

**Freedom, Situation and Ambiguity:**  
**A study in the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University*  
*in partial fulfilment of the requirements*  
*for the award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “Freedom, Situation and Ambiguity: A Study in the Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir” submitted by Puja Ghosh in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy from the Jawaharlal Nehru University is an original work and has not been submitted either in part or in full in this or any other university.

We recommend this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

**(Dr. Bhagat Oinam)**

**Supervisor**

**(Prof. R.P. Singh)**

**Chairperson**

## **DECLARATION**

I, Puja Ghosh, declare that the dissertation entitled “Freedom, Situation and Ambiguity: A Study in the Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree in this or any other university.

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*To my dida, dadai, maa and baba.*

## *Acknowledgements*

*First of all, I owe my debt to the Almighty whose presence and blessings I have felt many times during the completion of this thesis.*

*Then I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and utmost respect for Dr. Bhagat Oinam who very kindly agreed to be my guide. Under his able supervision, I always felt encouraged to work hard and justify his belief in me. He on his part was always there for me and made the project intellectually challenging as well as stimulating. I thank him from the very core of my heart. I also want to express my deep regards to Prof. R.P. Singh, Dr. Manidipa Sen and Prof. S.P. Gautam who were quite helpful with their encouraging attitude and whose lectures made me understand philosophy better.*

*It would be a crime not to mention the ever-available support and goodwill of Sh. Rajinder Singh and Sh. Dharminder who made sure that the students face no official hiccups during their thesis work. I cannot thank enough all my classmates and seniors who through their engaging and useful discussions opened up new vistas of thinking to me. All of them have a hand in the success of my endeavors.*

*This being my first significant achievement in my subject, my mind wanders back to my days in Lady Shriram College when I learnt the basics of Philosophy in the company of learned teachers. Here I would like to express my gratitude to all of them.*

*During the course of this thesis, there were occasions when I grew weary or confused. It was at these times when my friends cheered me up and encouraged me further. I sincerely thank Shipra, Dipti, Swati, Rajkumar, Krattika, Shivani, Priti and Anubhuti. Special thanks are due to Amit for tolerating me through some very hard times. I owe a lot to him. I would also like to thank Varun who was very helpful with the procurement of material and the designing of the final draft. I also could not have completed this thesis in time if it were not for the sisterly goodwill and assistance of my roommate Niboo. She was always there to help me and I cannot recall a single occasion where I was disappointed in her.*

*Last but not the least, I owe my ever-lasting gratitude to my family members, especially my dad, for always being there for me.*

*Puja Ghosh*

# CONTENTS

<b>Preface</b>	<b>i-ii</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1-6</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Freedom and Situation</b>	<b>7-42</b>
I.    The Notion of Freedom and Responsibility	8
II.   Situation and Embodiment	21
<b>Chapter 2: Other and Reciprocity</b>	<b>43-76</b>
I.    Self, Other and Universal Liberation	44
II.   Woman as Other	60
<b>Chapter 3: Paradox of Ambiguity</b>	<b>77-96</b>
I.    Dimensionalities of Ambiguity	78
II.   Ambiguity and Ethical Discourses	87
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>97-102</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>103-106</b>

## PREFACE

The title of my dissertation is *Freedom, Situation and Ambiguity: A study in the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*. Firstly it is an allusion to the ethical writings of Beauvoir. Beauvoir's philosophy has not been majorly categorised into ethics,<sup>1</sup> and other branches of philosophy, thus I have used the term "philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir" instead of "ethical writings of Beauvoir." Moreover, her texts on ethics are also not broadly and strongly divided, and her concern towards ethics are presented in an overlapping writing style.

So, I have tried to extract the writings on the concepts of freedom, situation and ambiguity from her various novels, memoirs and texts. The texts I have largely focussed is Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. However, some ethical concerns also lie in the text of *The Second Sex*. Infact many a Beauvoirian scholar have suggested that *The Second Sex* is a detailed analysis of her positions taken in the *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.<sup>2</sup> So, I have also taken parts of *The Second Sex* as the next important text. I will like to bring to notice that I have referred to two editions of it – the new 2010 vintage edition, as well as the older edition by HM Parshley. Apart from it during the course of my secondary readings, many writers have quoted the older editions of *The Second Sex* in their work which has been quoted by me. In dealing each concept at a wide length – Beauvoir's diaries (war-time diary and diary of a philosophy student), memoirs and novels like *She Came to Stay*, *The Blood of Others* are taken into account for explanation of certain concepts in detail.

The thesis uses the word Other (with a capital "O") in the second section – "Other and Reciprocity." Here Other is used in the sense of an existential term. "The Other (when written with a capital "O") is a concept more properly belonging to phenomenology and its account of intersubjectivity. However, the concept has seen widespread use in existentialist writings, and the conclusions drawn from it differ slightly from the phenomenological accounts. The experience of the Other is the experience of another free

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<sup>1</sup> Schroeder, 2005 : 299.

<sup>2</sup> Evans, 1998 :127.

subject who inhabits the same world as a person does. In its most basic form, it is this experience of the Other that constitutes intersubjectivity and objectivity.”<sup>3</sup>

Considering the above thought, Other is used in an existential term in the first sub-section of the second chapter. However, the word Other in the second section is used with reference to existentialism but in the way Beauvoir has expressed it in her writing with regard to women to showcase their inessentiality. Other place where there is a usage of the word “other” (with small “o”) is put up in a general use of term as the one and other.

Apart from this, in the second sub-section of the second chapter, the use of the term “man” and “woman” has been given to maintain uniformity in writing style. It however symbolises the affiliation of the whole class of women and men. The singular form is maintained throughout to maintain the decorum of language however the fact explained denote to the generalised class belonging to both gender.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existentialism>. Accessed on.21/7/2012.



## INTRODUCTION

Simone de Beauvoir has been described as “the emblematic intellectual woman of the twentieth century.”<sup>1</sup> She stands important as one of the crucial cultural historians of the twentieth century. The range of her contribution to twentieth-century cultural capital is certainly impressive: Goncourt prize winner and author of seven fictional works; a thinker and a political activist, who addressed controversial issues such as the brutality of the French army during the Algerian War, attitudes to ageing and women’s right to contraception and abortion within a patriarchal society. She remains a key theorist within French existentialism. An author of *The Second Sex* (1949), which is arguably the most pioneering feminist text of the century; an important travel writer and contributor to the French epistolary tradition.

Simone de Beauvoir was also one of the most thoughtful critics of society of the twentieth century. Her insights might have been a direct result of the mental stimulation she and her contemporaries provided to each other. Known primarily for her non-fiction, Beauvoir was a philosophical crusader. She explored the roles of women in society in *The Second Sex*, a work placing her in the vanguard of the feminist movement. Later, she dealt with the challenges of the aged members of society, in *The Coming of Age* and other works. While Sartre often preferred speeches and magazine editorials, Beauvoir constructed long works with astounding clarity. While Sartre is known most for short works of fiction, Beauvoir’s major works retain a role in political thought.<sup>2</sup>

While Sartre has been called “the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century” by Bernard-Henri Levy and others, this often overlooks the contributions of Beauvoir to Sartre’s thinking. Also, there is an increasing amount of evidence that Beauvoir “edited” and contributed to her companion’s most influential works. This willingness to be overshadowed by Beauvoir herself at times definitely complicates the image of Simone de Beauvoir as a feminist.

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<sup>1</sup> Deirdre, 1986: 150.

<sup>2</sup> Brosman, 1991: 90.

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Other than this it is true that the works of Beauvoir were not noticed for a long time. Margaret A. Simons notes the distressing situation of the time when Beauvoir's work was not acknowledged. She asserts that Beauvoir's philosophical work was held in such low regard that by the late 1960s her name had largely disappeared from American histories of French existential phenomenology.<sup>3</sup> In particular, since Beauvoir's death in 1986, and thereafter the publication of her letters to Sartre, to Nelson Algren, in *Journals* in 1990 have sparked critical interest in her oeuvre and have assumed a renewed impetus. The resurgence of interest in Beauvoir's life and work following her death in 1986, the growing influence of feminism in philosophy, and the posthumous publication in 1990 of Beauvoir's diaries and letters to Sartre launched a renaissance in Beauvoir scholarship among philosophers, rejecting the disparagement of her work and challenging the traditional interpretation of Beauvoir as merely Sartre's philosophical follower.<sup>4</sup> There has been a re-evaluation of her work and scholars have started to shed interest in Beauvoir as well.

Papers on Beauvoir's philosophy have been presented at the Modern Language Association, in conferences of the Simone de Beauvoir Society, at the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology at Florida Atlantic University, at the World Congress of Philosophy and the Symposium of the International Association of Women Philosophers, and at program sessions of the Beauvoir Circle.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, during these past few years some excellent studies of Beauvoir's work have been published. We have thus come to know about the rich writings of Beauvoir, the way she grew up to be such an emanating personality, her varied works on the realities of life, of human experiences, ethics and feminism.

So what does Beauvoir write? Indeed her feminist master piece *The Second Sex* needs no introduction. This work firmly established her as a feminist and political leader. Feminism, or at least the roots of "gender studies," was born in 1949 with publication of *The Second Sex*.

Simone started *The Second Sex* in 1947, while in America. The influence of her views on the United States can be detected throughout the work due to mentions of race

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<sup>3</sup> Simons, 1999: 101.

<sup>4</sup> Brosman, 1991: 92.

<sup>5</sup> Simons, 2006: 2.

relations and sexism in America. It came out to be an epic book for the feminist scholarship. Although on its grounds, some later feminists have also criticised Beauvoir. However, it still remains her most widely acknowledged book.

Apart from this, Beauvoir has written many novels, fictions and other books on varied subjects. Most of Beauvoir's writing in some way reflects her own life. In addition to four volumes of memoirs, she wrote a book about her travels in the United States (*America Day by Day*), a book about her trip to China (*The Long March*), a narrative about her mother's dying (*A Very Easy Death*), another about Sartre's final years (*Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*), and two autobiographical novels, *She Came to Stay* and *The Mandarins*. There were omissions in Beauvoir's memoirs, but there was also a lot that she said – enough to excite generations of readers. Her autobiographies, letters, remain the richest source of her thoughts and expressions. “Simone de Beauvoir presents an ongoing questioning and exploration of her writing practice within the autobiographies whilst reminding us of the many ways in which writing intersects with, and is a necessary part of her daily experience.”<sup>6</sup> Beauvoir's works are not very categorically organized as there is an overlapping and connectedness of various issues and concepts. However one cannot deny the clarity about each concept which is yielded by the detailed dealing with each one of them at concrete level. Deirdre affirms that Beauvoir's texts and writing styles have “a certain aesthetic value, a literary value.”<sup>7</sup>

In most of the writings, there is an underlying quest that Beauvoir has spent grappling with; the questions of ethics and morality. *The Second Sex*, *The Old Age* as well as the characters in her novels are explained to go through the existential crisis and are often surmounted with questions of ethics. Infact, it was the Second World War, the socio-political situation that often led to many ethical questions.

Simone de Beauvoir published *The Ethics of Ambiguity* in the fall of 1947, two years after the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, and three years after the liberation of Paris. In this, one of her few specifically theoretical works, she establishes an ethical system based in what she describes as the fundamental ambiguity of the human condition. What we all have in common as human beings is the perception of ourselves as subjects, of others as objects, and the difficulties that inhere in the recognition

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<sup>6</sup> Bainbrigge, 2005: 11.

<sup>7</sup> Deirdre, 1990: 54.

that for those ‘other’ subjects, we are objects, and that they are themselves subjects in their own right. It is given for Beauvoir that there is no higher power upon which humans can rely that will reveal or hide the meaning of mortal lives.

Each person must make meaning out of the material of life. The disclosure of this meaning, or failure thereof, is found in the content of the actions each person undertakes. While each subject exists for the disclosure of the meaning of her own life, she also exists in a world of other subjects, and one of the fundamental difficulties is that these ‘other subjects’ are seen and treated merely as “Others.” It is this difficulty that must be confronted in the making of a meaningful life. Beauvoir says, “And it is true that each is bound to all, but that is precisely the ambiguity of his condition: in his surpassing toward others, each one exists absolutely as for himself; each is interested in the liberation of all, but as a separate existence engaged in his own projects.”<sup>8</sup>

It thus becomes very important to look at the aspects which constitute an ethics that Beauvoir is trying to construct. Freedom, situation and ambiguity thus becomes the important concepts that needs to be understood in order to understand and examine the construction of an ethics of ambiguity. It is a matter of research and examination whether the ethics of ambiguity will entail a positive outcome or not. Thus my thesis’s foremost concern is to understand the dynamics of relations shared by the three concepts-freedom, situation and ambiguity in Beauvoir’s writings and how it serves as an understanding to the questions of human existence.

The first chapter – “Freedom and Situation” tries to look into concepts of freedom and situation. It tries to first examine here the role of freedom in our everyday life and how it can be achieved. My objective here is to examine if we can achieve our ethical freedom or not. It then leads to an analysis of the impediments in the way to achieve ethical freedom. In the ethics of Beauvoir, freedom is the source of all meaning and values. Freedom in Beauvoir’s philosophizing has been explained in quite a different way from Sartre’s radical freedom. For Beauvoir, freedom is always in relation to others, it is situated. This brings in the concept of situation. In Beauvoir’s writings, “situation” refers to how a human being as an individual consciousness is engaged in the world with regard to other people, time, space.<sup>9</sup> My first chapter thus explains and tries to how freedom is

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<sup>8</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 112.

<sup>9</sup> Tidd, 2004: 30.

explained and is related to situatedness. In the first section of the first chapter, the notion of freedom and responsibility is dealt keeping in track the ethical discourse to be followed later. The second section analyzes how the body which exercises freedom in a situation becomes embodied subjectivity. The embodiment of old man and woman has been taken as an example to illustrate the various ways embodiment can be an impediment in the way of freedom. It also shows the practice that how often embodiment is responsible for oppression of individuals. This indeed brings in the role of Other which is dealt in the next chapter.

The second chapter on “Other and Reciprocity” deals with the vulnerability of the relation between self - Other in this living world. It gives a direction to the course of ethical philosophizing and by entailing an explanation of the Other. There are other long standing areas of sub concerns under the broader philosophizing of freedom and situation, which emphasizes dealing with responsibility, reciprocity in the notion of freedom to “Others.” It is in relation to “Others” that the notion of freedom becomes an issue and becomes vulnerable. The Other can be a threat to freedom as well as it is only through others that freedom can be realized in the full sense. It is here that reciprocity becomes an important feature. However, how the “Others” logically revert back the notion of reciprocity is an area of analysis that is tried to be seen – both in case of self - Other and in relationship to man and woman. The evaluation of “Other” is very integral to this research. And so the two subsection of the second chapter tries to deal exhaustively with a) self - Other b) Woman as Other. Thus my second chapter examines these concerns and tries to examine the relation of self - Other in the living world and how it can yield a relationship of harmony. But this harmony seems ambiguous because of the strife between self - Other. Infact there is an ambiguity in almost all facets of human existence. Configuring this fact of ambiguity in life’s almost all the places; Beauvoir explains the various dimensionalities of ambiguity.

The third chapter – “Paradox of Ambiguity” tries to showcase the importance, explanation of the term ambiguity in Beauvoir’s writings. The first section proceeds to examine the various dimensionalities of ambiguity. It tries to decipher the explanation of the term ambiguity in all the places where it has been used by Beauvoir. The first section engages with an understanding and analysis of the term ambiguity. It leads one to the close connection between ambiguity and ethics that Beauvoir has explained. Thus the second sub-section deals with the importance of ambiguity in ethics. If ambiguity is not diagnosed

by traditional or modern discourses, what is the condition of its emergence and what is its significance? Why has it become a concern? And, what, exactly, is Beauvoir's account of the ethics of ambiguity? The last section tries to get answers to these questions by looking into the ethics of ambiguity and existentialist ethics.

The conclusion finally tries to integrate the three concepts – “freedom,” “situation” and “ambiguity” by one thread. It tries to show that how each of these concept have enabled to answer the questions of problematic of human existence. My attempt to study the notions of freedom, situation and ambiguity in Beauvoir's thought is largely done keeping in the view the ethical perspectives she gave, and which I find is practical and realistic in the discourse of ethics considering the contemporary concerns.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **FREEDOM AND SITUATION**

Freedom and situation remain key Beauvoirian motifs in the understanding of ethical writings of Simone de Beauvoir. The relation between freedom and situation remain the means to decipher the complexities that Beauvoir tries to comprehend in her construction of an existential ethics. It is in the juxtaposition of these two terms on which rests the foundation of the ethics of Beauvoir, delving around the issues that crop up in this relationship. It is the strife in this relationship, which brings in light the weight of an inevitable freedom that an individual tries to grasp and the realities of a concrete situation. It showcases the fervour of an existential life and imbibes in it the questions of choice, responsibility, and angst. It is here in the relationship between freedom and situation that I can outline the tensions and the contradictions that occur in a moral framework and so my effort will be basically to carve out an understanding that shall enhance me to answer the larger ethical questions of this research about the ethics of ambiguity.

The relationship between freedom and situation propels me to a deeper investigation of the term freedom in the writings of Beauvoir. Freedom is very crucial and forms the core of any existential writing but noting the factor that Beauvoir was one of the first to take the initiative of constructing an existential ethics, it becomes predominantly important to investigate and precisely understand how the idea of freedom she has put in, for constructing an ethics of ambiguity differed from the general idea of freedom considered. In the first section thus I deal in trying to understand the concept of freedom given by Beauvoir from a largely ethical perspective thereby simultaneously also looking into the domain of responsibility. A closer look at Beauvoir's writings on freedom makes one know that the idea of freedom and responsibility is sited with the concept of situation. Along these lines, Beauvoir explains the criticalities associated with it that show the vulnerability of the body in a situated freedom and the subtle impetus of circles of oppression that often start working around an individual in the living world of an everyday life. Thus, in my second section I will examine the above mentioned areas and engage with an understanding of the functioning of the body in situation, intriguing in matters of a subject's embodiment and its oppression at both peripheral levels and at the core of it.



## I. THE NOTION OF FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

The notion of freedom remains of great importance to any existentialist writing. Freedom as such becomes the central vital thought that is exerted through the writings of existentialism and it is the understanding of freedom that entails one to the directive of a responsibility entailed with it. It becomes quite necessary to know and understand the aspects of freedom and the responsibility as they stand as foundational base in understanding human experience and become relevant in realizing the queries of an ethical matter. In fact the truth of the matter remains that if one is not free then the other infinitesimal and extended complicated existential questions will possess no meaning to it. The approach to a wide and in-depth analysis and questioning of an individual's choice, relationship with issues of meaning, and human limitation take on a very different meaning if we are restricted and not free. Thus undoubtedly to understand the larger questions, I must first look into an understanding of Beauvoir's writings and the way freedom has been explicated in her writings.

Beauvoir gives relevance to the idea of freedom with utmost importance as is the hallmark of all existentialist writings. Quite popular to the existentialist discourse of writings, much of the ideas about any notion have been beautifully explained with a picturesque of existential writing in novels and asserted by the role that characters play in it. Beauvoir did produce few books that have spoken about freedom at length and in-depth but one can also notice the idea of freedom that ran in the earlier novels which she wrote. Since the time of Kierkegaard, existentialists have used fictional characters to convey their philosophical views. Presumably their reason for doing so was the belief that the total living individual is both the subject and the object of philosophy and that principle of a philosophy of existence can be expressed only in a concrete setting. Beauvoir's idea of freedom also springs up firstly from the novels she has written and an understanding of it is a must in order to recognize her idea and allusion of freedom at large.

Beauvoir's characters in the novel have been often put in a set up of best of the complex concrete situation and their conflicts have unleashed the importance of freedom of an individual. One may however notice that even Beauvoir's understanding of freedom has changed from time to time. In the second part to *Pyrrhus et Cineas*, Beauvoir analyses individual's relation to other people and thus comes closer to the ground of ethics. Instead of other's freedom threatening to engulf one's own, Beauvoir argues in *Pyrrhus et Cineas*,

one's individual's freedom lies in the support and finds another's, like one stone supporting another in an arch.<sup>10</sup>

The idea of freedom remains a bit uneven until Beauvoir philosophically puts it up in depth in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, as even in *Pyrrhus et Cineas* there seems to be contradictions in her own writings. Though she realises and explains that one's freedom supports and finds another's freedom yet she writes: "I never create anything for others except points of departure."<sup>11</sup> While I agree with Arp, I find that Beauvoir makes statements that are at odds with her latter conception of the relationship between individual freedom.<sup>12</sup> Beauvoir says here, "as freedom, the other is radically separated from me; no connection can be made between me and this pure interiority upon which even God would have no hold."<sup>13</sup> Thus one can see that her idea of a freedom in relation to the Other is sometimes appreciated and occasionally, but intensely, denied by herself in her own novels. Perhaps she could not come to terms with herself on the idea of freedom. She realised the grey areas of ambiguity of human life where sometimes freedom might have yielded a meaning with the Other, and at times impelled to make a meaning out of the union.

Moving on to her second novel, *The Blood of Others*, one can again see her emphasis on freedom where she concludes the novel with an appeal to embrace freedom, calling it "that good which saves each man from all the others and from myself."<sup>14</sup> Bloomart, the character in the novel, appeals to this supreme good to justify his ultimate decision to send off the resistance fighters under his command on a new mission. In the novel, freedom remains very ethical which can even be justified by the spattering of blood.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note the way Beauvoir has explained and understood freedom in its entire multifarious and actual situation. The expressions of freedom in her novels are cognized from the most subtle to the darkest and heaviest of impressions. Beauvoir's versatile yet significant and crucial expressions of freedom, yields to an idea of freedom that is more realistic and practical which can make a way to an existential primer ethics.

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<sup>10</sup> Arp, 2001: 24.

<sup>11</sup> Beauvoir, 1944: 79.

<sup>12</sup> Arp, 2001: 28.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>15</sup> Arp, 2001: 29.

The idea and vitality of freedom is signified in much of Beauvoir's memoirs, articles, novels, and it can be approached in a consolidated and philosophical sense.

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir explains her idea of freedom at length. Though she begins to be associated for her scholarship with Sartre, and much of her work is claimed to be based "basically working out of Sartre's existentialist framework,"<sup>16</sup> she offers distinctive views of freedom and interpersonal relations. Agreeing along with Kristana Arp, it is only in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that this idea of the difference between an ontological freedom and ethical freedom takes its central place.<sup>17</sup> Beauvoir differs from Sartre's idea of an absolute freedom, which presupposes the idea of an inevitable intense freedom. For Sartre, we human beings are condemned to be free. Beauvoir disagrees with this idea of an absolute freedom which Sartre was emphasizing on. She distances herself from this kind of a view, and perhaps she does this because it is impossible to base an ethics on freedom which is solely equated with the agent himself. She writes:

Now Sartre declares that every man is free, that there is no way of 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 ethical freedom? 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 conquered if at first it is something given.<sup>18</sup>

There remains no scope of addressing any kind of ethics at large or construct any forum of responsibility in this kind of a premise. Beauvoir asserts in the above lines that this kind of a freedom cannot bring in the concerns of an ethics and responsibility because even before the foundation of freedom is laid to attain, it is already given. In Beauvoir's language, it is already conquered. It is impossible to base an ethics on freedom if freedom is equated solely with subjectivity.<sup>19</sup> Beauvoir says that every man is originally free but certainly not everyone acts morally. The only way out of this impasse for Beauvoir thus remains to posit two different levels of freedom.<sup>20</sup> Understanding Beauvoir from the perspective of many Beauvoirian scholars like Kristana Arp, Ursula Tidd, Margaret A.

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<sup>16</sup> Gutting, 2001: 160.

<sup>17</sup> Arp, 2001: 54.

<sup>18</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 32.

<sup>19</sup> Arp, 2001: 55.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 55.

Simons, and agreeing along their lines, it can be said that Beauvoir posited two levels of freedom. In her book, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* the difference is comprehensible and she has used the terms ethical freedom and natural freedom separately which shows the difference she is trying to bring to light.

One may say that unlike other philosophers she has not paraphrased it in one definitional style of writing or categorically elaborated about it but a deeper look at the text reveals the difference at par. The difference runs throughout her text and is highlighted in the difference of approach. The difference in between both the kind of freedom is viable in the making of an existentialist ethics that Beauvoir is trying to carve out. Beauvoir scholars have however over the years, understood and used ontological freedom synonymously with natural freedom and moral freedom with ethical freedom. The difference is evaded and taken in a larger spirit and thus same shall be also exemplified here.

Natural freedom is the freedom that is spontaneous and contingent – of coming into existence. Moral freedom is the freedom grounded by project and involves other people. Natural freedom is the freedom that Sartre talks about in *Being and Nothingness*, which Beauvoir so reluctantly accepts (in their earlier conversations).<sup>21</sup> The most primal forms of assertions are often considered as freedom of ontological kind. Beauvoir indicates that such kind of freedom is what Sartre has been focussing on and given her own notion of situated freedom.

Simons explains that one can react in two different ways when faced with the discovery of one's ontological freedom: you can either fail to choose to will yourself free, i.e. "One can persist in the vain desire to be and *not will oneself free* (which would be equivalent to bad faith) or one can will oneself free by accepting one's freedom and actively making oneself a lack of being."<sup>22</sup> Although one cannot will oneself not to be free because freedom is the ontological structure of human existence, one can fail to choose to "will oneself free." Since one is always free, one can, and indeed one must, freely choose what attitude to take to one's own freedom. Beauvoir wrote, "If man wishes to save his existence, as only he himself can do, his original spontaneity must be raised to the height of moral freedom by taking itself as an end through the discourse of a particular content."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Beauvoir, 1977: 78.

<sup>22</sup> Simons, 1986: 107.

<sup>23</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 32.

If a person chooses this option then he or she achieves moral freedom. Thus ontological freedom is the kind of freedom that we all are born with (so to say natural freedom) whereas moral freedom becomes something we constantly strive for.

For Beauvoir, to be moral involves not just “being free,” but “willing oneself free.” The advocacy for two levels of freedom in trying to carve out discourse of existentialist ethics was implicitly lying in Beauvoir. This is being shown by Beauvoir in the first part of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Here Beauvoir underpinned this idea by creating the difference between “being free” and “willing free.” “Being free” implies the ontological form of freedom, whereas by willing ourselves as free, we identify positively with the fact that we are free and have to make choices continually of which we are responsible. Simons explains that “willing oneself free” becomes not only an ethical freedom where we are constantly in the process of attaining and holding onto, but rather a process of continual moral attitude that one develops, involved with the processes of moral conversion.<sup>24</sup> “To will oneself moral and to will oneself free are one and the same decision.”<sup>25</sup> To will oneself free is to effect the transition from nature to morality by establishing a genuine freedom on the original upsurge of our existence. For Beauvoir, every man is free that he spontaneously casts himself into the world. But if we consider this spontaneity in the face of human facticity, it appears to us as a pure contingency and we find human spontaneity always projects itself towards something.<sup>26</sup> Beauvoir interestingly notes and explains that the psychoanalyst discovers a meaning even in the abortive acts and attacks of hysteria, thereby pertaining to the fact that human spontaneity is always intentional, i.e. towards something. “But in order for this meaning to justify the transcendence which discloses it, it must itself be founded, which it will never be if *I do not choose to found it myself*.”<sup>27</sup> Thus one finds that ethical freedom, by “willing free” simply implies autonomy, importance of the self, the power that the individual possesses by holding up a choice and realising it.

“To convert the absence into presence, to convert my flight into will, I must assume my project positively.”<sup>28</sup> Ethical freedom thus consists in willing “to be a

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<sup>24</sup> Simons, 2004: 167.

<sup>25</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 24.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 26.

disclosure of being,” i.e. willing to remain open to new possibilities that may offer themselves for becoming other than what one is or has been. These possibilities must themselves be capable of being imagined as potentially realizable within one’s own existence. “To will man free is to will there to *be* being, it is to will the disclosure of being in the joy of existence.”<sup>29</sup> Thus one can say that to achieve moral freedom one has to will to disclosure of being and perhaps that adorns one with the joy of existence.

Eva Gothlin puts up that disclosure is set in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* as the foundation for authenticity and a way to freedom.<sup>30</sup> This kind of a fulfilment is also taken in terms of explanation of living an authentic life that the individual realises with his disclosure. Disclosure is related to another aspect of human being – its freedom. Beauvoir makes affirming oneself as disclosure, synonymous with affirming oneself as a free human being. Authenticity is connected to seeing oneself (or in Beauvoir’s terminology, affirming oneself) as disclosure and not pursuing the desire of being rather it is in its truth.<sup>31</sup> However one must note that the term disclosure has been used differently at different context by Beauvoir herself in her various texts as Arp puts up in her article, “The Joys of Disclosure.”<sup>32</sup> The word disclosure is used in another sense in her ethical writings from what it means in the Heideggerian sense of the term though some scholars analyse that there are close connections between both of the them in the usage of the term and even claim that Beauvoir was influenced by Heidegger’s concept of disclosure during her time.

Disclosure in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *Pyrrhus et Cineas* is accounted as a revelation of one’s authentic self to the world in the realization of a moral freedom. Thus disclosure, as used in Beauvoir’s ethical writings, becomes a quintessential term. Disclosure is a paradoxical operation in the ethics that Beauvoir tries to design – that one is always uprooting oneself from the world and yet one remains rooted in it.<sup>33</sup> For Beauvoir, disclosure involves a relationship between two terms of freedom and situation. In *Pyrrhus et Cineas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir speaks more abstractly of subjectivity or man disclosing being or the world which can be said at times that disclosure accounts to the grasping of meaning. Beauvoir herself says that “meaning surges up only by the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>30</sup> Gothlin, 2003: 288.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>32</sup> Arp, 2005: 361

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 370.

disclosure which a free subject effects in his project.”<sup>34</sup> The act of disclosing becomes one of the most joyful experiences:

Every man casts himself into the world by making himself a lack of being; he thereby contributes to reinvesting it with human signification. He discloses it. And in this movement even the most outcast sometimes feel the joy of existing. They then manifest existence as happiness and the world as a source of joy.<sup>35</sup>

For a disclosure to happen and take place one must commit oneself to a moral choice. It is this particular moral choice that grants one the way to disclose, realise and avow freedom and thus simultaneously come to terms with the meaning as Beauvoir explains above and so to say render the source of joy. It indeed stands true that this kind of an assertion of freedom by wishing to a way to disclosure leads to an experience of joy, but between all these there lays the aspect of moral choice. “It is up to one to make oneself a lack of more or less various, profound and rich aspects of being.”<sup>36</sup> In her attempt to strengthen her point, Beauvoir even says that vitality, sensitivity and intelligence are not ready made qualities but a way of casting oneself into the world and of disclosing being. Like Beauvoir says, “To wish for the disclosure of the world and to assert oneself as freedom are one and the same movement.”<sup>37</sup>

Beauvoir says that humans cannot help disclosing being in some way or another. “Men are always disclosing being, in Buchenwald as well as in the blue isles of the pacific, in hovels as well as in palaces.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Beauvoir explains that even at this level the realm of being that is disclosed through freedom is the human world penetrated with human meanings, because there is no other world to disclose.

Considering the specific aspect of Beauvoir’s thought on two types of freedom, Kristana Arp describes that it turns out that both ontological freedom and moral freedom disclose the world.<sup>39</sup> The difference lies in the vicissitudes of its reception which summons a different attitude to be taken. It seems that disclosure has its foreground in both the

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<sup>34</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 20.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>39</sup> Arp, 2001: 67.

freedom, but there remains a difference in its approach which renders differences in the consequences or the way they are perceived. At the level of ontological freedom, freedom always discloses a world, and that world testifies to the presence of other freedom. But a person should not be content to remain at the level of mere ontological freedom, Beauvoir holds. The challenge is to achieve an authentic realization of one's ontological freedom – to rise to the level of moral freedom. The next question is: what relation to the world is involved in moral freedom? How is the world disclosed through it? The key is whether one desires or wills the disclosure of being. If one does, then one is on the road to achieving moral freedom. Since this whole framework of existentialist ethics is about giving a meaning, of grasping the goal and about revealing the authenticity of one's existence to oneself; disclosure as Beauvoir has also explained becomes of huge importance in understanding and revealing freedom. Thus, ethical freedom follows an existentialist conversion.

For Beauvoir, an existentialist conversion allows us to live authentically at the crossroads of freedom and facticity. The notion of ethical freedom however does not presuppose the construction of a moral theory as such. The existentialist philosophy simply asserts the premise that every human being is free and has to invent his or her own behaviour and there are no positive maxims, general rules and no certain set of directives that we must apply in order for a certain behaviour or idea engage the world.

Beauvoir's construction of existentialist ethics and her idea of ethical freedom is not a set of canonical rules that are meant to be followed but rather she tried to work out a type of ethics that consists of an attitude. Willing ourselves free is wanting to practice our freedom. She accepts Sartre's ontological definition of man as being nothing but a consciousness, empty and therefore free. But she claims that in addition to this we have to assert and realize our freedom by acting in the world as incarnated consciousness.<sup>40</sup> For Sartre, freedom basically meant experiencing the emptiness of consciousness. Beauvoir, on the contrary, emphasized our bodily existence in the world. Beauvoir argued that since we are both empty consciousness and incarnated beings, the human condition is ambiguous. The ethical attitude implies that we through a "moral conversion," accept our bodily and emotional dimension and transform our pure freedom into a concrete commitment to the freedom of our fellow men.<sup>41</sup> This now obviously requires that we engage our freedom in

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<sup>40</sup> Holveck, 2002: 177.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 201.



projects which must emerge from a spontaneous choice and engage in willing ourselves free as well as that of others. Thus one can say that this attempt of a moral conversion, in which it seemed that disclosure was a way of revealing to the world, engaging with the everyday world and rising to the plane of ethical freedom is in fact a larger project of engaging with the Other.

Beauvoir's plea for the moral attitude of "willing oneself free" thus implies a plea for a sensitive self that engages itself in the world and lifts itself to a cognizable self that pertains to the involvement with people. In this way, one finds that the expressions of ethical freedom stretches as far as to the point where an ethical - political way of life is said to be followed by absorbing with social world. Ethical freedom so remains a fact of willing oneself free along with willing others free. It is here that one must note that though there is a difference between being free and willing oneself free yet just willing oneself free also substantially means willing others free. The only code or rule that we have is that by willing ourselves free we commit ourselves to freedom as such and therefore to the freedom of everyone. Unlike Sartre, Beauvoir has given much importance to the "Other" in terms of a concept of universal liberation and in the realization of freedom. The importance of Other for the questions of human existence, ethics and freedom shall be dealt at length in the next chapter.

Willing oneself free simultaneously sets the ground of willing others free. In the process of willing oneself free, one should not just strive for one's own freedom but also that of all other human beings. Beauvoir's own life, as recorded and constructed in her auto- biographical work should be seen within the framework of her ethical theory which reconciles two sides: the freedom and development of her own self as well as the freedom of the other along with us. She was in love with the nature, the country and had set her own timings for writings but at the same time she was emotionally attached to Others. She did not want people to live "through" others but rather cooperate with each other as a moral attitude and responsibility for each other's upliftment.<sup>42</sup>

Beauvoir is emphatic that even though existentialist ethics upholds the sanctity of individuals, an individual is always situated within a community and as such, separate existents are necessarily bound to each other. She argues that every enterprise is expressed

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<sup>42</sup> Vintges, 1996: 76.

in a world populated by and thus affecting other human beings. She defends this position by returning to an idea touched upon in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* and more fully developed in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. The individual projects fall upon themselves if there are not Others with whom our projects intersect and who consequently carry our actions beyond us in space and time.<sup>43</sup> Thus ethical freedom's realization is ultimately a realization of freedom of oneself and along with it that of Others.

In addition, the ends and goals of our actions must never be set up as absolutes, separate from we who choose them. In this sense, Beauvoir sets limits to freedom. To be free is not to have free license to do whatever one wants. Rather, to be free entails the conscious assumption of this freedom through projects which are chosen at each moment. The meaning of actions is thus granted not from some external source of values (say in God, the church, the state, our family, etc.) but in the existent's spontaneous act of choosing them. Each individual must positively assume his or her project (whether it be to write a novel, graduate from university, preside over a courtroom, etc.) and not try to escape freedom by escaping into the goal as into a static object. Thus, we act ethically only insofar as we accept the weight of our choices and the consequences and responsibilities of our freedom.

Since Beauvoir's idea of existentialism does not acknowledge for any idea of God who shall be held responsible for the consequences of human actions, the idea of responsibility is imbibed and followed and wholly rests upon the individual. The focus on freedom entails and showcases the burden of responsibility that is endowed upon when one takes up one's freedom. In a way, the focus is on choosing one's freedom simply and constantly taking up the burden of one's own responsibility. Beauvoir does not exclusively write or provide explanation about the term "moral responsibility" in a canonical way, as generally the traditional school of thought do while formulating ethics of any kind. Though the idea of freedom was dealt in the phenomenological tradition, the concept of responsibility only gained its significance in the existential movement initiated by Sartre, Beauvoir, and others. Highlighting the idea of responsibility evokes the sense of the ethical. Frederick A. Olafson asserts along the same lines and explains that responsibility as a concept was never taken in a serious manner. He further avers:

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<sup>43</sup> Holveck, 2002: 140.

The concepts of freedom and responsibility are central to any understanding of what a human being is. The contribution to this understanding that has been made by the tradition of thought we refer to as “phenomenology and existential philosophy” has been somewhat uneven. In its earliest phase, it showed no strong interest in either of these concepts. Later on, after phenomenology became existential philosophy, there was a marked uptake in the attention paid to freedom, but responsibility, at least in any ethical sense, never achieved a comparable prominence. The relation between the two concepts has also been neglected, even though freedom without responsibility sounds dangerous and responsibility without freedom is hard to imagine.<sup>44</sup>

The connotation is that in existentialism the account of responsibility is though addressed, it could not gain complete ethical articulation. This of course is open to contention. The very account of “bad faith” that Sartre gives is an explanation of the individual who is pretending oneself, engaging in a play acting to escape ones responsibility. In the existential discourse, freedom along with responsibility is an antidote to bad faith. Thus I avoid bad faith when I actively and openly affirm my full responsibility for everything I do and about my existence.<sup>45</sup> Responsibility is portrayed as a logical requirement of freedom and becomes necessary prerequisite to live an authentic life. So, it is not that existentialism does not engage with the ethical dimension of life.

Beauvoir has worked out her writings on these lines itself, but the only stark difference is her account of freedom that is posited at two levels which governs her articulation of responsibility, too. According to Beauvoir, ethical freedom simply follows that willing others free is a part of “willing myself free” and thus the “responsibility of others freedom” somewhere rests on me. Although philosophizing on an existentialist paradigm and agreeing to the fact that an individual’s responsibility is entailed by the freedom he possesses yet because he is in relation with Other; it is here that Beauvoir’s account of responsibility leans towards an ethical arena. The responsibility of others is also said to be *equally* a responsibility of the individual.

The epigraph of Beauvoir’s second fictional work, *The Blood of Others* neatly capsulates this concern. It carries a quotation from Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers*

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<sup>44</sup> Olafson, 2009: 263.

<sup>45</sup> Cerborne, 2006: 86.

*Karamazov*, proclaiming that each of us is responsible for everything and to every human being. Beauvoir explains that my individual freedom is always enmeshed with another's freedom, so that freedom is therefore a collective responsibility. However, agreeing with Debra Bergoffen, I would say that there still remains a difference between being responsible for myself and my actions and being responsible for other. Responsibility towards the other belongs to a level that Beauvoir means, is an attitude of moral concern. Debra Bergoffen clearly asserts that Beauvoir insists on the difference between acting with the other and acting for the other.<sup>46</sup>

While I must act with the other, I cannot claim to act for them. However devoted I may claim to be to the other; however certain I may be that I know the other; however sincere I may be in my desire to do what is good for the other, I can never, Beauvoir insists substitute myself for the other.<sup>47</sup>

Thus one can say that there entails a responsibility for the other. However Beauvoir cannot make us responsible for the other in the usual sense of the term and application as it stands for the self. It is to say as Bergoffen asserts through her article, "Necessity of Violence, The Gift of Generosity," that one may not be directly responsible for the malady of the condition that the poverty of a state has bought but yet one is somewhere in the system responsible for creating the other's position as degraded and banal.

Whether or not I am responsible for the material conditions of poverty, I am responsible for constituting the meaning of poverty. My constituted meaning becomes part of the way the world is experienced. I am therefore responsible for whether or not the meaning of the world contains the meaning of freedom and the possibility of liberation.<sup>48</sup>

Beauvoir's phenomenological conception of responsibility calls on an individual to enhance the meaning of the world and thereby multiply other's possibilities. Basically the concept of responsibility sums down to the factor that we are responsible for other but one cannot claim the other to be wholly responsible and accuse them of the failure to some act or position in which they are engulfed in. It is as exemplified by the example above that Bergoffen gives of being responsible in constituting the poverty somewhere. It is like

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<sup>46</sup> Bergoffen, 1997: 50.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 59.

“However much I am responsible for giving your situation meaning, I am never responsible for what you make of it.”<sup>49</sup>

Apart from this, ethically Beauvoir simply asserts that we are wholly responsible for all our decisions. Thus moral choice and the responsibility of that moral choice become very significant and important in Beauvoir’s understanding of responsibility. According to Beauvoir, each person “bears the responsibility for the world which is not the work of a strange power, but of himself, where his defeats are inscribed and victories as well.”<sup>50</sup> It is therefore the individual’s choice, his autonomy to choose that marks his projects to a definitive way with new possibilities. One is responsible in making the meaning of life or creating one’s own position through one’s own choices. These choices entails a lot of anxiety, anguish, in its process and so one may say that aspiring for a freedom means repeatedly and constantly taking up burden of one’s own responsibility.

It is this owning up of the burden of responsibility that marks the place for existential crisis. For Beauvoir, the concept of freedom and responsibility is marked by a project of constructing an ethics of ambiguity. Thus the question of humanness is primary for all questions of responsibility because ethics does not exist in a world without human beings. Unlike most philosophers for whom human existence is given, the moral question is on how human beings should act. The goal is to recreate genuine human beings. So unlike other ethicist, Beauvoir does not assert very largely, and in a traditional discourse, the relation of freedom and responsibility.

She has managed to show the importance that freedom has and the fact that it with itself equally asserts responsibility. However, as we analyse the complexities of the ethical discourse in depth, we find that unlike Sartre, Beauvoir has not given absolute accounts of bad faith and simply explained the way why people flee away from responsibility. Infact her is a more detailed version; she goes on to the structuring of the detailed account of the ground premise, which is the actual cause for the person to go into a mode of bad faith. Beauvoir’s *Ethics of Ambiguity* is that of a secular humanism, which rejects both the ideas of God and humanity. How so ever different they may be in content, both the ideas provide an already given ground and justification for our actions. They allow us to abdicate our responsibility for creating the conditions of our existence and to evade our ambiguity.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>50</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 16

Whether or not we live a moral life depends on the material conditions of our situation and on our response to the ambiguities and failures of intentionality. If we are exploited and terrorized, we cannot be accused of refusing to be free of *bad faith*. In all other cases, however, we are accountable for our response to the experience of freedom and our situation is responsible somewhere at times to be the reason to flee to bad faith. This has resulted in her explanation of a concept of a situated freedom, a situation that often compliances the individual unable to perform his required responsibility. The next section will thus deal with situation, embodiment and oppression. It will decipher the much detailed instrumental working on an ethical plane in which individuals often abstain from their performance of responsibility, the factors responsible for individuals to operate in bad faith and the individual's entrapment in it in the form of embodiment and oppression.

## II. SITUATION AND EMBODIMENT

Situation stands as a very crucial term in understanding Beauvoir's ethics and to really grasp her sense of dealing with the more detailed understanding of reasons of why often people wean away from their responsibilities and try to attain a state of bad faith. A deeper investigation in it simply shows that often the situation of the individual is so tied up, or composed in such a way that he is not even aware of his responsibilities. Apart from this, situation remains responsible for the way an individual is, and the fact that even he cannot exercise the simple choices he desires for himself.

The concept of situation in understanding the human condition remains of great and very realistic importance in carving an ethics for the human kind. Unless the questions of human existence are dealt at the real problematic grass root level, no actualization of the ethics generated can have a meaning. It is here that the account of situation and the concept of freedom vis-à-vis a situation marks the true spirit of the matter and propels one to look at life from the wider and closer focal length of realistic conditions in everyday life.

Beauvoir had a notion of situation in her mind from the beginning itself though she never quite outwardly professed it in a loud manner. As Sonia Kruks has noted, "Beauvoir was never willing to challenge Sartre's conception of freedom head-on but

instead was quietly to subvert it.”<sup>51</sup> But it came to her writings as the quest of her ethical writings led her to honest dealings with the conditions of women, people at a war-time country which often showcased their helplessness in the choices they made and thus followed the consequences of being engrossed in a situation. In her autobiography too one can see that, Beauvoir at one point looks back to a damp, dreary evening in the spring of 1940, when she and Sartre wandered the streets of Paris discussing philosophy. Sartre, briefly in Paris on leave from the army, had sketched out the main lines of the argument of what was to become *Being and Nothingness*. Their discussions over the next few days, Beauvoir tells us, centred above all on the problem of the relation of situation to freedom.<sup>52</sup> On this point they disagreed. Writing in 1960, she recalls

I maintained that, from the point of view of freedom, as Sartre defined it – not as a stoical resignation but as an active transcendence of the given. Not every situation is equal: what transcendence is possible for a woman locked up in a harem? Even such a cloistered existence could be lived in several different ways, Sartre said. I clung to my opinion for a long time and then made only a token submission. Basically [she comments in 1960] I was right. But to have been able to defend my position, I would have had to abandon the terrain of individualist thus idealist, morality where we stood.<sup>53</sup>

Situation as a concept, threw light on the areas of human condition that otherwise were overshadowed by traditional ethical discourse on the particularity of either being in the camp of right or wrong. It grew as a concept to understand the historicity, the prosaic condition, and the actual reason sometimes responsible for the person to be the way she/he is. Situation as a concept marked the distinctiveness of approach that had still not arrived to the conspiring of an ethics of humanity. Understanding the concept of situation has led us to mature perspectives in the dealing of the concept of freedom vis-à-vis responsibility.

Facticity as a term has already been used in the existentialist discourses; however Beauvoir explains it in a relation to a more detailed analysis of it, which in her philosophy has been termed as situation. There stands a very meagre line of differentiation; however a very good understanding of both the terms in matters of philosophizing reveals their difference in usage of purpose. It is essentially that existentialist discourses already see

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<sup>51</sup> Kruks, 1990: 81.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>53</sup> Beauvoir, 1977: 78.

“givenness” of the human being and the fact that they are thrown into the world, in Heideggerian sense and characterised by facticity which is further delineated with the concept of situation.

Ursula Tidd explains in relation to situation and facticity that in Beauvoir’s thought, “situation” refers to how a human being as an individual consciousness is engaged in the world with regard to other people, to time, to space and to other products of his/her facticity.<sup>54</sup> “Situation” is a chief concept in Beauvoir’s thought and needs to be understood as a philosophical term rather than in its more familiar sense of “context”. My “situation” is not something outside or around me, but the glue which binds my freedom and my facticity together. “Facticity” refers to the necessary connection between consciousness and the world of inert matter and the past. Aspects of my facticity are aspects of my situation which I have not chosen – for example, the facts of my birth, my body, the existence of other people, my death – and that I cannot choose not to accept as part of my situation.<sup>55</sup> One’s facticity is lived in such a way that the self also accomplishes an escape from its facticity. Facticity thus signifies all of the concrete details against the background of which human freedom exists and is limited.

Facticity explains the materiality of the things and one’s assertion of freedom is thus an effort to change the facticity of the situation. Beauvoir explains facticity as a structure of what is given in one’s life. Beauvoir explains that it is facticity that we live in a world that we were born into. It already contains rules and laws. She also says that facticity is something that we must triumph over in order to be happy and free. In her quote “ethics is the triumph of freedom over facticity,”<sup>56</sup> Beauvoir exactly says that when one gains moral principles, they in turn triumph over facticity. Ethics are principles that you create on your own. When one gains these principles after living a life that he or she has been brought up into (facticity), the life where they learned the concept of conforming in a hidden caste system, they become free. This person becomes happy inside because they have the ability to choose things and make decisions that they were not able to make prior to becoming free. They realize that the world they are living in is not simple and complete, but much more comprehensive than imagined. They also realize that there is so much more

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<sup>54</sup> Tidd, 2004: 30.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>56</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 44.



to learn in the world. New things are present and this person becomes more open with their morals and ethics, allowing them to become their own individual. Thus before any level of freedom is achieved, we seek to look at the factors that often are responsible for the person to not attain a state of freedom. Indeed the situation in which an individual is located is very important while analysing the failure or the reason of taking refuge in bad faith.

The term “situation” in existentialism expresses the innate ambiguity of the human being to be both freedom and facticity simultaneously. There is no freedom without situation. I find myself always in a certain situation, that I didn’t choose before. Be it a certain country, a certain environment in this or that body; I was born into a world that I have not chosen. Without situation there is no achieving of freedom. The situation is the starting point of my projects. Through this however, my situation is always transcended. The analysis of the concept of situation is done very minutely and in particulars and depth by Beauvoir. Unlike other philosophers who generally elaborate about ethics, by pre-thinking that the human beings stand to be an already rational refined intellectually brilliant set of people, Beauvoir carves an ethics describing the complexities from the time of childhood and keeping in mind even the qualification of a lay man. She cites the narration of the situation in which a child is generally placed from his time of birth and how this places him into an ambiguous condition which eventually results into attitudes that indicate accepting ones responsibility.

She explains the basics and that how this world is pre-given to the child and is serious to him as a matter of fact from the point of existence. We begin our lives as children who are dependent on others and embedded in a world already endowed with meaning. We are born into the condition which Beauvoir calls the “serious world.” This is a world of readymade values and established authorities. This is a world where obedience is demanded. For children, this world is neither alienating nor stifling; at that age we are not yet ready for the responsibilities of freedom. Beauvoir asserts that “child feels himself happily irresponsible.”<sup>57</sup> Free to play, children develop their creative capacities and their meaning-making abilities without, however, being held responsible for the worlds they bring into being. Thus one can see how the “situation” makes itself inescapable right from the time one is born and grows up through his phases of childhood.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 35.

The child's situation is characterized by his finding himself cast into a universe which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit. In his eyes, human inventions, words, customs and values are given facts as inevitable as the sky and the trees. This means that the world he lives is a serious world, since the characteristic of the spirit of seriousness is to consider values as readymade things.<sup>58</sup> The foundations of the world are secure and that their place in the world is naturally given and unchangeable. In addition, the situation of the child gives us a glimpse into what Beauvoir calls the *attitude of seriousness* in which values are given, not chosen. Beauvoir ascribes to the view that it is because each person was once a child that the serious attitude is the most prevalent form of bad faith which is later diagnosed. This situation which was for the child a state of permanency comes to an end as the childhood is passed into adolescence. Beauvoir explains the various ways a man's life in situation is transcended. The idyllic era of childhood comes to an end with the onset of adolescence. It is the time of moral decision.

Emerging into the world of adults, we are now called upon to renounce the serious world, and to take responsibility for our choices and live by a world that we choose for ourselves. But as one passes through the age of adolescence; one realises that the choice to take up or not take up the ethical demand treads in because not all of the people in the adolescence take up the ethical demand as such. The fact of our initial dependency has moral implications, for it predisposes us to the temptations of bad faith, strategies by which we deny our existential freedom and our moral responsibility, and it sets our desire in the direction of nostalgia for those lost carefree days. Looking to return to the security of that metaphysically privileged time, some of us evade the responsibilities of freedom by choosing to remain children, that is, to submit to the authority of others. Beauvoir recognizes this tendency and often describes it as a desire to flee from freedom that stems from our nostalgia for the security and cheerfulness that one has experienced in the childhood and takes the shape of bad faith.

The child's world is a serious one, but it is one for which she/he bears no responsibility. The serious world, characterized by what Beauvoir has explained in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that identifies with the spirit of seriousness, is one comprised of ready-made values. The child in the serious world considers the world as given, values as

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 35.

inherent, and the adults who structure their lives as the one who are to be looked up to and obeyed. One may live in such a world playfully because “the domain open to his subjectivity seems insignificant and puerile in his own eyes.”<sup>59</sup> And one may pursue some measure of freedom within it only insofar as one seeks the realization of those values and traverses the path toward a moral being and owing up his/her responsibility. This is not to say that children live in bad faith since children are not yet aware of their subjectivity and do not have a sense of inhabiting the world in any other way.

Beauvoir explains that there are people who after living this kind of a childhood are so much in a state of servitude and ignorance that they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads, i.e. to say that they can exercise their freedom, but only within this universe which has been set up before them, without them.<sup>60</sup> Beauvoir thinks the same is conceivable of that of the eighteenth-century slaves, the women in many civilizations who can only submit to an already existent readymade system of laws, god, values and custom to which they obey and inhere to submit. They also have till now not identified or raised their consciousness enough to provoke them against slavery or even to question or analyse the prevalent system suffer a similar state of ignorance. One can see that how the “situation” becomes so much important in directing the course of life of an individual.

One finds that there is no instrument of any form that permits or empowers people who are in a certain system and oppressed, to criticise it in any form. The society that oppresses them in their everyday life in different ways is not even scrutinised and questioned. Even the very consciousness of subjectivity is so entrapped in the way the system has been carved right from the childhood that no voices seem to register the malpractice of avoiding responsibility. The subjectivity is chained and doomed in the dark to take up any moral choice whatsoever for oneself in regard to one’s life. Their behaviour is defined and can be judged only within this given situation, and it is possible that in this situation, limited like every human situation, they realize a perfect assertion of their freedom. “But once there appears a possibility of liberation, it is resignation of freedom not to exploit the possibility, a resignation which implies dishonestly and which is a positive fault.”<sup>61</sup> However, once one matures in one’s subjectivity and becomes acquainted with

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 38.

one's freedom, then the nostalgia for the serious-but-carefree world of the child, the desire to trade freedom for security, and the resignation or outright denial of one's responsibility, constitute bad faith.

We indeed recognize the way one's subjectivity is doomed or the way the transformations takes places from ones childhood. This forms the situation of that person. But it is only when this situation is transcended by a certain act that one can experience the joy of freedom. Settling down with explanation of how a situation is constituted and how its dynamics work in an explanation of bad faith is one thing, but the questions of human existence which is the larger aim of this research can only be attained by proposing an ethics that appeals to welcome possibilities in a situation. Beauvoir herself recognizes this possibility. "The goal which my freedom aims at," Beauvoir tells us, "is conquering existence across the always inadequate density of being."<sup>62</sup> The transcendence has to be meaningfully achieved by the concrete engagement with that situation and not merely fleeing away from the face of it.

Beauvoir explains the various problematic conditions in the most pragmatic sense and asserts that when an individual comes across such a situation; there prevails the constant threat of failure that haunts one's existence almost every day. To further elaborate the threat of the failure and perhaps also to show the rough terrain to realize freedom and liberation, Beauvoir makes it obvious and transparent in her explanations that there are not one but many ways to fail:

one may hesitate to make oneself a lack of being, one may withdraw before existence, or one may falsely assert oneself as being, or assert oneself as nothingness. One may realize his freedom only as an abstract independence, or, on the contrary, reject with despair the distance which separates us from being. All errors are possible since man is negativity, and they are motivated by the anguish he feels in the face of his freedom. Concretely, men slide incoherently from one attitude to another.<sup>63</sup>

Beauvoir portrays the complexity of the ways in which we either avoid or accept the responsibilities of freedom. How people in their everyday life and system take refuge in it or tend to accumulate themselves in region of a behaviour of bad faith is exemplified by taking up five types of people by Beauvoir. Undoubtedly, these are all very different

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 34.

kinds of failures, and Beauvoir goes to discuss these through examples she provides of the sub man, the serious man, the nihilist, and the adventurer as the major personality types. Describing the various ways in which existents flee their freedom and responsibility, Beauvoir catalogues a number of different inauthentic attitudes, which in various forms are all indicative of a flight from freedom. Beauvoir presents a hierarchy of personality types which in fact portrays the kind of attitude any man in general most obviously takes up to. The attitude that Beauvoir confronts in each of the case goes down in hierarchy of the morality and freedom. On the lowest is the attitude of a sub-man as given by Beauvoir and the best is sought to be an idea of genuine freedom that is difficult to find but encapsulates the qualities of an adventures, a passionate man and some other qualities as well.

The sub man leads a very dry morbid life almost not having any zeal or passion in any agenda of his work and existence. Beauvoir explains his movement of life very beautifully by explaining that it resembles the stroke of a bad painter who is satisfied by one single stroke of brush and tries to legitimize his painting from that one effort itself without seeking any liveliness in it. Thus the first category of bad faith consists of the “sub-man” who, through boredom and laziness, restrains the original movement of spontaneity in the denial of his or her freedom.<sup>64</sup> Beauvoir explains that the people who fall in this category are actually afraid of engaging themselves in any kind of project, as even before taking up the project he feels the fear of failure take on to him so badly that he takes the easier way of affirming to readymade values of the society. Thus, for the sub man, there cannot be any promulgation of rights or ethics as he can be said to be existent in his facticity and has thus never desires for a meaning or purpose in life. The sub-man thus becomes the strongest case of bad faith as his life and his subjectivity has moved down to the level of pretentious jargons of existence with no authenticity in it.

The next case up in the hierarchy remains the attitude of the serious man. The attitude of the serious man is not too far removed, says Beauvoir, from that of the sub-man; this is because even in his own way the serious man also denies freedom. The attitude taken by the serious man of considering some values as eternal and immutable is in Beauvoir’s explanation, one of the most widely taken attitudes. This attitude, Beauvoir says, is dangerous and resorts to bad faith as the attitude the man develops is a common attitude of flight. He is dangerous because he looks outside and starts believing in idols and

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<sup>64</sup> <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauvoir>, accessed on 21/1/2012.

the conclusion of it often leads to fanaticism, because for his values to be adhered he will readily sacrifice others in the name of it. "Attitude of seriousness gives rise to tyranny and oppression when the "cause" is pronounced more important than those who comprise it."<sup>65</sup>

The serious man upholds absolute and unconditioned values to which he or she subordinates his or her freedom.

The serious man joins a group of people such as Christians or Communists and these identifications supply him with rights. The individual, says Beauvoir, makes himself serious; he hides his subjectivity "under the shield of rights which emanate from the ethical universe recognized by him; he is no longer a man, but a father, a boss, a member of the Christian church or the communist party."<sup>66</sup> This reduces the serious man not only to an enclave of dishonesty but also condemn him to be the slave of such values which he himself has made valuable and cannot think beyond it. Thus he forgets that every goal is a point of departure and that what stands above all is a continuous realization of moral freedom.

Beauvoir has already told us, all action loses meaning if it is not willed from freedom, setting up freedom as its goal. Thus the serious man is the ultimate example of bad faith because rather than seeking to embrace freedom, he or she seeks to lose into an external idol. Other attitudes of bad faith include the "nihilist" which in Beauvoir's language is an attitude resulting from disappointed seriousness turned back on itself.<sup>67</sup> The nihilist, having failed at life, decides not to try anything at all and since there is nothing external to him that can hold him, he concludes in taking up an attitude that desires to be in absolute void. The nihilist desires to be nothing which is not unlike the reality of human freedom for Beauvoir. However, the nihilist is not an authentic choice because he or she does not assert nothingness in the sense of freedom, but in the sense of denial.

The nihilist just forces the recognition of the fact that life is worthless with no meaning in it, but the world can be given a meaning and that also it is the individual who makes this difference. But the nihilist fails to see this and exists in the loathsome negative condition. This attitude of bad faith have also led sometimes to dire consequences taking different forms such as suicide, physical dissipation and systematic nihilism can result in

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<sup>65</sup> Kruks, 1990: 45.

<sup>66</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 49.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 48.

tyranny and destruction of the individual too. Beauvoir mentions lastly about the adventurer and the passionate man who are still at a better and higher level from the yardstick of understanding freedom and responsibility and explains the situation responsible for their behaviour pattern also. The adventurer is interesting because it is so close to an authentically moral attitude. Disdaining the values of seriousness and nihilism, the adventurer throws him or herself into life and chooses action for its own sake. But the adventurer cares only for his or her own freedom and projects, and thus embodies a selfish and potentially tyrannical attitude. Unlike the nihilist or the serious man, the adventurer rejoices in the ambiguity of existence. He likes that he does not have values, that life is uncertain. He does not take refuge in any system, and he does not care how his adventures affect others. He cares only about glory.<sup>68</sup>

The adventurer does not attach himself to the end at which he aims; only to his conquest. So this becomes at times close to a very rigid system of goal following. Thus he, at times, may be at the clutches of a situation that prevents him to aspire and realize his freedom. But in the broader sense of the term he throws himself to the new experiences of the world. The joy that Beauvoir places which is faced by the adventurer in such explorations and the way he faces his unjustified existence is significant. The real failure in this situation that an adventurer explores is with relationship to the Other around him and is complex which will be explained later in the next chapter. Finally the passionate man is last in the category that Beauvoir explains, exalting it to a level where freedom is experienced at higher levels than the rest.

The passionate man is, in a way, the antithesis of the adventurer. In him, too there is a sketch of the synthesis of freedom and its content. But in the adventurer it is the content which does not succeed in being genuinely fulfilled. Whereas in the passionate man it is the subjectivity which fails to fulfil itself genuinely.<sup>69</sup> Beauvoir in her explanations guards against maniacal kind of passion which may take place due to non possession of his object of passion or otherwise leading to unhealthy consequences. But apart from some disruption in the case of passionate man, Beauvoir finds some hope for the passionate man: a conversion from passion to love is always possible. “To love another, as opposed to possessing or wanting to possess that other, is to recognize that

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 64.

person as a free subject in her own right.”<sup>70</sup> Thus the willing of oneself and others as free under any situation is the way to ethical freedom and responsibility.

In describing the different ways in which freedom is evaded or not taken responsibility of, Beauvoir establishes how in each case the account of bad faith in a situation is at the same time responsible for such an act. Be it the case of the childhood instance, or how one gradually develops and enters adolescence, or the various cases of the different men, that Beauvoir explains to elaborate the complexity that is inscribed around bad faith, it simply explains the complexity of the situation one is entangled in. She shows us that acknowledging our freedom is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for ethical action. It must, according to Beauvoir, embrace the ties that bind me to others and take up the appeal – an act whereby I call on others, in their freedom, to join me in bringing certain values, projects, conditions into being. Her writing expresses the subjective passion that grounds the ethical life and how it is embraced in a conflict and mutilated.

We find that the concept of situated subject is central to the thought of human existence as seen above in the examples of the different attitudes of the men whose various situation and attitude make them slip into bad faith in different ways. Basically we locate that individual is always a situated subject, and situation describes how the material and political complexities of our situations can either alienate me from my freedom or open me to my freedom. The above attitudes apart from showing the importance of the situation, explains that ethical-political of willing ourselves and others free taking responsibility is not an easy one and demands constant practice because we are tempted to avoid the anguish of this permanent choice. By envisioning the future as open and contingent it challenges the mystifications that validate sacrificing the present for the future.

The situational approach in dealing with the detailed analysis of the reason behind people not being able to attain that state of ethical freedom leads to a an enriched version of ethics that Beauvoir tries to build up. Beauvoir’s interest lies in the comprehension of these complexities of situation, their impact on how one develops ones character as an individual and engages in the liberation from oppression, taking responsibility of oneself. We find that the concept of situation therefore provides the matter as well as the context for an ethical existence but my ability to detach myself consciously (through reflection), from my situation in order to evaluate the possibilities it presents to me is absolutely

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 64.



essential – to the ethical “justification” of my existence.<sup>71</sup> On this account, the situation provides a necessary obstacle to my freedom.

Beginning from the situation of the concrete existing individual, it provides an analysis of our human condition that takes account of our unique and particular subjectivity, our embeddedness in the world, and our essential relatedness to each other. The situation is necessary because it forces me to engage my freedom concretely, which is the only way in which my freedom can become meaningful to myself and to others. One is conscious to the situation one finds oneself in and one is rooted in the “here” and “now” that follows one wherever one may go. Situation thus shows its consequences on an act and the freedom that is taken up by the agent. Situation is also an obstacle because my freedom must triumph over the constraints that the situation places upon the realization of my projects. Thus, the concept of situation that Beauvoir explains shows the external limitation placed on the project of authenticity which Sartrean existentialism fails to analyse in details. So the account of situation given by Beauvoir adequately addresses the external impediments followed by analysis of embodiment and oppression.

Situation has been explored and understood as the structure of one’s lived experience where one finds oneself with a fixed social political and historical condition which governs their take on freedom. One is always born to a particular time, place and in a certain family, culture and with a specific body. All these factors shade someone’s consciousness of the world. Beauvoir explains the various situations that compel one to not own up to one’s responsibility and freedom. This becomes often the position that has to be transcended to achieve a state of ethical freedom. The analysis of situation provides an elaboration of our existential-ethical situation that joins a hard-headed realism which even concludes the fact that one’s body is also situated and so body which is the agent to deny or confirm ethical freedom is already situated in a condition. All situation give some kind of agency to act and it is the ability of the body situated at that particular situation that either affirms or denies it.

A deeper look into the problematic of this situated body simply states that the matter of confirmation and denial is not independently of the body, but as a matter of being situated in a certain condition, it enacts in a certain way. Thus the realization of freedom is situated and subject to embodiment, historicity and often the culture. A non-situated

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<sup>71</sup> Vintges, 1996: 45.

consciousness is, by definition, impossible. The feminist theorist, Toril Moi, explains that the concept of “situation.” Beauvoir’s notion of the body as a situation is, according to Moi, a crucially original and often overlooked contribution to feminism.<sup>72</sup> The issue of situated embodied existence becomes indeed a crucial one to understand the implications it has on freedom.

The theme of situated embodiment was a concern of Beauvoir’s since early childhood and that it was this interest which was the impetus for Beauvoir’s later philosophical notion of authentic embodiment. The argument put forth by Simons is that because of her childhood experiences in her quest for her own freedom, Beauvoir was able to realize the power that social pressures hold.<sup>73</sup> Through the examination of Beauvoir’s autobiographies it becomes evident that Beauvoir consistently demonstrates an early awareness that one’s situation will be expressed through one’s body. This idea is also present in Beauvoir’s novels. In the novels it is shown that many of the characters are struggling within authentic embodiment. The concept of embodiment is not a new one in philosophy, but the way in which it is utilized by philosophers has changed. Embodiment used in this sense does not pertain to the lived experience of the individual, but rather the way in which objects and concepts in the world interact with the forms.

The idea of embodied subjectivity is also present in Beauvoir’s earliest meetings with Merleau-Ponty in 1927. He criticized Beauvoir for being too emotional, to which she responded, “Certainly I have a more complicated, more nuanced sensibility than his and a more exhausting power of love. These problems that he lives with his brain, I live them with my arms and legs... I do not want to lose all that.”<sup>74</sup> The critical stance she adopts towards Merleau-Ponty’s attitude demonstrates Beauvoir’s early understanding that embodiment is necessary for a full existence and also explains in this line her rejection of Cartesian dualism. If Beauvoir were a dualist, she would not describe her situation as being expressed through her body. For Beauvoir, the mind and body cannot be separate, as such, one cannot escape from one’s body; hence, one will always be embodied. What is important is one’s comportment toward one’s situation, which will determine whether one is authentically embodied or not. Embodiment, for Beauvoir, is the lived experience and the situation of the individual will be expressed and lived through the body. Hence, the

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<sup>72</sup> Moi, 1990: 46.

<sup>73</sup> Simons, 1986: 90.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 90.

historical, cultural and social situation that the individual is in will affect how the individual is embodied.

Disembodiment is not possible because one cannot quit one's body, but the individual can decide whether or not to authentically assume their situation. The authentic attitude that one has toward their situation occurs when the individual fully accepts their lived situation. When one is inauthentic one will often not accept one's situation or will delude oneself about aspects of one's own situation. For example, slaves can only exercise their freedom within the parameters of their situation; they are not entirely free. They act as an embodiment that is inauthentic due to a certain situation pulled by constraints of a kind. Apart from speaking at length about embodiment in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir also explains that how embodiment affects the life of people in the way to embrace the freedom they otherwise could.

It is also explicated in her novels for example, in the nightclub scene in *She Came to Stay*; the female protagonist explores various possibilities for "experiencing" the body. First, one identifies the notion of consciousness of the body as lived in by the subject when Xaviere does things to her arm and, whilst touching her eyelashes, talks to herself. Then there is the body of a young woman in feathers as perceived by her male companion who has pounced on her hand, i.e., the body as an object for the other subject. Her body is perceived by the other, the man, but she rejects this "objectification" of her body as being part of her experience of her body because it becomes a thing. And a young woman talking about flirting perceives the body of the man – she is staring at him – but at the same time rejecting the notion of her body as potential object for the other subjectivity. This is again the body as object for a subject. Now the reality of the subject's lived experience must include both the experience of the lived body as part of one's own subjectivity, and the experience of the lived body as object of subjectivity. To dissociate or to deny this dual aspect of experience was to be in bad faith for Beauvoir. Embodiment thus exists in Beauvoir's novels; the characters of her novel are embodied and stage the tyranny, strife and the consequences and complexity of embodiment. Beauvoir has widely and very deeply understood embodiment in divergent ways and not only addressed issues related to feminine embodiment, but dealt with various other unnoticed aspects as well.

Beauvoir even notes in the book, *Old Age*, how biological changes can affect embodiment and in this way also show how situation (here old age) puts its thrust upon taking on the freedom: "Generally speaking, so long as the mind retains strength and

balance, the subject can be kept in good health: it is when the intellectual, spiritual side is badly shaken that the body deteriorates.”<sup>75</sup> This is important to note because Beauvoir is emphasizing the intimate connection needed to maintain health in the body and the mind. In the second half of her book, Beauvoir begins her existential account of old age.

She notes that a feeling of inauthentic embodiment occurs in the elderly due to the deterioration of the body. The elderly individual observes their body from a position of detachment: this is demonstrated by elderly who can describe their symptoms with little attachment. One does not really have a conception of what one’s body looks like on the outside; rather one depends on others for that image of ourselves. Some elderly people develop a distorted view of their bodies as still youthful and as such they do not consider themselves as old. However, when a person comments on the elderly person’s age or appearance, for example, saying to an elderly person that they are “a nice old man,”<sup>76</sup> the elderly person becomes aware of the gap between the image they have of themselves and the actual image of themselves as perceived by others. Beauvoir comments on this disassociation: “whether we have recovered a more or less convincing, more or less satisfactory image of ourselves or not, we are obliged to live this old age that we are incapable of realizing. And in the first place we have to live it, to experience it, in our bodies.”<sup>77</sup> Many elderly people experience inauthentic embodiment as though their body were a physical shell forced upon them and which they have to take care of.

Beauvoir also notes those elderly who take inauthentic embodiment to such a point that they manifest symptoms in their bodies. Thus embodiment carves out its place and influence on not just from the point of view of a gendered perspective but also in other way. This simply states that how old age people can face inauthentic embodiment which we often term as bad faith, but is often in-detailed analysis of a matter of natural situation. Similarly Beauvoir brings in the notion of various type of embodiment, of which the most important is the female embodiment. Bergoffen gives a very precise and clear understanding of Beauvoir on embodiment and how it leads to an understanding recounting sexual difference in ethics.

It was by confronting the question of the ethical order insisting on the fundamental reality of desire and remaining attentive to the social/historical

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<sup>75</sup> Beauvoir, 1977: 143.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 112.

implications of the phenomenological critique of the subject object dichotomy, that Beauvoir explored the relationship between situation and embodied desire and discovered the concept of gender. In introducing the concept of gender and examining the processes of gendering, Beauvoir may be seen as participating in the phenomenological-existentialist project of historicizing the embodied subject. Subjective embodiment, Beauvoir notes is always sexed and gendered. Further, given current historical conditions, our bodies are sexed and gendered according to the categories of patriarchy-categories which pervert the meanings of desire and subjectivity and which undermine the conditions of the possibility of reciprocity.”<sup>78</sup>

The emphasis on embodiment is clearly given in her book *The Second Sex* where the concept of embodiment as a philosophical concept is fully formed. It clearly describes about female embodiment. The original title of *The Second Sex* was “Essays on Women’s Situation,” which describes better Beauvoir’s overall aim. The situated self, as described by Simons, is something that is “embodied, intersubjective, shaped by history, culture, and society and engaged in practical action in the world.”<sup>79</sup> *The Second Sex* marks the naissance as well as the nexus of the notion of “becoming-woman.” Beauvoir puts forth the crucial distinction between sex and gender that changes the discourse around the female, the feminine, and womanhood. It is a continual modality of bodily interpretation within or partially outside the shifting paradigms of normality. Not only does it describe the complications of embodiment of women but also how the situation and embodiment leads to oppression. Biological explanations of woman for Beauvoir serve only to demonstrate how the male is trying to imprison woman in his dominion. This will be dealt at length in the next chapter.

Beauvoir clearly states that the body is not a thing, but it is a situation, which emphasizes the tie between the body and situation. In a way, to grasp freedom, both situation and body work as impediment in some context. In some cases, the body in a particular situation prohibits to clinch the freedom. Moi convincingly argues that Beauvoir espouses neither biological determinism nor a theory of social construction of gender, but rather develops an account of a woman being “in situation” for whom the body finds “my

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<sup>78</sup> Bergoffen, 1997: 29.

<sup>79</sup> Simons, 1986: 96.

experience of myself and the world.”<sup>80</sup> Embodiment, which is a combination of body and situation, cannot be achieved authentically because these women do not authentically assimilate in their situation. Rather, the situation is imposed on woman by man; she does not have any active role.

In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir turns to the concrete realities of this situation. She traces female development through its formative stages: childhood, youth, and sexual initiation. Her goal is to prove that women are not *born* “feminine” but shaped by a thousand external processes. She shows how, at each stage of her upbringing, a girl is conditioned into accepting passivity, dependence, repetition, and inwardness. Every force in society conspires to deprive her of subjectivity and flatten her into an object. Denied the possibility of independent work or creative fulfilment, the woman must accept a dissatisfying life of housework, childbearing, and sexual slavishness. In the final chapter of this section, “Woman’s Situation and Character,”<sup>81</sup> Beauvoir reiterates the controversial claim that woman’s situation is *not* a result of her character. Rather, her character is a result of her situation. Her mediocrity, complacency, lack of accomplishment, laziness, passivity – all these qualities are the *consequences* of her subordination.

Beauvoir explains the “phenomenology of the body” as lived throughout the different stages of a woman’s life. Here she is explicitly offering her narrative as an account of lived experience, the body in situation, and not as part of the data of biology. Beauvoir explains that woman does not authentically assume her situation because she adheres to the situation imposed on her by man, which for woman means that she is solely immanent. By her constructivist account, Beauvoir explained that how women were historically and politically situated, and how deeply embodiment matters while embracing freedom and this has been explicated even in the matter of erotic experience.<sup>82</sup> Becoming a woman is a matter that brings to her life – consequences in accord with the platonic ideal of femininity projected over her, and thereby repressing her will-to-freedom and the possibility of becoming a transcendent existent.

Through female embodiment also, Beauvoir simply shows that woman has immense difficulty in experiencing authentic embodiment. The implication of the idea that

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<sup>80</sup> Moi, 2001: 62.

<sup>81</sup> Beauvoir, 2010: 673.

<sup>82</sup> Beauvoir, 2010: 352.

woman's situation is culturally determined is that it does not allow her to authentically realize her embodiment because she is not socialized to assume her situation as a transcendent being; rather she learns to be passive which allows her to be immanent. The situations for women act as their restraint. Women's situation is restricted in such a way that they are already situated in a society that is male dominated and thus choosing against themselves may seem to be the only way to choose. Woman's embodiment is affected because even though women are aware of their bodies, they are still not actively pursuing their transcendence or assuming their situation; hence woman has difficulty in achieving authentic embodiment.<sup>83</sup>

Woman and the elderly who are in bad faith, succumb to the image that society presents of how they should act. Woman is told to dress and act in a certain way; the same can be said for the elderly. The influence of society will have direct repercussions on their authentic embodiment. The individual, as woman or as the aged, will not be genuinely assuming his/her situation, if the situation is imposed on them. There can be no chance for authentic embodiment as long as woman and the elderly are not free to *assume* their own situation.<sup>84</sup> For all marginalized groups, the body seems to be viewed by society as an object. This objectification of the body is internalized by the individual; hence the individual can easily slip into bad faith. For woman as for the elderly, the body is considered a passive thing that is manipulated by outside forces.

In choosing woman's position without consulting her, the male asserts his subjectivity, whereas woman, who passively accepts the situation, imposed on her, only serves to further her objectivity which leads to oppression of women. Oppression shows the condition of women's situation as one which restricts their project for authenticity and transcendence. With this emphasis on situation as a limiting factor for transcendence, and focussing on the embodiment of women, it simply shows how women are sided into chains of cyclic oppression. Beauvoir simply explains the malady of a women's embodiment and how she is dragged into subtle chains of confinement in her due process of socialization, culture and behaviour pattern and thus enter into states of oppression.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Beauvoir, 2010: 199.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 789.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 712.

In the case of oppression, the failure to realize our freedom is not a moral fault, but rather a matter of being compelled to assume the position of subjects who are not recognized in their subjectivity. Beauvoir, then, was critical of women for being complicit with their own oppression, while at the same time critical of men for continuing to occupy the role of oppressors. She argues that men have typically denied their corporeality, and that women have typically taken responsibility for men's embodiment. Some women who are oppressed are not even conscious of the fact that they are oppressed as they give in to what choices are available in the existent society.<sup>86</sup> Over the time, some women are so used to their "roles" and accepted to be objectified that the consciousness of liberation has not entered them. Oppression is the degradation of freedom into the stagnant life of the *en-soi* but our bodies are not objects and clearly not meant to be stagnant to the unavailability of choices. Our body is not first posited in the world the way a tree or a rock is. It lives in the world; it is our general way of having a world. It expresses our existence, which signifies not that it is an exterior accompaniment of our existence, but that our existence realizes itself in it.

Beauvoir was centrally concerned with the problems of oppression and embodiment in her studies. What was a phenomenological breakthrough was used in *The Second Sex* as a liberatory tool by attending to the ways in which patriarchal structures used sexual difference to deprive women. *The Second Sex* was a detailed analysis of the lived body, and an ethical and political indictment of the ways in which patriarchy alienated women from their embodied capacities; from the feminist perspective, it was also an appeal – an analysis (both concrete and theoretical) that called on women to take up the cause of their liberation. It provided the phenomenological insight that it is as embodied beings that we engage the world. The positioning of the body in the world is simply an assertion of the individual's engagement with the living world with possibilities. Thus if the body is repressed, suppressed in any way, and delineated of space and liberty; it leads to oppression. This not only stands true in case of women but also slaves or any individual whose body is tormented or not provided with the liberty of being a free agency.

*The Ethics of Ambiguity* unveils the immediate connection between the situation of woman and that of others who have their freedom restricted in some manner. With the goal of elucidating an existentialist ethics and with the existing socio-political situation at

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 801.



that time, with World War II at its upfront, Beauvoir was indeed concerned with questions of oppression and ethical responsibility. So true is this fact and this remains the truth that in embodiment, if there is no transcendence, it ultimately loses itself to be an object, stagnant and hence the state prevails of oppression. Body is not a thing but a way of relating to Other, of engaging in the world, acting as an agent in desired projects. Oppression clearly is the curtailment of aspiration of existence, shedding choices, and reducing one to the state of objects.

However in line to the above discourse of Beauvoir's importance on situation and followed by it embodiment, it is indeed complex to decipher the way the particular individual has been a victim and been oppressed. Simone de Beauvoir, despite her own emphasis on freedom and individual choice, anticipates the complexities that arise when we attempt to make sense of different people's actions in the face of oppressive circumstances. Beauvoir claims about the experience of oppression that it is complicated in practice. Apart from this kind of case, where the victim is unconscious, there are aspects where the oppression takes place as the victim gives itself to the readymade structure and often slips into bad faith. These oppressed people can be said to be in complicity, in bad faith in their oppression and they evade any choice of revolt that could render them any kind of freedom. People in this case behave like an object, pretending to a given role, acting as stagnant agents and denying his/her subjectivity.

Kruks, following Beauvoir, distinguishes between less severe cases of oppression, in which the individual may too willingly claim the mantle of victim in order to discharge herself of responsibility for changing her situation, and more severe cases, in which one cannot hold the individual culpable for failing to pursue alternatives.<sup>87</sup> She eloquently sums up Beauvoir's position as follows:

There are cases where the slave does not know his servitude and where it is necessary to bring the seed of his liberation to him from the outside: his submission is not enough to justify the tyranny which is imposed on him. The slave is submissive when one has succeeded in mystifying him in such a way that his situation does not seem to him to be imposed by men, but to be immediately given by nature, by the gods, by the powers against whom revolt has no meaning; thus, he does not accept his condition through a resignation of his freedom since he cannot even dream of any other; and in

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<sup>87</sup> Kruks, 1990: 97.

his relationships with his friends, for example, he can live as a free and moral man within this world where his ignorance has enclosed him.<sup>88</sup>

The basis of the problem of oppression can be sort out by the act of liberation. In a more existentialist usage of the term, one can be called liberated when one will be able to have *transcendence* as one acts as an agent. The same idea is used in a socio-political plane, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* by asserting the distinction made between maintenance and progression. This simply asserts that the way out of oppression is to indulge in constant activities that lead to transcendence. Activities of transcendence include precisely those activities of progress, creation, and discovery that are opposed to the maintenance of life in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, while the mechanical chores that minister to the life process are here activities of immanence.

Oppression thus demands liberation and this must be started as soon as one is awakened with the conscious fact of realization that one is oppressed. It becomes our moral obligation to raise our acts in the way to liberate those who are in the clutches of oppression due to their embodiment and situation, and not able to embrace freedom as we do. However, as we saw in the first unit, Beauvoir keeps it as a moral responsibility that if the Other is not aware of his oppression and we are then it is our duty to condemn the oppressive acts for the freedom of them along with our. The Other thus forms an important category in the ethical discourse and I will deal with it in the upcoming chapter.

Freedom and situation thus juxtaposes the condition of human life in its contention. Freedom remains one of the most important value that is considered by Beauvoir to be embraced by individuals however this freedom is found to be situated as we see in the second unit and this situatedness forms, either privileges or complexities in embracing it. The situatedness then ventures into detailed analysis of embodiment and examines the factors that are often responsible for individuals to own up a life full of freedom. The impediments are studied at length by Beauvoir and the exhaustive understanding of situation and embodiment yields realistic positions and shows the reasons behind individuals often fleeing away from their responsibility. Though freedom entails a responsibility, yet sometimes the situation concede to such a problem that the individual attains the state of bad faith. Beauvoir goes beyond what a general ethicist will do. She not only gives the account of freedom at length but penetrates very ambitiously at the core

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 89.

levels of the locale of a humanitarian life that is larger and may be countered with grey areas. The ambiguity of the fact of a natural tendency to flee away from freedom is encountered by Beauvoir. Understanding them under the exhaustive light of situation as a concept and embodiment, she simply explains the reasons we often overlook in the rudimentary approach to ethics as to why even if individuals want they sometimes *cannot* grip their freedom and act responsibly. Encompassing a wide spectrum of ethical question of attaining freedom and living a responsible life in a high moral plane, Beauvoir has done much justice to the questions of ethics if they are meant to be realistically implemented as all accounts suffice to cases of utter factual concrete situation. The account of freedom and situation has given way to the realism of position of an everyday world we encounter bringing in subtle acts of embodiment, situation that affects largely the fleeing from responsibility. This situation is more than a body; it has a large role of the Other who can completely give a new direction to the discourse of ethical philosophizing. This will be dealt at length in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### OTHER AND RECIPROCITY

The role of the Other and reciprocity gives a complete new direction to the philosophizing in ethics and question about human existence. From time immemorial till many centuries that have followed on, there was much philosophizing on “self” and no one might have imagined that different subjects might exist (like the Other), or that man and woman in particular might be different subject. It is this exploration of the Other as a different subject that is crucial for Beauvoir and to existentialism in its quest for locating an ethics of ambiguity. Beauvoir engages her ethics with the notion of intentionality of consciousness, as also contemplated so by Bergoffen in her article, “Necessity of Violence, Gift of Generosity.”<sup>89</sup> Beauvoir’s ethics surmounts to the call of Other for meaning.

Similar to the disclosure of consciousness is the disclosure of meaning of the self in relation to the Other. Other undoubtedly remains very important to Beauvoir. The existential world is always that of one individual consciousness to which the Other cannot remain alien and opaque, so while carving the questions of human existence, the Other remains necessary and indispensable. Understanding the relation where Other is posed as a threat at times, and is often a source of meaning to my existence; Beauvoir brings out the importance of reciprocity in the relation between the self and Other. Reciprocity showcases the vulnerable aspects of a relation between self and Other. Reciprocity brings out the tension of the relation of self and Other in the existentialist ethic framework.

The notion of creation of a meaning to existence is inextricably tied to an ethical response to the Other and is addressed by Beauvoir in *The Ethics Of Ambiguity* as well as even *The Second Sex*. This general exploration of the possibility of an existential ethics is given a particularity and a concrete dimension through her exploration of the place of women in society in *The Second Sex*. In the following two sections, the Other has been examined in relation to the ethics that Beauvoir is trying to carve out. The first section deals with the relation between self and Other. It analyses the aspect of the vulnerability of self in relation to Other, and how the self - Other relation is an undeniable contingent

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<sup>89</sup> Bergoffen, 1997: 45.

necessity of the society. It tries to comprehend a way we can positively frame the relation between self - Other for universal liberation. The possibility of an existentialist ethics is on the baseline of the involvement of the Other. The second section deals the Other in context to feminist discourses – Woman as Other. It is important to note, however, that Beauvoir is not proposing an ethics of sexual difference. Beauvoir outlines an existential ethics that is grounded in a new way of viewing the self, and by implication, a new way of viewing the Other. Thus the last section provides an examination of the how women have been given the role of Other along with the complexity of it.

### **I. SELF, OTHER AND UNIVERSAL LIBERATION**

Freedom remains utmost important while understanding Beauvoir. Specially after establishing her ethical paradigm of philosophizing, one understands that the state of ethical freedom can only be attained by willing oneself and others free. The freedom of other inexplicably becomes the responsibility of an individual as was explained in detail in the first chapter. There is an interdependence of freedom of each other in a mutual tone, and the call for a lived unity is echoed in the ethics of Beauvoir. However, the subjective aspect is never ignored. Being an existentialist writer, the “self” remains indeed important and at the centre. It is with the relation to the self, that the Other is posited both an opponent or an ally in terms of the existing project that an individual registers himself in. The question of self and Other indeed remains crucial and influential in carving out the ethics that Beauvoir is trying to bring out.

We find from the beginning of philosophical writing, the “self” has always enjoyed the privileged status of greater importance and prominent space in philosophical writings. The problems of philosophy have become the problems of the “self” or say the individual. It is in fact credible of Beauvoir who carved out the notion of freedom with relation to Others and gave birth to a new kind of thinking. Although it went unnoticed for many years but it is worthwhile and qualitatively rich. Beauvoir’s idea of a situated freedom of the individual to lay the foundation for a more sustainable understanding of human freedom by realizing a conception freedom that is with the Other was an unique consideration. Beauvoir’s self is a self that is indeed autonomous, responsible but at the same time it is very much in relation with the Other.

In fact one can see that it was from the very beginning that Beauvoir had given over a self that was very solitary or self positioning that lives up to its own anxiety only. It is not the solipsistic, all ending – “I” but rather the “I” that is in the lived world, every time transcending with Others and engaging with them. This is not to be mistaken that she did not have an individual personal life; indeed she had bouts of self anxiety, questions and explorations about herself. Her autobiographies simply show the time she had spent alone or even enjoyed in solitude with nature, and with her pen and paper. Thus her idea of “self” was basically to deny a solipsistic self and this had started to emerge in her writings quite early. Writing just prior to the outbreak of World War II, Beauvoir says:

Little by little I had abandoned the quasi-solipsism and illusionary autonomy I cherished as a girl of twenty; though I had come to recognise the fact of other people’s existence, it was still my individual relationships with separate people that mattered most to me, and I still yearned fiercely for freedom. Then suddenly, history burst over me, and I dissolved into fragments. I woke to find myself scattered over the four corners of the globe, linked by every nerve in me to each and every other individual.<sup>90</sup>

One may say that perhaps it was the time, the socio-political situation that existed then in France that moulded her thinking to shape a view about the self in relation to Other. It was a Paris, during the Nazi occupation and so it might have influenced her thought process rendering how the lived unity or the Other can be an ally in matters of political struggle and freedom. It seems Beauvoir’s understanding of subjectivity and the duality of self and Other is always from an ethical and, consequently, from a relational perspective. All of her ethical thought leads to this notion of the possibility of a genuine recognition between self and Other. It is reflected in her novels and even in her autobiographies.

In fact the opposition of self and Other is one of the most crucial theme that had hovered over her from her time as a philosophy student. From her diary as a philosophy student, she writes and vows to “Clearly spell out philosophical ideas...the theme is almost always this opposition of self and other that I felt upon starting to live. Now has come the time to make a synthesis of it.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 369.

<sup>91</sup> Beauvoir, 2006: 43.

Beauvoir from the earliest has been bothered about the question of self and Other and her outcome about the relationship between self and Other in terms of philosophizing has not been very precise and clear probably because she in her own personal life kept vacillating regarding the question of self and Other. She had tried to synthesis the self and the Other but lastly in her memoirs she asserts that she has failed to do so. At times she has felt this vehement need and call of individualism, yet she has also understood the reliance and the dependence on Other and its importance. The uncertainty prevails with the value of independence of the self on one hand and the existence of Other on the other hand.

A very close reading at her memoirs and diaries reveals that the “Other,” is often the close experiences she had in her personal life with her friends and lovers. In 1927, in her diary she writes taking and feeling the importance of individualism at its extreme that “Others can no longer be anything definitive and complete; the great renunciation that I had dreamed of is possible. They are not anything but themselves, as I am but myself, and above all, I have no need of them.”<sup>92</sup> At the same time, latter we find that she gives so much importance in building up a relationship with the Other. Even her writings in her diary take a different turn, like she says “I count on myself; I know that I can count on myself but I would like not to have to count on myself.”<sup>93</sup> This simply shows that Beauvoir was in a dilemma and could not decide to take a stand on constructing an ethics, deciding whether to give importance to self or the Other. The self sufficiency and self independence of one led to the complete end of the other.

The writings in her diary come to an unresolved end. However when she came up with her philosophical writings, they beautifully showed up the importance of individualism and along with it equally at par, made it an essential point to have a respectful mutually reciprocal relation with the Other. Beauvoir emerged with a view of self - Other out of dilemmas and it helped her making way to construct an ethics of existentialism. The self and Other both remain indispensable to ethics and with the idea of an universal liberation. The self and its relation with the Other, as Beauvoir defines, is from an ontological perspective of forming an existentialist ethics.

It can be traced back to its phenomenological roots for a better understanding of it. However, unlike most other philosophers working in the phenomenological tradition,

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 57.

Beauvoir focuses not on individual consciousness but on the relationship of that consciousness with Others. Agreeing along with Ursula Tidd, I will say that for Beauvoir, consciousness is intentional and it is directed towards something and often transcended.<sup>94</sup> This transcendence is on an ethical dimension and in fact this transcendence of the self is only possible through a means of the Other. Thus, consciousness moves towards the realisation of its own possibilities by means of the Other. The relationship of self and Other is drawn phenomenologically to the roots of intentionality and explained how intentionality is always about something and that somewhere undoubtedly includes the Other. One can also say this by studying Beauvoir's remarks on Merleau Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. In the review of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, Beauvoir states:

...phenomenological notion of intentionality – that is, the direct relation between subject and object – has important implications for an understanding of ethics: One of the great merits of phenomenology is to have given back to man the right to an authentic existence, by eliminating the opposition of the subject and the object.<sup>95</sup>

The phenomenological understanding of consciousness means that consciousness always reaches out beyond itself; it is always, and necessarily, consciousness of something. Beauvoir, true to her existentialism, also accepts that consciousness desires autonomy. In accord with Sartre, therefore, she asserts that the ontological freedom to transcend itself is a fundamental constituent of humanity but because her philosophical focus is ethical rather than ontological, she implicitly questions Sartre's notion of absolute freedom. Beauvoir argues that the development of a coherent ethics means that existential freedom cannot simply be synonymous with consciousness but, rather, must also be understood as embedded within the person's social and physical existence. The intentional conscious subjectivity through constructive activities tries to achieve transcendence involving Others. By introducing the significance of situated freedom into existentialism, Beauvoir effectively changes the existential focus from a concern with one's own freedom into a concern that necessarily incorporates the freedom of Others. Thus the phenomenological importance of the relation between self and Other is engrained in Beauvoir's thought and it

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<sup>94</sup> Tidd, 2004: 37.

<sup>95</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 248.



becomes very positively just also. The ethical parameters of the self and Other relation remained very crucial to Beauvoir as we have seen from the beginning itself.

For Beauvoir, the self, can never be completely reduced to the whims of an absolute self proclaiming – “I” constituted of absolute self ego only. It has to be given to a lived world to be a part of the material social world. People can only make a meaning engaging with the project and Other. One’s self has to be engaged in this lived world and not in solitude. There remains no way to escape from this world for any individual. The “self” that Beauvoir speaks must be a part of a collectivity owing up responsibility for Others and sharing the compassion of any political or social enterprise. The self owes a large amount of responsibility to the Other. Beauvoir along these lines explains in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that one can rise only to the level of an ethical freedom, only by willing others free along with our freedom. “To will myself free, I must will the freedom of others.”<sup>96</sup> The claim at the very first glance sounds fundamentally egoistic since it appears that the freedom of Others is subordinate to the freedom of the individual. But on a larger understanding one finds that Beauvoir is trying to elaborate the importance of sociality and the fact that the individual is a social being that exceeds a conception of the subject indebted to individualism and to elaborate ethics that accounts for more than the individual’s untainted self interest.

A morally free person in this lived world has the responsibility to owe up and take a stand in preserving the freedom of Others along with his own self. The pursuit for an ethical freedom obliges one to fight against those who attempt to take away the freedom of others. It is through the Others that Beauvoir tries to construct her broad ethical notion of a mutual beneficent, considerate, integrated community. There is a deep-seated notion of fellowship and the reliance on each other is at such a level that concerns of the Other, is taken into accountability for action in case of need and despair.

Considering the fact that the Other for the most of the time by Beauvoir is perceived in an ethical frame, Ursula Tidd notes that it was in *Pyrrhus et Cineas* – her so called first text related to ethics – that the question about the relationship of the self to the world and Other had showed up for the first time.<sup>97</sup> Beauvoir’s analysis of the free subject immediately implies an ethical consideration of other free subjects in the world. The

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<sup>96</sup>Beauvoir, 1948: 72.

<sup>97</sup>Tidd, 2004: 31.

external world can often manifest itself as a crushing, objective reality whereas the Other can reveal to us our fundamental freedom. Lacking a God to guarantee morality, it is up to the individual existent to create a bond with Others through ethical action. As Weiss asserts that as a free subject the self is in a contingent world living alongside Others in a community life. He serves his bond with Others but as an individual, he has his own existential desires as well as ethical tasks.<sup>98</sup> Existentially he wants to project himself into the world and leave his mark on it by creating a difference and ethically somewhere he is obliged to recognize along with his, Other's existentialist status also. He therefore must refrain from self projections and refuse objects which compromise, ignore or negate other's freedom. There is thus a call for solidarity in attaining a mutual reliance.

This bond requires a fundamentally active orientation to the world through projects that express our own freedom as well as encourage the freedom of our fellow human beings. And being "human" is essentially to rupture the given world through our spontaneous transcendence rather than to reduce to be an object and slide into bad faith. In addition, rather than seeing the Other as a threat to my freedom, Beauvoir sees the Other as the necessary axis of my freedom – without whom, in other words, I could not be free. With the goal of elucidating an existentialist ethics then, Beauvoir is concerned with every way to strike the importance of the Other and how it enlightens in bringing the part of self to the world. In other words, how the Other reveals the world to the self.

This approach towards ethics is indeed sensible and aims for a community that can live a life on higher moral plane but accepting the Other is not easy for the self. If we are really dealing with an ethics of realism and instrumentally working on it, we find that the first perception of the Other is that of an interloper.<sup>99</sup> Beauvoir herself remarks this fact and explains about this in her writings. She says that it is often that any young individual at the very first instance sees the Other in a negative way and perceives only that aspect where the Other is negative but Beauvoir asserts that this is a tendency we inhere from our childhood. We through are social conditioning are made to believe that the Other is separate, unapproachable and not a part of me. There is a persistent hostility towards the unknown Other's consciousness as Beauvoir herself quotes Hegel's lines explaining that

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<sup>98</sup>Weiss, 2006: 241.

<sup>99</sup> Tidd, 2004: 31.

every consciousness seeks the death of other consciousness but she says that this happens at the preliminary level only.<sup>100</sup>

Beauvoir claims that it is *genuine* for an individual and a group to oppose itself to the Other. Elaborating on this idea, she gives reference to travellers chancing to share a train compartment who are treated as “Others” in comparison of all the rest of the passengers on the train. This practice she deems equally common of considering suspect those of another race or community in the common living world. In small town the general public, eyes persons not belonging to the village and they are suspected “Others.” Similarly to the native of a country all who inhabit other countries are “foreigners;” Jews are “Others” for the anti - Semite, as are Blacks for American racists, indigenous peoples for colonists, proletarians for the privileged class. Thus Beauvoir acknowledges that humans constantly experience each other as threat, suspect, or alien at the initial level.

At the very first level of understanding and perception, the Other seems to be contrary to the individual and thus seen as a impostor in the spaces that assumingly belonged to myself. To explain how much the Other is thought as a threat, Beauvoir quotes the preface to *Inner Experience* by Georges Bataille.

...each individual wants to be all. He sees in every other man and particularly in those whose existence is asserted with most brilliance, a limit, a condemnation of himself. And indeed at every moment others are stealing the whole world away from me.<sup>101</sup>

Beauvoir explains that it is our social conditioning and the very fact that we feel that Others are pre-occupying the space that we as individuals deserve, makes the first movement to hate them. The hatred is naive because it is no sooner that one realises that the fragile thread of existence lies on the very face of the existence of the Other. Beauvoir argues that the negation of Other cannot happen as it is redundant in its approach because it is only the Other who reveals the world to me. One cannot be everything and occupy logically all the space. There has to be the feeling of dependence and mutual cooperation which Beauvoir rightly addresses and which at times may look unrealistic on the peripheral level but is not so. The fact remains in the realization that if everything would be

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<sup>100</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 70.

<sup>101</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 70.

constituted of *me*, then there would be nothing other than me. Hence life would lose its meaning of existence as there will be nothing worth revealing grasping or discovering.

At every moment others are stealing the whole world away from me. The first movement is to hate them. But this hatred is naive, and the desire immediately struggles against itself. If I were really everything there would be nothing beside me; the world would be empty. There would be nothing to possess, and I myself would be nothing... by taking the world away from me, Others also give it to me, since a thing is given to me only by the movement that snatches it from me. To will that there be being is also to will that there be men by and for whom the world is endowed with human significations. One can reveal the world only on a basis revealed by other men.<sup>102</sup>

It will indeed hit the vicissitudes of emptiness in its proclamation of constitution if there were not the Other. This same realization takes over any individual who perhaps had encountered the Other with threat and then eventually moved on to accept and understand the importance of Other. It is through the Other that our life gets a meaning, our conquest gets an existence. It is only in the context of Others that we create and define oneself. As Beauvoir says “One can reveal the world only on a basis revealed by other men. No project can be defined except by its interference with other projects. To make being “be” is to communicate with others by means of being.”<sup>103</sup>

The Other remains as a benefactor of total admiration, check or criticism. The Other bears witness to our actions and thus make our life qualitatively affluent. There should be someone to bear testimony to our acts otherwise meaningful existence can cease away with a dictatorial act of living. Beauvoir sees engaging with Others the hall mark of moral freedom. Beauvoir thus tries to strike a relationship of mutual recognition, human dignity, respect and of community reliance by establishing a very ethical relationship between the self and the Other.

Beauvoir asserts that it is this concern about the Other that makes us not things, but rather as a higher moral being and this relationship is an irreducible one. The Other gives me the sense of identity as “I” do to the Other. But to engage with the Other in the lived world and to attain a life of unity and dignity, there should be a “reciprocal

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<sup>102</sup>.Ibid., 71.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 71.

relationship” between the self and the Other. Reciprocity is an important feature of self - Other relations for Beauvoir. It refers to a mode of relating to oneself and to others as both subject and object and as equal freedoms in the world.<sup>104</sup> Now this relation as commonly assumed and as Beauvoir strives to contend, asserts a positive relation between the self and the Other.

Beauvoir explicitly and very positively opens the possibility that people may achieve through reciprocal recognition but she realises that there is gender discrimination in this reciprocal recognition which is the result of evading women to the class of Other. This is dealt at length in the next section. Reciprocity thus becomes a very important factor in the relationship between self and Other. In fact a reciprocal relationship can only follow up if the Other perceives you at the same level in which you perceive the Other. To see another conscious being and relate to him is to see somebody who is mutually able to relate to you as well and view you in a similar way. Reciprocity becomes a necessary condition for relation to Other if not a sufficient one. Beauvoir along this line asserts “There can be no presence of an other unless the other is also present for himself: which is to say that true alterity is that of consciousness separate from mine and identical with mine.”<sup>105</sup>

Reciprocity becomes very important while studying the relation between self and Other in Beauvoir. Reciprocity says Tidd,<sup>106</sup> Vintges,<sup>107</sup> is said to be borrowed from the Hegelian master slave dialectic where the Hegelian reciprocity demands that beings mutually recognize one another as subjects. The importance that Beauvoir attributes to the moment of Hegelian recognition in the master-slave dialectic means that she emphasises the potential for reciprocity in our relation to the Other. Both men and women should not only accept each other and themselves as subjects, but they should accept all possible dimensions of each other in a feeling of fraternity. Ursula Tidd explains the importance of reciprocity explaining Beauvoir’s point of view very clearly:

Beauvoir asserts the Other as potentially reciprocally equal – as a being who is always already included in this movement of consciousness towards its own perpetual self construction. She argues that self – Other relations constitute reciprocally the facticity of my situation or the given features of

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<sup>104</sup> Tidd, 2004: 34.

<sup>105</sup> Beauvoir, 1993: 237.

<sup>106</sup> Tidd, 2006: 228.

<sup>107</sup> Vintges, 2006: 215.

my existence in the world which I have not chosen. So the Other assumes the same importance for me as other elements of my facticity, such as my body, my past and my birth. She explains that each person's experience of subjectivity is unique to him or herself and that we each need to be 'recognised' for our unique individuality. This reciprocity has to inhere to an understanding and recognition of the Other.<sup>108</sup>

The relationship between self and Other thus entail a logic of reciprocity to actually attain a state of equilibrium of acceptance from each other. Along these lines of reciprocity, can further develop the idea of friendship and mutual generosity as is put up by Beauvoir scholar, Julie K.Ward in her article "Reciprocity and Friendship in Beauvoir's Thought."<sup>109</sup> Ward explains that the call for reciprocity is important for a reciprocal cognition. Only when there is a reciprocal cognition, it yields the same truth to the other subject and there is a mutual relation. Otherwise there is always the threat of subjugation or considering the other as an object. When there is an act of reciprocal cognition and the same truth to the other subject is revealed, it is a relationship that is characterised by equality and respect and involving solidarity and fellowship. The two consciousnesses are able to attain a state of mutual benevolence and recognition.<sup>110</sup> Beauvoir emphasizing on the relation of reciprocal recognition asserts that if this relationship is attained then even the master slave dichotomy can be solved.

It is possible to rise above this conflict (that of the master-slave) if each individual freely recognizes the Other – each regarding himself and the Other simultaneously as object and as subject in a reciprocal manner. But friendship and generosity, which alone permit this recognition of free beings, are not facile virtues; they are assuredly humanity's highest achievement.<sup>111</sup> Here Beauvoir characterizes reciprocity as a mode in which subjects recognize each other equally both as object and as subject, implying that the fundamental opposition of the Other as object is overcome by a parallel recognition of other as subject.<sup>112</sup> This reciprocity remains and so fosters the dependence

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<sup>108</sup> Tidd, 2004: 35.

<sup>109</sup> Ward, 2006: 154.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>111</sup> Beauvoir, 2010: 140.

<sup>112</sup> Gothlin, 2006: 71.

on each other however one must not mistake that there is a loss of individualism in the voice of the ethics that Beauvoir is trying to carve out.

Although there is much dependence on Others, but the self and Other are two extremes that cannot be reduced. There is a relation of concern, unity, understanding and transcendence but at the same time the parable of individuality remains. Ward establishes that it is along these lines that more ethical values can be grown like friendship, generosity and there is an environment of solidarity and fellowship which even Beauvoir asserts in her ethical writings.

First, reciprocity is not possible without a prior equality between subjects and can only be expressed between a self and Other who share a relation of complete reciprocal equality.<sup>113</sup> Beauvoir ascribes to the thinking that authentic love, friendship, generosity and understanding solely lies on the base of a reciprocal recognition. It is at this qualitatively high level of friendship, union in the reciprocal recognition that one's autonomy is dissolved and one does not just "interacts" with the Other but "merges" with the Other. Eva Gothlin has noted this kind of a union where the autonomy perishes, on the base of reciprocal cognition and when desire overtakes, are union wherein there are moments of intersubjectivity.<sup>114</sup> But these moments of intersubjectivity between the self and Other are by Beauvoir basically explained in terms of sexual union and intimacy. A little critical examination reveals that intersubjectivity in reciprocal relationship by Beauvoir had started to appear in her initial ethical writings as in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*. Beauvoir argues for a notion of the Other as reciprocally equal, as a being who is always already included as the goal of this movement of consciousness toward its own perpetual self constitution.

It is because my subjectivity is not inertia, withdrawal or separation but rather a movement towards the Other that the difference between myself and the Other no longer exists and I can call the Other mine; only I can forge the bond which unites me to the Other and it is forged on the basis that I am not a thing but a project of selfhood in movement towards the Other – in short, a transcendent being.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ward, 2006: 155.

<sup>114</sup> Gothlin, 2006: 71.

<sup>115</sup> Beauvoir, 1944: 253.

We find that often reciprocity apart from yielding a positive way to relate to the Other is also a way where the self relates to the Other, but then the relation is either of separation or enmity. Reciprocity necessarily does not entail positive consequences in the ethical paradigm. If one examines, then one finds that reciprocity need not always help in communion, or to establish a positive bond of the self with the Other. Reciprocity is to relate to the Other and this can be in enmity or friendship as Beauvoir asserts

When two human categories find themselves in each other's presence, each aspires to impose its sovereignty upon the other. If both are able to sustain this claim, a reciprocal relation is created between them. Whether it is in enmity, or in amity, it is always in a state of tension. If one of the two is privileged, has some advantage, this one prevails over the other and undertakes to keep the other in subjection.<sup>116</sup>

The reluctance in reciprocity can however not be overlooked. One obvious reason for the reluctance is that reciprocity of subjects would threaten the dominant subject's sovereignty. It is thus by posing woman as absolute Other that man finds "a means of escaping that implacable dialectic which has its source in the reciprocity that exists between free beings."<sup>117</sup> In the case of sexual difference, there indeed the reciprocity is not just recognized but used in subjugating woman as Other. This shall be dealt in the next section. Thus we find that in reciprocal recognition, there can be at times situation when the Other does not acknowledge to reciprocity and instead try to oppress the individual.

In these times, Beauvoir even concedes to the path of violence in order to attain one's own dignity and freedom. Violence is not desirable for the Other but if someone takes the reciprocal cognition to such a level of oppression that the individual feels victimised then perhaps violence is the only way out to regain the freedom desired. However, one finds that at the end the associations of self and Other by following the ideal of reciprocity, inflect her renewed turn to ethics. There is indeed complexity in the relation between self and Other which vacillates from developing reciprocity that almost suggests intersubjectivity at its core at one end to a relation where the self has related to be oppressed by Other. Ward notes in that while constructing an existentialist ethics, for

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<sup>116</sup> Beauvoir, 2010: 701.

<sup>117</sup> Beauvoir, 2010: 141.



Beauvoir, the crucial gain is that reciprocity allows for a resolution to the dialectical opposition of consciousnesses.<sup>118</sup>

More importantly, only mutual recognition of subjects allows the kind of freedom proper to our humanity. Still, the goal of reciprocity is, as she has always noted – hard won and it cannot be substituted by a flawed universality in which subjects desire sovereignty for themselves individually.<sup>119</sup> The failing of reciprocity simply explains that it disposes egoism to the self. The world is subject to a lot of complexity and the distinctness of human behaviour and varied thought leads to divergence in the way individuals behave. Thus the relationship of self and Other is also subject to divergent ways existent. The positive act of morality as described by Beauvoir indeed relies on a bond of positive reciprocity and dependence of the self on Other but Beauvoir also notes the very essential fact that the Other is separate and sometimes opposed to self.

It disturbs obviously the ethical order that Beauvoir had carved out of mutual reliance as there arises concrete difficult problems in individual's relation with the Other. Beauvoir herself has not failed to see that irrespective of her determination to carve out an ethical discourse involving the Other in a manner of an ally to transcend project; the Other at the same time can become an extreme case of absolute power and pose threat. We have already seen above that at times there is reluctance to the reciprocal relationship between the self and Other and often this reciprocity is not reverted in terms of a positive ethical approach. This whole reliance and reciprocal recognition of self - Other makes both the self and the Other vulnerable to each other.

The complication in the relationship takes place when the Other tries to dissuade away with the existing relationship and asserts the weight of his own thrust solely taking the advantage of the individual's vulnerability at times. The reliance on Others is then targeted as the way to manipulate situations and torment the weaker ones and oppress them. The dependence on each other for the possibility of a transcendence and completion of any project, say political or social is subjugated at times to such a point that an individual who was initially a cohort of the project is reduced to a mere object.

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<sup>118</sup> Ward, 2006: 157.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.,157.

This shift of relationship and the uphold of power construct is done to such a position that the Other is often seen as the *oppressor*. Thus the interdependence on Others can negatively lead to oppression. Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* asserts:

For “we” is legion and not an individual; each one depends upon others, and what happens to me by means of others, depends upon me as regards its meaning; one does not submit to a war or an occupation as he does to an earthquake: he must take sides for or against, and the foreign wills thereby become allied or hostile. It is this interdependence which explains why oppression is possible and why it is hateful.<sup>120</sup>

The dependence on other men was because they emerged to give a future of possibility to the individual. Beauvoir develops the idea that since it is we who make the way to a future in a project for the Other; abstaining others from encouraging in ethical freedom is a way we are acting against the ethical call of the other. Without others, our actions are destined to fall back upon themselves as useless and absurd. However, with others who are also free, our actions are taken up and carried beyond themselves into the future – transcending the limits of the present. And thus this objection or failing to ensure other’s freedom is also an implicit way we are oppressing the Other. Thus oppression can take place instrumentally at various levels which we often seem to ignore.

At a larger level, we find the exploitation where the oppressor is conscious of the fact that he is doing acts that is ethically making me subject to exploitation but he takes advantage of my dependence. The Other has the power to recognize, give meaning to my life as well the power to exploit me which is what is followed here. The individual is dependent for the realization of his freedom on the Others but instead of making the individual a part of it, they cut the individual off from what he was supposed to gain. It is not participating with the individual but in fact conspiring against the individual. Others cut the individual off from the project, from the future, by keeping the individual abandoned and cutting him off from freely mixing with other agents. The Other reduces the individual into an object by clogging the freedom of interaction and transcendence. The Other thus becomes the oppressor in this process and as Beauvoir goes on to say, that the oppressor feeds himself on their, (the individuals) transcendence and refuses to extend it by a free recognition.

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<sup>120</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 82.

This leads to a case of subordination and Otherness of the individual since his free level of interaction from the lived world is bracketed out. The individual becomes the one who is dominated and dependent. Beauvoir in her discussion of oppression affirms that it is mutual dependence with our relationship that leads us to oppression and it creates two classes of people – “those who parasitically depend on the oppression of the Other and who oblige humanity to forge ahead in spite of itself, and those whose lives are a mere repetition of mechanical gestures destined to serve the aims of their oppressor.”<sup>121</sup> The ethical inquires however does not satisfy itself with the admission that the self is oppressed by the Other. The fact remains that we live in a lived world and at every project we call upon an ally or an opponent in the Other we face. Thus ones oppressed, the individual cannot give up the reason of absconding from the relationship and the ethical order of self - Other relationship. He is in a lived world and community, circumscribed by people and he has to make meaning in the face of this existing situation.

The individual has a choice and that is to decide against this oppression and it is then as Beauvoir asserts in her language that the “movement of emancipation”<sup>122</sup> really begins. And this movement is then joined by many others who are ally to the part of this project; sometimes this movement of universal liberation begins by one man and then the liberation take place by enjoining of the Other as an ally and then a comrade in the project to give it an universal theme of proclamation. Since we have already seen that my future rests on the possibilities provided by the Other, it is often the Other who sees my plight and initiates the revolt in the community for a universal liberation.

However, here, Beauvoir interestingly points out, and adhering to the realistic situation in a socio-political world, she says that it is indeed a feeling of fellowship and solidarity to feel for the oppression and pain of the Other but often what one feels is “empathy” as one has really not undergone the situation and trauma of the problematic state. The self can empathise with the Other but never *feel* the part of the pain he has gone through or the complexities of the case subjected to the individual. Indeed she says that it is this benefit of the relationship with the self and Other that carves out her ethics for existentialism yet somewhere she concedes to the understanding that people with similar agenda must join together for liberation of their cause; like women for women sake, Jews for Jews.

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<sup>121</sup> Beauvoir, 1944: 120.

<sup>122</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 79.

One must note that she is not against or critically taking the relationship between the self and Other where each comes to the call for liberation of the other. It is just that she has ascribed to a realistic position, I suppose, by establishing the fact that people with the same political or social goal should get along better for their purpose of liberation and needful action. Beauvoir has never linked the self to the Other with a base that lies on universalism of any kind, thus when the self - Other relation is achieved on the grounds of ethical quest and for the need of liberation, it indeed marks a notion that our relatedness is a fundamental need. The individual and the Other remain irreducible and recognize their differences, but it is only the idea of otherness that causes the individuals to unite with others, and to transcend the difference between that one absolute Other and self.

Universal liberation thus calls on the face two things; either to join in the movement as an ally with the others and take the responsibility of it owing to the cause of it or liberate those who are still now not enlightened enough to cause a revolt for their own rights. This fight for universal liberation simultaneously in its course not only becomes a fight for those who were oppressed, but it becomes a fight for the self and not just the Other. Often the self loses and submerges itself in the revolt of an action of universal liberation for the Other. Here the collective conception in man is not valid sentiments of love, tenderness and friendship as seen above and as Beauvoir also notes. The relationship between the self and Other, guided by the manifesto of a universal liberation in its call changes from ethical to political and social. Perhaps that is the beauty because this remains one of the most stable and powerful relationship of the self - Other. Beauvoir also asserts in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that the individual is in a comradeship and this is likened between each one to each of the other. She writes:

In marching in choral singing in common work and struggle, all the other appear as same; nobody ever dies. On the contrary, if individuals recognize themselves in their differences, individual relations are established among them, and each one becomes irreplaceable for a few others.<sup>123</sup>

The self is not just related to Other, it reaches a juncture that is more than reciprocal recognition or a positive relation with the Other. Perhaps this is the union where

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<sup>123</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 108.

the reciprocal recognition is needed at preliminary level to relate, but the cause and the call is of high moral plane of fighting “together”– in unity for causes that have consequences on not just the Other who is present now but many to follow.

It is the realm of political society that constitutes our ethical acts and here we find that the Other is obliged to work for the conditions of material and political equality. The self is engaged in joint activities as the hallmark of moral freedom which is established in the act of universal liberation of the Other. This brings us to the entire ethical framework and understanding related to self - Other and universal liberation that Beauvoir tries to construct. However, the reciprocity towards Other as noted above is gendered and this forms an another interesting area to examine in the ethical discourse. The next section will look into this gendered reciprocity with in feminist discourse.

## **II.WOMAN AS OTHER**

In the early section one sees that the Other incessantly demands for a reciprocal recognition in order for a relationship to develop for the self and Other. One needs to be recognized for one’s subjectivity in order to exist in the lived world which is argued by Beauvoir to be denied in the case of woman, making them as the inessential, the Other. The conflict of self and Other is foundational to the concept in *The Second Sex* of woman as the Other. In the end to the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir directly asks all these questions, perhaps to direct the beginning of the discourse that indeed paved the first storm of reflection in feminist thinking.

“...being like every other human being an autonomous liberty, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men make her assume herself as the Other ...they attempt to fix her as an object and doom her to immanence insofar as her transcendence is to be perpetually transcended by another consciousness that is essential and sovereign. The drama of woman is this conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject, who always poses himself or herself as the essential, and the exigencies of a situation that constitutes her as inessential. How in the feminine condition can a woman become a human being? What roads are open to her? Which culminate in impasses? How can independence be rediscovered at the heart of

dependence? What circumstances limit the liberty of woman and which can she surpass?<sup>124</sup>

Beauvoir's 1949 feminist masterpiece, *The Second Sex* analyses the political historical situation of woman and argues that in the patriarchal frame of society, woman is the Other. Margaret Crossland characterizes Beauvoir's central thesis, that under patriarchy woman is the Other, as an application of Sartre's phenomenology of interpersonal relationships, and its "dynamic of consciousness struggling against consciousness."<sup>125</sup> However, the matter is just not about struggling consciousness, but it is about a kind of culture, sociality and civilization we all grew up and which has subjugated woman. Beauvoir argues, that it is the society that turned out to be strictly patriarchal leading woman to the status of Other. This Other, as many Beauvoirian scholar like Ursula Tidd, have tried to show (as I dealt earlier) is the Other that is taken from the Hegelian insight of the Other. Beauvoir herself has quoted Hegel in *The Second Sex* in the understanding of the Other as she says that in understanding any social group, man and woman, one needs to understand that "in consciousness itself there is a fundamental hostility to every other consciousness. The subject can be posed only in being opposed – he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the Other, the inessential, the object."<sup>126</sup> Thus Beauvoir's explanation is indebted to Hegel in her use to the status of women who is the Other, and accordingly the man becomes the subject, the absolute, the essential.

Beauvoir makes reference to Hegel's master-slave dialectic in *The Second Sex* while explaining the status of woman as Other, essentially to contrast and bring in the position of woman with that of the slave. However, this position of comparing the slave with the woman has been put to criticism by later feminists. Woman is termed as Other by Beauvoir to show that she is the inessential, dictated by the subject – the Other. However, when the comparison between the slave and woman is done, there seems to be some unconvincing positions. Unlike the woman's relationship is seen by Beauvoir with a man where the woman is the object, subjugated and feels herself inessential, the slave finds himself as a subject. At times, the slave can feel essential in his struggle in the master and slave dialectic. Beauvoir says that a woman is in a worse position, like the slave and the slave can yet see himself as a subject, essential and there is a possibility that he can

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<sup>124</sup> Beauvoir, 1953: xxxv.

<sup>125</sup> Crossland, 1992: 189.

<sup>126</sup> Beauvoir, 2010: 17

overthrow his master but in the relationship between a man and woman; a woman cannot ever supersede the man and consider him inessential.

Beauvoir asserts that woman can never reach the necessary consciousness of emancipation. It is this use of Hegel, asserts Judith Butler in her article “Myths and ideology,” which later feminist have criticised. Butler says that if woman is deprived even of the potential victory that is attained by a slave, then it can be concluded from this that Beauvoir’s message is that woman can never attain freedom for themselves except if there is some change that is instrumentally done by the society itself or the master.<sup>127</sup> Agreeing with Butler, I will say that if one takes the Hegelian term Other and its entire usage in a very strict sense of the term, then *The Second Sex* seems to clearly establish that woman cannot be freed from their position and their state of being an object. But this sense of theoretical implication must be avoided and not taken into account. The underpinnings of this work can be criticised but there are larger and greater contributions that this book has done in feminism. In her detailed reading of *The Second Sex*, Eva Lundgren-Gothlin argues convincingly that Beauvoir does not position man as master and woman as slave in her use of the master-slave dialectic, Beauvoir privileges reciprocal recognition as the means to overcome the potential, perpetual conflict between self and Other.<sup>128</sup> As Gothlin notes, woman do not participate in the Hegelian struggle for recognition, which takes place between men.

Beauvoir is working here with two different notions of the master-slave conflict which seeks to establish self and Other, among men and the non-dialectical relationship of self and absolute Other between man and woman. This is a relationship that is rooted in their biological and psychological dependence on each other. This dependence is the result of sexually differentiated roles, which has their origins in female and male biology. But whatever is the reason of difference between male and female, one cannot ignore the stand that Beauvoir takes in *The Second Sex* and that is of the position that woman was taken as Other. This Other should be fully understood and examined from a Hegelian insight or not is a debatable matter and yet to be resolved. Largely, we take the term Other then as the

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<sup>127</sup> Butler, 1990: 78

<sup>128</sup> Gothlin, 2003: 74.

distinction between subject and object as understood by Joseph Mahon in his article “Philosophical foundation of Second Sex.”<sup>129</sup>

The Subject is invariably the self, the essential, the sovereign and transcendence. Male human beings are assigned to this category and it has been contrasted with the category of the Other which in this context is the woman to which the female counterpart is assigned. Hostility towards the Other is not something that is very surprising in terms of understanding the relation between self and Other, but how it becomes extreme in cases of the relationship between man and woman so that the Other reaches levels of oppression is worth seeking. Reciprocal recognition is important to male-female relationship and it gives the possibility to make both as subjects and objects.

In context to Beauvoir, woman is termed as the Inessential Other and man is termed as the Other. The Other when Beauvoir refers is the affirmation of a sociological space as given by Mahon and this space is termed as “Inessential,” the existence of woman.<sup>130</sup> Stein affirms that when Beauvoir says Other, in this context it is not in reference to any other human being here but in reference to the woman in relationship with man. Her inessentiality is also regarded in relation to man. Both man and woman, Beauvoir claims, see woman as a less essential thing.

“She is defined and differentiated with respect to man, and not with reference to her. She is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute – she is the Other.”<sup>131</sup>

In the sections of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir asserts how historically, socially and politically this civilization over the years has made to feel woman as the Other in the lived world. She has been objectified by many small and large ways and made to feel inessential. The social conditions and the institutions have contributed to make her submissive dependent and subordinate to the man. The account of woman situated in a patriarchal society and her examination of the positions of biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism affirms that how woman has been treated. Beauvoir studies this all these disciplines in order to know that where and how these gender roles and stereotypical gender biasness started making places.

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<sup>129</sup> Mahon, 1997: 104.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>131</sup> Beauvoir, 2010: 291.



The chapter on biology elaborates about the essential biological facts and then moves towards more complex details explaining the differences between male and female. It shows cases of biological considerations are an essential element in a woman's situation but Beauvoir affirms that they are "insufficient for setting up a hierarchy of the sexes; they fail to explain why woman is the Other and they do not condemn her to remain in this subordinate role for ever."<sup>132</sup> Similarly even Beauvoir's examination of psycho analysis by Freud fails to explain why woman is Other.<sup>133</sup> In fact, Beauvoir asserts in *The Second Sex* that Freud never actually showed much concern with the analysis of woman and instead he simply adapted account from that of man with slight modification in it. Although he explained about Electra complex, Beauvoir asserts that it was way less minutely detailed and described than Oedipus complex. While psychoanalysis gives the framework within which to study the dynamics of gender, it does not explain the origins of masculine domination nor its persistence, resting as it does on the assumption of the patriarchal father. Beauvoir therefore turns to historical materialism and, in particular, Engel's claim that private property is at the root of masculine domination. While acknowledging the influence of economic forces, she rejects Engel's argument on the grounds that it never explains the very constitution of male and female subjects.

Beauvoir remains critical and unimpressed by the Marxist account of female history. She cannot justify how the oppression of woman can be reduced to class oppression, and the antagonism of the sexes to class antagonism. Rejecting, therefore, both the "sexual determinism" of Freud and the "economic determinism" of Engels, she presents a history of male domination by integrating the biological and psychoanalytic into a materialist analysis of history.<sup>134</sup> These disciplines reveal indisputable "essential" differences between man and woman but do not show that woman is the Other. In this way Beauvoir dispenses with the scientific foundations for views that regard woman as, by nature, destined to be man's Other, showing them all to be fallacious.

Beauvoir then provides a detailed account of the historical situation of woman. It explains the early origins of woman's demotion to the category of Other. It tries to decipher what would have been the reason for the establishment of male supremacy that has eventually led to target woman as Other. She then moves to history to trace the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 71.

emergence of male superiority in society, from nomadic hunter-gatherers through the French Revolution and contemporary time. Although the historical aspects may be less crucial for my inquiries, there are still some important points to consider in relation to this historical analysis.

For nomadic woman, pregnancy and menses were a distinct disadvantage because they prevented them from doing work, and in turn, they had to be taken care of by the male. Due in part to the lack of natural birth control (such as seasonal or cyclical fertility, which is the case for some other female mammals), human female was at constant risk of pregnancy, which in turn made the nomadic woman submit passively to their biological fate. Beauvoir uses the term “risk” when discussing pregnancy because it could happen at any time, and at this point in history, there were hardly any ways to prevent pregnancy. In this respect, the female nomad is restricted to a life of repetition and immanence, according to Beauvoir, which is contrasted with the male who represents transcendence, is marked by activity wherein the male was the hunter and actively ensured the survival of the group. The female nomad does not have the same opportunity to escape the biological restraints as the male, and as such, she becomes solely defined by her body. This shows how very naturally woman is given immanent roles by the society and man is transcendent.<sup>135</sup>

The transcendence and immanence dichotomy shows the gender inequities that have crept in silently at our homes. They act as two ways of domination and disclosure of a human being if we see it in the larger picture. Immanence explains a closed-off realm where woman are interior, passive, static, and immersed in themselves, whereas transcendence showcases going beyond the corporeality and engagement with the world. Woman are tied to this life of immanence due to the way the masculine world throughout history have confined them to believe and have constructed a framework of political economical network that simply makes her believe in her immanent roles she adheres to. Beauvoir affirms that man as we see is engaged in purposeful transcendental activity and woman has been assigned an existence in immanence by masculine culture. The ways and the process of the subjugation of woman to a status of immanent role will simply explain the reason of the status of woman as Other. This has also been seen in economic enterprise and activities.

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 651.

The early tillers of the soil represent a brief moment in history when woman had considerable economic power. Property and name were from the female's side, and in turn, any inherited property would be passed down from the females. However, with this economic responsibility also came many myths surrounding femininity, such as females being able to make crops grow by magical powers and to suit the spirits of ancestors. These myths were perpetuated by an increasingly patriarchal society, which actively sought the removal of woman from positions of power. These myths, as prevalent then as they are now, enforce the removal of the tie of woman from the earth.<sup>136</sup> They also allow for woman to be marginally honoured, but only out of fear by the male. This occurred because of the lack of scientific explanations for these events. Male's fear turned into resentment, and thus the active effort to rid the female of her supposed mystical powers. Ultimately, it was the male who took over the position of woman as mystic.

In taking over the woman's position without consulting her, the male asserts his subjectivity, whereas woman, who passively accepts the situation, imposed on her, only serves to further her objectivity. Woman was further relegated to the role of the Other with the increasing stress on private property, according to Beauvoir. This was due to the fact that it was man who held the property, and woman was considered to be part of that property. The situation of woman did not advance until the advent of the industrial revolution when machinery erased the need for raw brute strength, and woman was permitted to assume an economic role. The economic roles did advance during the industrial revolution because woman was gaining economic independence from man. However, due to the fact that working conditions were so horrible in most factories during the nineteenth century, more often than not, women would work seventeen hours a day without seeing any sunlight.

In this respect, woman still did not gain their economic freedom because they were still paid a fraction of what their male counterparts were making. Thus we see that not only historically but even in economic enterprise, the biasness prevailed and woman was subjugated to the extent as the Other. However it was during this time that with the introduction of birth control, some freedom was afforded to woman. Woman was finally able to take control of her reproductive capabilities, which afforded her more freedom to enter the workforce. Beauvoir asserts that woman could thus regain control over her

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 277.

situation because she was no longer subject to her biological nature. The situation of woman was also not improved by the many myths surrounding femininity but it tried to come out of the perils of woman as Other.

Beauvoir argues since the rise of patriarchy, males have kept woman in a state of dependence, and thus she has remained the ultimate Other. Having drawn up a history of masculine domination, a history in which man defines woman as Other, as we saw in history as well as economic activities, Beauvoir asks how man have imagined woman in their dreams, as it matters and related them to new existing situations. *The Second Sex* is devoted to the exploration of the myths men create about women to justify their subordination.<sup>137</sup> Most myths support this role of woman as Other; for example, in Genesis, Eve was created from Adam's rib, and therefore she is not an independent being. For Beauvoir, woman does not set themselves up as Subject and hence have erected no virile myth in which their projects are reflected. She says that they have no religion, poetry, god or even dream of their own.

Beauvoir discovers the most vivid expression of these imaginations in literature, poetry have incarnations of woman, often as an object of appeal, desire which are designed by man. There Beauvoir, though not largely, also detects the possibility that man, seeing woman as necessary to his existence. He is the one defining himself in her mirror, relating to her in fantasies and thus catches sight of a human being with her own needs with whom he might share a life of transcendence. However, as per the necessity of the discourse, and as per largely is discussed in *The Second Sex*, is the fact that it is woman who is constituted as Other. She is sometimes projected as a slave and companion to man's fanciful desires for his own self-realization in the myths that he processes and at times as a distraction or compensation for the anxieties of his own entrapment in the cruel or noble competition with other man. Woman serves so many functions as Other to man's projection of himself, his limitations and his potentialities. The implication from woman's not creating her own values leads to a definite problem when woman try to achieve a space for themselves and are termed as Other.

However, she is partially responsible for this relegation to the role of the Other because she has freely chosen to be the Other. In this respect, Beauvoir does not view woman as a slave, (in context to the debate of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic) because

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 270.

all woman have the choice to relinquish this position of object, but more often than not, woman does not exercise this right. Hence, without choosing and assuming a situation of her own, and her body being constantly objectified, woman has immense difficulty in experiencing authentic embodiment and so will continue to remain as the Other.

The objectification of body of woman has been termed, not because they are termed to be weak but because of the male patriarchy has virulently spread at all spaces. Weakness of female body, according to Beauvoir cannot be a reason to make her a subordinate or an inferior Other.<sup>138</sup> Beauvoir in fact argues that it is the civilization, the way woman are made as passive principle in economies, myths, everywhere that even establishes male body as privileged. It indeed is the difference in body that has led to the up rise of the male supremacy but it is not the weakness of her body but the way it has been perceived that becomes an issue in the patriarchal world.

The continuing passivity of woman is explained by Beauvoir by the extraordinary power that society has attributed to the male penis. Beauvoir argues that the value attributed to the penis is social and not intrinsic. This social conditioning of the way the male body is taken into account not only relinquishes the male with unanimous power and establishment of patriarchy but makes woman's body in this way unrecognized.<sup>139</sup> From the start the woman's body and role is one of ambiguity – in theory she is free yet because of her body she finds herself defined as the Other. The patriarchy is established and it sets values in such a way that places man as the standard of all things. So the whole dialectic and discourse is not about achieving a place that is of equality but it is rather of achieving by woman to measure against the standard that is of man. Patriarchy becomes the standard and woman measure against this standard. Thus Beauvoir insists that there is no neutral subject here and the norm is man himself.

Beauvoir compares woman and man to two electrical poles; man occupies the positive and negative poles while woman represents only the negative pole, as an absence of man. Therefore, historically, “woman” has come to represent, in some sense, an absence of manhood. It is like humanity is male and female is a neglected part of it that constitutes the Other. What makes one a woman, Beauvoir argues, is that she has participated in this “Otherness.” It means to belong to the group of people set up as the Other, whose identity

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 589.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 405.

is shaped by an absence of characteristics. As Beauvoir points out, “The category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself.”<sup>140</sup> That is to say, inherent in any primitive notion of being exists a duality of the essential and the inessential.

The only way to dismantle this status of woman as Other is to transform patriarchy rule from the lived world at all possible spaces. Beauvoir indicates that the transformation of patriarchy requires a transformation of the concept of the subject. It must accommodate the different ways in which distinctly sexed bodies live their transcendence and ambiguity. It must perceive the Other as equal, which actually demands recognition of one by the authority of other. The perception of Other with whatever situation she actually exists, in reciprocity can result in denial of the status of woman as Other. But the problem now remains that often woman are comfortable in being the Other.

Women may fail to lay the claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the Other.<sup>141</sup>

In many ways, woman has become dependent on man for her very survival. But this dependence works the other way also. Beauvoir says that woman is the Other in a totality of which the two components are necessary to one another. Thus, woman and man have a symbiotic relationship. There is a reciprocity that should run between a man and a woman relationship. Woman depends upon man for her survival, and, conversely, man depends upon woman for his survival. Woman’s failure to take on the dominant role rests in the failure to recognize and exploit this latter point. Interestingly, Beauvoir seems to be slipping back to a biological explanation for womanhood. She has previously argued that woman is more than biology, yet, at the same time, she posits a biological relationship between woman and man. But it is here that Beauvoir discovers not only myths that ratify and eternalize domination but also catches glimpses of transcendence when man, caught in the grip of their dependence on woman, recognize that their freedom can only be won with and through the freedom of women.<sup>142</sup> This also brings in light how superbly the man-woman relationship is fetched on a reciprocal relationship of recognition. But then what is

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 705.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 707.

<sup>142</sup> Mahon, 1997: 109.

the problematic question is why woman's reciprocity has not resulted in forms of reciprocity but rather enabled men to oppress her?

How, then, is it that between the sexes this reciprocity has not been posed, that one of the terms can be affirmed as the sole essential, denying all relativity in relation to its correlative, defining it as pure otherness? Why don't women contest male sovereignty? No subject poses himself immediately and spontaneously as the inessential; it is not the Other who in defining herself as the Other defines the One: the Other is posed as the Other by the One posing himself as the One. But for the turning back of the Other to the One not to take place, the Other must submit to this alien point of view. Whence in the woman comes this submission?<sup>143</sup>

It is in this reciprocal relation that Beauvoir challenges the relation of Otherness that are conflictual and the conflict between the two equal kinds of freedom. Reciprocity when unrecognized by the male has often led to a behaviour that has caused inequality in the relationship between the two. Beauvoir finds that there is a gendered difference in the desire for recognition between the male and female. Reciprocity requires each to apprehend and appreciate each other's complete situation. The only way a relation between men and women cannot degrade to a position of the Other, if they mutually recognize each other as subjects as Beauvoir asserts.

The sliding from this subject and object behaviour has led to failure to revert back reciprocity and resulted in forms of Otherness of woman, as Beauvoir writes, that in most of the cases the man affirms his position and subjectivity. According to Gothlin, Beauvoir's view is that woman has failed to enter a competing claim to recognition in the wake of their being objectified by men.<sup>144</sup> Because woman fail to enter this claim, man is unlikely to be struck by the relativity of woman's Otherness. There is slim chance for the sort of reciprocity that becomes unavoidable, according to Beauvoir, when both parties demand recognition. Thus, man demands recognition; woman fail to demand it in return and woman as a result are oppressed as Other. Instead, woman is seen as not participating in the process of recognition, a fact that explains the unique nature of her oppression.

The experience of being the Other in a society ruled by man makes woman feel objectified. It is the experience that constitutes intersubjectivity and objectivity but woman

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<sup>143</sup> Beauvoir, 1953: 17.

<sup>144</sup> Gothlin, 2003: 74.

experience themselves as seen or gazed upon by man leading them to conclusion that yields them a feeling of sheer objectification. One experiences oneself as seen in the Other's Look in precisely the same way that one experiences the Other as seen by him, as subjectivity. The Look as a concept has been elaborately staged by Sartre but Beauvoir borrows this term and uses this concept in great detail in her feminist book *The Second Sex* to show how, despite woman's sincere efforts at proving themselves as human beings firmly established in their own rights, man continue to relegate to them a status of a lower, inferior "Other." It is in this context that this feminist-existential term has to be understood. Emily Grosholz in this context notes how Beauvoir modifies, the Look, that was given by Sartre in her context. He says:

Beauvoir describes the way in which women internalize a social status as being for others...Because it is sustained by an inequitable social and economic situation, women do not have an equal ability to shrug off their being for other by "returning the look." "Burning presence of Other's Look" is where the genderless subject becomes object.<sup>145</sup>

Deutscher Penelope says that this very Look that reduces the Other to object is responsible to reduce the Other to the state of pure facticity.<sup>146</sup> Woman feel shameful consciousness of Otherness in being objectified as there is absence of response. The Look is not reverted back to confirm any acknowledgement and value. This thus leads to an inequitable relation and a biased interchange of objectification leads to stating the woman as Other. This gaze, this look no longer is reciprocal. It no longer remains an awareness of the possibility of the existence of Other as subject but reduces to the monitoring of an object. It becomes a one way perception and experienced by man who through the Look makes the Other possible and yet at the same time pose a threat that one feels when looked upon by man.

Beauvoir, as noted by Simons, has encountered this problem in her life too.<sup>147</sup> She explains in her autobiography that the time when she first started living independently outside her home, she initially felt threatened by the views of others that were different from her and could be imposed upon her and the fear that unknowingly used to dawn upon her when unknown men gazed her by. Bergoffen affirms in this context that given the

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<sup>145</sup> Grosholz, 2004: 114.

<sup>146</sup> Deutscher, 2008: 210.

<sup>147</sup> Simons, 2006: 89.



perversions of sexuality inherent in patriarchy's sex gender codes, Beauvoir discovers that the perceiving subject described by Sartre's Look is also an erotically embodied subject.<sup>148</sup> Thus the perceiving activity is also biased and sexed. It is scrutinized by the way in which erotic desires situate it in the world.

Beauvoir discovers in this context how erotic experiences and desires disrupt the Look, subject to perversions in the subjectivity accounted by a patriarchal society. It, in its Looks thus creates the differences in gendering the perceiving subject. The man of the society via their Look thus are capable of turning the woman as Other, as an object. However, Arp argues that it is not the Look that has objectified the body of woman but an alternative theory of how historically man has oppressed woman.<sup>149</sup> The female body becomes the site of oppression, as we have already seen above in the explanation of myths and how woman's body are taken as a source to exploitation.

It is perhaps this subjugation from time immemorial, together with the contribution of some woman who could not resist the temptation of avoiding bad faith and enjoyed the luxury of being in it as an object, that has stated woman as Other. In it has developed, the notion of Look which indeed has contributed to the difference of approach and is sexed as a perceptive mode but yet the larger picture as Arp has pointed out is the main reason behind every instrumental small process that takes place to lower the status of woman as Other.

Now, what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she – a free and autonomous being like all human creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other.<sup>150</sup>

Thus by the non reciprocity and the advent of the Look, it simply shows the domination of masculine power. The masculine ideology in fact exploits the sexual difference to create systems of inequality and make woman as Other. The whole system of patriarchy is chained up in such a fashion that a woman is made to feel the inferior counterpart. This is done by showing her passive in her actions, body, economies and in history and myths that is even professed by male only. In fact woman themselves are so submerged to the kind of civilization they are in, the values, which they never question that

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<sup>148</sup> Bergoffen, 1997: 90.

<sup>149</sup> Arp, 2001: 78.

<sup>150</sup> Beauvoir, 1989: 29.

they do not feel that there is an over binding force of patriarchy ruling them and responsible to make them feel as the inferior Other. This inferiority has made woman to feel as the “inessential Other” however Bergoffen notes that there is a difference to the approach between the inferior Other and the inessential Other.<sup>151</sup>

Bergoffen says that there is a considerable difference between calling woman the inferior Other and calling her the inessential Other. Although both the concept emerge out of patriarchy and show the privilege case of male masculinity yet Beauvoir develops the concept of inessential Other, asserts Bergoffen to explain the difference between women and any exploited groups. Woman become inessential in regard to a man’s reciprocity and thus often remain barely conscious of other woman around them. Generally in other oppressed groups, people are concerned of each other’s pain and agony and basically each one is conscious of the fact that they are exploited but in the case of woman they are first of all not aware of the fact that they are exploited. And even if sometimes they are aware of the fact, they either submit to the roles they are playing, becoming the inessential Other. It is a counterpart to a man or and it simply ignores their exploitation assuming what woman are meant to receive in this particular role.

In the other oppressed group, they slowly form a union and also adhere to a kind of unity and a feeling of “we” is there; the woman essentially lacks this union. In fact they themselves ally with their oppressors and contribute to their oppression. According to Beauvoir, the key to the fact that patriarchy has been ruling from ancient civilization is due to the reason that woman do not rebel and this “not rebelling” is also conditioned and by now assumed to be a characteristic of woman, designed by a male dominated system. “Isolated with regard to each other, women bind themselves in their individuality to their men.”<sup>152</sup> It has become clear for Beauvoir that woman has been set up as the inessential by man, as an Other, but it still remains unclear why the balance of power is thus. Why has man become the essential, the dominant category? Furthermore, why have woman seemingly allowed their subjugation? It seems that both categories fundamentally are equally capable of domination.

Woman is not a minority category; she represents approximately half the human population. There is no reason to think that woman wouldn’t have been able to take the

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<sup>151</sup>Bergoffen, 1997: 89.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 21.

dominant role to define them as the essential as opposed to the masculine inessential. It seems, therefore, that the woman has submitted themselves, in some way, under the domination of masculine forces. This submission, Beauvoir argues, could not have been caused by a historical event. However, the difference in body as the way it became a passive principle is somewhere contributor to the fact that woman were dominated by man but it cannot be the only reason to the fact of woman being considered inessential as Other.

Woman has always existed, and most often have always existed as subordinate to man. Though one might argue that this is the nature of the relationship, Beauvoir argues that “the nature of things is no more immutably given, once for all, than is historical reality. If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change.”<sup>153</sup> She continues, “The woman’s effort has never been anything more than a symbolic agitation. They have gained only what men have been willing to grant; they have taken nothing, they have only received.”<sup>154</sup> Woman has failed to bring about this change because, as Beauvoir says, that they have not organized themselves in the way that ethnic groups do or other oppressed class. This was also exactly the reason Bergoffen pointed out earlier in the above paragraph to quote women as the inessential Other and not the inferior Other.

According to Beauvoir, woman must exploit this fact of nature, and claim their identity as equals. But woman have been loathe to exploit this, because, in a sense, they have been afraid of giving up what they have already earned. They would give up their protection that man provides; the economic advantages that they have in virtue of men. Thus, it seems, there are certain gains to subordination, woman are also responsible. Beauvoir believes many woman do not want to surrender these gains for a chance at even greater gains. There is also the temptation to forgo liberty and become a thing. This is a dangerous road as it has the danger of discovering and unfolding new avenues. In other words, woman, having been subordinated as the inessential, is afraid to confront her own transcendence. It represents a monumental sacrifice that she is entirely hesitant to make. It seems to be a dilemma of risking a fairly safe existence for a riskier chance at a more fulfilling existence. Sometimes it is less challenging to take the easy route, to allow someone else to decide on our behalf. Woman has been tempted to allow man to make the

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<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 28.

important ethical decision on their behalf. To do so is to eschew responsibility for their own lives.

Throughout history they [women] have always been subordinated to men, and hence their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change—it was not something that occurred.<sup>155</sup>

Beauvoir's point is not to deny subordination. She does not claim that subordination "did not happen," but she suggests that its reality is not in the order of happenings and events. If we refuse to take responsibility for our freedom, preferring to acquiesce to the will of someone else, choosing to give up being the authors of our own lives, we condemn ourselves to the status of things.

Woman as Other is relegated to a status and though it shows that she at some instances can be partly held responsible yet ethically we have to look into the whole context to understand the complex problem of woman as Other. The reasons are obviously a patriarchal framework as we have seen in the discourse. However many of her sayings do not apply to the present time. But one must note that Beauvoir's writing is from the time of the century when woman was denied of much status quo so it stands relevant to that kind of a society and situation. The vacillation in reciprocity can aim man also making them as objects by their female counterparts. Beauvoir does not deny this shift in oscillation of poles. Though Beauvoir asserts that there should be forms of reciprocity between man and woman and for it, woman should also strive for financial and all kinds of independence possible as it will be healthier to retain and diverge the reciprocity accordingly then with their male counterparts yet she also conceded to the use of reciprocity at very personal as well as domestic level. Beauvoir affirms a man and woman's relation is most of the time asymmetrical and it is because there is absence of reciprocity.

The Other thus can entail an ethics of existentialist values, and yield freedom only when there is positive reciprocity at all level. Whether it be the case of a man-woman relationship where reciprocity is denied and is responsible for stating woman as Other or the case of man where reciprocity works to relate them positively for universal liberation; the Other remains an important category in the questions of human existence. Without the Other, there is no meaning yet it is the Other who at the same time has the power to de-value my existence. Woman and man can achieve reciprocal recognition of one another as

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 18.

embodied subjectivities and proceed for a harmonious relationship. Our projects and connections with others are made possible as our bodies engage with the world, but our embodiment also makes us vulnerable to possible objectification, exploitation, and domination by Others. The embodied and interdependent nature of our freedom explains both the possibility of oppression and the potential to overcome relations of domination through reciprocal recognition.

The vulnerability of placing the self with Other remains the interest of the complication as well as yields serious consequences to question of freedom and responsibility. It puts one in ambiguity. Recognizing the dual nature of ourselves as embodied subjectivities becomes, in turn, the foundation for an existentialist ethics. The Other becomes an important part of the larger questions of human existence as well as to the ethical queries to achieve a life of freedom and responsibility. Infact it has given the discourse a direction; but the direction remains ambiguous because the affirmation of the Other for our liberation is not a fact but a possibility. Infact there is ambiguity from the beginning of the quest of existentialist ethics itself where on the one hand we aspire for a freedom that is almost the highest value but are baffled by our concrete situation; hence ambiguity persists. The last section will thus look into the third important element of the tripod that is trying to seek justice to questions of human existence, freedom and morality in our everyday life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PARADOX OF AMBIGUITY

In the construction of an existentialist ethics, Beauvoir's contribution remains to endow us with the concept of ambiguity. It is in relation to the strife between freedom and situation that ambiguity is brought to light. The introduction of ambiguity has led one to understand that area of humanity cannot be categorically put up in camp of right or wrong. It showcases the realism of human condition. Human ambiguity is not only in the strife between freedom and situation but also in relation to the Other.

The concept of ambiguity is indeed termed to be paradoxical in Beauvoir's philosophy but this is also the reason that it has been termed to be so important and different from other existentialist writers who have spoken about ambiguity.<sup>156</sup> The dimensionalities of ambiguities are a part of life and Beauvoir emphasizes on them in her moral framework. So the first section deals with the various dimensionalities of ambiguity. It will reflect upon the various way ambiguity as a concept has been majorly employed by Beauvoir in her writings. It tries to elaborate and examine the different dimension of ambiguity as seen in feminist discourses and in other aspects of life. This simply leads us to the understanding of ambiguity at large so that one can embrace it in one's life. However, the ethical aspect of ambiguity constitutes an all together different importance in Beauvoir's philosophy.

In line to the dimensions of ambiguity, and stressing more on the ethical dimension; the second section deals with ethics and ambiguity. It tries to understand the importance of deployment of the concept of ambiguity in ethical discourses. It deciphers the importance of ambiguity in ethical discourses amidst the traditional schools of moral philosophy. An examination of the ambiguity in ethics leads to an understanding of existentialist ethics and this has also been dealt in the second section.

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<sup>156</sup> Langer, 2003: 91.

## I. DIMENSIONALITIES OF AMBIGUITY

Ambiguity indicates the strain between the two kinds of opposing occurrence that the self experiences; at times as a free subject and at times as an object for others. Beauvoir experiences these opposing forces in almost every aspect of life that an individual leads. In fact for Beauvoir, ambiguity is the base on which humanity rests. Beauvoir tries to comprehend the experiences of human life which she says lies in “tragic ambiguity of their conditions.”<sup>157</sup> Monika Langer in the *Cambridge Companion to Simone De Beauvoir* describes the origin of the word ambiguity. “Ambiguity comes from the Latin *ambiguitas*, meaning doubt, uncertainty the struggle or paradox. The adjective *ambiguous* means ambiguous, obscure, dark, wavering.”<sup>158</sup>

Beauvoir addresses the whole of humanity, the world, to be in a process of continuous paradoxical influence and in this process holding to polar positions. The paradox is in the act of transcending himself/herself for freedom and at the same time being trapped in a particular situation (as we saw in the first chapter – “Freedom and Situation”). “He asserts himself in pure internality against which no external power can take hold, and he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things.”<sup>159</sup> This strife has been reflected not only in relation to an individual himself but also in relation to Other as was seen in the second chapter. The ambiguous relation with the Other results often in either realising a state of being a subject or merely being treated as an object.

To declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won. Absurdity challenges every ethics; but also the finished rationalization of the real would leave no room for ethics; it is because man’s condition is ambiguous that he seeks, through failure and outrageousness, to save his existence.<sup>160</sup>

Beauvoir calls man’s ambivalent attitudes and situations ambiguous. Whatever tragic contingencies she depicts, “ambiguity” is for her the common denominator. The intricate fusion of success and failure of our actions, the opposite principles of our conduct,

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<sup>157</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 7.

<sup>158</sup> Langer, 2003: 89.

<sup>159</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 7.

<sup>160</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 119.

the vicissitude of freedom and oppression – all of these are for Beauvoir connotations of ambiguity whose affirmation is the central theme of her treatise in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

Beauvoir makes a distinction between ambiguity and absurdity which lets her claim that an ethics can be formulated on the basis of the former but not the latter. Her definition of the absurd is that it is something which denies the possibility of any valid meaning. To her, that is an incorrect extension of the principle that no meaning is given to mankind from above. As the definition stands, it is indeed incorrect to infer from the lack of imposed meaning – a lack of meaning altogether.

The concept of ambiguity is thus which mandates that meaning be won through mediating between opposed parts of the human condition such as freedom and facticity, individuality and collectivity. Beauvoir poses a middle ground which allows for meaning-making in the present, while still allowing for ties to the future, and therefore for evaluation. It is this aspect of ambiguity – the meaning-making that gives ambiguity a base for having one's own ethics in life. Ambiguity is understood in many aspects by Beauvoir in order to engage with it largely and grasp solution to problematical areas in ethics. However, the burden is still on Beauvoir to find a meaningful ethics without external justification.

She even goes so far as to say that it is only through ambiguity that an ethics is possible because if we were indeed wholly rationalizable, we would have no need for making decisions about what we ought to do. Thus ambiguity becomes that part of the human condition that allows for meaningful ethics and this will be seen in the next section.

However, to every ethics there is a challenge from absurdity, that is, for any imperative statement there's a problem of fundamental meaninglessness to handle. The question that the absurd poses to every ethics is "how can these principles be justified without any external values to measure them against?" Beauvoir answers that by referring to the human condition, which is one thing which we don't choose or invent. To her, the most fundamental base of the human condition is ambiguity, which appears to be the flip side of the absurdity that we fear. Therefore, the fundamental basis for her ethics seems to be embracing relative valuations based on our position in existence. We don't choose something because it's objectively good, but because we are the agent that chooses it for the sake of our *own* choice.



It appears that ambiguity and absurdity are two sides of the same coin – one used to affirm and the other to deny. If Beauvoir's definitions are accepted at face value, then her assessment of both seems correct. It is possible to quibble over whether her definition of absurd is the same as Camus's, but as it stands, absurdity can only be a destructive force while ambiguity has been shown to be usable in mankind's search for an ethics. If we are to accept that no meaning is possible then we have no choice but despair, whereas if we stop at no meaning being given, without the unwarranted extension of total absurdity, we can formulate an ethics. Thus we find that ambiguity is different from absurdity and it is posed here not in a derogatory sense.

Beauvoir describes various aspects of ambiguity so that one can embrace it and solve the problematical areas concerned. In fact in understanding the various dimensionalities of ambiguity, Beauvoir traces back to Kierkegaard who affirmed the irreducible character of ambiguity and his opposition to the Hegelian dialectic which ultimately surpasses ambiguity through the *Aufhebung* reconciling thesis and anti-thesis.<sup>161</sup>

Ambiguity is a major concept in Beauvoir's thought and constitutes a fundamental characteristic of human existence that resists easy definition. In the introduction to *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir expresses a severe critique against a metaphysical tradition that remains unable to accept the "tragic ambiguity" of the human condition, by denying one side of the dualism – matter or mind – by merging them within one single substance, or by establishing a hierarchy between body and soul, death and life. To stress ambiguity means to insist on the inseparability of the two sides of the paradox. Ambiguity is thus the relatedness of the two sides of the paradox in an intersubjective relation. It involves "an irreducible indeterminacy and multiple, inseparable significations and aspects."<sup>162</sup>

Stacy Keltner explains that the historical disclosure of ambiguity reveals certain mechanisms at work. She explains about ambiguity in the multidimensional way it has functioned and worked. She avers:

Ambiguity has functioned as the condition of possibility of the historical discourses of philosophy, religion, and politics. The experience of ambiguity has led philosophers to create discourses that, perhaps unknowingly, evade and conceal this very experience. For Beauvoir, discourses of philosophy,

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<sup>161</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>162</sup> Langer, 2003: 90.

religion, and politics have functioned to conceal our fundamental condition of ambiguity by instituting mechanisms designed to obliterate ambiguity either through a philosophy of the subject that takes the subject as an atom or through a philosophy that obliterates the subject in an organic unity. Both are implicated in a denial of the very experiences that condition our existence.”<sup>163</sup>

Gothlin has traced Beauvoir’s use of the concept of ambiguity to her interpretation of Heidegger’s notions of disclosedness and ‘*Mitsein*’ (being-with-others).<sup>164</sup> Gothlin also argues that, unlike Sartre, Beauvoir does not see the human condition as a ‘useless passion’ but rather, following Heidegger, as a desire to disclose being.<sup>165</sup> She links freedom and disclosure as we have also dealt in the first chapter. Basically the multi-faceted dimensions that ambiguity as a concept is used by Beauvoir, has been philosophically re-read by Beauvoir scholars and variously interpreted. The wider way ambiguity is understood in Beauvoir’s writings, the more important it becomes as a concept to understand how it solves the problematic concerns of human existence. We shall thus see the various dimensionalities of ambiguity in Beauvoir’s usage and in the next section deal with the ethical concerns of ambiguity.

Human existence has been defined to be ambiguous by Beauvoir. It is because human beings are both free and unfree, separate and connected to each other, a subject for ourselves and an object for others, consciousness and body, alive yet born to die. “Two important examples of ambiguity in Beauvoir’s thought are that (1) human beings are both separate from and dependent on other people, and (2) women experience their embodiment and desire as ambiguous.”<sup>166</sup>

Ambiguity is understood in relation to Other. Often the Other reduces me to object and sometimes I find myself as a subject. There is constant state of paradoxical reversal in my interaction with the Other in the living world. The ambiguity is seen when at times I feel that it is my own existence that defines me completely and nevertheless at times my existence is meaningful only in relation to Other. Ambiguity in fact relates the two opposing feelings of the self in relation with the Other. Thus embracing ambiguity in

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<sup>163</sup>Keltner, 2006: 202.

<sup>164</sup>Gothlin, 2001: 121.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>166</sup>Tidd, 2004: 38.

the Other and about oneself reduces the inner conflict related to Other. It indeed develops an understanding that gives answer to many conflicts that the self faces as an individual in the world with relation to Others.

Embracing ambiguity and understanding it in our daily lives is however not so easy. The body that interacts with the Other is based on a situation as Beauvoir asserts and is open to interpretation that may be positive and negative. (Here positive and negative asserts being a subject in an interpersonal relation and having a positive reciprocity and negative asserts being an object in an interpersonal relation). Whether the body becomes an interpretation of a certain clogged-up situation or a possibility is ambiguous. The ambiguity of an embodied situation marks the subject with experiences that makes her individual existence frenzied. The richness of ambiguity in between the self and Other is made prominent by Beauvoir by the elaboration of the concepts of transcendence and immanence, maintenance and progression. The onus of ambiguity can be located amidst these processes that Beauvoir asserts and as explained in the previous chapters.

Beauvoir considers the notion of ambiguity to hold for all humans, independently of their particular situations. But the situation of woman differs fundamentally from that of man and this is explained by Beauvoir how our sexual and gendered beings impact and complexify ambiguity in the context of feminine discourses. Dr. Daigle asserts that Beauvoir's method in *The Second Sex* allows her to uncover another layer of ambiguity which is related to sex and gender. Her analysis acknowledges sexual difference and its impact on consciousness. If one is an embodied consciousness, then one is necessarily sexed. Gender, however, is another issue and involves the subject's dealing with one's own sexuality ambiguously as an embodied freedom.<sup>167</sup>

As this excerpt makes clear, this concept is bound up with the idea of the body. Ambiguity is thus explained in a dimension where it is related and experienced with the body of a female. It is explained in terms of her ambiguity related to the desire and appeal she invokes in herself. Toril Moi explains that Beauvoir here poses a radically new theory of sexual difference.<sup>168</sup> While we are all split and ambiguous, Beauvoir argues, women are more split and ambiguous than men. For Simone de Beauvoir, then women are fundamentally characterized by ambiguity and conflict. Toril Moi explains:

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<sup>167</sup> Daigle, 2006: 92.

<sup>168</sup> Moi, 1990: 121.

Rich and varied, Beauvoir's own vocabulary of ambiguity and conflict ranges from ambivalence, distance, divorce, and split to alienation, contradiction, and mutilation. But every ambiguity is not negative: as readers of *The Second Sex*, we must not make the paradoxical mistake of taking the value of ambiguity to be given once and for all. For Beauvoir, the word ambiguous often means "dialectical" and describes a fundamental contradiction underpinning an apparently stable and coherent phenomenon. In *The Second Sex*, every conflict is potentially both productive and destructive: in some cases, one aspect wins out; in others, the tension remains unresolved. The advantage of Beauvoir's position is that it enables her to draw up a highly complex map of women's situation in the world, one that is never blind to the way in which women occasionally reap paradoxical advantages from their very powerlessness.<sup>169</sup>

Ambiguity in feminine discourses – women's embodiment, desire and romantic love is highly studied in detail by Beauvoir. Ambiguity, which is an important notion in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, appears less often as a term in *The Second Sex*. But ambiguity as a concept is still of importance in *The Second Sex*, and one of its interesting aspects is that it is related to the female body and desire.

The specific contradiction of women's situation is caused by the conflict between their status as free and autonomous human beings and the fact that they are socialized in a world in which men consistently cast them as Other. The effect is to produce women as subjects which is painfully torn between freedom and alienation, transcendence and immanence, subject-being and object-being. This fundamental contradiction, or split, in which the general ambiguity of human beings is repeated and reinforced by the social pressures brought to bear on women, is specific to women under patriarchy.

Needless to explain, the whole conflict about women's embodiment as a subject and object in the patriarchal domain with stifling ways that define her roles is also termed as ambiguous. It is because of her *own* approval to be treated sometimes as an object that makes the female embodiment ambiguous.

Gothlin says that concept of ambiguity in *The Second Sex* pictures woman as embodying more explicitly than man the ambiguity of the human condition, being separate

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<sup>169</sup>Ibid., 93.

as well as interdependent, body as well as consciousness.<sup>170</sup> This is expressed in terms to the biological changes in her body during adolescence and during time of maternity. During these processes she herself feels alienated from her body, seeing one's own body like an object at times and thereby it results into states of ambiguity. Apart from female embodiment being ambiguous at times, the concept of desire in women is also an aspect of ambiguity. This aspect of ambiguity has not been explained earlier. The concept of appeal desire is transposed in *The Second Sex* to characterize the female body while continuing to bear ethical connotations. The concept of desire as ambiguous in feminine discourse is very complex as is explained by Beauvoir.

In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir take as fact an original and common desire in children of both sexes. This desire is characterized as an "aggressive eroticism" which involves a desire to grab, hug, and caress something that is smooth, creamy, and elastic. The desire is connected to the child's primary relationship to the mother's body, which is an object of desire for both male and female children. Gothlin notices that Beauvoir addresses that in the male, this "aggressive eroticism" remains dominant.<sup>171</sup> Man can continuously satisfy his desire in this context in relation to the woman, whose body has the desired characteristics. Most women on the other hand, according to Beauvoir, supplement this "aggressive eroticism," which is played out in lesbian relationships and in relation to their children, with a "passive eroticism". This means that "woman likes to be embraced, caressed, and especially after puberty she wants to be flesh in a man's arms."<sup>172</sup>

Gothlin says that this desire is not, as is the man's, connected to a will to grab and hold, and incarnated in a single organ. It is instead spread out in the body and not forwarded by well-connected activity. The woman is activated body and soul, but she makes herself also in some sense into an object. A woman, whose body in its entirety develops into an erotic zone, since these zones are so many, does not have such an instrumental relationship to the other. Her desire is not singularly represented in an organ, and woman feels ambivalence in relation to the man and his body. She is simultaneously subject and object and thus feminine desire is termed to be ambiguous in its existence. Gothlin says that feminine desire is ambiguous in that it can take the form of two types of sexuality, but also in the fact that the specific feminine desire is seen as contradictory if the

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<sup>170</sup> Gothlin, 2006: 133.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>172</sup> Beauvoir, 2010: 398.

male norm is applied. Beauvoir's erotic experience disrupts the perversions of subjectivity and thus states the ambiguity in it. Beauvoir's analysis of the ambiguity of the erotic state stretches to an understanding of moral plane wherein an attempt of a foundation of feminist ethics takes its recourse which will be dealt in the next section regarding ethical concerns.

Beauvoir's understanding of ambiguity in examples of relation to the individual with Other, and in relation to men and women is somehow rooted in the in-depth analysis of examining consciousness as ambiguous. For Beauvoir, the intentionality of consciousness is ambiguous. Beauvoir treads the path of Husserl attending to the question of intentionality. *The Ethics of Ambiguity* takes up the unique vision of intentionality that takes up the understanding of ambiguity. Here Beauvoir takes up the phenomenologies of Husserl to provide an analysis of intersubjectivity that accepts the singularity of the existing individual without allowing that singularity to justify an epistemological solipsism.<sup>173</sup>

*The Ethics of Ambiguity* opens with an account of intentionality which designates the meaning-disclosing, meaning-making and meaning-desiring activities of consciousness as insistent and ambiguous — insistent in that they are spontaneous and unstoppable; ambiguous in that they preclude any possibility of self unification or closure.

Beauvoir describes that consciousness itself is ambiguous as it is characterised by the flow and tension between two moods and moments of intentionality. It is having a two-fold relationship to the acts of intentionality. Beauvoir describes the intentionality of consciousness as operating in two ways. Bergoffen asserts that both the voices are grounded in an analysis of intentionality that describes it as broken into two moments, with each moment characterised by a unique desire and mood.<sup>174</sup> The direction of the desire and mood gives a way to the ambiguity resulting in positive and negative contestations.

First there is the activity of wanting to disclose the meaning of being, of discovering the meanings of the world. The first intentional moment of openness by identifying it as our original relationship with the world and mark it with joy. Second there is the activity of bringing meaning to the world, of wanting to be the creator of the world's meaning. In the first mode of activity consciousness expresses its freedom to discover meaning. In the second, it exists as the freedom of bringing meaning into the world. As

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<sup>173</sup> Grosholz, 2004: 120.

<sup>174</sup> Bergoffen, 1997: 103.

human, however, we are unable to remain at or sustain this intentionality. We necessarily and inevitably move to a subsequent intentional moment of judgment.

Beauvoir identifies each of these intensionalities of freedom with a mood: the first with the mood of joy, the second with the dual moods of hope and domination.<sup>175</sup> Whether the second intentionality becomes the ground of projects of liberation or exploitation depends on which mood prevails. In a world that reflected the life of consciousness, we would each experience ourselves as ambiguous intentionalities. In showing that human existence is ambiguous, Beauvoir thereby tends to show the aspect of ambiguity that lies in consciousness.

Describing consciousness as ambiguous, Beauvoir identifies our ambiguity with the idea of failure. We can never fulfil our passion for meaning in either of its intentional expressions; that is, we will never succeed in fully revealing the meaning of the world, and never fulfil our desire to impress our meaning on the world. These truths of intentionality set the criteria of Beauvoir's ethics. Finding that ethical systems and absolutes, insofar as they claim to give final answers to our ethical dilemmas and authoritarian justifications for our actions, offer dangerous consolations for our failure to be the source of the world's meaning or being. Beauvoir rejects them in favour of ethical projects that acknowledge our limits and recognize the future as open. From this perspective her ethics of ambiguity might be characterized as an ethics of existential hope and this will be dealt in the next section. We often find that the analytic tradition in philosophy tends to view ambiguity as a flaw, which is because it interferes with clarity.<sup>176</sup> But Beauvoir in her existential discourse uses it as a means to grasp the grey areas and to win meanings. The dimensionalities of ambiguity, in Beauvoir have been examined above and it can only gain a much larger meaning in her construction of an ethics. The next section thus deals with ambiguity and ethical concerns and attempts to establish the importance of ambiguity in the ethical discourse to the larger questions of problematic of human existence.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>176</sup> Card, 2003: 14.

## II. AMBIGUITY AND ETHICAL DISCOURSES

Understanding ambiguity as a concept in a theoretical approach can be a difficult task but one can comprehend it if one reflects it lies in our daily experiences in the living world. However, the attempt here will be to understand ambiguity from the point of view as Beauvoir has asserted in respect to her construction of an ethics. We have already dealt in the earlier section the various dimensionalities of the concept of ambiguity. It has only led us to the conclusion of the linkage between ambiguity and ethics in Beauvoir's work which is central to her writings. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir tries to construct her notion of existentialist ethics giving prime importance to ambiguity in her structure.

Ambiguity is not explicitly thematised in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, and the word is only mentioned in a discussion of the ambiguity of human action.<sup>177</sup> The ambiguities that Beauvoir later articulates in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, of existing as embodied and conscious, as finite and infinite, and as bound to and separate – from others underlie her analysis of freedom already in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*. The first part of this essay is a description of the different ways in which the ethical bond between oneself and others fail when one fails to recognise the necessity of concrete action for freedom. This shows the first thematised relation between ambiguity and ethics.

The paradox of the human condition appears already in *Pyrrhus and Cineas* as a way to conceptualise the contradictory meaning of the particular ends toward which man is a project: every end can be surpassed, according Beauvoir, but it is also the project that defines the end as an end.<sup>178</sup> Or again: "In order to surpass an end, it must first have been projected as something that is not to be surpassed."<sup>179</sup> This statement leads to a reflection on finitude and death, which again echoes Montaigne's distinction between death as a limit to life and death as intrinsic to the movement of life. It also provokes us to make a *meaning* of life, and thereby urges to construct an ethics.

*The Ethics of Ambiguity* begins with the central existentialist premise that existence precedes essence. Basically, this means that we humans create our own essence or nature through our choices and actions. When Beauvoir discusses human essence, she refers not only to this general notion, but also to Heidegger's assertion in *Being and*

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<sup>177</sup> Beauvoir, 1944: 223.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 113.



*Time* that our creation of ourselves in the present is based both on our past actions and on the choices that we make while projecting ourselves into the future.

The aspect of Beauvoir's ethics dealing with choice stems from Sartre's distinction in *Being and Nothingness* between the "in-itself" and the "for-itself" – but with Beauvoir's own twist. The in-itself is the category of material things, such as rocks and tables, which have an inherent, pre-determined essence.<sup>180</sup> The for-itself is the category of beings (or "existents") with consciousness, who are inherently without a pre-determined essence, continually recreating themselves through their choices and actions.<sup>181</sup> Beauvoir agrees with Sartre that both these aspects are found in human. Unlike Sartre though, Beauvoir believes that tensions between the two aspects contribute to the ambiguity of human existence.

She uses this idea in her ethics in terms of what Stacy Keltner has called a "felt ambiguity between antecedent limits (facticity) and future possibilities (transcendence)."<sup>182</sup> In other words, for Beauvoir there is an ambiguity between an individual's past as a given thing determining the nature of the present, and the future they are about to freely create. Given that the future effects of our present choices cannot yet be known, we feel the ethical weight of each decision we make. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir lays out how and why my conduct does matter for him.

This has been described also in the relation to Other as we have interaction with them in the living world. The Other makes us go through the weight of this ambiguity in our daily lives as we strive to decipher the place and meaning we hold in other's lives. Sometimes we are posited as object and sometimes as subject. The situation undoubtedly remains ambiguous. In total we find that the human existence and his life remain ambiguous in his everyday living. Beauvoir has noticed this ambiguity and on the upfront proposed an ethics of ambiguity that is trying to embrace this ambiguity instead of evading them.

Beauvoir says as long as men have lived, they have felt this tragic ambiguity of their condition; and as long as there have been men, they have tried to overcome this ambiguity by denying it, repressing it, revolting against it, or perhaps by living with it.

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<sup>180</sup> Sartre, 1943: 24.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>182</sup> Keltner, 2006: 212.

Many philosophers of the past have tried to mask this basic ambiguity by reducing mind to matter, by reabsorbing matter into mind, by merging them into one substance, or by establishing a harmony between body and soul which then allows for considering as negligible that part of man which cannot be saved.<sup>183</sup> The ethics which these philosophers have proposed has always tried to eliminate the basic ambiguity by making man either pure inwardness or pure externality. Although at the present time many philosophers still pursue the same course, many today feel more acutely than ever the paradox of their condition.

Beauvoir tries to highlight the need to grapple with ambiguity. Keltner asserts that Beauvoir takes the charge of examining this ambiguity and thus deals with some realistic human condition that other philosophers have tried to avoid. In her explanation he says:

Beauvoir writes as an existentialist. Hence she does not seek to comfort us with some lofty illusions, knowing very well that we cannot conquer the precariousness of our life with verbal edifices. If there are indigenous tragic constituents at the core of our existence, we must face them as such, and not resign to fatalism or quietism, nor have recourse to deceptions. With this heuristic principle in her mind, Beauvoir proceeds to disclose our predicaments. Of what nature are they? Of what kind are the facts which make for despair, anguish, and forlornness? Since the dawn of his mind man has found death, the abrupt end of his life, the most frightening event. The consciousness of his finitude is the high price he pays for his exceptional position as a thinking creature...<sup>184</sup>

Ethics cannot be based on the authoritative certainty given by mathematics and logic, or prescribed directly from the empirical findings of science. She states: "Since we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us therefore try to look the truth in the face. Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our life that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting."<sup>185</sup>

By emphasizing "the abortive aspect of human nature," Beauvoir does not want us to renounce our activities, commitments, and involvements. Indifference to pursuits wrought with defeat or apathy to ideals because of their uncertain outcome leads to a

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<sup>183</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 10.

<sup>184</sup> Keltner, 2006: 210.

<sup>185</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 9.

gloomy passivity, and there “is no sadder virtue than resignation.”<sup>186</sup> Beauvoir urges us to face the adventure of living with intelligence and dignity. The vital source from which we can draw such a moral strength is our creative passion.

Surprisingly, she is not focused on such questions as general ethicist does: What is the only “good” step that was ought to be taken? What is the law that should be abided? This all question seems redundant to the kind of ethics that Beauvoir is trying to pose. Instead, she tries to show how the ambiguity that lies in their situation is an important aspect to address, understand and engage in order to live an ethical life. She has posed ambiguity to constantly show the tension that is pretence of a genuine political realm. This approach illuminates human beings as such and it surmounts the importance of not “what is ought to be done” but rather “how it is that someone acted in such way.” To the question and call of an action related to the ethics that Beauvoir poses; the understanding of ambiguity calls in for an action by the agent. “Beauvoir’s ethics is very sensitive to the context of human action. It does not judge them in terms of any overarching principles. It takes into account the actual circumstances that people find them in.”<sup>187</sup>

Beauvoir’s own life, as recorded and constructed in her autobiographical work, should be seen within the framework of her ethical theory which reconciles the two ambiguous side of human condition: the one of the conscious and freedom on the one hand and the one of the bodily and situated dimension of the other. The necessity of the liberation from the whole system of patriarchy is the crux of Beauvoir’s overall project. *The Ethics of Ambiguity* recognizes the need for individuals to be ambiguous subjects.

Beauvoir’s ethics makes itself realistic in its approach by embracing the ambiguities of life, engaging with it and understanding them. It offers us in facing and conquering the “ambiguity” of life. Beauvoir fundamentally understands existentialism as a philosophy of ambiguity. On an ontological level too, existence manifests itself in several different ambiguities. Today Beauvoir’s agent centred, relational and situational approach to ethics finds natural homes only in continental European philosophy but also in fairly analytical character ethics, feminist ethics, and conversation about moral luck.<sup>188</sup> Thus the ethics she proposes of affirming to an ambiguity also forms a basis for feminist ethics.

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>187</sup> Arp, 2001: 8.

<sup>188</sup> Card, 2003: 3.

Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, holds that only healthy relationships recognize the ambiguity of each partner in a reciprocal relationship. This goes in the context of elderly people, who must recognize the ambiguity of their being as they must balance their internal impression of themselves and the outside perspective of themselves. Ambiguity is suppressed under the yoke of patriarchy.

Beauvoir links the issue of morality and body. The body becomes the platform wherein various acts are performed and it comes out as a moral plane. The dimension of ambiguity that is realised in women's bodies and her appeal and desire has already been discussed in the earlier chapter. The ambiguity in the body leads to the addressal of a kind of feminist ethics. Generally, the ambiguity in feminist discourses is overtaken by the autonomy of patriarchy. The ambiguity is dismissed and not entertained and is in fact submerged in affirmation with patriarchy of the existing roles and particular situatedness of women. Addressing this ambiguity in feminist discourse has led to the questioning of norms of society. This has led the questions to an ethical plane and then with recognition of this ambiguity and difference; an ethics of feminist discourse has been strived.

Mahon contends that Beauvoir's argument in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* provides a valuable resource for feminists currently addressing the question of the legitimacy of political violence, whether of the state or otherwise.<sup>189</sup> The reason is not that Beauvoir provides a definitive answer to this question, but rather because of the ways in which she deconstructs it. "In enabling her reader to appreciate what is presupposed by a resistant politics that adopts violence as its instrument, Beauvoir illuminates the problems encountered by the kinds of "realistic and positive" and "idealistic and moral" arguments through which the use of violence in politics is routinely justified."<sup>190</sup> At the same time, Beauvoir demonstrates that to deconstruct the question of the legitimacy of violence is neither to banish nor resolve it. She does not offer a recipe for determining the legitimacy or otherwise of the use of violence in politics in general; instead, she illuminates the irremediable difficulty and inescapability of such judgments in a violent and intransigent world.

Beauvoir's employment of the concept of ambiguity has led to an existentialist ethics as it deals with the development of freedom, Other, embodiment, disclosure, and

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<sup>189</sup> Mahon, 1997: 79.

<sup>190</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 65.

situation. Intriguing among the liberating effects of this re-examination, then, is how it affirms the value of admitting ambiguity into epistemology and moral-political philosophy: an affirmation that flies in the face of the very quest for certainty that has mobilized so many post-positivist epistemologists and ethical-political philosophers, at least since the early twentieth century.<sup>191</sup>

Acknowledging ambiguity in ethics has thus led to develop ethics in a discourse that can invite socio-political philosophizing rendering the importance of agent centric action. This acknowledgement of ambiguity has led to understand the conflictual grounds of freedom and facticity and the tiff between self and Other and thus the whole emphasis is now to strike some kind of harmony between the existent realistic situations of discord.

What will emerge from a closer look at Beauvoir's ethics is that she is much more in line with existentialism; this is shown in her concern for the existence of concrete human beings and her focus on human freedom, as well as in her attempt to criticize the traditional school of moral philosophizing. Thus the ethics of ambiguity becomes an existentialist ethics. Beauvoir's approach to ethics fits people's actual moral attitudes and practices.

The question of humanness is primary for all questions of responsibility because ethics does not exist in a world without human beings. Unlike most philosophers, for whom human existence is given and the moral question is how existing human beings should act; Beauvoir holds that the goal is to recreate a human world in which genuine human beings exist. Beauvoir by linking ambiguity and ethics is trying to show what it means to be a human being in the realistic world under multi-faceted situations. Therefore Beauvoir's thinking on responsibility takes place on an entirely different level as I have presented in the first chapter.

Addressing the concrete ethical outcome of embracing ambiguity is that it would be offering certain limits on action. It is the idea of universal liberation that shows the limits in "feeling" for the issues by differentiating between one those who actually are victimised by the oppression and one who "empathise" with it. It marks the ambiguity between both the actions. On the other hand, universal liberation also showcases the ethical discourse of action of a group of persons who work together.<sup>192</sup> It is based on the basis of

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 45.

an agreement that illuminates human equality and individuality and thereby gives human lives meaning. A call for a political action alone can distinguish individual human beings from the mass of almost indistinguishable animals – revealing each as a “who,” instead of a “what.” In short, the ethical changes into the political and makes a meaning for the call of action by the agent.

Beauvoir’s ethics makes way from the ethical to political as one sees the need for universal liberation and agent centric action. It underlies the voice that the task of becoming an individual is thoroughly political, and it is only through becoming political that we become sufficiently individual. It simply addresses the fact that authentic existence does not end in isolated individualism lacking all moral guidance but leads to social engagement, by embracing the ambiguity in each other.

Furthermore, “although taking up the seemingly vague and abstract question of humanness does not appear to have concrete consequences, guaranteeing humanness does directly affect human lives. It has led to an ethics of ambiguity that lies on the existential paradigm of creating a meaning of life by moral choice.”<sup>193</sup> The construction of an ethics of ambiguity as an existentialist ethics becomes more important with its base lying on existentialism. Beauvoir in her construction of an existentialist ethics rejects all traditional form of moral idealism. Beauvoir identifies the moral idealism with traditional, classical morality, a more or less adulterated Kantianism that appeals to universal imperatives and worships justice, right as great idols.

Beauvoir makes her most pointed criticism of Kant in this essay; it is impossible to deduce what one should do in an actual situation from an abstract universal law, she says. Many people intuit these short comings of traditional morality. Beauvoir wants to replace this bankrupt form of morality with an authentic morality. Authentic morality does not appeal to a collection of already constituted values and principles as traditional morality does.”<sup>194</sup> An authentic morality carries out its justification within itself.<sup>195</sup> Beauvoir’s ethics of ambiguity is then certainly existentialist. It shares many of the existentialist view and also phenomenological as we have seen above.

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>194</sup> Arp, 2001: 35.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 78.

The problem that existentialist ethics faces is the one dictum that makes its very base is that human beings are essentially free. Every human being now according to the tenets of existentialism freely chooses his values. There are no a priori values and so each individual chooses the value according to his situation. If this is the case, notes Kristana, then we are in the danger to be run by ethical relativism.<sup>196</sup> The charges of ethical relativism are often the strongest one towards any kind of existentialist ethics. However Daigle explains that Beauvoir's ethics is free from these charges.<sup>197</sup> The argument he puts forward is that Beauvoir's ethics does not come to a solipsistic end and nor a relativistic one. Infact by addressing ambiguity as a concept, she has made the demonstration of an existentialist ethics that is intersubjective in its endeavour. Her ethics cannot be charged with ethical relativism as Weiss explains in this context that Beauvoir's ethics is always in realising a freedom with the Other in the social and political plane.<sup>198</sup>

Ambiguity in positioning of ethics attempts to transcend the subjectivist and solipsist points of view in ethics by means of an appeal not to an impersonal universal man, but to the plurality of concrete, particular men, who project themselves toward their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical as subjectivity itself.<sup>199</sup> In other words, existentialist ethics is deeply aware of the fact that the plurality of autonomous men implies a very difficult problem for ethics: it has to explain somehow that separate beings can be bound to each other and this Beauvoir does in her explanation of the relation of self - Other.<sup>200</sup>

The ethics of ambiguity thus comes out of the chains of the criticism of ethical solipsism. It has also of late been appreciated by other schools of ethical philosophizing. The ethics of ambiguity has been of importance, for the both criticism and approval in ethical discourses. Particularly in post-modernist ethical discourses, ambiguity and uncertainty characterize the present condition. There is a growing emphasis on ambivalence, multiplicity, and paradox.

The temporary social reality itself can be characterized in those terms and cannot be easily comprehended through familiar cognitive and social structures. Its proponents

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<sup>196</sup> Arp, 2001: 89.

<sup>197</sup> Diagle, 2004: 92.

<sup>198</sup> Weiss, 2006: 245.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 56 .

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 89.

believe that the negation of modern “meta-narratives” opens a way to the Other, which is ordinarily marginalized and suppressed both in thought and in social practice. Beauvoir’s account of ambiguity as an intersubjective relation makes way to a meta-narrative discourse as seen by the post modernity. The assumption underlying this belief is that idea and reality are inseparable: suppression in the realm of thought is inevitably linked to violence in social reality. Thus, the positioning of ambiguity opens us way to conversations in ethics that leads to realistic conclusions in addressing problems of human existence.

However Daigle asserts that although Beauvoir’s notion of ambiguity is attractive yet it is still plagued by some problems. Some have to do with the notion of lived ambiguity and others have to do with the notion of ambiguous sexuality. The problems are related to an articulation of lived ambiguity. Explaining his problem around sexual ambiguity, he says:

If, for example, gender is ambiguous and not related to the sexual characteristics of the body, as Beauvoir would have it, should we not then multiply categories? In between the two poles of the “hyper-masculine” and the “hyperfeminine”; sexual ambiguity is also problematic. By putting its emphasis on human ambiguity, Beauvoir’s philosophy goes well beyond the sexual differences that she notes. However, if her notion of ambiguity does not necessarily entail an elimination of categories, we may still wonder whether it commands a multiplication of categories which could lead infinite variety of genders. Or is gender rather a performative role enacted in a constant flux and oscillation between these two poles?<sup>201</sup>

Thus there remains some criticism about the concept of ambiguity and about its employment in ethics. The criticism about placing ambiguity, particularly sexual ambiguity is however different from a critique about its ethics yet it can influence feminist ethics. However, the concept of ambiguity fails to gather more criticism. It is basically and largely taken in an appositive way, more so because of the way Beauvoir has asserted about it and employed it in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

The ethics summons upon the disclosure of our predicaments and dilemma and it thus enables us to the “meaning” of life amidst the ambiguity that is often in general terms taken otherwise and in a negative way. This almost leads us to face and conquer our ambiguity of life. By recognizing values as our own creations we learn to “bear the

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<sup>201</sup> Daigle, 2004: 92.



responsibility for a world which is not a work of a strange power but of ourselves where our defeats are inscribed and our victories as well.”<sup>202</sup> By accentuating the autonomy of our moral engagements, by ascribing to each person an absolute value, and by defining an individual through his relationship to other individuals; one can say that Beauvoir comes very close to Kant’s three formulations of the moral law. But like Kant, she does not succeed in offering us an objective content of the moral will.

The essential meaning that the ethics of ambiguity gives is basically an ethics in which making meaning out of the ambiguity remains of utmost importance and value. Needless to say it addresses the grey areas that are often overlooked in the traditional school of moral philosophy that rests on moral idealism. It gives away a larger area to reflect than a set of principles to adhere to and follow.

The last section showed the various dimensionalities of ambiguity and from it one can simply find that because ambiguity as a concept has been used so voraciously at multifaceted way, it becomes indeed at times close to criticism. However, its ethical discourse goes back to show that the various dimensionalities of ambiguity, as shown in the previous section need to be understood, engaged and embraced in order to have an ethics of ambiguity. Throughout *The Ethics of Ambiguity* Beauvoir argues for the affirmation and acceptance of the ambiguities that make us human and that are ultimately the very foundation of an ethical or meaningful life. It basically lies in engaging in those ambiguities and not to take it negatively at the face of it as failure but deal with it and strive to constantly make a meaning. Beauvoir is here claiming that an ethics that does not recognise the fundamental ambiguity of human existence *cannot* claim to address the concrete reality of human existence. In spite of a rational or a consoling ethics, the individual is still acutely aware of the paradox that is his lived life. Beauvoir’s belief is that the inherent ambiguity of the human person is central to the notion of genuine recognition and this is taken in account while constructing the ethics of ambiguity.

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<sup>202</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 16.

## CONCLUSION

A study of Beauvoir's writings related to freedom, situation and ambiguity had indeed been an ethical quest in trying to answer questions of human existence. Beauvoir's each of this concept is knitted closely in understanding of her ethics. Each concept has been dealt in her autobiographies and novels and by explanation of each of the concept she has tried to answer the problem of human existence. Each concept has tried to show the ambiguity of life that it is not possible for man to be free as he wants.

The concepts given by Beauvoir largely emphasizes on the human constraints. It does not however means that an individual should submit to these constraints but it simply showcases the grey areas of life. Showcasing these grey areas of life makes one grasp reality and adhere to the reality of life. This also leads one to construct an existentialist ethics, where ambiguity is embraced and not taken as a negative term. The traditional school of moral philosophy that preach moral idealism have been thus criticised by Beauvoir.<sup>203</sup> Beauvoir gives an ethics of realism, an ethics which can actually be *workable* in the living world, dealing with situations that are practical.

The first chapter analyses the strife between freedom and situation and elaborates the conflict of human existence. Disagreeing with Sartre's notion of absolute freedom, Beauvoir gives her own version of situated freedom.<sup>204</sup> This situated freedom has enabled people to see the ambiguities of life, the strife of life in general. It explains the detailed analysis of why people flee away to bad faith or do not own up their responsibility. The base of Beauvoir's ethics is indeed freedom but nevertheless she does not fail to encounter the realistic situations and impediments of life that often obstruct one's way to achieve his/her freedom.

Why some people are at a privileged position while given the same things why cannot the other gain the same position? Why everyone even after knowing that freedom is the basis of human existence cannot achieve it? The strife between freedom and situation address these questions and comes out with some very concrete answers. It shows the

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<sup>203</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 10.

<sup>204</sup> Beauvoir, 1977: 78.

realistic way of the moral framework. Given the fact that everybody is provided with same privileges as of now, but one is not able to attain the same amount of freedom from the system. It is because there has been in a situation with a certain historicity, facticity to which he has been affiliated that either works for aggravation or degradation towards his freedom. The women's situation simply establishes the truth of this fact which has been elaborated in the second chapter. Women have been part of the patriarchal society and their embracing freedom also lies in this vicious circle of the socio-political situation that we have built up for her. Giving her the same privileges will not result in embracing the same kind of a freedom a man does, because there is already a historicity of domination that she has faced. However, Beauvoir first argues for a mutual reciprocity between both sexes.

The situatedness of people has been explained by Beauvoir which is a very realistic approach to any ethical writing. It asserts the complexities at grass root level in the instrumental working of it. Beauvoir explains the situation of five personality types in order to demonstrate the various facticity, nature of different kind of men, and how each one of them are unable to grasp freedom due their own attitudes. The five type of men also assert in their living the relation with Other and how each one of them are unable to accept the Other as genuinely free subjects.<sup>205</sup> This shows the strife in relation between self - Other. The difference between self - Other suggests that how very difficult it is to construct an ethics and follow it as we constantly see that theorising ethics is a different thing and following it is different. Different men have been attuned to different facticity and hold on to different views. Each finds ambiguity in accepting the Other. These lines of discord are very beautifully portrayed by Beauvoir. It is explained not only through her book but by the characters of her novel and she does justice to the explanation of each concept.

The situatedness then undertakes into detailed analysis of embodiment and oppression. She unlike a general ethicist goes beyond the peripheral problems of a human continuation. She not only gives the account of embodiment at length but makes a way into the nucleus of the setting of a civilized life that is larger and may be countered with grey areas. Her explanation of embodiment in case of women and old aged people intrigues in areas that perhaps none of the traditional moral school of philosophy has dared

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<sup>205</sup> Arp, 2001: 64.

to intervene. True, it is that Beauvoir's work of *The Second Sex* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* are not termed philosophical,<sup>206</sup> yet nobody can deny the richness of exemplary explanation and in-depth analysis of each of her concept. She stretches to her explanation of embodiment, only to substantiate her point that how situation (and here embodiment comes under a certain situation that can affect an individual) can come in the way to embrace freedom. She explains the minute observation of the old age embodiment, the psychology that works with elderly people and how these processes affect the life of human.<sup>207</sup> By the explanation of embodiment at such minute levels and how it is related to the freedom we want to achieve; she strikes the relation between body and morality. It remains as a very sensitive contribution in the field of ethical philosophizing.

The question of freedom and situation thus in between not only shows the strife of human life but in the light of it have encompasses many larger questions. The concept of responsibility is not dissuaded but only kept in explanation of the reasons that are exhaustively answerable of an individual's fleeing away from his/her responsibility. The whole analysis of situation, personality types, embodiment is basically to grasp the reason beyond what is generally given. It makes Beauvoir's ethics richer and more lucid to approach. In our life of an everyday living, we are often faced with these ambiguities and the strife that Beauvoir portrays and we need an ethics that can actually pertain to the problems in the realistic sense. I think Beauvoir has done much justice to the question of ethics, particularly as they give accounts of concrete problematic.

There are the traditional schools of thought who have given a way to "purify" one's life and given certain laws to abide in order to achieve a certain life.<sup>208</sup> But the fact is life is not itself certain. We are constantly being bogged down by new surprising and often unwanted situation. There is no set of principles that can equip us to face the ambiguity of life and answer all the problematical situations of humanity. Beauvoir here is simply trying to make us aware of that ambiguity that lies on the face of life itself. She is trying to explain the life is itself ambiguous and we have to constantly try to make meaning of it.

As we are a part of the living world, we are encountered in the strife which is between self - Other. However, Beauvoir gives an account of both the negative and

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<sup>206</sup> Bauer, 2001: 21.

<sup>207</sup> Beauvoir, 1977: 80.

<sup>208</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 10.

positive ways we approach the Other. She explains in detail how the Other poses as a threat and how it often becomes as an ally in our projects. The Other has been termed as in other sense in respect to woman where she has been termed in a derogatory, inessential way. Beauvoir explains the whole background as to what has led to a non reciprocal relation between man and woman and why she is termed as the Other.

Other and reciprocity between them can reduce the ambiguity of life. If there is reciprocity, it simply implies an engagement and understanding of the Other by the individual. Beauvoir through her concept of positive reciprocity wants to reduce the tension between the self - Other. It also marks as a solution to the problem that is posed in human relation. Her concept of reciprocity has been termed to be equally important in relation to man-woman. It eases to reduce the strife by bring both the adversaries to a position of mutual recognition, engagement and appreciation. Beauvoir thus highlights the importance of Other in construction of her ethics and in relation to her freedom.

The best part with Beauvoir is she digs into any concept that she explains and does not impose her explanations rudimentarily. Her explanations are followed by an in-depth analysis and explanation. In the concept of Other, Beauvoir calmly explains the reasons for the non-acceptability of Other by an individual at the initial level. She then explains the reasons of this approach and how with time the Other can often become an ally. Infact she strives to strike a chord of harmony between the self - Other by the concept of universal liberation.<sup>209</sup> However she guards against being an ally where in the name of ally the individual is oppressed. At such level of oppression, she has even asserted to take recourse in violence if needed. Thus we see that Beauvoir has introduced us to the varied facets the relation between self - Other may end up to. This indeed directs the ethical plane to political wherein agent sometimes works in favour of us and often even result in a strong opponent. However, she constantly tries that as individual we must in our ethical as well as when we interact with Other in the socio-political arena make meaning of ourselves. We must come together for a cause of universal liberation of mankind.

Beauvoir's approach to Other in her writings is therefore consistent and yields a clear understanding of the positions she wants to assert. However, many a times "autobiography can be a privileged literary genre for the ethical exchange between self and

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<sup>209</sup> Beauvoir, 1948: 81.

Other.”<sup>210</sup> And in case of Beauvoir, since she has written very few books, most of her concepts have derived a clear understanding from her memoirs, autobiographies and novels. However, in the relation to self - Other, her autobiographies show an inconsistency in her view and writings. This has been explained in the chapter also. It comes as a strong criticism from many scholars as her autobiography’s different views have posed problematic in relation to the matter of self - Other for the reader.<sup>211</sup>

Perhaps, her vacillating views on self - Other perhaps simply showcases her varied expressions of day to day interactions with the world and it can be subject to difference. The ambiguity she has faced in the real life may be the reason of difference of opinions in her autobiography which any normal man in her day to day life often experiences.

Infact this is the ambiguity she has largely dealt in her relation with the Other, with freedom and situation. Thus Beauvoir in her ethics has finally asked to embrace this ambiguity. Again as I asserted before, she does not *categorically imposed* it. She explains the various dimensionalities of ambiguity. Ambiguity is explained by her in relationship with Other, in women, in desire, in love and more varied aspects. This largely explains that our human existence is itself ambiguous and we cannot do away with this ambiguity. Beauvoir thus constructs an ethics which tries to engage with this ambiguity, face it and make a meaning out of it. Her ethics of ambiguity thus turns into an existentialist ethics as it addresses all questions of anxiety and human strife. It has been often seen that existentialist ethics has been criticised of ethical solipsism but the very notion of ambiguity guides against making it a solipsistic ethics.<sup>212</sup> This has been explained in the chapter – “ambiguity and ethical discourses.” Ambiguity itself is an intersubjective relation and Beauvoir completely explains it with full justice.

Largely the ethics of ambiguity does justice to much of the problematic of human existence. It underlines the grey areas of human nature and life that often goes unnoticed and unaddressed. By addressing ambiguity in ethical discourse, Beauvoir has not only been the first to deal ethics with such realism but given strong points of ethical bankruptcy in the idealist school of moral philosophy. Beauvoir does not talk about freedom as a

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<sup>210</sup> Tidd, 2004: 237.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>212</sup> Diagle, 2004: 94.

value<sup>213</sup> but yet she showcases the importance of it and makes it central to her ethics. “To make freedom into a supreme good in this way seems to turn existentialist ethics into a strange utilitarianism.”<sup>214</sup> Beauvoir thus guards against this. Her approach to ethics is thus of a kind which a general ethicist will not dive into, yet she offers some of the greatest existential understanding of human life and in-depth analysis of possibilities of impediments that obstruct us from embracing freedom and sometimes doing our responsibility.

In short, she offers a large base for an existential ethical discourse to take it new turn from the place where she has started. She has enabled to enlighten the readers on areas we otherwise would not have delved into. Particularly, by posing ambiguity in ethics – she has enabled to go beyond the regular conversation of “right and wrong,” “good and evil.” She has moved beyond dichotomy, with substantial premise by her explanations of situation, embodiment etc. I feel the ethics of ambiguity has justified its purpose completely in the ethical discourse. I think by asking us to face our ambiguity and derive meaning out of it, Beauvoir has given a solution to the problematic of the uncertainty of the human life. Although, Beauvoir centering of the concept of ambiguity in ethics changes the traditional focus in moral philosophy from right versus wrong, and blame versus excuse to a focus instead on enhancing the agency in a world where agency is always limited and never perfect. Centering ambiguity also tempers the analytical demand for clarity and definition. Its danger is, of course, the risk of tolerating what we should reject. Its advantage however is a more realistic ground for ethics.

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<sup>213</sup> Arp, 2001: 90.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 91.

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