13 The Concept of Transcendence in Beauvoir and Sartre

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Scholars of twentieth-century French existentialism have traditionally assumed that Simone de Beauvoir borrows her concept of transcendence from the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre. In this chapter, I work to demonstrate that Beauvoir develops her concept of transcendence independently of Sartre, with the result that the two have different notions of transcendence. In her early ethical treatise *Pyrrhus and Cinéas,* Beauvoir creates a sense of transcendence as constructive activity in the world, arguing that only transcendence can provide meaning for human existence. Not only does her concept of transcendence differ significantly from Sartre's metaphysical concept of transcendence in *Being and Nothingness,* but Beauvoir also develops this concept of transcendence with reference to a host of writers in Western literature and philosophy—including Hegel, Pascal, Horace, Valéry, Gide, and Epicurus—rather than with reference to Sartre.

Pyrrhus and Cinéas, written in 1943 at the suggestion of a publisher seeking a new contribution in existentialism, was Beauvoir's first published philosophical essay. Although Beauvoir later said that she worked consciously within a Sartrean framework in writing this and other essays, she also remarked that *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* provided an opportunity to reconcile Sartrean views on freedom with her own views on the significance of situation in undermining or encouraging the realization of freedom.[1] Largely a treatise on the justification of human existence, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* provided Beauvoir an opportunity to explore the themes of political violence and the interdependence of human freedoms, themes she addressed as well in her novel *The Blood of Others.* Although the treatise was well received after its publication in postwar France, it has since remained relatively neglected. An English translation was finally published in 2004 by Marybeth Timmerman, Margaret Simons, and Sylvie le Bon de Beauvoir.

The uniquely Beauvoirian sense of transcendence at play in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* continues throughout the works she published in the later 1940s. Transcendence takes on an ethical dimension when incorporated in an existentialist account of oppression in *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* in which Beauvoir makes clear that transcendence is achieved, not in the relatively ephemeral labor required for the maintenance of life, but in the "constructive movements" of men and women who set up the world of tomorrow and push the progress of humanity forward (*EA,* 82–83). The concept of transcendence gains its greatest prominence in *The Second Sex,* in which Beauvoir couples transcendence with the Hegelian concept of immanence in her analyses of female oppression. Throughout these works, Beauvoir occasionally trades between a Sartrean sense of transcendence and her own sense of transcendence, but, particularly in *The Second Sex,* the predominant meaning of the concept is not Sartrean.

It should not be surprising that Beauvoir departs from a Sartrean sense of transcendence in her early ethical treatises, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity.* She writes at the outset of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that an existentialist ethics can be founded neither upon Sartre's ontological freedom nor upon the popular sense of freedom as obtaining chosen ends, but must be founded upon a "*liberté morale,*" or ethical freedom (*EA,* 24–32). The concepts of freedom and transcendence are closely related in the writings of Sartre and Beauvoir, and Beauvoir's *liberté morale*—in which human beings found our freedom in deliberately willing both ourselves and others free—is realized concretely in transcendent activity. We embrace our freedom and situate ourselves around other free beings by propelling ourselves into the world in constructive or self-expressive projects. In *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* Beauvoir derives moral and political obligations to support the freedom of others from the interdependence of human transcendences. Sartrean ontology, in contrast, not only creates a fundamental separation among human beings but also makes nonsense of a moral failure to act freely or promote the freedom of others.

In the final section of this chapter, I examine the arguments Beauvoir provides for an ethical obligation to will the freedom of others. Sartre clearly announces in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* that an authentic moral agent wills the freedom of others, but he simply states this claim without furnishing an explanation.[2] In *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*—a treatise written two years prior to Sartre's lecture "Existentialism Is a Humanism" in 1945—Beauvoir provides at least four arguments in favor of an existentialist moral imperative to support the freedom of others.[3] In brief, willing ourselves free requires willing the free-

dom of others, for a necessary condition of the full realization of our freedom is the presence of other free beings.

Transcendence in *Being and Nothingness* and *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*

In developing a phenomenology of consciousness in *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre frequently uses the term "transcendence" to describe the intentional directedness of human consciousness toward various objects. "All consciousness," he writes in his introduction on the pursuit of being, "transcends itself in order to reach an object" (*BN,* li).[4] The phenomenological content present in consciousness derives from the objects of consciousness; conscious subjectivity is in itself a nothingness, with neither content nor any determining essence. It is a pure and spontaneous movement toward the world, an intentional transcending projection toward objects which it is not. Human subjectivity indeed never fails to be a free and active transcendence, for even if one is in a state of rest, consciousness itself remains neither passive nor causally predetermined. The total freedom of consciousness stems from its spontaneous transcendence of what is given toward unrealized goals, ideals, and projects. Every conscious action involves an intentional projection or reaching outward toward what is not, and what is not can be determined only by a free intentional consciousness (*BN,* 435ff.).

In addition to describing consciousness as a transcendence toward the world, Sartre also uses the term "transcendent" to designate objectivity, as in his claim that values are not "transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity." Values, for Sartre, spring only from human subjectivity and acts of choice: we choose to distinguish flowers from weeds, or justice from injustice, while apprehending the world through categories that are not antecedently given but that depend upon our desires, interests, and purposes (*BN,* 38). On the other hand, Sartre uses the term "transcended" in describing objectification, as when one subjectivity faces another in an ineluctable mutual struggle for domination and recognition. As Sartre characterizes the basic dilemma of human relations, "one must either transcend [and therefore objectify] the Other or allow oneself to be transcended [objectified] by him. The essence of the relations between consciousnesses is not the *Mitsein;* it is conflict" (*BN,* 429).

Notably, although Sartre emphasizes the absolute freedom of transcendent subjectivity in the introduction and conclusion to *Being and Nothingness,* a substantial portion of the third part of the work characterizes human reality as comprising both free subjectivity and our embodied nature. As embodied and

historically situated living beings, we are conditioned and limited by an existing and given world (*BN,* 305–26). We are embedded in facticity, the factual dimensions of ourselves ranging from our birth, race, and ethnicity; to the physiological structure of our bodies; to our past, class, and character. Because we are embodied subjectivities, we experience ourselves as situated in a concrete world, rather than as pure transcendence (*BN,* 328ff.). In spite of the limitations imposed upon us by facticity, however, Sartre maintains that we remain inescapably free, for consciousness is pure transcendence, continually negating and transcending what is given toward nonexistent potentialities. As a transcending consciousness, I am free from the factual dimension of myself, and any limitations on my freedom exist only in relation to my freely chosen projects (*BN,* 520–31).

Beauvoir's early ethical treatises, particularly *Pyrrhus and Cinéas,* use the concept of transcendence in part as Sartre uses the concept throughout *Being and Nothingness* and other works in which transcendence is associated with the movement of the for-itself and contrasted with facticity. In *Pyrrhus and Cinéas,* transcendence sometimes refers to the "perpetual surpassing" of intentional consciousness and, occasionally, to the process whereby one creates oneself at every moment through some project. Transcendence is the spontaneous directedness of consciousness at something, a reaching outward beyond oneself toward some end, or a "[throwing oneself] toward the future" (*PC,* 111). In this sense of transcendence, all human beings continually transcend themselves, for every look, act, or thought of an intentional consciousness is an act of transcendence (*PC,* 98).

The clear undertones of the Sartrean for-itself in this early characterization of transcendence has led even revisionist Beauvoir scholarship to concede a Sartrean influence on *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* in particular. Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, for example, writes that while *The Second Sex* develops a Hegelian rather than Sartrean sense of transcendence, "in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* Beauvoir mainly uses the concept of transcendence as Sartre defines it in *Being and Nothingness:* transcendence is tied to the actions of the intentional consciousness."[5] Although Lundgren-Gothlin and other Beauvoir scholars emphatically reject the view that *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* as a whole merely parrots or defends Sartrean concepts, they see a predominant Sartrean influence on the concepts of freedom and transcendence in this work in particular.[6]

I would like to suggest that in addition to the clear Sartrean sense of transcendence present throughout *Pyrrhus and Cinéas,* this work also introduces a specifically Beauvoirian sense of transcendence as constructive activity; it does not adhere throughout to Sartre's metaphysical concept of transcendence. Beau-

voir's sense of transcendence as constructive or creative activity gains greater prominence in *The Second Sex,* but it emerges here in the course of Beauvoir's response to the suggestion scattered throughout Western literature that human unhappiness arises from active engagement with the world.[7] Pascal, for instance, writes in his *Pensées* that "all the unhappiness of men arises from a single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own chamber."[8] Beauvoir finds this idea repeated in the French essayist Gide and prefigured in the writings of Aristippus, Epicurus, and Horace:

> It is the moral of Aristippus, that of Horace's *Carpe diem,* and Gide's *Nourritures* [*Fruits of the Earth*]. Let us turn away from the world, from undertakings and conquests; let us devise no more projects; let us remain at home, at rest at the heart of our enjoyment. (*PC,* 95)

Contrasting repose and relaxation with movement and transcendence, Beauvoir suggests, against Pascal and others, that it is *disengagement* from the world through repose that cannot provide fulfillment for human beings, for human transcendence cannot be successfully realized in states of rest (*PC,* 97–100). The basic nature of transcendence is active movement, perpetual surpassing, or going beyond the given; and transcendence is thus truly achieved, not in the enjoyment of relaxation, but in some endeavor that moves an individual beyond the present status quo toward an open future. One achieves transcendence when one "studies science, writes poetry, or builds motors" (*PC,* 110), not when one sits idly by, devising no project, or relaxing in passive enjoyment.

The contrast between passivity and activity in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas,* which is taken up into the dichotomy between transcendence and immanence in *The Second Sex,* is drawn from a host of French, German, Latin, and Greek writings. Beauvoir identifies and contests the implicit endorsements of passivity in figures such as Aristippus, Horace, Epicurus, Gide, and Pascal and develops the association between transcendence and activity with reference to Hegel, Valéry, Arland, and Chardonne, rather than with reference to Sartre (*PC,* 95–98). In fact, Beauvoir mentions Sartre only twice within the text of *Pyrrhus and Cinéas.* Her sense of transcendence as constructive activity does partly incorporate a Heideggerian and Sartrean notion of project, but the distinction developed in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* between constructive action and the passive enjoyment of life is absent in the Heideggerian notion of project and the Sartrean sense of transcendence. Sartre's ontological conception of transcendence as the movement of the for-itself, indeed, does not permit a distinction between the constructive activity of transcendence and the passivity of rest, for intentional

movements of the for-itself occur even in relaxation and withdrawal from the world.

Beauvoir's association of transcendence with constructive activity, on the other hand, enables her to respond to the suggestion made by Pyrrhus that when finished with his world conquests, he will enjoy the paradise of rest. Since restful paradise—conceived as an existence without constructive endeavors—promises only eternal tedium, Pyrrhus "lacks imagination" in suggesting that he will rest when finished with his world conquests. It is written into the human condition that we are not fulfilled upon attaining a goal but constantly surpass everything given. Associating transcendence with active pursuits in the world once again, Beauvoir writes:

> Paradise is rest; it is transcendence abolished, a state of things that is given and does not have to be surpassed. But then, what shall we do [in restful paradise]? In order for the air there to be breathable, it must leave room for actions and desires. . . . The beauty of the promised land is that it promised new promises. Immobile paradises promise us nothing but eternal ennui. . . . Once returned home, [Pyrrhus] will hunt, he will legislate, he will go to war again. If he tries to stay truly at rest, he will only yawn. (*PC,* 98)

Pyrrhus and Cinéas thus uses "transcendence" to refer not only to the upsurge of the for-itself, nor only to the projection of the self into the world through any conscious activity, but also to an active mode of existence, filled with accomplishments and a continual surpassing of a given state of affairs. One salient difficulty with the simultaneous presence of these concepts of transcendence in this work, however, is the incommensurability of the former Sartrean senses of transcendence with the latter sense of transcendence as constructive activity. Where the latter Beauvoirian sense excludes passivity and repose from transcendence, the metaphysical sense includes any movement of intentional consciousness, even those that occur in moments of passivity. Transcendence cannot consistently refer to any subjective movement of consciousness and yet to the considerably more circumscribed set of human actions that accomplish, produce, or push back the boundaries of the present.

Some of the literature discussing Beauvoir's use of transcendence has granted that the concepts of transcendence and immanence are "contradictory and illusive,"[9] and in the respect that incongruent concepts of transcendence occur simultaneously in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and in other treatises, this assessment appears warranted. However, the presence of different concepts of transcen-

dence in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* may also reflect the very development of the concept of transcendence in this work. The eventual maturation of the concept of transcendence in *The Second Sex,* in which transcendence designates an active, creative mode of existence, indicates that Beauvoir ultimately finds a more Hegelian sense of transcendence to be more fruitful than a metaphysical sense of transcendence. *Pyrrhus and Cinéas,* at any rate, clearly breaks beyond a Sartrean sense of transcendence to develop a sense that is more illuminating for questions concerning the human need for meaningful action in the world.

Transcendence and Immanence in *The Second Sex*

Although Beauvoir's early ethical treatises incorporate a Hegelian and Sartrean concept of transcendence, associating transcendence with activity, progression, and the surpassing movement of consciousness, it is not until *The Second Sex* that Beauvoir appropriates the Hegelian concept of immanence as a counterpart to transcendence. Once paired with immanence in *The Second Sex,* transcendence refers to constructive work and, more generally, to an active mode of existence in which one attempts to surpass the present, burst out onto the future, and remain free from biological fate. Immanence, by contrast, designates the round of futile and largely uncreative chores necessary to sustain life as well as a mode of existence marked by passivity, ease, and submission to biological fate.

The concepts of transcendence and immanence in *The Second Sex* are multifaceted and simultaneously descriptive and normative, but the metaphysical meanings of transcendence largely drop out in *The Second Sex,* and transcendence and immanence become delineated primarily in terms of a typology of activities or active and passive modes of existing. The account of oppression developed in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* using the distinction between maintenance and progression is imported in full into *The Second Sex,* together with the thesis that an authentically lived existence requires that one establish reason for being for oneself through transcendent activities. Activities of transcendence include precisely those activities of progress, creation, and discovery that are opposed to the mere maintenance of life in *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* while the mechanical chores that minister to the life process are here activities of immanence.[10]

The Introduction to *The Second Sex* does contain two salient descriptions of transcendence in terms of Sartrean ontology,[11] but the majority of *The Second Sex* delineates transcendence and immanence primarily as a typology of activities.[12] Transcendence and immanence are contrasted not only in terms of

their relation to time—transcendence expands present horizons into the future, whereas immanence perpetuates the present—but also in terms of what transcendence and immanence accomplish. Achieved "in work and action" (*SS,*[13] 183), transcendence engages the individual in the world and situates him or her among other freedoms by laying a foundation for a new future, creating an enduring artifact, enabling individual self-expression, transforming the world, or in some other fashion contributing positively to the constructive endeavors of the human race. Transcendent activities—precisely the same as those distinguished from maintenance labor in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*—enable us to surpass the present "toward the totality of the universe and the infinity of the future" (*SS,* 471).[14]

Immanence, on the other hand, produces nothing durable through which we move beyond ourselves but merely (1) perpetuates life or (2) maintains the status quo. Activities of immanence include not only the everyday labors that sustain and repair the body and mind, like cooking, cleaning and, presumably, television watching, but also bureaucratic paper pushing and biological functions such as giving birth. Beauvoir occasionally characterizes immanence as repetitive and uncreative (*SS,* 65–69; 474–78), although immanence is not defined against transcendence in terms of its repetitiveness or uncreativity, for activities of immanence can involve creativity or self-expression in like manner as activities of transcendence can involve repetition. Activities of immanence are characteristically futile—immanence consumes time and labor but accomplishes nothing—and the combination of necessity and futility involved in maintenance labor, in turn, makes some forms of immanence necessarily repetitive. The labor required to cook, clean, wash, or rake leaves, for instance, is necessary for the maintenance of life but is eventually negated and brought to nothing once taken up into the endless cycle of life itself (*SS,* 474–478).

Since activities of immanence merely sustain life and achieve nothing more than its continuation, they cannot themselves serve as the justifying ground for living. *The Second Sex* employs a contrast between life and existence that mirrors the point made in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* concerning the inability of maintenance activities to lend meaning to human existence. "Life," Beauvoir writes here, "does not carry within itself its reasons for being, reasons that are more important than the life itself" (*SS,* 68). Reason for living must be established through some activity that reaches beyond the maintenance of life itself toward the future; otherwise one labors to maintain life in the absence of an initial reason for laboring to maintain life. Putting the matter in terms of the reproduction of species-life as a whole, Beauvoir writes:

> Here we have the key to the whole mystery. On the biological level a species is maintained only by creating itself anew; but this creation results only in repeating the same Life in more individuals. . . . In the animal, the freedom and variety of male activities are vain because no project is involved. . . . Whereas in serving the species, the human male also remodels the face of the earth, he creates new instruments, he invents, he shapes the future. (*SS,* 68)

Surpassing the repetition of biological life, man has historically represented transcendence, given his participation in the activities that set up the world over and against nature: he remodels the earth, creates new values, takes risks, fights, progresses, conquers—in short, he accomplishes what transcends the maintenance of life itself. Woman, on the other hand, has originally represented immanence, the repetition of life, given her bondage to the natural functions of childbirth and childrearing (*SS,* 65–69).

Notably, the reinterpretation of transcendence and immanence given above provides a partial defense of Beauvoir against contemporary feminist critics who maintain that *The Second Sex* incorporates a masculinist philosophical framework. Genevieve Lloyd and Charlene Haddock Siegfried, for instance, have assumed that Beauvoir's concepts of transcendence and immanence are imports of Sartrean metaphysics; these critics and others argue that the masculine elements of Sartrean existentialism render it inadequate for analyzing the female condition. As Siegfried summarizes her understanding of Beauvoirian transcendence:

> Transcendence refers to nothing less than the central thesis of Sartrean existentialism. . . . The free subject, in ordering his life, makes of himself something. . . . While the object is always some definite thing, the subject is nothing insofar as the subject, freed from all constraints, unconditionally chooses to choose and thus continuously creates and re-creates his self.[15]

Associating transcendence with free subjectivity and immanence with facticity, Siegfried proceeds to argue that the transcendence/immanence dichotomy glorifies male transcendence as a human value while undermining an acknowledgment of specifically female values based in women's experiences. Similarly, Lloyd argues that Beauvoir's indebtedness to the concepts of "Sartrean immanence" and "Sartrean transcendence" "left its [male] mark on the very concepts of 'transcendence' and 'immanence.'"[16]

These feminist critiques of Beauvoir clearly rest on a misinterpretation of her concepts of transcendence and immanence. Beauvoirian immanence emerges

in *The Second Sex* primarily with reference to Hegel and Marx. Sartre, indeed, rarely employs the term "immanence," preferring instead to speak of facticity and of the ontological given being-in-itself.[17] Furthermore, whereas Sartrean transcendence stands opposed to facticity rather than to the labor necessary to maintain life, Beauvoir associates transcendence primarily with constructive activity, using the dichotomy between transcendence and immanence to distinguish activities that lend life meaning from those that cannot. As I have shown, Beauvoir associates transcendence with Sartrean metaphysics only briefly in the Introduction to *The Second Sex,* but these initial associations betray the deeper meaning of Beauvoirian transcendence as developed throughout *The Second Sex* and other works.

Moreover, feminist critiques of *The Second Sex* as antithetical to feminine values overstate Beauvoir's denigration of maternity and do not acknowledge that Beauvoir's normative dichotomy between transcendence and immanence itself holds potential to critique continuing inequities in the institutions of motherhood and marriage. Although Beauvoir indeed does not admire feminine values, and although transcendence indeed distinguishes the human being, Beauvoir's view of motherhood is not unremittingly bleak. Her negative characterization of giving birth as an uncreative function has been distinguished in recent revisionist literature from her more positive portrayal of motherhood in the chapter on motherhood in *The Second Sex*.[18] In this discussion, Beauvoir notes that motherhood can be an enrichment for existence and can enable women to develop the value of generosity, although her larger point is that motherhood cannot alone serve as a reason for being (*SS,* 511; 522–27).

Critiquing the institution of motherhood rather than the experience of mothering, Beauvoir herself claims not that mothering per se is an activity of immanence but that the occupations consequent upon motherhood tend to mire women in immanence. Writing on the situation of women in antiquity, for instance, Beauvoir characterizes the domestic labors associated with raising children as activities of immanence, rather than motherhood itself as immanence:

> *The domestic labors* that fell to her lot because they were reconcilable with the cares of maternity *imprisoned her in repetition and immanence;* they were repeated from day to day in an identical form, which was perpetuated without change from century to century; they produced nothing new. (*SS,* 63; emphasis added)

The principal obstacle that motherhood presents to the free pursuit of transcendence is not the care of children itself (for childrearing can enable women to

create relatively durable human beings) but the tendency of motherhood to relegate women to activities of immanence in the private realm.

As I have argued elsewhere, Beauvoir's distinction between transcendent activity and labors of immanence can, in fact, lend positive support to a feminist critique of gender inequities in marriage and divisions of domestic labor.[19] An ethics directed by the pursuit of transcendence has, as an advantage over other ethical theories, a means of judging qualitatively inequitable divisions of domestic work. Beauvoir not only captures the basic character of housework as unfulfilling labor but also establishes a need to participate in work that lends meaning to human existence. A Kantian ethics, by comparison, can establish a moral wrong in qualitatively inequitable divisions of domestic labor if such divisions of labor treat women merely as means, but it is a normative distinction between transcendent work and immanent labor that underpins a moral obligation to share less-fulfilling forms of domestic maintenance labor. Since the transcendence/immanence dichotomy functions as a normative framework for critiquing inequitable divisions of domestic work, this dichotomy is, in fact, an important component in arguing for the continuing relevance of *The Second Sex.*

Ethical Freedom and the Freedom of Others

In this final section, I would like to examine Beauvoirian transcendence in the context of her concept of ethical freedom. In recent years, Simone de Beauvoir scholars have been at pains to point out that by emphasizing the notion of situated freedom and by distinguishing an ethical freedom apart from Sartre's ontological freedom, Beauvoir lays a groundwork for an existentialist ethics where Sartre does not.[20] For Sartre, human beings are always free within a given situation to choose our course of conduct and impose an interpretation or an attitude upon our situation; ontologically, the slave is as free as his master and can choose an authentic response to his objectification.[21] In shifting away from radical Sartrean freedom, Beauvoir argues at the outset of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that if freedom is identified with the pure nothingness of subjectivity and all human beings are inescapably free, it becomes senseless to speak of moral failures to act freely or to promote the freedom of others (*EA,* 26; 24–32). Noting an incompatibility between the conception of freedom needed for an ethics of ambiguity and that present in *Being and Nothingness,* Beauvoir writes:

> Now Sartre declares that every man is free, that there is no way of his not being free. When he wants to escape his destiny, he is still freely fleeing

> it. Does not this presence of a so to speak natural freedom contradict the notion of an ethical freedom [*liberté morale*]? What meaning can there be in the words *to will oneself free,* since at the beginning we *are* free? It is contradictory to set freedom up as something to be conquered if at first it is something given. (*EA,* 24)

Rather than relying on the notion of freedom at play in *Being and Nothingness,* Beauvoir speaks instead of a *liberté morale,* a normative rather than ontological freedom that is deliberately willed and can be abdicated in "laziness, heedlessness, capriciousness, [or] cowardice" (*EA,* 25). To assume an ethical freedom is to found ontological freedom, to "effect the transition from [ontology] to morality by establishing a genuine freedom on the original upsurge of our existence" (*EA,* 25).[22]

To assume an ethical freedom in willing oneself free is not an empty formula: ethical freedom is realized in engagement with the public world and in constructive activities, rather than in passivity, laziness, or idle enjoyment (*EA,* 78–81). Human beings do not truly exist apart from doing something, and it is therefore human action, in which we create and change the world, open up new possibilities to one another, or at least justify and reinvent the status quo, that first defines the freedom of an existentialist ethics. The creation of science, art, architecture, philosophy, and so forth exist in this light, not simply for their own sakes, nor for the achievement of progress or enlightenment, but also for the sake of realizing human freedom:

> The constructive activities of man take on a valid meaning only when they are assumed as a movement toward freedom; and, reciprocally, one sees that such a movement is concrete: discoveries, inventions, industries, culture, paintings, and books people the world concretely and open concrete possibilities to men. (*EA,* 80–81)

Whatever may be the particular content of an ethically free action, it aims to propel the individual into the world through her engagement in some project and, simultaneously, to open possibilities for the future for oneself and others.

As a willing oneself free, ethical freedom is realized in transcendent activities, or in other words, it is the ability to achieve transcendence, where transcendence is the surpassing of the present into the future through a creative endeavor that produces something durable or enables individual self-expression. "Transcendence" and "freedom" are, in fact, frequently used interchangeably by Beauvoir: both terms can designate either the surpassing movement of consciousness itself or the founding of consciousness in a creative project. How-

ever, Beauvoir does distinguish "freedom" from "transcendence": where "transcendence" is fundamentally a surpassing movement and a projecting of oneself into the world, in Beauvoir's early ethical writings "freedom" often refers to the fundamental Sartrean separateness of each human being and, occasionally, to the absence of coercion or causal determination. Writing on human interdependency in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas,* Beauvoir distinguishes human freedom from the transcendent projecting of the self: "Freedoms are neither united nor opposed, they are separate. It is in projecting himself into the world that a man situates himself in situating other men around him" (*PC,* 108). Whereas individual freedoms are initially separate, it is in the transcendent project that we situate ourselves in a human world and create an interdependency out of an initial separateness.

Ethical freedom cannot be realized in the absence of a world populated with other free human beings, and willing oneself free therefore requires willing the freedom of others. Throughout *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* Beauvoir sets out four arguments, explicated below, that appeal to the interdependency of human freedoms in demonstrating that the freedom of others is a necessary condition for the realization of our own freedom. The primary ethical and political implication of our need for the freedom of others is that we must not only avoid the inherently inconsistent objectification of others but also work to create a social order that enables others to realize their transcendent potential.

First, freedom cannot be realized in transcendent projects except against a backdrop of a human world infused with meanings and significations that are created by free beings. Without the existence of other free beings whose communications and practices create shared meanings, transcendent projects would be, if not impossible, meaningless. This point, Kristana Arp notes, is a recapitulation of Edmund Husserl's insight that consciousness is the source of human signification, although Beauvoir emphasizes that the significations necessary for transcendent projects originate in shared human practices rather than in consciousness itself.[23] The shared communications and practices of human agents create "a human world in which each object is penetrated with human meanings" (*EA,* 74). If one denies the human character of objects in the world by denying the subjectivity of those who manufacture the world, one becomes like a thing oneself, as when "the parasite [i.e., the slave owner] ignores the human character of the objects which he uses. In the tools, the machines, the houses, and the bread he eats, he does not recognize the mark of any freedom. Only the matter remains, and to the extent that he depends upon only matter, he is also matter and passivity . . . a thing among things" (*PC,* 132).

Secondly, in the absence of a world constituted of other free individuals, nearly all human action becomes disturbingly absurd. That is, there would be little reason for acting unless there are other consciousnesses in the world (or outside of it) who can observe us acting. The inherently performative dimension of action is indeed evident precisely in considering that action becomes vain at best, if not altogether futile, if performed for no audience. Because human beings have a deep need for action—we could neither stand living nor realize our freedom unless we act—we must will that there be a human world with consciousnesses who observe us acting. As Beauvoir writes, "a man alone in the world would be paralyzed by the manifest vision of the vanity of all his goals. He would undoubtedly not be able to stand living" (*PC,* 115). If an individual alone in the world were to build an artifice, draw in the sand, keep a journal, gesture, create any non-utilitarian object, attempt to communicate or accomplish anything at all, he would find himself in the position of acting only for his own recognition. Accomplishment would become ridiculous. An individual alone in the world must therefore "strive, like Ezekiel, to resuscitate humanity, or he will have nothing left to do but die" (*PC,* 135).

To be sure, in a world without other consciousness, actions that secure the sustenance of life itself or enable locomotion in the world serve these immediate utilitarian ends. But an individual alone in the world lacks a reason for constructive activity, for without humanity the projects that motivate the drive to create become futile. Without humanity, my projects can neither have meaning nor enable communication with another: "Only through . . . objects that I make exist in the world," Beauvoir writes, "can I communicate with others. If I make nothing exist, there is neither communication nor justification" (*PC,* 129). Of course, sometimes one is satisfied to act in the absence of other consciousnesses: one can take a solitary walk, kick a stone, appreciate nature, or climb mountains all in solitude. However, one would not be satisfied to act in solitude for her entire existence. Even the child who finishes painting a drawing must run to show her parents, for without an eye that looks at it, the drawing accomplishes nothing (*PC,* 116).

Furthermore, it is not sufficient that there be just any witnessing eye upon our projects; the recognition of a slave, a vassal, or a child is not enough. "My essential need is to be faced with free men," for I seek not simply to be perceived by another consciousness but to have my actions understood (*PC,* 129). We must be faced with others who are our peers or equals (*mes pairs*), or our approximate peers, so that we can make appeal to others who have the capacity to appreciate the meaning and significance of our actions. Sometimes our actions appeal to a long posterity—as in the project of the architect—and other times

only to our contemporaries, but in order that our actions not become "lost in the void, there must be men ready to hear me . . . , and these men must be my peers" (*PC,* 137). If the men and women around us are unfree, our projects fall on deaf ears, and we have no one to hear us or to accompany us in our transcendence. Presumably, however, if those who witness and validate our projects have a greater amount of freedom or are more equipped for transcendence than ourselves, we still achieve self-expression and establish a reason for our actions, even if we cannot always join their projects in turn.

Thirdly, willing ourselves free requires that we be faced with other free beings for the reason that we continually act with or against others in transcendent projects, and we need other free individuals to take up our work in their own projects. The entirety of human projects do not form a progressive continuous succession, but individual freedoms intermingle and draw from one another in the collective projects of humankind, even when individuals oppose one another's projects (*PC,* 109). Pushing back the boundaries of music, achieving progress in science or medicine, or inventing and enacting a solution to a social problem require acting with—or against—other free beings, and we therefore need the existence of other freedoms in developing and positioning our own transcendent work. Even the scholar or the artist who works primarily in private requires the free transcendence of others, for their work takes its departure from what others are doing and calls out to others to serve as a basis for new work. "The writer does not want simply to be read; he wants to have influence; he wants to be imitated and pondered. The inventor asks that the tool he invented be used" (*PC,* 132). Indeed, if our projects fail to play a role in the work of others but are ultimately taken nowhere, our projects "fall back upon themselves" rather than serving as a mode of transcendence and become like inert and useless objects (e.g., *PC,* 135).

Finally, Beauvoir claims in her fourth argument that the particular plans and projects in which human freedoms intertwine fundamentally aim to project ourselves into the future, and we need other free beings to carry our work forward:

> I myself cannot go backwards, because the movement of my transcendence is carrying me ceaselessly forward, and I cannot walk toward the future alone. (*PC,* 137)

The idea that transcendence propels us in the direction of the future, indeed, runs throughout most of Beauvoir's works and is a predominant theme in her play *Who Shall Die?* In this work, a group of townspeople face a low store of food while fighting a war for political independence and toil away at building a

bell tower to ring out their eventual victory. They labor under the presumption that they will justify their present toiling and struggling by thrusting themselves toward the future: one character comments, "without this impulse which throws us forwards, we would be no more than a layer of mildew on the face of the earth" (*WSD,* 39).

In later works, Beauvoir continues to argue that the future secures a justification for present living and that, since action unfolds toward the future, the future is "the meaning and substance of all action" (*EA,* 127). Our work will not find an ultimate positive meaning in future work unless other free individuals link their work with our own and carry our work forward. Of course, forming and carrying out transcendent work also requires looking into the past and building on the past work of others, but since transcendence cannot alter the past and aims instead at the future, we need there to be other free beings in the present or future who can take up our work within their own and move it forward. Therefore, in securing a future for our projects, we must work to ensure that others can realize the full dimension of their transcendence.

These four arguments provide a foundation for working toward equitable social and economic structures by demonstrating that the social and material condition lived by others affects our freedom. I need others to attain my level of freedom so that I can carry out and give meaning to my projects, and I should therefore support social situations that secure the conditions of transcendence for other women and men. As Beauvoir summarizes, "I must . . . endeavor to create for all men situations which will enable them to accompany and surpass my transcendence. I need their freedom to be available to make use of me, to preserve me in surpassing me. I require for men health, knowledge, well being, leisure, so that their freedom does not consume itself in fighting sickness, ignorance, misery" (*PC,* 137).

Even in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas,* Beauvoir thus breaks beyond Sartrean conceptions of freedom and transcendence to sketch an existentialist moral imperative to support the freedom of others. Sartre, by contrast, did not offer arguments for valuing the freedom of others, and he emphasized the absolute freedom of transcendent subjectivity, in spite of recognizing with Beauvoir that human beings are embodied subjectivities, historically situated in a concrete world. Unlike Sartre, Beauvoir emphasizes not just the facticity of existence but also the interdependence of human transcendences, arguing that the pursuit of transcendence situates us in a human world and creates a need for the recognition of other free beings. An authentic ethical freedom for Beauvoir thus cannot be assumed without simultaneously willing the freedom of others.

Notes

1. In *The Prime of Life,* Beauvoir notes that *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* enabled her to reconcile Sartre's views on freedom with ideas she "upheld against him in various conversations" concerning the significance of situation (*PL,* 434–35). Beauvoir describes *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* as written within a Sartrean framework in an interview with Michel Sicard entitled "Interférences," 325–29.

2. Some Sartre scholars, including Thomas Anderson, Robert Stone, and Linda Bell, have attempted to reconstruct Sartrean arguments for willing the freedom of others; however, they acknowledge that their reconstructive efforts are speculative, based primarily on implications of Sartre's claims and suggestions he makes throughout his writings (Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics;* Stone, "Freedom as a Universal Notion," 137–48; Bell, review of Anderson's *Foundation and Structure of Sartrean Ethics,* 223–34).

3. As noted above, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* was published in 1944 but written in 1943. According to biographer Deirdre Bair, Beauvoir informed Bair that she sketched ideas for *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* in the fall of 1942 (Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography,* 639, n. 28).

4. In *Transcendence of the Ego,* Sartre similarly characterizes consciousness as a transcendence of what is given and as a sphere of free and uncaused activity (*TE,* 82–99).

5. Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence,* 231. In *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy and Feminism,* Nancy Bauer also sees a Sartrean influence on the concepts of freedom and transcendence in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas.* She writes: "The idea that all human beings are forced by the fact of their unimpeachable metaphysical liberty to [do one thing or another], the idea that Beauvoir has been at pains to elaborate and defend for almost all of *Pyrrhus et Cinéas,* is pure Sartre" (145). Sonia Kruks also characterizes transcendence in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* in Sartrean terms: "Transcendence," she writes, "is the upsurge of the for-itself in the world, but it becomes concrete, it particularizes itself in the specific projects of individuals" ("Beauvoir: The Weight of Situation," 51).

6. Bauer's main point concerning *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* is that this early work reflects a Hegelian influence in its treatment of the self; Kruks argues that although *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* employs Sartrean notions of freedom and transcendence, Beauvoir develops a more reasonable account of situation and oppression than Sartre develops (Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir,* 137–58; Kruks, "Beauvoir: The Weight of Situation," 47–55).

7. See especially the section of *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* titled "The Instant," 95–100.

8. Pascal, *Pensées,* 37.

9. Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence,* 230.

10. Eva Lundgren-Gothlin has argued that Beauvoir's concepts of transcendence and immanence in *The Second Sex* are influenced more by Hegel and Marx than by Sartre. She argues that a Hegelian influence on the concepts of transcendence and immanence is particularly clear in Beauvoir's anthropological description of the historical development of human society, in which the pure repetition of life in its generality is transcended for the singularity of existence in the public realm. Notably, Beauvoir reported in a 1985 interview with Lundgren-Gothlin that she read Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* during the war years, although she herself did not attend the seminars on Hegel given by Alexandre Kojève in

the 1930s, which related the works of Hegel and Marx to phenomenology and existentialism. See Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence,* chaps. 4 and 7, esp. pp. 57–59.

11. Both Sartrean characterizations of transcendence occur on page lix of *The Second Sex*. In one passage, Beauvoir links transcendence and immanence with Sartre's *en-soi:* "Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the '*en-soi*'—the brutish life of subjection to given conditions—and of liberty into constraint and contingence" (*SS,* lix).

12. See especially *The Second Sex,* xxvii, 65–69, 186–87, 226, 313–14, 451–52, 470–74, 477–80, 505, 551, 634, and 675.

13. I am using the 1952 [1993 reprint] Knopf edition of *The Second Sex.*

14. Consider especially 78–83 of *The Ethics of Ambiguity.*

15. Siegfried, "Gender Specific Values," 426.

16. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason* (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), esp. 100–101. Lloyd argues that transcendence is necessarily a transcendence of what is feminine, so that the transcendence requires excluding and surpassing of feminine immanence. The transcendence/immanence dichotomy is itself masculinist, she argues, insofar as "it is only from a male perspective that the feminine can be seen as what must be transcended" (101).

17. In one relevant usage of "immanence" in *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre says that he does not wish to refer to being-in-itself as immanence (*BN,* lxv).

18. In *The Other Within: Ethics, Politics and the Body in Simone de Beauvoir,* Fredrika Scarth unearths a crucial distinction in *The Second Sex* between enforced maternity and *maternité libre;* she also demonstrates that, for Beauvoir, having a child can be a valid engagement with the world. See also Margaret Simons, *Beauvoir and* The Second Sex, 73–91, and Linda Zerilli, "A Process without a Subject," 111–35. Like Scarth, Zerilli reinterprets Beauvoir's discussions of the maternal body, whereas Simons demonstrates that Beauvoir's characterization of motherhood is considerably less negative in later portions of *The Second Sex*.

19. See my article "The Sisyphean Torture of Housework," 121–43.

20. See Kristana Arp, *The Bonds of Freedom,* and Sonia Kruks, "Beauvoir: The Weight of Situation." Kruks argues that Beauvoir better appreciates the situated nature of freedom and that she preceded Sartre in working toward an existentialist social philosophy. Notably, however, Karen Green argues against these claims in "Sartre and de Beauvoir on Freedom and Oppression."

21. Thomas Anderson has argued that although Sartre argues for unimpeachable human freedom in *Being and Nothingness,* in *The Notebooks for an Ethics* he sketches a more nuanced account of human freedom, emphasizing the limitations imposed upon freedom by embodiment or historical circumstance (Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics,* chaps. 2–5).

22. Kristana Arp has written most extensively on Beauvoir's distinction of an ethical freedom apart from Sartrean ontological freedom (*Bonds of Freedom,* 64ff.). In contrast with my interpretation of ethical freedom and transcendence, Arp associates transcendence with subjectivity and ethical freedom with actions that oppose oppressive practices. Thus, she does not see ethical freedom as realized in transcendent activity. Furthermore, because Arp sees transcendence as associated primarily with the upsurge of consciousness, and immanence as associated with materiality, she considers it prob-

lematical and even nonsensical that Beauvoir characterizes the oppressed as reduced to immanence (138–40). In my interpretation, in contrast, it makes sense to speak of the oppressed as reduced to immanence, for immanence refers primarily to the labor necessary to perpetuate life. For Beauvoir, oppression divides the world into two clans: one segment of humanity achieves transcendence through constructive or creative endeavors, while another segment becomes relegated to the mere maintenance of life (*EA*, 80–82).

23. Arp, "Conceptions of Freedom," 28.