullbrook and Fullbrook 1998, 2008; Moi 2008; Daigle and Golomb 2009; Garcia 2018). Heinämaa (2003), who stands alone in drawing systematic attention to Beauvoir's use of genealogy, dedicates the bulk of her study to Beauvoir's relation to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.

[6] On the vindicatory/debunking distinction, see Craig (2007).

[7] Hence, her existentialism: "The perspective I will adopt is that of existentialist morality. Every subject posits itself concretely through projects as a transcendence… Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, existence degrades into the 'for-itself', freedom into facticity" (1949a: 33). My 'situation' can never *determine* me to act in a certain way; I retain transcendental as well as empirical perspectives on my own selfhood. Here, Beauvoir's view might be fruitfully compared to Kant: "[Man] is thus to himself, on the one hand phenomenon, and on the other hand, in respect of certain faculties the action of which cannot be ascribed to the receptivity of sensibility, a purely intelligible object" (1781/1787: A547/B575).

particular meaning within a given field of values. Thus, while we cannot change our historical past, our human physiology, or our own individual upbringings, we *can* change the meanings that such phenomena have for us; we can change the system of values within which they are incorporated.

This distinction is crucial, given how bleak Beauvoir's genealogical content is. The genealogy of women's oppression, for Beauvoir, is monotonous: it is not dynamic, nor is it structured by a series of essentially contingent causes. As Heinämaa notes, there is a sense in which women's subjection is not strictly speaking *historical* at all: "Instead of having the structure of an event, the phenomenon is saturated with a peculiar sense of necessity" (2003: 102). The current 'situation' women find themselves in is the outcome of a certain material reality—a certain physical embodiment—acquiring a social meaning within a given value system (what Beauvoir sometimes terms 'male ethics'),[8] one which ultimately upholds the patriarchy. If, as Foucault (1971) characterized Nietzsche, "genealogy opposes itself to the search for 'origins'" by showing the "disparity" and "dissension" of putative causes, in Beauvoir, genealogy opposes the problem of origin by suspending the very idea that the genealogized concept have the status of having been historically *caused* at all.

As I show below, Beauvoir does not just genealogize the concepts 'woman' (Srinivasan 2019, forth.) or 'subjection' (Heinämaa 2003), but in fact, like Nietzsche, offers a genealogy of morality. On Beauvoir's view, the scope of moral talk and thought, under current oppressive conditions, is the expression of a 'will to power' of sorts: namely, of patriarchy, of the male will for dominance. In such conditions, women find their own systemic problems excluded from the scope of 'morality': the obstacles to flourishing they face within the social world do not show up as morally salient, or are even falsely imputed to them as their own responsibility (as in Beauvoir's most prominent examples of sex work, abortion, and rape).

In this respect, Beauvoir's critique of morality is more radical than that of certain influential strands of feminist ethics: she does not merely claim, for instance, that women see moral problems differently than men (Gilligan 1982), nor that women's work is systematically devalued as unimportant (Tronto 1993, Held 2006), but that women are *themselves* commonly coded as 'immoral' for the

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[8] Below, I follow Beauvoir in her terminology to maintain historical and interpretive accuracy; of course, although her writings importantly anticipated and influenced many of the subsequent developments in gender studies and terminology around sex and gender, they were published decades prior to these developments, and therefore retain terms now sometimes rejected as essentialist.

systemic discrimination visited on them and not subject to their own control. If one ostensible function of our normative talk is to capture conditions for collective justice and individual autonomy, Beauvoir's critique of 'morality' shows that the *real* function of this concept instead does the opposite: it casts male domination and women's oppression as rightful, obscuring women's potential recourse to alternate, more emancipatory social arrangements. Beauvoir takes the Marxist stance that morality under patriarchy serves an ideological function, but, unlike Marx, explicitly aims to retain the moral dimension of her critique of women's situation.

We might see Beauvoir's intervention as a kind of 'reverse-engineering' and subsequent 'amelioration' of the concept of morality (McPherson and Plunkett 2020, Haslanger 2020, Queloz 2021). In what follows, however, I urge caution in assimilating Beauvoir too readily to the governing terms of the debates on genealogy critique, moral criticism, or agency in conditions of structural injustice. Beauvoir, I claim, is neither a practitioner of vindicatory nor subversive genealogy; neither a straightforward morality critic (in the vein of Marx or Nietzsche) nor a conventional foundationalist; neither a relativist nor a realist.

Instead, Beauvoir's project is best situated in terms of the diagnosis of a problem—what I call the *moral unintelligibility* of patriarchal wrongs—and, by way of a solution, the proposal of a unique political virtue, both epistemic and ethical, which Beauvoir terms *moral invention*. One implication of Beauvoir's critique of morality, so understood, is that if genealogical methods are to be considered as, at bottom, normative,[9] the invocation of normativity in such projects must itself be included within the scope of genealogical or conceptual-ethical inquiry in reflexive fashion, as part and parcel of the practice of the virtue of moral invention.

### *"Biological Data"*

At the end of the chapter on biology, Beauvoir claims: "The woman is, among all the female mammals, the most profoundly alienated… in no other is the enslavement of the organism to the reproductive function more pressing or more difficult to accept" (1949a: 72). Indeed, Beauvoir begins the chapter with the claim that, in the rest of the animal kingdom, the "very meaning of the division of species into two sexes is not clear", since "it does not occur universally in nature": amoebas, bacilli, and one-celled organisms reproduce asexually, through binary

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[9] "I doubt whether there can be such a thing as an intrinsically neutral genealogy" (Craig 2007: 184); see also Haslanger (2020: 256).

fission (1949a: 38). Even sexed organisms do not inevitably feature male dominance or fixed sex roles: bees, termites, praying mantises, spiders, and ants each destroy their males in order to perpetuate the species (1949a: 54-56); in certain kinds of birds, fathers participate in constructing the nest, protecting and taking care of their young, and even incubating eggs (1949a: 58); among some species of fish and amphibians, as soon as the father has fertilized the eggs, "he chases away the female, who tries to devour them" (1949a: 57).

Beauvoir holds, however, that the more complex biological life, the more taxing becomes the work of parturition, and the more the "female is in prey to the species" (1949a: 58). Thus, it is primarily in mammals that the male "imposes" mating on the female, which "she undergoes with indifference or even resists"; it is in mammals that "the mother sustains the strongest relations with her offspring while the father is the least interested" (1949a: 58-59). Beauvoir employs strongly normatively charged language to describe the plight of female mammals: the male "*takes* her; she is *taken*", "grabs her, immobilizes her… penetrates her, such that she "appears as a violated interiority"; the male's organ a "tool" allowing him to "realize himself as activity", while the female organ "merely an inert receptacle" (1949a: 59).

For human women, physical difference presents an even greater obstacle than for other mammals. Women develop much more conspicuous and cumbersome mammary glands than other mammals, parts of the body functional only for sexual reproduction (1949a: 66); they undergo painful menstrual cycles every month, where other mammals are only fertile during one season a year, lose no blood, and experience no pain (1949a: 67); gestation, too, is much more taxing and dangerous for humans than other animals, in part due to our two-legged physiology (1949a: 69-70). In each of these experiences, the woman's body feels to her "an opaque alienated thing, in prey to a stubborn and foreign life that every month makes and unmakes its cradle…. The woman, like the man, *is* her body, but her body is something other than herself" (1949a: 68-69). These physical differences persist even when women are not preoccupied with the tasks of reproduction: on average women "are smaller than men, less heavy, have a finer skeleton, a larger pelvis", their "muscular strength is far lesser than men's: around two-thirds"; they have a "lesser respiratory capacity", "their vascular system more unstable" (1949a: 71).

Thus, Beauvoir does not take her biological taxonomy *in itself* to indicate any possibilities of resistance for human women, nor to reveal the contingency of women's oppression. Considered as a group, Beauvoir takes these empirical givens to constitute an "essential element of [women's] situation" (1949a: 72). Yet she

ends the chapter with a startling conclusion, one that undermines the evidentiary force of the preceding forty pages:

> It is not physiology that grounds values: instead, biological data assumes the values that the existent gives it. If the respect or fear that the woman inspires forbids the use of violence against her, male muscular superiority is not a source of power. If customs require—as is the case in certain Native American tribes—that young women choose their own husbands… male sexual aggressivity does not confer him any advantage. (1949a: 78)

Beauvoir rejects the idea, then, that we can take any given empirical fact at face value; instead, its meaning depends on how it is received within a given evaluative context. Thus, as she claims in the introduction, "There is no so-called objective description that can be extricated from its ethical background"; all attributions "envelop values" (1949a: 32). For the human being, mere nature has to contend with the "second nature" of custom and social practice; physiological difference in itself therefore does not suffice to ground sexual inequality (1949a: 78).[10]

### *"History"*

In the case of biology, Beauvoir concludes that empirical facts only take on meaning within a given value system, and in the subsequent section, "History", she claims that the *predominant* value system is one that nevertheless has been created by men. Beauvoir closes the section, over one hundred pages chronicling women's experience of near-total patriarchal domination from prehistory to the present, with another appeal to values: "All of women's history has been made by men… We've seen the reasons why, from the beginning, men have had moral distinction along with physical force. They have created the values, the customs, and the religions, while women have never disputed this control" (1949a: 222).

This outcome was in part the inevitable result of the physical differences between men and women outlined in the Biology chapter. The fact that human women are so burdened physiologically by the demands of pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation, and nursing inevitably created a dependence on men: "Since nature doesn't ensure women the same periods of infertility it does for other female mammals, the repeated pregnancies had to absorb the greatest part of their energy and time; they were not capable of protecting the life of the children they brought into the world" (1949a: 112-113). Nevertheless, Beauvoir begins her historical survey by acknowledging that prehistory might have looked very different than

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[10] See also Beauvoir (1949a): 75, 98.

what can be gleaned from written records: in such divergent and physically demanding conditions of life, "we don't know whether… the woman's musculature, her respiratory apparatus, was just as developed as the man's" (1949a: 111-112). Such conditions may have sufficed, in certain early periods of human life, to enable matriarchal forms of society. Though Beauvoir leaves indeterminate which groups or time periods she is referring to precisely, she points to evidence of certain tribes in which lineage takes on a matrilineal form, with property and family names being transferred through women and children being the possession of the mother's tribe (1949a: 120), and others in which women fought as warriors in tribal expeditions (1949a: 112).

Any such privileges, however, ended with the advent of written history; indeed, with the advent of agriculture. Beauvoir rejects the idea of a historical transition from matriarchy to patriarchy: "This golden age of the Woman is nothing but a myth…. Society has always been male; political power has always been in the hands of men" (1949a: 124). For Beauvoir, then, there is very little that is *contingent* about women's oppression throughout history. Indeed, given physical differences between men and women and women's role in reproduction, it was seemingly unavoidable for women to have been so subordinated: "The triumph of patriarchy was neither an accident nor the result of violent revolution. From the origins of humanity, men's biological privilege enabled them to affirm themselves alone as sovereign subjects; they never abdicated this privilege" (1949a: 132).

The problem, as Beauvoir characterizes it, is not merely that women are weaker than men and therefore vulnerable to male violence, but that, in a thesis that anticipates Arendt's distinction between *animal laborans* and *homo faber*, women have historically had to concern themselves with the mere reproduction of life over the production of new artifacts or new life (which, with agriculture, becomes the predominant means of subsistence for many societies):

> What was harmful for her was that, not becoming a labor partner for the worker, she was excluded from the human *Mitsein*. That woman is weak and has a lower productive capacity does not explain this exclusion; rather, it is because she did not participate in his way of working and thinking and because she remained enslaved to the mysteries of life that the male did not recognize in her an equal…. The male will for expansion and domination transformed women's incapacity into a curse. (1949a: 133)

With agriculture, and then increasingly with greater industrialization, comes the transition to a way of life that gives pride of place to the "male principle of creative force" (1949a: 131). By inventing new technologies, "man poses ends, projects paths toward them, realizes himself as an existent… he creates", in the same

impulse manifested "when today he builds a dam, a skyscraper, a nuclear reactor"; in waging war and defending the family, he risks his life, thereby "brilliantly proving that life is not the supreme human value, but that life has to serve ends more important than itself" (1949a: 115). In short, along with the creation of the nuclear reactor, the skyscraper, the techniques of warfaring, comes the implementation of a masculinist system of values.

The reproductive role women have historically and physiologically been tasked with, however, excludes them from recognition within this androcentric economy of creation and production: "The woman who gives birth does not know the pride of creation…. Conceiving, breastfeeding are not *activities*; they are natural functions. No project is thereby undertaken" (1949a: 114). Concomitantly, women's preoccupation with the mere repetition of life prevents them from recognizing values beyond life itself—from recognizing the realm of 'spirit'. The woman, unlike even Hegel's slave, "is originally an existent who gives *Life* but does not risk *her* life; between her and the male, there has never been struggle" (1949a: 116).

We might take such passages to suggest that Beauvoir concurs with the valorization of activities historically undertaken by men; indeed, Beauvoir has been taken to task for her denigration of traditionally feminine experiences such as pregnancy and motherhood (Simons 1984: 76-9; Evans 1985: 62; Hartsock 1985: 288; Heinämaa 2003: 109-116). Thus, women's "complicity" in male sovereignty, on such an interpretation, is twofold: first, for valuing their lives more than freedom from male domination (in other words, for not fighting back); and second, for accepting conditions in which their role is restricted to the mere sustenance of life rather than original production (1949a: 23-24, 116; 1949b: 50, 639). Beauvoir's pronouncements of her "existentialist perspective" sometimes tend in this direction, valorizing transcendence over immanence and the intellectual realm over the realm of everyday life (e.g., 1949a: 33).

Yet, in the "History" chapter, Beauvoir goes on to elaborate 'complicity' in a direction that begins to emphasize the creation of *new* values rather than the perpetuation of preexisting patriarchal evaluative frameworks. The relationship between men and women, she says, "is distinct from a relation of oppression because the woman herself recognizes and aims at the values that are concretely attained by males…. In truth women have never opposed male values [*valeurs mâles*] with female values [*valeurs femelles*]" (1949a: 116-117). Here, Beauvoir is making a historical claim: only men, until the current moment, have been in the position to create new values ('male values'), a possibility so far barred to women. It has historically been men who, in superseding bare sustenance, "create values

that deny any value to pure repetition [of life]" (1949a: 116).

The result has been the construction and perpetuation of a patriarchal, male-dominated value system impervious to the possible new values articulable by women, given their divergent experiences and material practices in the sex-based division of labor. Beauvoir attributes this state of affairs in part to the fact that women are fully integrated into society with men, and, since they generally live in close proximity to them, feel more solidarity with men than with fellow women (1949a: 124, 20). Unlike other oppressed groups, on Beauvoir's account, women have never formed their own class or their own culture (1949a: 211); they have no past, no 'before', that precedes male domination. As a result, they lack the collective resources to produce counter-narratives, or opposing frameworks of valorization, to male domination.

Thus, the history Beauvoir tells has the quality of unrelenting sameness: there is no collective break in the general story of women's subordination, only a few isolated individual examples that emerge without breaking through into the broader culture (see, e.g., 1949a: 164, 179, 194-6, 211).[11] There *is* no genealogical origin to which women can take refuge in order to prove their equality to men: "One ends up," as Michèle Le Dœuff points out, "with the image of an oppression without a fundamental cause" (1980: 285-6).

What to make of Beauvoir's monotonous narrative? One way to understand the "Biological Data" and "History" chapters is as showing that women's subjugation was *necessary*, given how history and evolutionary forces have played out. But to fully grasp whether this is the case, we need to distinguish between two senses of 'necessity'.[12] Women's subjugation was certainly not *metaphysically necessary*—that is, it could have played out differently. Thus, Beauvoir repeatedly draws attention to the differing ways biological life evolved among various species, as if to emphasize the contingent nature, evolutionarily speaking, of biological sexual difference in human beings; indeed, she underscores the unfortunate situation of human women, who evolved to accrue much heavier physiological burdens than the females of other species. But Beauvoir suggests that the subjugation of women may have nevertheless been *historically necessary*, given the material conditions in which human men and women evolved and in which the first human societies formed: "The devaluation of women represents a necessary step in the history of humanity" (1949a: 129). Women were disadvantaged because of the unlucky confluence of their burdensome physiology paired with the needs of the first

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[11] See also Simons (1983) on the omission of many of these examples from the first English translation of the text.

[12] I am indebted to Fraser MacBride for pushing me on this point.

human cultures. These needs, Beauvoir holds, apparently could not have been otherwise, given what it takes to subsist among harsh natural forces. Thus, on this reading, values at this first historical stage would admit of material explanation: like Hegel and Marx, Beauvoir claims that creative laboring activity is requisite for the realization of human freedom,[13] which, for her, takes the form of positing meaning and value; and we could take her to conceive of history as, up to a certain stage, a necessary progression—'necessary' in the restricted, historical sense, rather than the unrestricted, metaphysical one.[14]

However, there is significant ambiguity in the reconstruction I've just offered, due to Beauvoir's rhetorical tendency, as I emphasized above, to conclude her evolutionary and historical narratives with claims reaffirming the individual power to confer value on fact, no matter what the facts in question may be (e.g., 1949a: 129). This may be a point at which the Marxist strand of Beauvoir's view comes into tension with the Kantian or existentialist strand. Nevertheless, such a tension would not affect Beauvoir's diagnosis. Even if we conclude that Beauvoir's genealogy is historically necessary—unlike the narratives of other debunking genealogists—her genealogy nevertheless debunks the *current* necessity of women's subjugation, and she therefore demonstrates that contingency and debunking can be prised apart. Like Marx, for whom history necessarily proceeds through the development of class struggle and the accumulation of crises within capitalism, opening onto a newly privileged moment in which the proletarian class can finally take control of their situation, for Beauvoir, too, the historical necessity of women's subjugation has given way, in the intervening centuries, to the possibility for change.

But unlike Marx,[15] Beauvoir does not hold that the future will take the form of a teleologically necessary progression, as the past has. Instead, she holds that the past has furnished the appropriate conditions for divergence from its heretofore necessary course—for the future to take shape along newly contingent and

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[13] Reflecting on the nineteenth century, Beauvoir writes, "It is through labor that woman won her dignity as a human being; but it was a singularly difficult and slow conquest" (Beauvoir 1949a: 198).

[14] Bauer's (2001) extensive, and excellent, discussion of the ways in which Beauvoir draws from Hegel is a common touchstone in the scholarship; Beauvoir's appropriation (and critique) of Hegelianism and Marxism is also quite explicit in the *Second Sex* itself: see Beauvoir's application of the master/slave dialectic to women (1949a: 115-7, 323-4), appropriation of the 'tragedy of unhappy conscience' (1949a: 240), and references to Hegel in the Introduction (1949a: 19, 27), as well as her engagement with historical materialism (1949a: 98-108; 188-203).

[15] See Allen (this volume) for a genealogical reading of Marx's *Capital*, which concludes that, unlike Beauvoir, Marx offers a *vindicatory* genealogy of capitalism and its future progression to communism; I am indebted to her for conversations on this point.

branching paths. In other words, the past has furnished the appropriate conditions of possibility for women's actualization of freedom: conditions that have historically been present for (some) men, but not, up until recently, for women. Beauvoir criticizes Marx and Engels for holding that the industrial revolution would entail women's liberation; instead, due to their docility, refusal to unionize, and lack of solidarity, women have been even more exploited under capitalism than men (1949a: 197-200).

Thus, unlike Marx and Engels, Beauvoir holds that there is nothing inevitable about women's liberation through class struggle and industrialization, since their liberation is also dependent on how they choose to actualize their 'possibilities' (1949a: 200). However, she agrees that the new technologies made possible through industrialization—not merely technologies of production, however, but, even more decisively, technologies controlling *re*production (1949a: 203-209)—can be taken to constitute an important *enabling condition* for the actualization of women's freedom. For Beauvoir, industrialization is at most a condition of possibility for freedom, and not sufficient to entail freedom. As a result, the appropriate conditions are finally in place for women's freedom to emerge as an *ethical* problem—precisely because its realization is *not* necessarily entailed by past events. Past necessity, then, gives way to future contingency.

### *Morality as ideology and the problem of moral intelligibility*

In Beauvoir's genealogy of biological and historical conditions, we are offered an account that helps to explain how women's current situation of oppression came to be, whether it concerns what Beauvoir takes to be facts about women's bodies and the intrinsic inequities of human reproduction, or the ways in which these bodily differences have been exploited throughout history to ensure that men have always had the upper hand. In the first case, Beauvoir claims that these facts only take on meaning within a given value system; in the second, she claims that that very value system has been created by men. Thus, even though it could be the case that physiological facts about men and women have no relevance for their lived experience, the current social structure is one in which such facts *do* have outsized relevance, because it is one in which values and ethical judgments reflect patriarchal dominance. In other words, women find themselves in the disconcerting circumstance of living a morality that is not theirs. In such a context, normative considerations actually work *against* their possibilities for emancipation rather than *for* them. While the material conditions of Beauvoir's present moment seem, for the first time, to enable women's full agency, women

find themselves enmeshed within the masculinist construction of values, such that the very texture of evaluative language deprives them of the resources to accurately diagnose and critique their situation.[16] Call this the *moral intelligibility* thesis: Beauvoir holds that, under conditions of patriarchy, women are often unable to make the wrong of their own situation fully intelligible to themselves or to others *as* a wrong.

In my view, this is a central element of Beauvoir's wider account of oppression and why a genealogy is needed before patriarchal mystifications can be dispelled —one that has not gained much traction in the literature. Beauvoir claims that "the value of muscular strength, of the phallus, of the tool can only be defined within a world of values"; the problem is that that world of values is constituted by men in order to sustain an androcentric system of dominance (1949a: 108). Instead, some commentators have taken issue with the apparently moralizing nature of Beauvoir's criticisms of women's conduct, charging her with blaming victims of oppression for 'choosing' their situation (Le Dœuff 1980, Butler 1986), while others have instead minimized the moral dimension of Beauvoir's critique (Garcia 2018: 33-34).

These charges, however, each presuppose that the moral dimension of Beauvoir's diagnosis is not *itself* subject to the very critique of morality undertaken throughout the *Second Sex*. Beauvoir holds that the current constitution of moral and normative resources presents an obstacle to women's flourishing. The felt wrong of women's oppression remains, to a certain degree, unintelligible to them; it does not always rise to the level of possible articulation. The response that Beauvoir therefore advocates is not so much appropriate moral conduct for women as the practice of what she calls 'moral invention'. This is an extension of the practice of creating new values that men have long been engaged in, as Beauvoir makes clear in the "History" chapter: men's immersion in the activity of creation, fashioning new ends and laboring to produce new objects, also results, over time, in the construction of a value system in their own image.

Thus, it remains unclear whether the notion of 'moral conduct' is even coherent, given the situation women find themselves in. Beauvoir claims that women are often cast outside the bounds of conventional morality altogether. They are ostracized as 'immoral' for having an abortion, being raped, or lying to husbands who abuse them, while the avenues considered 'moral' open to them are actively detrimental to their flourishing (1949b: 335, 338, 427, 497-8). Thus, what is called for is not so much compliance with a given moral code—which Beauvoir doubts

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[16] In this respect, Beauvoir's account parallels Marx's critique of morality as ideology (as well as Nietzsche's rejection of morality); see, e.g., Wood (2004), chapter 10.

can be supplied in abstraction from a given social and economic context[17]—as the courage to call such codes into question whenever they serve to mask oppression.

On Beauvoir's diagnosis, a crucial aspect of oppression consists in the idea that values are *imposed* on the oppressed. In the "Myths" section, for instance, she claims that, given that men have "invented" women, or at least a certain construction thereof, men are really embracing themselves when they "clutch in their arms the being on whom they have imposed their values and laws" (1949a: 304). Men "have created the values… while women have never disputed this control" (1949a: 222); "the categories according to which men think the world are constituted from their point of view, as absolutes" (1949a: 400). Any positive changes for women have been mere advancements within this value scheme: it's just been an "evolution of male ethics [*éthique mâle*]", for instance, that has brought about the dissemination of birth control partially freeing women from forced reproduction (1949a: 222).

Living within an ethical framework that they had no part in creating, "women are doomed to immorality" (1949b: 310). For women, what is considered right conduct is really wrongful conduct, and vice versa; they occupy an upside-down world in which their perceptions can find no purchase within the domain of social meaning.[18] Beauvoir claims that the moral commendation of women consists in evaluating their proximity to inhuman types, such as "the strong woman, the admirable mother, the honest woman" (1949b: 310). It is enough for women to "think, dream, sleep, desire, or breathe without instruction" to fall short, thereby becoming subject to moral censure (1949b: 310).

We might therefore take Beauvoir to agree with Marx that morality is merely ideology. Much of Beauvoir's analysis emphasizes the inverted quality of the evaluative language applied to women. What are called feminine virtues, for instance, only harm women, marking the deformation of their character rather than the presence of the virtues. Beauvoir comments, "We see useless and charming virtues proliferate among women, such as their modesty, their pride, their fragility. In one sense, they are defects: they engender lies, susceptibilities, and fits of anger" (1949a: 383). The modes of conduct Beauvoir considers most taboo, most 'immoral', in society—abortion, prostitution, 'letting oneself' be raped —are, at the time of her writing, the sole burdens of women, leaving them "browbeaten by a morality that retains its prestige in their eyes even though their

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[17] "I was in error when I thought that I could define a morality independent of social context" (Beauvoir 1963: 99).

[18] There are degrees, of course, to which women's experiences do receive uptake, but not at a sufficiently public scale; see the account below of discussions between women, behind closed doors.

conduct cannot be made to conform to it" (1949b: 335). The fact of being oppressed can even *morally stunt* women: traits including "mediocrity, meanness, shyness, pettiness, laziness, frivolity, and servility" with which women are reproached are simply an expression of women's impoverished avenues of choice (1949b: 485). In either case, traits which reflect the stunting of women's character can only be perceived as through a *camera obscura*, whether valorized or condemned. In neither case can they be seen as symptoms of a broader injustice, and in neither case can *resistance* be rightly seen as a virtuous response to women's situation. As a result, it is difficult for a given woman to articulate and diagnose such distortions; the wrong at issue remains, to varying degrees, *morally unintelligible*—either for uptake by society at large, or, in many cases, to the woman herself.

Often, women's subjection to a value system that so evidently excludes them restricts them to a deficient range of moral response, resulting in a diminished capacity for agency. Referring to actresses in Hollywood, Beauvoir writes: "The kept woman often internalizes her dependence: subject to [public] opinion, she recognizes their values; she admires the 'high society' and adopts their customs" (1949b: 445). These women, having been given a rare, and nevertheless limited, avenue for self-actualization, find their continued prospects for success contingent on their acceptance of the prevailing value system. A similar choice, Beauvoir notes, faced women suddenly stripped of their rights in ancient Rome: "When the dissolution of the family renders the prior private virtues useless and outmoded, there is no longer any morality [*aucune morale*] available to women. They have the choice between two solutions: either they obstinately persist in respecting the same values as their forebears, or they cease to recognize any" (1949a: 156). In either case, women face a bleak array of possible responses: internalization, the revival of a value system rendered obsolete, or wholesale renunciation of morality.

### *Moral revisability and moral invention*

However, unlike Marx (as he is usually read, at least), I suggest that Beauvoir's diagnosis of the ideological function of moral discourse under patriarchy does not lead her to reject morality altogether. Instead, genealogically uncovering the iniquitous use of normative evaluation opens up a broader project. If morality's function as tool of the patriarchy makes it difficult for women to render their own situation morally intelligible or normatively salient, to others or to themselves, the solution Beauvoir proposes is what she terms the virtue of 'moral invention'.

Beauvoir attempts to criticize the current scope and employment of what we

might call 'social morality' (Calhoun 2016), while nevertheless retaining the force of moral evaluation in criticizing the unjust situation women find themselves in. She thus emphasizes the extramoral capacities and constraints required for a given agent to overcome the perpetuation of oppression. As in Fricker's (2007) account of epistemic (particularly hermeneutical) injustice, which stresses the jointly epistemic and ethical dimensions of the virtuous response called for in situations of oppression, Beauvoir claims that there can be constraints an oppressed agent faces merely in order to make sense of her own experiences of mistreatment, constraints that can impede access to the hermeneutical resources needed in order to fashion solutions or seek help. Moral philosophers have recently begun to acknowledge the uneasy moral status of agential complicity in structural injustice: neither obligatory nor supererogatory, responsiveness to systemic injustice fits only imperfectly within the traditional moral frame of juridical responsibility on the one hand, and praise and commendation on the other (Knowles 2019, 2021; Zheng 2021).

Thus, Beauvoir does not appeal to a given normative framework in order to ground practices of moral criticism. In fact, her diagnosis of the current patriarchal function of morality leads her to be suspicious that we can take our understanding of the content of morality for granted. If not all structural wrongs are morally intelligible as such to women (the *moral intelligibility* thesis), what is called for is the political virtue of ethical refashioning or moral invention (the *moral invention* thesis). While I go on to situate this virtue as jointly ethical and epistemic, which might call to mind Fricker's notion of hermeneutical injustice, Beauvoir's conception of moral invention is importantly distinct from Fricker's construal of hermeneutical injustice and its moral implications. Indeed, hermeneutical injustice ultimately collapses into the conventional model of individual moral responsibility, which it attributes solely to the hearer of a victim of hermeneutical injustice, while the speaker is situated outside of the normative or moral frame altogether: only the hearer can practice the virtue of epistemic justice (Fricker 2007: 159-161). Beauvoir's conception of moral invention is instead focused, as I understand it, on *changing* the normative frame, shifting it to encompass the experiences of marginalized agents and situating these agents as locii of virtue in their own right —where virtue, here, is not strictly individual, but is *political*, calling for collective action; is not strictly moral, but also *epistemic*, given Beauvoir's conception of moral unintelligibility under patriarchy.

In one striking passage, Beauvoir suggests that, because women so often find themselves grappling with how to make space for themselves within a value system that does not reflect them, they already have a more developed capacity

than men for moral reinvention. When it comes to friendship between women, Beauvoir writes that women seek an affirmation of their own perceived reality which so often does not accord with the range of social meanings available to them—"an affirmation", that is, "of that universe that is common to them" (1949b: 405):

> They join forces to create a sort of counter-universe whose values prevail over male values. Reunited, they find the force to shake their chains: they negate men's sexual domination by confiding in each other about their frigidity, in cynically teasing male appetites or lack of prowess; they contest, too, the male and intellectual superiority of their husband or of men in general. They compare their experiences: pregnancies, births, their illnesses, or those of their children, household tasks, each become essential events in human history. Their work is no longer just technique: in transmitting recipes or cleaning methods, they give them the dignity of a secret science grounded in oral tradition.

> Sometimes they examine moral problems together. The 'little correspondences' of women's magazines give a good indication of these exchanges. An 'advice column' reserved for men can hardly be imagined, since men meet each other in the world that is *their* world. Instead, women have to define, measure, and explore their own domain. They talk mostly about beauty advice, recipes, and knitting patterns, asking for advice, but sometimes real worries [*vraies angoisses*] pierce through the appetite for gossip and self-display. The woman knows that the male code is not her own, that men themselves don't expect her to observe it, since they push her to abortion, adultery, to faults, betrayals, and lies that they officially condemn. She therefore asks other women to help her in defining a sort of 'contextual law [*loi du milieu*]', a women's moral code. It is not merely out of malice that women spend so much time criticizing and commenting on the behavior of their friends—to judge them and to conduct themselves, they need much more moral invention than men. (1949b: 405-6)

Already inchoate in women's ordinary experience among each other, then, is a capacity to revalue extant values. The conventionally denigrated tasks with which women are charged—cooking, cleaning, makeup—are elevated above 'mere technique' to the rank of a 'science'; their so-called 'frigidity' is reevaluated, from a feminine deficiency to a problem with men;[19] male superiority, more broadly, is contested. Women carry out the refashioning of conventional values as a collective practice, among each other—with friends, in advice columns, in women's magazines. And all of this amounts to a rejection of the 'male code' that women know isn't for them, that is essentially "hypocritical" (1949b: 498), in favor of the

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[19] Though see also discussion in Altman (2020): "Repulsive as we find the concept of frigidity, what it replaced was in some ways worse: the good woman and mother as passionless" (47).

construction of a new 'women's moral code'; it amounts, in other words, to what Beauvoir calls a general practice of 'moral invention'.

Nevertheless, Beauvoir views this general practice of moral invention among women as still insufficient, because it remains largely private, cloistered within the pages of fashion magazines or behind the closed door of the kitchen during dinner parties. The 'counter-universe' women thereby construct remains limited, secretive, and marginal; it does not rise to the level of a genuine contestation of the 'male code'. By contrast, there can be nothing private or individual about the way out of women's oppression: in the final analysis, Beauvoir asserts that it can only be won through "a collective evolution" (1949b: 645).

Yet Beauvoir makes clear that she takes the virtue of moral invention thereby evinced, however rudimentarily, to be a necessary component of women's emancipation. She criticizes psychoanalytic diagnoses of women's experience for having no room for "moral invention", for proposing only an "ersatz morality" which admits of "failures, never of creations" (1949a: 95). She speaks approvingly of "pulling back the limits of the possible and operating a transmutation of values" (1949a: 126), of "revising in every instant established values" (1949a: 385), of "surpassing all recognized values" (1949a: 384).

By contrast, one of the defining aspects of Beauvoir's conception of ethical fault is an acceptance of established values, or preconceived reasons or justifications: "From day to day, the woman feels the ambiguity of her condition. Beyond her sterile protestations, she could have the courage to put into question established optimism, preconceived [*toutes faites*] values, hypocritical and unthreatening morality" (1949a: 131). [20] Beauvoir insists repeatedly that both the mother and the courtesan, among other feminine 'types', are figures who help themselves to merely given values or justifications [*valeurs toutes faites, justifications toutes faites*] (1949b: 346, 380, 449, 465). Beauvoir also refers to 'fixed' values, suggesting that genuine values are instead mutable, subject to moral invention: "Virility is a sacred aura, a fixed, given value" [*valeur donée, figée*]" (1949b: 503).[21]

Against these typical strategies for assuming one's femininity, Beauvoir cites the "moving example" of George Eliot's depiction of the moral life in *The Mill on the Floss*. While the men of the book "obstinately affirm accepted principles" and "fix [*figent*] morality into moral rules", the female protagonist "reverses" their rules,

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[20] '*Tout fait*' is translated as 'ready-made' in Borde and Malovany-Chevalier's recent translation of Beauvoir. I have opted for 'given' or 'preconceived', adjectives which strike me as more natural when it comes to talk of value, reason-giving, and justification.

[21] Compare to claims such as "men feel entitled to fix [the woman] as an object [*on prétend la figer en objet*] and thereby doom her to immanence" (1949a: 34).

emerging "as a pure freedom beyond the fossilized world of the men" (1949a: 131). Along with Eliot, Beauvoir draws continuously from women's own narratives, including Colette Audry, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Marie Bashkirtseff, Dorothy Parker, and Sophia Tolstoy, gesturing to the subversive, transvaluative possibility of creation under patriarchal conditions. Beauvoir's genealogy of morality thereby has a *possibilizing* function (Lorenzini 2020): it serves to demonstrate, in part, the possibility of resistance (here, the possibility of a transvaluation of the patriarchal value system), given the numerous examples, however fragmentary, partial, and isolated, it cites throughout history.

The role of moral invention can allow us to reframe the ongoing problem, posed in the literature, of how to reconstruct Beauvoir's ethical position and what normatively grounds her claim to critique. Many scholars do read Beauvoir as ultimately foundationalist, with the value of freedom constituting a fixed foundation for all other values (Fullbrook and Fullbrook 2008, Kruks 2012, Webber 2018). I am broadly sympathetic with these readings: in the *Ethics of Ambiguity*—which, however, Beauvoir later claimed, was "of all my books, [the one that] now irritates me the most" (1963: 97)—she argues, "Freedom is the source from which all meanings and all values spring" (33), helping to define a moral 'law': "The freedom of other men must be respected and they must be helped to free themselves. Such a law imposes limits upon action and at the same time immediately gives it a content" (1947: 86).

However, while freedom can plausibly be situated as the ultimate value for Beauvoir,[22] it is important to emphasize that she defines freedom *itself* in terms of creation, invention, and opening onto new 'freedoms' altogether. Freedom is realizable only "through a perpetual surpassing towards *other freedoms*" and entails "the metaphysical risk of a freedom that must *invent* its ends without assistance" (1949a: 33, 21, my emphasis). Thus, freedom for Beauvoir is a necessarily open-ended value, subject to ongoing construction and alteration.

As if to underscore the point, Beauvoir distinguishes two conceptions of freedom: one fixed, or 'abstract freedom' (which she rejects), and one open-ended and subject to recreation, or 'concrete freedom' (which she embraces) (Beauvoir 1947: 41, 86, 110; 1949a: 228n). She claims that freedom must "giv[e] itself a

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[22] Neither relativist nor realist, Beauvoir might be considered a constructivist: while a full consideration of Beauvoir's metaethics is beyond my scope here, Beauvoir claims that values are constructed by the valuing agent (whose evaluative perspective has been shaped within a given society, with all the inequities that entails): one might "think that values are in the world, in front of the human being, in spite of her, such that she only has to collect them. But Spinoza, and even more definitively Hegel, have already dissipated the false objectivity of this illusion"; "given values do not exist without me, whose hierarchy imposes itself on my decisions" (1944: 29, 91).

particular content" in order to serve as an authentic value; indeed, "very often, abstract freedom and concrete powers vary inversely" (1947: 42; 153).[23] Freedom, then, can itself be defined in terms of *the activity of* creating values, of moral invention. Freedom, so understood, is an imperative for us and for others, one has acquired the status of a universal. However, as the "History" chapter demonstrates, this conception of freedom is itself genealogizable: Beauvoir there demonstrates how freedom, as the positing of *new* values, emerged as a value over the course of human history, and thus how it came to play a foundational role for us in the present.

'Concrete freedom', in this sense, is cashed out more precisely in terms of constructive activity, where this is characterized, in turn, in terms of the creation of new possibilities for self and others: "The constructive activities of man take on a valid meaning only when they are taken on as a movement toward freedom. Reciprocally, this movement is concrete: discoveries, inventions, industries, culture, paintings, and books… open concrete possibilities to men" (1947: 113). Freedom is only realizable if "the situation *opens up more possibilities* to [the agent]" (1947: 44; see also 121-2). Beauvoir therefore reproaches the current state of society because, although it is true that "nowadays, women on the whole are inferior to men, this only means that their situation opens *fewer possibilities* for them" (1949a: 27); the problem, then, is that women's "*possibilities* have to be defined" by women themselves rather than dictated by natural fact (1949a: 75).

By dint of her references to 'possibilities', Beauvoir suggests that oppression does not merely have material effects, but also epistemic effects, which in turn have modal implications. Oppression affects what it is possible for us to render *intelligible* to others and to ourselves in the domain of practical reasoning, and thus constrains our sense, not only of possible moral reprobation of what is happening *to* us, but also of what it is possible for us to *do*. If acting freely leads me to posit new values, and thereby to create new possibilities for myself and others, realizing my freedom can in turn be characterized in terms of the practice of moral invention and the expansion of moral intelligibility. Genealogy can help here, by showing the contingency of the currently dominant moral system, as well as possibilities for resistance and transvaluation. Yet if freedom, for Beauvoir, is not just moral, but also calls for the practice of epistemic virtue, this extramoral dimension is missed if Beauvoir's view of freedom is simply reconstructed as the missing moral foundation for her view.

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[23] As Kruks (2012) claims, "Consciousness and freedom remain crucial aspects of 'the human' for her—but not as abstract universals" (26).

*Conclusion: the ultimate status of genealogy for Beauvoir*

Beauvoir's genealogy of how women came to be constituted as the second sex, I have argued, can be read as a genealogy of morality—at least in terms of the current function morality serves for the patriarchy. Yet, I have suggested, Beauvoir's genealogy of morality does not easily fit within the prevailing frameworks for understanding either genealogy or morality.

Beauvoir's genealogical method does not bottom out in the *rejection* of morality, as has been argued for the 'morality critics' Marx, Nietzsche, or Freud. Yet nor does Beauvoir unequivocally affirm the foundational role of moral evaluation, either in order to ground her criticism of patriarchy, or to fix a standard of virtuous conduct for bucking complicity in the status quo. Beauvoir instead emphasizes the problem of what I have termed *moral intelligibility*, in response to which she suggests the practice of *moral invention*. Beauvoir does not take the harm social morality does to women to constitute a *reductio* of morality as such; instead, it constitutes a premise in her broader argument that the current employment of normative practices can and should be *revised* to accommodate richer possibilities for description, diagnosis, and evaluation.

I have therefore claimed that Beauvoir's practice of genealogy does not easily fit within the conventional rubric of subversive or vindicatory, undermining or justificatory genealogical methods (Craig 2007). For Beauvoir (as for Marx), women's oppression may very well have been historically *necessary* for a given stage of human development, as may have been the adoption of a masculinist framework of values. But, instead of taking this conclusion to *vindicate* current sexist practices, patriarchal institutions, or masculinist values, as has been the case for other justificatory (in particular, state of nature) genealogies (Williams 2000, Craig 2007, Fricker 2007), Beauvoir charges such an inference with the genetic fallacy.[24] The mere fact that a given social arrangement may have been necessary in a given time and place does not entail that it remains necessary for us today, and the way in which it may have come about in the past does not entail a given role it should continue to play in contemporary life. Beauvoir draws *subversive conclusions*, then, even from her genealogy of the overwhelming *lack* of contingency of women's oppression in human history. We might conclude, then, that there is a tension between the Kantian or existentialist dimension of Beauvoir's thought, which posits that human freedom always entails the possibility of acting otherwise and that the values we imbue on social and material reality are—to

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[24] See discussion of the genetic fallacy and ideology critique (Geuss 1981).

varying degrees—up to us, and the Marxist or Hegelian strand, which posits at least a given stage of human history as necessitated by material and physiological conditions—of human reproduction, of subsistence in the harsh realities of nature, of the activity of work and the division of labor. Either way, genealogy for Beauvoir cannot tell us anything about how we ought to act *now*, since the nature of our response is ultimately up to us—up to the inventive transvaluation of our past and present. But it can indicate the contours of our situation:[25] the obstacles with which we are confronted, and the enabling conditions for our freedom.[26]

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[25] I am indebted to Michelle Kosch for pushing me on Beauvoir's conception of 'situation'.

[26] Versions of this paper were presented at a panel of the Society for Analytical Feminism at the Eastern Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in January 2020 and at the "Genealogy" conference at the University of Warwick in June 2021. I am indebted to audience members on either of these occasions for their helpful feedback, and, in particular, to comments by Amy Allen, Sacha Golob, David Owen, Guy Longworth, Alexander Prescott-Couch, Andrew Huddleston, and Daniel Rodriguez-Navas. In addition, I am particularly grateful to Fraser McBride, Michelle Kosch, Charlotte Knowles, Chloé de Canson, Daniele Lorenzini, Amia Srinivasan, Axel Honneth, and an anonymous reviewer for their comments on written versions of this paper, and to Nancy Bauer for discussion.

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