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Ambiguity and Difference: Two Feminist Ethics of the Present

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In several works, Luce Irigaray contrasts her own philosophy of sexual difference with Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist account of human becoming. Irigaray articulates the contrast by different concepts in different contexts, but the main idea remains the same: her own philosophy of difference must be kept separate from Beauvoir's philosophy of ambiguity which, despite its critical potential, remains bound to the oppositional categories of patriarchal thinking or phallogocentrism, to use the term of Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida.¹

The title of Irigaray's short memorial text, "Equal or Different?" (*Égales ou différentes?* 1986), suggests that the main disagreement is between feminism of equality, on the one hand, and feminism of difference, on the other hand.² In this framing, Beauvoir would represent the Enlightenment tradition that emphasizes the principle of equality between men and women and assumes that their existential

¹ Originally the term "phallogocentrism" was used by the British psychoanalyst and neurologist Ernest Jones in the 1920s and 1930s as part of his critique of Freud's account of femininity and the formation of woman's sexual identity. Cixous and

² Luce Irigaray, "Égales ou différentes?", in *Je, tu, nous: pour une culture de la différence* (Paris: Grasset, [1986] 1990), 7–10, in English "Equal and different", David Macey (trans.), in *The Irigaray Reader*, Margaret Withford (ed.), 30–33 (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986), 30–33.

conditions are fundamentally similar. In “Equal or Different?” Irigaray presents her own work as part of a radical inquiry that questions the adequacy of the modernistic principles of equality and all theories of sexual relations grounded in them.³

“Equal or Different?” also suggests another distinguishing feature, methodologically more specific than the one identified above. Irigaray points out that her own philosophy of difference involves a constructive attitude to psychoanalysis whereas Beauvoir’s existential humanism simply blocks or bypasses the Freudian way. In Irigaray’s account, Freud’s and Lacan’s methods are crucial to any understanding of the formation of sexual identities and any efficient questioning of them, and thus Beauvoir’s analysis remains partial or superficial.⁴

³ In *Hipparchia’s Choice (L’etude et le rouet 1989)*, Michèle Le Dœff tracks the opposition between equality-feminism and feminism of difference to the chasm between two developments in Enlightenment philosophy, the emphasis on universal reason (e.g. Descartes, Kant, Wollstonecraft), on the one hand, and the idea of different virtues (e.g. Rousseau), on the other hand. *L’etude et le rouet: Tome I: Des femmes de la philosophie etc.* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 24ff., in English *Hipparchia’s Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, etc.*, Trista Selous (trans.) (Oxford UK and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1991), 14ff.

⁴ “Equal ou”, 9, “Equal or”, 31. In the light of Beauvoir’s extensive usage of psychoanalytical sources, not just Freud but also many of his Anglophone successors, e.g. Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, Melanie Klein and Havelock Ellis, Irigaray’s statement is somewhat surprising. In fact, the difference between these two philosophers does not seem to be in their attitudes toward psychoanalysis as such but rather in their interpretations of its method and objectives: whereas Irigaray starts

The later work *I Love to You: Sketch for a Felicity within History* (*J'aime à toi: esquisse d'une félicité dans histoire* 1992) identifies yet another contrasting feature. Here Irigaray questions the famous Beauvoirian thesis about woman's

from Lacan's structuralistic-linguistic version of psychoanalysis, Beauvoir turns to alternative readings which better suit her existential analysis of experiencing and its categories of temporality, facticity, situatedness and otherness. To be sure, the introduction to *The Second Sex* includes a hash critique of Freud's concept of libido as being androcentric (Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe I: les faits et les mythes*, Paris: Gallimard, [1949] 1993, 77–97; in English *The Second Sex*, H.M. Parshley (trans.), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953, 69–83, *The Second Sex*, Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (trans.), New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010, 49–61, cf. Sara Heinämaa, "Psychoanalysis of Things: Objective Meanings or Subjective Projects?", in *Beauvoir & Sartre: The Riddle of Influence*, Christine Daigle and Jacob Golomb (eds.), Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 128–143). This however does not compromise the fact that in her own existentialist account of sexual becoming, Beauvoir relies on several psychoanalytical sources and utilizes their innovations, Lacan's theory of the mirror phase being one of them (Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe II: l'expérience vécue*, Paris: Gallimard, [1949] 1991, 15; in English *The Second*, 1953, 297, *The Second* 2010, 284). In my mind, Beauvoir takes distance from the Lacanian framework because of its universalistic aspirations that make it difficult, if not impossible, to identify and theorize *several different* ways of being (and not being) woman and becoming (and not becoming) woman (cf. Le Dœuff, *L'étude*, 251–252, *Hipparhia's*, 228-229).

becoming by writing: “It is not as Simone de Beauvoir said: one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (through culture), but rather: I am born a woman, but I must still become this woman that I am by nature”.⁵ In Irigaray’s Freudian-Lacanian framework, sexual difference is a transcendental category of signification that covers both natural being and cultural becoming. From this viewpoint, the alternatives of either being born woman or becoming woman after birth are superficial.⁶ For Irigaray, the crucial task of feminist thinkers is not to study women’s life in terms of the traditional theories of nature and nurture but to disturb (*déranger*) the functioning of such dualities, to destroy their seeming coherence, and thus to establish a new beginning for human culture.⁷

I have argued elsewhere that one should not interpret these critical remarks as a rejection of Beauvoir’s feminist-philosophical approach. Rather than attacking Beauvoir’s existential-phenomenological arguments about women and men Irigaray’s criticism targets the dominant discourse that assimilates the concept of becoming with

⁵ Luce Irigaray, *J’aime à toi: esquisse d’une félicité dans l’histoire* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), 168; in English *I Love to You: Sketch for a Felicity within History*, Alison Martin (trans.) (New York: Routledge), 107.

⁶ On the concept of transcendental, see, Sara Heinämaa, Mirja Hartimo and Timo Miettinen, “Introduction: Methodological, Historical and Conceptual Starting Points”, in *Phenomenology and the Transcendental*, Sara Heinämaa, Mirja Hartimo and Timo Miettinen (eds.) (London: Routledge, 2014).

⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n’en pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), 72–76, 154–155; in English *This Sex Which is not One*, Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (trans.) (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 74–78, 159–160.

the empirical concepts of social-cultural development. The crucial thing to notice here is that Beauvoir's distinction between being and becoming does not build on the nature-culture distinction, but builds on the phenomenological distinctions between thrownness and freedom, sedimentation and constitution, and sensibility and ideality.⁸ These distinctions are not abandoned by Irigaray; on the contrary but are utilized and reworked by her in the construction of a new discourse of the transcendental aspects of sexual difference.

However, the most intimate points of contact between Beauvoir's existentialism and Irigaray's philosophy of difference are to be found in their respective analyses of embodiment and its conditions. Both operate with the phenomenological concepts of the lived body as distinct from the material thing and the natural organism; both resort to the phenomenological theory of the human person as a expressive bodily unity; and both work systematically to articulate the specific form of erotic intentionality that diverts from all forms of theoretical and practical-communal intentionality.⁹ It is crucial to notice that this feminist paradigm has deep

⁸ For this argument, see Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford, Bowman & Littlefield, 2003).

⁹ Heinämaa, *Toward*; Sara Heinämaa, "On Luce Irigaray's Inquiries into Intersubjectivity: Between the Feminine Body and its Other", in *Returning to Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy, Politics, and the Question of Unity*, Maria Cimitile and Elaine Miller (eds.), 243–265 (New York: SUNY, 2006); Sara Heinämaa, "Cixous, Kristeva and Le Dœuff – Three 'French Feminist'", in *History of*

Cartesian roots and that it builds on a methodology that distinguishes between three different and mutually irreducible ways of inquiry: metaphysics lead by the intellect, philosophy of nature developed by the intellect and imagination, and philosophy of human existence based on our experiential relations.¹⁰

In my reading, these methodological starting points separate Beauvoir's existentialism as well as Irigaray's deconstructivism from the recent "new materialist" movements that ultimately build on principles rooted in Spinoza's immanentism and monism. The emphasis on bodily experience as an independent source of insight, in distinction from metaphysical speculation and natural-scientific theoretization, sets Beauvoir's and Irigaray's approaches apart from all neo-Spinozist philosophies of materiality.¹¹

Continental Philosophy, Volume 6: Poststructuralism and Critical Theory: The Return of the Master Thinkers, Alan Schrift (ed.), 259–285 (Acumen, 2010).

¹⁰ Sara Heinämaa, "Wonder and (Sexual) Difference: Cartesian Radicalism in Phenomenological Thinking", in *Norms and Modes of Thinking in Descartes*, Acta Philosophica Fennica, Volume 64, Tuomo Aho and Mikko Yrjönsuuri (eds.), 279–296 (Helsinki, 1999); Sara Heinämaa, "The Soul-Body Union and its Sexuality: From Descartes to Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir", in *Feminist Reflections on the History of Philosophy*, Lilli Alanen and Charlotte Witt (eds.), 137–151 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2004); Sara Heinämaa, "Wonder as the Primary Passion: A Phenomenological Perspective on Irigaray's Ethics of Difference", in *Body/Self/Other: Phenomenology of Social Encounters*, Luna Dolezal and Danielle Petherbridge (eds.) (New York: SUNY, forthcoming 2016).

¹¹ In Descartes's *Meditations*, we read: "[N]ature (...) teaches me, by these feelings

I will continue my exploration of the relation between these two feminist approaches in this chapter by arguing that Irigaray builds on one central but largely neglected result of Beauvoir's argumentation: the claim that fundamentally sexual subordination constitutes an *ethical problem* that cannot be solved adequately by political or theoretical means merely but must be worked out between singular women and singular men in their concrete encounters. More precisely, I will demonstrate that Irigaray's ethics is indebted to two Beauvoirian principles in particular: first, the idea of a fundamental difference between men and women as spiritual-bodily subjects and, second, the emphasis on the ethical primacy of the

of pain, hunger, thirst, and so on, (...) that I am very closely joined, and as it were, intermingled with [my body], so that I and the body form a unit" (René Descartes, *Œuvres de Descartes*, Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (eds.) (Paris: Vrin/C.N.R.S., [Descartes, *Œuvres de Descartes*, Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (eds.) (Paris: Vrin/C.N.R.S., 1996] 1996), vol. III, 159). In a famous letter to princess Elisabeth of Bohemia – discussed in length by Merleau-Ponty – Descartes explains further: "Metaphysical thoughts, which exercise the pure intellect, help to familiarize us with the notion of the soul; and the study of mathematics, which exercises mainly imagination in the consideration of shapes and motions, accustoms us to form very distinct notions of body. But it is the ordinary course of life and conversation, and abstention from meditations and from the study of things which exercise imagination, that teaches us how to conceive the union of the soul and the body" (Descartes, *Œuvres*, vol. III, 692).

present (vs. past and future).¹² Thus, the aim here is not to argue anymore for conceptual or methodological affinities between these two approaches but for the continuation of an inquiry that concerns the genuine ethical relationship between women and men as unique persons with divergent histories of experiencing.

In order to make the case for this connection between Beauvoir's and Irigaray's feminist projects, I will first explicate the ethical dimensions of *The Second Sex* (*Le deuxième sexe* 1949). This requires an excursion to Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (*Pour une morale de la ambiguïté* 1947) and a recapitulation of its arguments. I will then turn to Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (*Éthique de la différence sexuelle* 1984) and study its task setting in the light of Beauvoir's contribution to feminist ethics.

1. Subordination as an Ethical Problem

¹² The term "spiritual", as used by existentialists and phenomenologists, is not synonymous with "religious", "divine" or "immaterial". The term refers to the spontaneous free acts and expressions of human persons. A special term is needed for such acts and expressions since they organize and order in a manner different from those of material things, events and processes that are bound by causal laws and by pure contingency. For example, human expressions have syntactic and semantic structures with ideal, non-causal, character. Most importantly, spirituality is here not opposed to materiality: all human acts and expressions are organized spiritually but at the same time they are founded on sensible matter and are manifested in bodies and things.

Let me start by recapitulating my interpretation of Beauvoir's feminist argument in *The Second Sex*. The leading idea of the book is, as I read it, that the subordination of women to men, that is, the sexual hierarchy, has no causal basis in nature or in any historical telos. The hierarchy was established by human agents, but it was established on no natural or historical ground; and it is re-established and reaffirmed today by our own equally groundless actions and practices. Beauvoir's basic insight is summarized in an illuminative way by Michèle Le Dœuff in *Hipparchia's Choice (L'étude et le rouet 1989)* as follows:

We are finally left with the image of an oppression *without a fundamental cause*. This void has a very strong and very dialectical effect. For then it seems, that given that oppression is based on nothing, countless mechanisms or institutional buttresses had to be established to create and maintain it. None of the involuntary factors (nature, economics, unconscious) maintain the phallic power: it must therefore have acquired a forest of crutches for each situation, a pile of symbolic guarantees and barriers from the education of little girls to repressive legislation on birth control, from dress codes to exclusion from politics.¹³

Le Dœuff concludes that the “image of oppression without a fundamental cause” or “groundless oppression” that Beauvoir presents is a corollary of Sartre's existential idea of nothingness as the essence of human consciousness. I have argued elsewhere that if we combine Beauvoir's analysis of oppression with her own ethics,

¹³ Le Dœuff, *L'étude*, 134–135, *Hipparchia's*, 117, emphasis added.

and not with Sartrean ontology, then we see that Le Dœuff's conclusion is premature or one-sided.¹⁴ The main emphasis of Beauvoir's discourse is not in the thesis that sexual oppression is without grounds; rather it is in the insight that this oppression is re-established in our *own acts* of dismissal and neglect operative *in the present*. This means that we ourselves are responsible for the permanence of the sexual hierarchy – not nature, not society, not history and not any of our predecessors, human or animal.

To understand and evaluate this argument one must go back to Beauvoir's account of the origin of values. Beauvoir did not include this account in *The Second Sex*; she took it for granted, because she had already presented it a few years earlier, in two ethical essays, *Pyrrhus and Cineas* (*Pyrrhus et Cinéas* 1944) and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

The ethical and axiological starting points of *The Second Sex* were ignored for decades. Several generations of readers and commentators assumed that Beauvoir explains the sexual hierarchy by the biological differences that we can detect between males and females. Some have argued that Beauvoir's account is non-coherent or self-contradictory¹⁵ since it includes an extensive discussion on organic and physical differences and the groundbreaking anti-naturalistic thesis "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman".¹⁶ For many readers, it still seems that Beauvoir vacillates in her argument between two incompatible opinions, between determinist naturalism and extreme social constructionism.

¹⁴ Heinämaa, *Toward*, xi–xii, 92–124.

¹⁵ E.g. Susan Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

¹⁶ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième II*, 13, *The Second* 1953, 295, *The Second* 2010, 283.

Such readings disregard Beauvoir's existentialist starting points and its ethical and axiological implications. In the first chapter of the work, titled "Destiny", Beauvoir indeed introduces three factors that are used to explain (and justify) sexual hierarchies: biological differences (strength) between males and females, psychological differences (virility) between men and women, and practical-economical differences (tools and technologies) between the activities and practices of men and women. However, she does not present these explanations as her own but takes a critical stand on them and calls into questions their explanatory power and experiential basis. Instead of affirming these explanatory grounds Beauvoir concludes that none of them suffices to account for the permanence of the sexual hierarchy. Even when combined, they fail to show how the hierarchy was, or could have been, established.

Beauvoir then argues that we can only understand the nature and (re)establishment of the hierarchy, if we turn to existential philosophy. In the introduction, she explicitly says that she intends to solve the problem of sexual hierarchy in the "perspective of existentialist ethics",¹⁷ and when she goes into the constructive part of her argument she starts the discussion by stating:

This has always been a man's world, and none of the reasons hitherto brought forward in explanation of this fact has seemed adequate [bioscientific, psychological, economical]. But we shall be able to understand how the hierarchy of the sexes was established by reviewing the data of prehistoric

¹⁷ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième I*, 31, *The Second* 1953, 28, *The Second* 2010, 16.

research and ethnography in the light of existentialist philosophy.¹⁸

For long, these statements have been taken as references to Sartre's voluntaristic ethics. However, from the beginning of the 1990s, fresh scholarly work demonstrated that Beauvoir did not base her reflections simply on Sartre's ethical or ontological concepts.¹⁹ She had her own original account that was influenced by the

¹⁸ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième I*, 109, *The Second* 1953, 93, *The Second* 2010, 71.

¹⁹ Le Dœuff, *L'étude*, 1989 (in English *Hipparchia's*, 1991); Sonia Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence: Freedom, Subjectivity and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, *Kön och existens: Studier i Simone de Beauvoirs "Le Deuxième Sexe"* (Göteborg: Daidalos, 1992); in English *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex"*, Linda Schenck (trans.) (London: Athlone, 1996); Sara Heinämaa, *Ele, työ ja sukupuoli: Merleau-Pontyn ja Beauvoirin ruumiinfenomenologia ja sen merkitys sukupuolikysymykselle* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 1996); Debra Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Margaret A. Simons, *Beauvoir and The Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism* (Lanham, Boulder, London, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Kristana Arp, *The Bonds of Freedom: Simone de Beauvoir's Existential Ethics* (Chicago, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2001).

Margaret Simon's and Michele Le Dœuff's works have been groundbreaking here. Already in the 1970s, Le Dœuff published articles that argued for the philosophical originality of Beauvoir's work, most importantly "Le l'existentialisme au *Deuxième sexe*", which appeared in *Le Magazine Littéraire* in 1979. Margaret

insights of classical existentialism (Kierkegaard and Nietzsche), transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty), and the traditions of women's literature and feminist thinking (Catherine of Siena, Christine de Pisan, Poulain de la Barre, John Stuart Mill, Mary Wollstonecraft, Colette, Helene Deutsch, Virginia Woolf, etc.).

Two years before *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir published an essay on ethics, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, in which she explained her own understanding of existentialist ethics and explained how it differed from her contemporary Kantian and Hegelian

Simon's volume from 1999 includes her early essays, originally published in the 1980s, which argued that Beauvoir was not a teacher of Sartrean philosophy but an independent thinker: "Beauvoir and Sartre: The Question of Influence" (1981), "The Silencing of Simone de Beauvoir: Guess What's Missing from *The Second Sex*?" (1985), and "Beauvoir and Sartre: The Philosophical Relationship" (1986). Also Judith Butler's early essays are important in this respect. Even though Butler remains ambivalent in her interpretations of the existentialists and argues later in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that Beauvoir's philosophy of gender boils down to Sartrean and/or Cartesian voluntarism, she explicates some central Beauvoirian insights in her essays. The most important of these are "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*" (*Yale French Studies: Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century*, no. 72 (1986), 35–49) and "Variations of Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault" (in *Essays in the Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies*, Sheyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (eds.), Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987). For the ambivalence in Butler's reading of Beauvoir, see, Sara Heinämaa, "What is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference", *Hypatia*, vol. 12 (1997), no. 1, 20–39.

approaches. Beauvoir rejected all universalistic – naturalistic as well as historicistic – theories of the origins of values by arguing that values are dependent on our own activities and our activities are bound to concrete unique situations that cannot be governed by any theory of impersonal reason, natural or historical, but must be interpreted and evaluated one by one. Thus no value or end is absolutely given; all refer back to particular human activities and practices. Beauvoir wrote: “It is desire which creates the desirable, and the project that sets up the end. It is human existence which makes values spring up in the world on the basis of which it will be able to judge the enterprise in which it will be engaged”.²⁰ *The Second Sex* applied this idea in its account of sexuality and the sexual differentiation. Beauvoir argued, for example, as follows: “It is by exercising sexual activity that men [humans] define the sexes and their relations, just as they create the sense and the value of all the functions that they accomplish”.²¹

This means that Beauvoir’s own critique of the sexual hierarchy is not based on any system of pre-established values or goals – equality, liberty, creativity, eternity – but is based on the realization that we must be ready to call into question all values and goals that we find implied in descriptions and explanations of the sexual relation.²² In the case of the bio-scientific paradigm, this means that the goals of

²⁰ Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, 22, *The Ethics*, 15.

²¹ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième I*, 39, *The Second* 1953, 38, *The Second* 2010, 24.

²² Accordingly, Beauvoir’s argument that women’s oppression is without a fundamental *cause* must be taken in its exact meaning: no causal or empirical explanation can make this phenomenon understandable since it is not merely a fact or a reality but also part of our intentional relating to the world, to its facts and realities.

reproduction and *survival* that form the basis of all biological explanations of sexual relations must be problematized. In the case of psychoanalytic explanations, it is necessary to study how the implicit privileging of the *phallus* directs the interpretation of women's desires and pleasures.²³ And finally, in the case of historical materialism, one needs to study the origins of the ideas of *ownership*, *work*, and *technology*.

Beauvoir ends the introductory chapter of *The Second Sex*, by writing:

In our attempt to discover woman we shall not reject certain contributions of biology, of psychoanalysis, and of historical materialism; but we shall hold that the body, the sexual life, and techniques exist concretely for man only in so far as he grasps them in the total perspective of his existence. The value of the muscular *strength*, of the *phallus*, of the *tool* can be defined only in the world of values: it is determined by the fundamental project in which the existent transcends himself toward being.²⁴

Thus Beauvoir argues that a proper philosophical treatment of the sexual

Rather than construing new or competing explanations in terms of facts or causes and effects one needs to enter into transcendental investigations of the constitution of sense and value. This idea radical critique is overlooked by Le Dœuff since her interpretation neglects the phenomenological dimensions of Beauvoir's argument for its supposedly Cartesian, subjectivistic or idealistic underpinnings.

²³ Cf. note 4 above.

²⁴ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième I*, 105–106, *The Second* 1953, 91, translation modified, emphasis added, *The Second* 2010, 68.

hierarchy cannot be founded on the values of life, procreation or physical strength. On the contrary, it must also include a critical examination of the origin of these values, how they are constituted, in what kinds of activities, and how these activities relate to sexuality and sexual difference. What is needed is a radically critical investigation into the foundations of values and valuations because all explanations given and considered thus far are invested with masculinistic values and goals and motivated by androcentric interests.

Beauvoir clarifies the radical nature of this ethical attitude by comparing it to the philosophical stance of the phenomenologist who suspends all belief in reality and all existential thesis of being. She explains that the existentialist ethical attitude must not be confused with a Hegelian act of surpassing (*Aufhebung*) nor with a Stoic conversion. Rather, it “should be compared to Husserlian reduction: let man put his will to be ‘in parenthesis’ and he will thereby be brought to the consciousness of his true condition”.²⁵

2. Ethics of Ambiguity in the Present

Beauvoir’s *The Ethics of Ambiguity* begins with a Kierkegaardian account of human existence as a paradoxical condition: the human subject lives in constant indecision between inwardness and externality, finitude and the infinite, temporality and eternity, solitude and bonding, freedom and boundedness. Beauvoir also accepts and develops the Kierkegaardian argument according to which these paradoxes cannot be resolved, since the two poles of each paradox are internally tied together and interdependent.

²⁵ Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, 20–21, *The Ethics*, 13–14.

Thus the task of the human being is to endure the paradoxes, and executed them in her own way in her own unique situation.

This means that Beauvoir's philosophy does not oppose freedom to embodiment. Rather for her corporeality is the basic level of human experience on which freedom (spontaneity) and boundedness (limitation) already intertwine: "To be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world".²⁶ Moreover, *The Second Sex* argues this intertwining of consciousness and corporeality, freedom and boundedness is most evident in erotic relations: "The erotic experience is one that most poignantly discloses to human beings the ambiguity of their condition; in it they are aware of themselves as flesh and as spirit, as the other and as subject".²⁷

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir describes several alternatives of mediating between the Kierkegaardian paradoxes of human life: the infantile person, the serious one, the nihilist, the adventurer, the passionate altruistic person, and the artistic critic. These figures are not introduced as developmental stages, and Beauvoir also struggles to avoid traditional moral language in characterizing them. Instead of representing moral virtues or stages of moral perfection,²⁸ Beauvoir's figures represent possible feats and failures in the tasks of self-understanding and ethical self-

²⁶ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième I*, xxx, *The Second 1953*, 36, cf. 61–62, *The Second*, 2010, xxx.

²⁷ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième I*, xxx, *The Second 1953*, 394, *The Second*, 2010, xxx.

²⁸ In the introduction of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir explicitly rejects happiness-based (*bonheur*) explanations of the sexual hierarchy (*Le deuxième I*, 30–31, *The Second 1953*, 28, *The Second*, 2010, 16).

responsibility.

The *infantile* person, or “the sub-man” (*sous-homme*) as Beauvoir calls him, takes all values as natural givens and does not realize that values are always based on human activities and on the acts of human individuals.²⁹ The *serious* person, as distinguished from the infantile, does not ground values in non-human agents, nature or God, but acknowledges their human origin. Her fault is to ignore or deny her own activity in the establishment of values and her responsibility for their validity. Instead of realizing or acknowledging her own participation in the constitution of values, the serious person attributes this task to others, the society, the tradition or the history.³⁰

The *nihilist* differs both from the infantile and the serious person in realizing that values are dependent on individual human acts and agents, her own acts and herself included, but she makes the wrong conclusion that this origin cancels or destroys the objective validity of values. Against this relativistic view, Beauvoir argues, that the subjective origin of values does not cancel their validity and that any such conclusion is based on a misunderstanding of the interdependency of subjectivity, objectivity, and intersubjectivity.³¹

The *adventurer* is a man who realizes his own involvement in the constitution

²⁹ Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, 51–56, 61–74, *The Ethics*, 35–38, 42–51.

³⁰ Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, 66, *The Ethics*, 46. Beauvoir’s account of the attitude of the serious person is equivalent Sartre’s discussion of bad faith or self-deception in *Being and Nothingness* (*L’être et le néant* 1943).

³¹ Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, 81ff., *The Ethics*, 55ff., cf. “La phénoménologie de la perception de Maurice Merleau-Ponty”, *Les temps modernes*, vol. 1 (1945), no. 2, 363–367.

of values as well as his dependency on others in this enterprise but who at the same time mistakenly exaggerates his own contribution by judging his own acts as more fundamental than the acts of other people. This, Beauvoir argues, is an illusory form of self-assurance and ignores the finiteness of human life: “The man we call adventurer (...) is one who remains indifferent (...) to the human meaning of his action, who thinks he can assert his own existence without taking into consideration that of others. (...) [But no] man can save himself alone. (...) When he dies, the adventurer will be surrendering his whole life into the hands of men; the only meaning it will have will be the one they confer upon it”.³²

In order to carve out the elements of a genuinely ethical attitude Beauvoir contrasts the egocentric attitude of the adventurer to two other affective attitudes: the attitude of the *passionate* person and the attitude of the *generous* one. Both the passionate person and the generous person properly acknowledge their own contribution as well as the contributions of others in value-constitution. But whereas the passionate person suffers from yet another type of self-deception, that of self-sacrifice, the generous person exemplifies genuine self-understanding.

The *passionate* man, or the “passionate altruist” as Beauvoir also calls him, recognizes the contributions of others but subjects others to his own altruistic, humanistic or sentimental projects of valuing them. He relates to each other person either as object of admiration and care or as an ally in the project of loving and caring: “Nothing exists outside his stubborn project; therefore nothing can induce him to modify his choices”.³³ Despite his good willing attitude, he fails to treat others an

³² Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, xxx, *The Ethics*, xxx.

³³ Cf. Bergoffen, *The Philosophy*, 63–64.

independent subject with their own values and goals – potentially diverging and even conflicting with her own project of loving and caring. Paula Mareuil in Beauvoir's novel *The Mandarins* (*Les mandarins* 1955) is a concrete example of such a person. She conceives her love for a particular man, a writer, as the highest good that outranks all other goods, an absolute that relativizes even the goods the this beloved man judges as most important to him, that is creativity and work. The problem is not love as such but the attitude that absolutizes the emotion or its object.³⁴

The *generous* person, in contrast, recognizes the other as similar to herself in respect to freedom while at the same time acknowledging that each specific other is different from her in having his or her own comprehensive projects. Her encounter with the other is, we can perhaps say, more fundamental since she realizes that the activities of the other may divert from her own activities in the constitutively crucial sense that they neither contribute to her projects nor conflict with them but set their very own goals and means and find their motivations in experiences and histories irreversibly out of her reach. Moreover, the generous person is able to conceive this difference as the source of human value.

Beauvoir ends her discussion of the figure the generous person by emphasizing the challenging implications of true generosity:

³⁴ Simone Beauvoir, *Les mandarins I* (Paris: Gallimard), 34–38, *The Mandarins*, Leonard M. Friedman (trans.) (London, New York, Toronto and Sydney: Harper Perennial), 31–34. Cf. Skye Cleary, *Existentialism and Romantic Love* (New York and London: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2015). This theme is further developed in three stories of Beauvoir's last novel *The Woman Destroyed* (*La femme rompue* 1967).

Thus, we see that no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself. It appeals to the existence of others. The idea of such a dependency is frightening, and the separation and multiplicity of existants raises highly disturbing problems.³⁵

Beauvoir refers are problems of conflict, violence, and sacrifice. Her argument is that there are no principles that would solve such problems a priori and frame us as mere operators applying general rules to particular cases. The ethical task is not to formulate a general theory or doctrine of moral action but to decide what is good and what is bad in unique, non-recurring circumstances. This is the Aristotelian teaching that Beauvoir develops in her ethics of ambiguity and that she contrasts to her contemporary Kantian and Hegelian doctrines.³⁶ Her discourse on self-justification has affinities with late twentieth century consequentialist theories that argue that the moral justification of human behaviour and actions depends on the consequences of the actions and not just on their formal structures. But this similarity is superficial:

³⁵ Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, 95, *The Ethics*, 67; cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), 83–84; in English “Pyrrhus and Cineas”, Marybeth Timmermann (trans.), in *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, Margaret Simons with Marybeth Timmermann and Mary Beth Mader (eds.), 77–150 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 123–124.

³⁶ Cf. Sara Heinämaa, Virpi Mäkinen and Miira Tuominen, “Aristotelian Challenges to Contemporary Philosophy: Nature, Knowledge, and the Good”, in *New Perspectives to Aristotelianism and Its Critics*, Sara Heinämaa, Virpi Mäkinen and Miira Tuominen (eds.), 196–212 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014).

Beauvoir is not suggesting that we should focus on the objective consequences of our deeds or calculate the common good.³⁷ Rather, her argument is that ethical reflection must penetrate through the objective world and ask about the situational significance of actions and the subjective and intersubjective constitution of this significance.³⁸

Whereas for existentialism, it is not impersonal universal man who is the source of values, but the plurality of concrete, particular men projecting themselves toward their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical as irreducible as subjectivity itself.³⁹

Beauvoir proceeds by identifying and analyzing the attitudes of the *curator* and the *reformist* who both are close to genuine self-understanding but lack understanding of the ethical implications of the uniqueness of human persons. Both the curator and the reformist recognize the human origin of values and both are able to acknowledge their own contribution as well as the contributions of others equally. However, their understanding of the temporal character of human actions is inadequate.⁴⁰ Both insert all human action, the actions of others as well as their own actions, in the framework of objective or intersubjective time that equalizes them

³⁷ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième I*, 30, *The Second* 1953, 28, *The Second* 2010, 16.

³⁸ Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, 149–150, *The Ethics*, 106–107.

³⁹ Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, 26, *The Ethics*, 18–19.

⁴⁰ Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, 128ff., *The Ethics*, p91ff.

all.⁴¹ In such reflections, the crucial and pressing character of the present, the now, is misconceived, neglected or completely lost. This is the fault of the historian, the utopian, and the dystopian, but it is also shared by the philosopher who confuses ethical reflection with scientific theoretization or cosmological contemplation and assumes that these all serve same purposes.⁴²

[A] man who would aspire to act upon the totality of the Universe would see the meaning of all action vanish (...) [I]t is in the interval which separates me today from an unforeseeable future that there are, meanings and ends toward which to direct my acts. (...) If one denies with Hegel the concrete thickness of the here and now in favor of universal space-time, if one denies the separate consciousness in favor of Mind, one misses with Hegel the truth of the world.

By thus distinguishing between these different figures and their attitudes to pre-given values Beauvoir identifies four fundamental faults of self-understanding. The first mistake is to assume that (moral) values have a foundation in non-human nature. The second mistake is to assume that one's own actions and acts do not take part in the constitution of values. The third mistake is to belittle, neglect or deny the contribution of other subjects. The fourth mistake is to assess one's own actions and the actions of others within the universal time of history without realizing that the

⁴¹ Cf. Sara Heinämaa, "Phenomenologies of Mortality and Generativity", in *Birth, Death, and Femininity: Philosophies of Embodiment*, Robin May Schott (ed.), 73–155 (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), 81–85.

⁴² Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, 145–146, cf. 170–175, *The Ethics*, 104, cf. 121–125.

present has a particular demand on our interaction.

Correspondingly, genuine self-understanding includes four aspects according to Beauvoir: the realization of the human origin of all values, the realization of one's own involvement in the constitution of their validity, the realization of one's dependency on others in the intersubjective process that constitutes values, and finally the realization of the difference between the demands of the present, the past, and the future. The task of an ethical person is to act in the present with the horizon of the future but not to privilege the future over the present or to assume that the present must be sacrificed for any future.

3. Erotic Generosity

The Second Sex uses the concepts of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* to explain the permanence of the sexual hierarchy. In my reading, Beauvoir's main argument is that, despite varying circumstances and the developing technologies, the hierarchy is repeated and reinstated since individual men and women fail to work for true self-understanding in their mutual encounters and common practices.

Men are settled and entrenched in the positions of the serious, the nihilist, and the adventurer, and at best approach women with passionate, altruistic, conservatory or reformist attitudes. All these stances are problematic since they overlook the distance and difference between the sexes and/or subordinate their present encounter to a common past or future. Consequently, men who live in any one of these attitudes fail to apprehend women as fellow beings or peers in reciprocal relations of self-

realization: “For men, the fellow being [*semblabe*], the other who is also the same, with whom reciprocal relations are established, is always another male individual”.⁴³

Women for their part suffer from the attitudes of the infantile, the serious and the passionate. On the one hand, women of pre-modern societies live in the position of children who assume that moral values have a divine origin and consequently fail to acknowledge their human origin.⁴⁴ On the other hand, modern Western women live either in the self-deceptive attitude of the serious person who constantly neglects her own contribution to the creation and maintenance of moral values or else in the attitude of the passionate person who absolutizes her own values. *The Second Sex* distinguishes between several different variants of these attitudes characteristic of Western women: the mystic, the narcissist, and the woman in love (*l'amoureuse*). None of these figures correctly acknowledges their own contribution to the values that they realize in their lives: the mystic finds the foundation of values in God or in Nature, the narcissist understands her own body or soul as an axiological absolute, and the woman in love treats her lover as the measure of all things.⁴⁵

⁴³ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe I*, 122, *The Second* 2010. 80, *The Second* 1953, 102; cf. Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe I*, 15–32, 280–281, *Le deuxième sexe II*, 646–647, *The Second* 1953, 16–29, 201–202, 727–728, *The Second* 2010. 6–17, 187–188, 755.

⁴⁴ Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, 54–59, *The Ethics*, 35–39.

⁴⁵ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième II*, 525–593, *The Second* 1953, 641–687, *The Second* 2010, 667–717; cf. Gail Weiss, “Introduction [to Beauvoir’s *The Ethics of Ambiguity*]”, in Simone de Beauvoir, *Philosophical Writings*, Margaret A. Simons with Marybeth Timmerman and Mary Beth Mader (ed.), 279–288 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 285; Sara Heinämaa and Erika Ruonakoski, “Johdanto:

The Second Sex also uses the concept of generosity to articulate the possibility of a non-suppressive and non-hierarchical relation between woman and man.

Beauvoir's novels, especially *The Mandarins*, flesh out this idea in more concrete terms. In *The Second Sex* we read:

The delight [*joie*] the lovers give and take in reciprocal consciousness of their freedom is what lends strength and dignity to physical love; under these circumstances nothing they do is degrading since nothing is a matter of submission, everything is a matter of willing generosity. Marriage is obscene in principle in so far as it transforms into rights and duties those mutual relations which should be founded on a spontaneous urge; it gives an instrumental, and therefore degrading, character to the two bodies in dooming them to know each other in their generality.⁴⁶

Beauvoir does not develop any systematic theory of erotic generosity between the sexes, but *The Ethics of Ambiguity* lays a conceptual ground for the idea.⁴⁷ The main insight is that human relations are not adequately explicable or accountable by the antagonistic and conflictual concepts that Sartre develops in *Being and*

Simone de Beauvoirin pluralistinen etiikka”, in *Moniselitteisyyden etiikka*, Erika Ruonakoski (trans.), 9–28 (Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto, 2011).

⁴⁶ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième II*, 254–255, *The Second* 1953, 463, *The Second* 2010, 465.

⁴⁷ For explications and elaborations, see, Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, “Gender and Ethics in the Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir”, *Nora: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 3 (1995), no. 1, 3–13; Bergoffen, *The Philosophy*.

Nothingness.⁴⁸ Human alternatives are not limited to the oppositions of self-abandonment and domination over others. In addition to these contrary attitudes,

48 Beauvoir's concept of recognition is usually assumed to be Hegelian. This is problematic since Beauvoir opposes her idea of spontaneous reciprocal bonding to Sartre's social ontology that is grounded on Hegelian concepts of *conflict* and *struggle*. Sartre's conflictual model and the idea of recognition as a resolution of conflict stem from Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit (Phänomenologie des Geistes* 1807), but instead of simply accepting this model, Beauvoir works to question its central position in our understanding of human relations (*Le deuxième*, 17–32, *The Second I* 1953, 17–29, *The Second* 2010, 9–17; cf. *Pour une morale*, 145–148, *The Ethics*, 104–106). Her essays as well as her novels envision forms of communion in which recognition is not a secondary formation grounded on a primary conflict but directly and spontaneously connects two individuals.

In the early novel *She Came to Stay (L'invitée* 1942), Beauvoir experimented with the conflictual model but found it abstract and distant from the concreteness of human life and thus unsatisfactory for her philosophical and literary purposes: "I am not satisfied with the ending of *She Came to Stay*: murder is not the solution to the difficulties engendered by coexistence. Instead of stepping around them I wanted to face them squarely. In *The Blood of Others* and *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* I attempted to define our true relation with other people [*autrui*]" (Simone de Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge*, Paris: Gallimard, [1960] 1986, 694, cf. 692; in English *The Prime of Life*, Peter Green (trans.), Harmondsworth: Penguin 1981, 607, cf. 605–606). Later novels introduce alternative cases of human communion in friendship, love and parenthood, and this experimental work culminates in *The Mandarins (Les mandarins* 1954) that

human beings are capable of spontaneous respect, esteem, and regard for one another; they can encounter one another both as free and as bound at the same time, both as infinite and as finite and both as conscious and as bodily. This is not just possible in communal and political contexts between equals but also in intimate relations between parents and children and in erotic encounters between lovers. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir contends that it is harder to establish a generous relation between two lovers of opposite sexes than between a two lovers of the same sex but at the same time she argues that generosity is possible also between man and woman and that it is necessary if love is not to be confined to relations of mirroring.⁴⁹

As Debra Bergoffen has shown, we must interpret Beauvoir's discussion of generosity between the sexes in the light of her more general concept of the generous attitude as developed in her ethical essays.⁵⁰ My argument is that especially two factors of this more general concept are crucial for heterosexual relations: (i) the recognition of the alterity of the other sex, and (ii) the temporal horizons of the erotic encounters. More exactly, what *The Ethics of Ambiguity* teaches us is that we must work to avoid two mistakes in our heteroerotic relations:

The first mistake is to fail to acknowledge the irreducible character of the experiential difference between women and men. For Beauvoir, his difference is unparalleled among human differences and it involves aspects of affectivity, sensibility, and generativity. She writes:

describes a whole universe of human couples in multiple relations of conflict and recognition but also in relations of immediate and mutual bonding.

⁴⁹ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième II*, 613, *The Second* 1953, 701, *The Second* 2010, 732.

⁵⁰ Bergoffen, *The Philosophy*.

There will always be certain differences between man and woman; her eroticism, and therefore her sexual world, have a special form of their own, and therefore cannot fail to engender a sensuality, a sensitivity of a special nature. This means that her relation to her own body, to that of the male, to the child, will never be identical with those the male bears to his own body, to the body of the female, and to the child.⁵¹

⁵¹ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième II*, xxs, 610, *The Second Sex* 1953, 396, 740, *The Second Sex* 2010, xxx, 765. Beauvoir's discussion of sexual relations emphasizes, not only the difference between woman and man, but also the divergence of their relations to the child. Whereas man needs to establish his relation to his child by external perception and language, woman already experiences the child in her very flesh: "She forms with this child from which she is swollen an equivocal couple overwhelmed by life" (Beauvoir, *Le deuxième II*, 349–350 Beauvoir, *The Second*, 1953, 512, *The Second* 2010, 538). This implies that the child is not given to the parents simply as a common goal or as a cooperative project to which both would contribute similarly, as if they would be two craftsmen working for a shared end. Both have their own particular relations to the child established in different ways in their experiential lives. The woman's body prepares for a child each month during her fertile years (Beauvoir, *Le deuxième II*, 485, *The Second* 1953, 609, *The Second* 2010, 639). The child does not appear to her primarily as a common creation or as an outcome of joint actions but is first given as "graft" that grows and develops inside of her body, to use Julia Kristeva's metaphors (Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater", in *Histoires d'amour*, Paris: Denoël, 1983, 240–241; in English "Stabat Mater", Léon S. Roudiez (trans.), in *The*

This does not imply that women would be similar or identical in respect to one another or that they would share a common unchanging nature or fixed essence.⁵² It only implies that the differences between women and men are existentially unparalleled among human differences and that they diverge from the differences between women of various communities, cultures, societies or historical eras, and of men correspondingly.

The second mistake is to confuse the pressing and fleeting character of the present with the horizontal character of the future and to fail to keep these two dimensions of time separate in erotic encounters. This mistake leads us to conceptualize our present as one moment in a universal and uniform history of the human kind. Such a conceptualization allows a comprehensive view of human happenings or events but at the same time it compromises our understanding of the pressing character or the thrust that the present has on our own actions and deeds as singular women and men. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir formulates this mistaken conception as follows:

The present is the transitory existence which is made in order to be abolished:
it retrieves itself only by transcending itself toward the permanence of future

Kristeva Reader, Toril Moi (ed.), Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1995, 177–179). The man, on the other hand, establishes his primary relation to his child not through his bodily sensations and feelings but by his perceptions and speech acts. There is connection and communality in both cases but one should not assume that these two kinds of relations are structurally identical or similar.

⁵² Beauvoir, *Le deuxième II*, 613, *The Second* 1953, 701, *The Second* 2010, 732.

being; it is only as an instrument, as a means, it is only by its efficacy with regard to the coming of the future that the present is validly realized: reduced to itself it is nothing, one may dispose of it as he pleases.⁵³

In erotic relations, this mistake takes the form of one-dimensional or mutual sacrifice: the erotic encounter between two persons is subjected to the affirmation of either of the two or else it is treated as a means of creating a common future for both. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir describes this false attitude in the case of a female lover: “She at first sought in love a confirmation of what she was, of her personality; but she also involves her future in it, and to justify her future she put it in the hands of the one who possesses all values”.⁵⁴ On the other hand, she also envisions another possibility: “One day when it will be possible for woman to love not in her weakness but in her strength, not to escape herself but to find herself, not to abase herself but to assert herself – on that day love will become for her, as for man, a source of life and not of mortal danger”.⁵⁵

In the rest of the paper, I will argue that in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* Irigaray responds to this Beauvoirian vision by starting a novel type of philosophical inquiry that aims at instituting mutually generous relationships between women and men. I will support this view by explicating two operative concepts that Irigaray develops on the basis of her readings of classical philosophical texts. These are Irigaray’s concepts of wonder and love which result from her dialogues with

⁵³ Beauvoir, *Pour une morale*, xxx, *The Ethics*, xxx.

⁵⁴ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième II*, xxx, *The Second*, 1953, 616; *The Second*, 2010, xxx.

⁵⁵ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième II*, xxx, *The Second*, 1953, 632; *The Second*, 2010, xxx.

Descartes' *Passions of the Soul* and Plato's *Symposium*, respectively. We will see that whereas Irigaray uses the concept of Cartesian wonder to articulate the idea of an irreducible difference between the sexes, she returns to the Platonic idea of love in order to flesh out the insight about the cruciality of the present of the erotic encounter. Both ideas have roots in Beauvoir's feminist ethics as explicated above.

4. Ethics Between Two

Irigaray begins her *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* by arguing that sexual difference is the problem of our time. She writes:

Sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age. According to Heidegger, each age has one issue to think through, and one only. Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our "salvation" if we thought it through.⁵⁶

An Ethics of Sexual Difference takes on this task. In a series of historical-philosophical essays, Irigaray sets out to think the difference between woman and man through in a new way. Her goal is not to theorize any essence of sexual difference or to analyze the components of such difference but, through a peculiar form of critique, to demonstrate that this difference is disguised since the feminine is

⁵⁶ Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 13; in English *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (trans.) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

systematically defined in terms of the masculine. Thus the task of feminist reflection is revised: the aim is not to articulate the relation between woman and man by available conceptual tools but to (re)discover their difference or rather to make conceptual space for the establishment and expression of the difference. Irigaray's argument is that if we can accomplish this assignment then the human culture will enter a new era of two:

Sexual difference would constitute the horizon of worlds more fecund than any known to date – at least in the West – and without reducing fecundity to the reproduction of bodies and flesh. For loving partners this would be fecundity of birth and regeneration, but also the production of a new age of thought, art, poetry and language: the creation of a new poetics.⁵⁷

The most fruitful interpretations of Irigaray's *Ethics* emphasize its argumentative connection to Heidegger's fundamental ontology and Levinas' ethical metaphysics.⁵⁸ In a similar way as Heidegger and Levinas, Irigaray turns back to

⁵⁷ Irigaray, *Éthique*, 13, *An Ethics*, 5.

⁵⁸ Ellen Mortensen, *The Feminine and Nihilism: Luce Irigaray with Nietzsche and Heidegger* (Oslo: Copenhagen, Stockholm, Scandinavian University Press, 1994); Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* (New York, London: Routledge 1995); Tina Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine: Levinas with Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Anne Leeuwen, "Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference: Between Irigaray and Heidegger", *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol. 43 (2010), no.1, 111–126; Anne Leeuwen, "An Examination

study our philosophical tradition and develops a series of critical close readings that challenge our conception of the first institutions of this tradition.

Like Heidegger, Irigaray believes that a return to classical texts is necessary if we want to understand ourselves as the inheritors, preservers or overcomers of the tradition of Western ontology. But unlike Heidegger, Irigaray argues – already in her very first philosophical work *Speculum of the Other Woman* (*Speculum, de l'autre femme* 1974) – that this tradition is not framed as a common enterprise of all lovers of wisdom or contemplators of being, past, contemporary and future, but is, and has always been, a project of learned men. What we have is a tradition and a history of repeated acts of androcentric speculations and exclusions, and not just the ethico-political exclusion or disregard of female teachers and writers or the forgetfulness of their works but the thematic exclusion or neglect of the topics of materiality, sensibility, embodiment, emotions, and birth associated with feminine life.⁵⁹ In *This Sex Which is not One* (*Ce sexe qui n'en pas un* 1977), Irigaray already states:

of Irigaray's Commitment to Transcendental pPhenomenology in *The Forgetting of the Air and the Way of Love*", *Hypatia*, vol. 28 (2013), nr. 3, 452–468; cf. Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); Allison Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); see also Stella Sandford's *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (London and New Brunswick: NJ, 2000) 133–138.

⁵⁹ Cf. Heinämaa, "Cixous, Kristeva".

For each philosopher, beginning with those whose names define some age in the history of philosophy, we have to point out how the break with material contiguity is made, how the system is put together, how the specular economy works.⁶⁰

So in order to establish a new beginning, it is not enough to question the sense of being, instituted in Ancient Greek and re-instituted in early and late modernity. Neither is it enough to inquiry into the difference between beings and Being. What one needs to search for is *sexual difference*, or conceptual and practical tools for the establishment of this difference.⁶¹

Irigaray turns to Levinas' critique of Heidegger in order to find conceptual tools for the articulation and unravelling of the androcentric genealogy of our philosophical present.⁶² What she finds in Levinas' metaphysical ethics is a novel account of the basic structures of human temporality. Levinas conceives human time fundamentally as an intersubjective accomplishment of two separate selves, a couple generated in love and wonder, and thus he is able to question the Heideggerian

⁶⁰ Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, 73, *This Sex*, 75.

⁶¹ Cf. Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, 146–148, *This Sex*, 150–151.

⁶² Irigaray's *Sexes and Genealogies* (*Sexes et parentés* 1987) presents her understanding of the juridical conditions of a genuinely heterogenous culture (Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et parentés*, Paris, Minuit, 1987; in English *Sexes and Genealogies*, Gillian C. Gill (trans.) (Ithaca and New York, Cornell, 1993). However, the question concerning the possibility of a feminine genealogy has been part of her work since the early essays published in *This Sex Which is Not One*.

opposition between general historical time, on the one hand, and solitary being-towards-death, on the other hand.⁶³

Levinas attacks Heidegger's analysis of time by arguing that it is preoccupied with the experience of mortality and negligent of other basic experiences that have their own peculiar forms of temporality. If we focus our inquiries on the experiences of erotic love and parenthood instead of mortality, he argues, then we can get rid of the illusion that the fundamental structures of time are to be found in our solitary lives and that the most original sense of being is our being-towards-death.⁶⁴

Irigaray accepts the critical thrust of this argument. But she doubts its constructive side. In her understanding, Levinas is able to question the abstractive grounds of Heidegger's discourse on human temporality but only at the price of presenting a male-male relationship as the most complete form of intersubjective temporality: the feminine beloved is claimed to grant a future to the loving subject, but the son is introduced as the radical newcomer who realizes or accomplishes this opening. Thus the feminine beloved and the erotic relation are conceived and presented as mere conditions for paternity and as mere means to the transgenerational futurity that the male offspring provides. Irigaray rejects the analysis by arguing:

⁶³ Levinas, *Temps*, 18–20, 73–89, *Time*, 39–42, 81–94; Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini: essai sur l'exteriorité* (Paris: Kluwer Academic Publishers, [1961] 1971), 230–236, 284–318; in English *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Alphonso Lingis (trans.) (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1994), 210–214, 253–285.

⁶⁴ For a more complete explication of these arguments, see Heinämaa, "Phenomenologies", 121–128.

He [Levinas' male lover] is forgetful of the fecundity, here and now, of lovemaking: the gift to each of the lovers of sexual birth and rebirth (...) The seduction of the beloved woman serves as a bridge between the Father and the son. Through her, who is only an aspect of himself, the male lover goes beyond love and pleasure toward the ethical.⁶⁵

In Levinas account, erotic relations between women and men are impaired by materiality and sensible corporeality.⁶⁶ In erotic sensuous touching, he claims, the

⁶⁵ Irigaray, *Éthique*, 187–188, *An Ethics*, 202–203. This line of argument in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* is both ethical and theological: “Thus, the God, like the son, would serve as a prop in the ethical journey of man who forgets to safeguard for the female lover the light of her return to the self” (*Éthique*, 190, *An Ethics*, 206).

Also several other feminist philosophers have criticized Levinas' metaphysical ethics for androcentric assumptions. The most interesting critiques include Catherine Chalier, *Figures du féminin* (Paris: La nuit surveillée, 1982); “Ethics and the Feminine”, in *Re-Reading Levinas*, Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (eds.), 119–129 (London: Athlone Press, 1991); Chanter, *The Ethics*; Sandford, *The Metaphysics*; Chanter, *Time*; Kelly Oliver, “Parental Election and the Absent Father”, in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, Tina Chanter (ed.), 224–240 (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

⁶⁶ Irigaray argues, for example, as follows: “He [Levinas' male lover] invokes this God but does not perceive him in the here and now, where God is already to be found and lost: in the sensibility of the female lover” (Irigaray, *Éthique*, 182, cf. 190, 193,

self is still “enchained” to its present, and thus bound to return to itself. It can truly transcend itself and gain a future only through paternity and its discursive freedom that breaks the sensuous and fleshly ties of erotic love. In *Totality and Infinity* (*Totalité et infini* 1961), Levinas explains:

I love fully only if the other loves me, not because I need the recognition of the Other, but because my voluptuousity delights in her voluptuousity, and because in this unparalleled conjuncture of identification, in this *trans-substantiation*, the Same and the Other are not united but precisely – beyond every possible projection, beyond every meaningful and intelligent power – engender a child. (...) By a total transcendence, the transcendence of trans-substantiation, the I is, in the child, an other. Paternity remains a self-identification, but also a distinction within identification.⁶⁷

For Irigaray, Lévinas’ solution is highly problematic, because it subordinates the erotic encounter of woman and man to the genealogy of paternity. The present encounter between woman and man, their dual sensuous here and now, is sacrificed in the Levinasian analysis for an imagined, anticipated or expected future.

An Ethics, 196, cf. 206, 209–211). She develops her critical-constructive concept of the *sensible transcendental* throughout her *Ethics*, starting in the first essay on Plato’s *Symposium* (e.g. *Éthique*, 38, 111, 124, 133, 139, *An Ethics*, 32, 115, 129, 140, 147–148).

⁶⁷ Levinas, *Totalité*, 298–299, *Totality and Infinity*, 266, translation modified.

In my reading, this is a Beauvoirian element in Irigaray's critique of the Heideggerian heritage. The crucial teaching of *The Second Sex* that we find developed in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* is the idea that the erotic relation between man and woman is not to be subjected to the teleology of procreation or reproduction since it has its own independent form of temporality and intentionality that concerns the regeneration of the two lovers. Moreover this relation does not comply with any one genealogy but is established between two beings of different genealogies. In a word, what Irigaray gets from Beauvoir is an insight into the pressing character of the heteroerotic encounter and the significance of the present in this encounter.⁶⁸ Irigaray writes:

⁶⁸ Irigaray's discourse of temporality in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* weaves together several elements: The Beauvoirian understanding of the pressing temporality of the erotic encounter is articulated with the help of Heideggerian concepts of *in-stance* and *in-between* (*Augenblick*) and the Catholic Christian ideas of *parousia*, marriage, and the bride (cf. Damien Casey, "Luce Irigaray and the Advent of the Divine", *In A Grain of Eternity*, Michael Griffith and James Tulip (eds.), Sydney: N.S.W., 1997; *Flesh Made World: Theology After Irigaray*, Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Press, 2010). So we read, for example: "Is wonder the time that is always covered over by the present. The bridge, the stasis, the moment of in-stance? Where I am no longer in the past and not yet in the future?" (xxx/75). And: "Does parousia correspond to the expectation of a future not only as a utopia or a destiny but also as a here and now, the willed construction of a bridge in the present between the past and the future?" (xxx/147).

Let love be that which can be given-returned as affection for self *through the other here and now*: according to a durational time that would be neither pure nostalgia for the past nor an appeal to the future with regard to the unique.⁶⁹

We see this idea developed most explicitly in Irigaray's critique of Levinas. Whereas Levinas assumes that there is a teleological connection between the two types of relations, the erotic and the reproductive, and that the erotic is cultivated in procreation, Irigaray works to keep conceptually separate the two relations and to study their intentionalities and temporalities without assuming that one serves the other.⁷⁰ The main argument of *An Ethics of sexual Difference* is that the erotic must not be subjected to the procreative but must be studied in its own right. This demand must be met at the same time both in flesh and in spirit.⁷¹

5. Wonder and Love Reconsidered

My aim here is not to deny or dismiss the heterogeneity of Irigaray's discourse on the temporality of wonder-love but to demonstrate that the feminist-philosophical core of this discourse, and its main thrust, is in the argument about the significance of a shared present *between the two sexes*. And I argue that in this core sense, Irigaray's discourse remains indebted to Beauvoir's discourse of erotic generosity.

⁶⁹ Irigaray, *Éthique*, xx, *An Ethics* 61.

⁷⁰ Irigaray, *Éthique*, e.g., 169, *An Ethics*, 213.

⁷¹ Irigaray, *Éthique*, 14, *An Ethics*, 6.

In order to find alternatives to the reproductive framing and the procreative model of heterosexual love, Irigaray turns to two classical texts, Plato's *Symposium* and Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*, and reinterprets their discourses on the passions of love and wonder.⁷² These two classical texts are discussed separately in two essays of *An Ethics* but the argument about the necessity to redefine heterosexual love-wonder proceeds from the beginning of the book to its final critical discussion on Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*. In the introductory essay, "Sexual Difference", Irigaray already states:

The feeling of surprise, astonishment, and wonder in the face of the unknowable ought to be returned to its locus: that of the sexual difference.⁷³

⁷² Erica Harth suggests, in her work on *Cartesian Women*, that Luce Irigaray is possibly the last of Descartes's feminist followers (*Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992, 235–239). Thus Harth places Irigaray in the same tradition with the so-called Cartesian women, e.g. Elisabeth of Bohemia and Catherine Descartes. Cf. Martina Reuter, "Questions of Sexual Difference and Equality in Descartes' Philosophy", in *Norms and Modes of Thinking in Descartes*, Acta Philosophica Fennica, Volume 64, Tuomo Aho and Mikko Yrjönsuuri (eds.) (Helsinki, 1999).

⁷³ For an illuminating account of the phrase "its locus", see Vigdis Songe-Møller, "Luce Irigaray rakkaudesta ja ihmetyksestä", Sara Heinämaa (trans.), in *Ruumiin kuvia: subjektin ja sukupuolen muunnelmia*, Sara Heinämaa, Martina Reuter and Kirsi Saarikangas (eds.), 23–36 (Helsinki: Gaudemus, 1997).

The passions have either been repressed, stifled, or reduced, or reserved for God. Sometimes a space for wonder is left to works of art. But it is never found to reside in this locus: between man and woman. Into this space came attraction, greed, possession, consummation, disgust, and so on. But not that wonder which beholds what it sees always as if for the first time, never taking hold of the other as its object. It does not try to seize, possess, or reduce this object, but leaves it subjective, still free.⁷⁴

My argument is that Irigaray's combined concept of *love-wonder* entails two ideas that we found in Beauvoir's discourse on erotic generosity: the idea that there is a irrevocable difference between woman and men and the notion that we need to protect and guard the present of the encounter and not to collapse its to our own past or future. In Irigaray's treatment, Beauvoir's concept of erotic generosity grows into a radical rethinking of the institutions of Western culture and its possibilities of regrowth.

Sexual difference would constitute the horizon of worlds more fecund than any known to date – at least in the West – and without reducing fecundity to the reproduction of bodies and flesh. For loving partners this would be a fecundity of birth and regeneration, but also the production of a new age of thought, art, poetry, and language: the creation of a new poetics.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Irigaray, *Éthique*, 20, *An Ethics*, 13.

⁷⁵ Irigaray, *Éthique*, xxx, *An Ethics*, 5.

Irigaray's main idea is that in love and wonder the two lovers – woman and man – can relate without abandoning their own identities and genealogies. They can regenerate themselves thanks to the other's loving and adoring approach and they can motivate the other's regeneration by their own respectful expressions. Love-wonder is directed at rebirth or regeneration of the two, not at fusion, unification or generation of any new objects or subjects, physical or mental. So rather than manifesting its creative force in the production or reproduction of new entities, bodily or psychic, love-wonder makes possible the renewal of two separate subjects and their irreversible difference.

Irigaray argues that we can find traces of such erotic exchanges in classical philosophical texts. These traces have been bypassed by a long line of commentators and critics or else they have been used for the construction of unitary and androcentric representations of human subjectivity. Thus they are not available but need to be discovered, or rediscovered, and developed further in the context of the quest for sexual difference.

Rise again from the traces of a culture, of works already produced by the other. Searching through what is in them – for what is not there. What allowed them to be, for what is not there. Their condition of possibility, for what is not there. (17/9–10)

For this purpose, Irigaray returns Descartes' theory of human passions and its analysis of the emotion of wonder. In Descartes' taxonomy of emotions, wonder is the primary emotion because of their exceptional intentional structure. Wonder or surprise (*admiration*) differs from all other passions – love and hatred, joy and

sadness, for example – in involving a comprehensive suspension of all evaluation, positive and negative.⁷⁶ In Cartesian wonder – and only in wonder – we can attend to the other without measuring him or her by our own standards or by the habitual criteria of the common good. The main idea here is the non-evaluative character of the emotion. Irigaray writes:

The other, male or female, should surprise us again and again, appear to us as new, very different from what we knew or what we thought he or she should be. Which means that we would look at the other, we would stop to look at him or her, ask ourselves, come close to ourselves through questioning. Who art thou? I am and I become thanks to this questioning.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Descartes, *Œuvres*, vol. XI; in English *The Passions of the Soul*, Robert Stoothoof (trans.), in *The Passions of the Soul*, Robert Stoothoof (trans.). in *The Philosophical of Descartes I*, John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoof and Dugald Murdoch (eds.), 218–238 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–1991). For a complete account and interpretation of Descartes’s discourse on wonder and Irigaray’s creative reading of it, see, Sara Heinämaa, “Wonder”; “Verwunderung und sexuelle Differenz: Luce Irigarays phänomenologischer Cartesianismus”, Silvia Stoller (trans.), in *Feminist Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, Linda Fisher, Silvia Stoller and Veronica Vasterling (eds.), 192–207 (Würzburg: Köningshausen & Neumann, 2005); Heinämaa, “Wonder as the Primary”.

⁷⁷ Irigaray, *Éthique*, 77, *An Ethics*, 74.

With the Cartesian idea of wonder, Irigaray argues that in order to proceed toward an ethics of sexual difference, we must look at the other – man or woman – without evaluating him or her according to any established standards. We must apprehend and approach the other without asking if she or he functions as an aid or obstacle in our projects, or contributes to our wellbeing or permanence, or improves or prolongs our lives.

In order to further clarify the specificity this task Irigaray resorts to Plato's *Symposium* and its discourse on erotic love. She focuses her reading on the speech of Diotima who according to Socrates was his teacher in the affairs of love.⁷⁸

In Irigaray's reading, the core of Diotima's teaching is in the emphasis on the non-productive nature of love. She argues that in Diotima's speech (or in its first part) love is not directed, as Socrates suggests, towards an external object, a person or a thing, but towards the processes of generation and birth as such. What is at issue is a "love of generation and of birth in the beauty".⁷⁹ Moreover, it is not just any kind of birth that is essential to love; rather it is crucial that generation should happen, as said, *in the beauty*.

⁷⁸ Diotima is called "priestess" in the English translations of *Symposium* but in the original Greek text she is merely characterized as "a woman", "wife" or "lady" (*guné*) (201d2) and "a stranger or a strange female person (*xenê*) (201e) (Angela Hobbs, "Female Imagery in Plato", in *Plato's Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, J. Leshner, D. Nails and S. Sheffield (eds.), 252–271 (Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University, 2006); Miira Tuominen, "Plato's *Symposium: Erôs* of the Individual in Diotima's Speech", manuscript 2015).

⁷⁹ Plato, *Symposium* 206e.

On the basis of this, Irigaray claims that in Diotima's speech love does not aim at producing anything. The outcome of generation, a physical child, an artwork, a speech or a written text, is inessential to the realization of love. In Aristotelian terms, one could say that love is not a *poesis* but a *praxis*: the aim is not any-thing outside of or separate from the activity-passivity of loving. The aim is loving itself. Irigaray states this by saying that love is a "mediator of a becoming with no other objective than the becoming."⁸⁰

To be sure, Diotima tells Socrates that finite, mortal beings can attain immortality and eternity only through generation, but generation should not be misunderstood as reproduction of children, nor as production of things.⁸¹ Instead, it must be seen as a transformation, a renewal of oneself with the other:

She [Diotima] speaks ... of becoming in time, of permanent generation-regeneration that takes place here and now in everyone, male and female, as far as corporeal and spiritual realities are concerned. Without going so far as to say that the one is the fruition of the other. Rather, that each moment, we are a "regrowth" of ourselves, in perpetual increase. No more searching for immortality through the child. But in ourselves, ceaselessly.⁸²

So the object of love is generation itself and the goal of generation is the permanent growth and re-growth of the two lovers, their constant change in their

⁸⁰ Irigaray, *Éthique*, 39, *An Ethics*, 33.

⁸¹ Plato, *Symposium*, 207.

⁸² Irigaray, *Éthique*, 34, *An Ethics*, 28.

mutual interchange. This idea is crystallized in the final essay of *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* where Irigaray develops her own alternative to Levinas' discourse of the erotic:

Searching for what has not yet come into being for himself, he invites me to become what I have not yet become. To realize a birth that is still in the future. Plunging me back into the material womb and beyond that conception, awakening me to another birth – as a loving woman [*amoureuse*].⁸³

The idea of love as a dual becoming is not restricted to Irigaray's reading of Plato or of Levinas. It is central to her whole ethical quest and we find it developed already in *Elemental Passions* (*Passions élémentaires* 1982):

[L]ove can be the motor of becoming, allowing both the one and the other to grow. For such love each must keep their bodies autonomous. The one should not be the source of the other nor the other of the one. Two lives should embrace and fertilize each other, without either being a fixed goal for the other.⁸⁴

6. An Ethics of Reading and Writing

⁸³ Irigaray, *Éthique*, 175, cf. 184, *An Ethics*, 187, cf. 199.

⁸⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Passions élémentaires* (Paris: Minuit, 1982), 32–33; in English *Elemental Passions*, Joanne Collie and Judith Still (trans.) (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), 27.

I have argued that Irigaray's *Ethics* is an attempt to think sexual difference through in a new way in a post-Beauvoirian philosophical setting. I have argued that Platonic love and Cartesian wonder between are crucial to this enterprise and that these emotions contain two crucial aspects of Beauvoir's idea of erotic generosity: an idea of a fundamental difference between women and men and an emphasis on the ethical significance of the present.

It seems to me that Irigaray develops these two ideas in an exceptional way in her main ethical study *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* and related works, such as *I Love To You* and *Elemental Passions*. In these works, passions are not just interpreted, analyzed or critically discussed *in abstracto* but are also concretely cultivated in the practice of reading and writing. In other words, love and wonder have also a performative function in Irigaray's discourse. In addition to describing sexual difference and arguing for it, Irigaray also makes an effort to realize this difference in her dialogue with past philosophers. I want to suggest, in conclusion, that her *Ethics* is both a account of a possible beginning of an ethical relation between the sexes, and an initiation for such an opening.⁸⁵

It is noteworthy that in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray's approach to the philosophical tradition is different from the deconstructive strategy of the early study *Speculum of the Other Woman*. She questions and comments on the texts of canonical male philosophers, from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes and Spinoza,

⁸⁵ Cf. Sara Heinämaa, *Ihmetys ja rakkaus: esseitä ruumiin ja sukupuolen fenomenologiasta* (Helsinki, Nemo, 2001), 9–14. For a development of this argument, see Virpi Lehtinen, *Luce Irigaray's Phenomenology of Feminine Being* (Albany: SUNY, 2014).

Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, but she does not focus her critical questions on their philosophical neglects, omissions or preconceptions. Instead, she identifies underdeveloped potentials in each text and works to actualize and develop these potentials, allowing each text to inform her own inquiry in a characteristic and unique way. In every case, she defers the closure of her reading, and ends in a questioning.

So what we have is not just an argument for the renewal of the erotic relation between man and woman in wonder and love, but also – and equally importantly – an attempt at finding a wondering and loving attitude towards philosophical texts. Accordingly, the aim is not just to write *about* love and wonder but also to read *in* love and wonder. Irigaray turns back to the philosophical tradition, but her interest is not in finding out if the texts fulfil or disappoint her expectations and contribute to her projects as evidence or support. Instead, she pays attention to intervals and interruptions, makes space for the unexpected and works for the mutual renewal of both thinkers, him and her.

The correct way to describe Irigaray's ethical work then is, I think, to say that she listens to the words of writers absent in time and space and follows their movements of thought. She does not assimilate herself to the texts, nor does she try to assimilate the text to her own theoretical or practical needs. Instead she works to keep both the texts and her own thoughts open and fecund for a new heterologous future.

I have argued that this idea and its practice has roots in Beauvoir's existential ethics and its idea of erotic generosity. Equally importantly, perhaps, its practical or performative form has roots in Beauvoir's literary works and their dialogical modes of inquiry. But this final point cannot be demonstrated here; it remains to be argued for later.

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