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## When Living Is Only Not Dying: Immanence and Animality in Beauvoir’s Analysis of Subordination

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### Abstract

This article examines the intertwining of oppression, animality, and biological life in Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of immanence. Analyzing the roots of this discussion in G.W.F. Hegel’s philosophy and tracing its development from *Pyrrhus and Cineas* to *The Second Sex*, the author suggests that Beauvoir’s insight that oppression involves a deprivation of transcendence is of lasting value, whereas her concept of immanence remains problematic.

### Keywords

Simone de Beauvoir – G.W.F. Hegel – oppression – immanence – animals – biological functions – women

What is oppression? What is the role of “immanence” in oppression? In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir crystallizes her view:

Oppression divides the world into two clans: those who enlighten mankind by thrusting it ahead of itself and those who are condemned to mark time hopelessly in order merely to support the collectivity; their life is a pure repetition of mechanical gestures; their leisure is just about sufficient for them to regain their strength; the oppressor feeds himself on their transcendence and refuses to extend it by a free recognition.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, those in power can fail to recognize the freedom of others and, in bad faith, treat them as pure facticity, reducing them to immanence.

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<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, “Pour une morale de l’ambiguïté,” in *Pour une morale de l’ambiguïté suivi de Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, Paris, Gallimard, 2003 [1947], 7–197, p. 104, translated by Bernard Frechtman as *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, New York, Kensington, 1976, p. 83. Subsequent references to these works are indicated respectively by the abbreviations *PMA* and *EA*. See also Margaret Simons’s analysis of this passage in *A Phenomenology of Oppression: A Critical Introduction to “Le Deuxième Sexe” by Simone de Beauvoir*, unpublished PhD dissertation, West Lafayette, IN, Purdue University, 1977, pp. 127–128. [https://www.academia.edu/33719958/A\\_Phenomenology\\_of\\_Oppression\\_A\\_Critical\\_Introduction\\_to\\_Le\\_Deuxième\\_Sexe\\_by\\_Simone\\_de\\_Beauvoir](https://www.academia.edu/33719958/A_Phenomenology_of_Oppression_A_Critical_Introduction_to_Le_Deuxième_Sexe_by_Simone_de_Beauvoir).

According to Beauvoir, confinement to immanence signifies that our efforts are limited to the perpetuation of life: that of others and of ourselves. This is when living is, in her words, “only not dying,” and when human existence is “indistinguishable from an absurd vegetation.”<sup>2</sup> Reduced to such a life, a person’s possibilities and thereby her transcendence are severely limited. Her relationship to her future likewise shrinks to reacting to the needs of survival. In Beauvoir’s view, such a diminished form of existence must not be tolerated. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she urges poor and working-class people “to revolt against the tyrants.”<sup>3</sup> In *The Second Sex*, she identifies women as a “caste” that is, to a great extent, confined to a life of immanence. She also elaborates the idea of “mere” biological life as the area that involves only the seeds of human existence as transcendence and project and is instead defined by repetition and reproduction, maintenance of the species.<sup>4</sup>

Even today, Beauvoir’s discussion of oppression, dominion, and control as a suppression of the other’s transcendence is topical, as the innumerable cases of exploitation of immigrants, modern slavery, and imprisonment of demonstrators in different countries make clear. Evidently, her philosophy holds great promise for a better understanding of oppressive relationships—and possibly their undoing. In contrast to this, Beauvoir’s presupposition of an inherent connection between the state of immanence and biological functions or nonhuman life seems like a gross misunderstanding, a stale idea from far-off days, not least because the parallel nurtures the same dichotomous logic of dominion that she sets out to bring down. Such a view does not help us deal with the most challenging issue of our time, climate change, or recognize the ambiguities that may have paved the way for it, but rather gives us a free pass to continue life as usual, as long as we respect and recognize the freedom of other human beings.

In view of Beauvoir’s ambivalent legacy, I ask: What, if anything, remains of her concept of immanence when it is stripped of its connection to animality and biological functions and when her Hegelian principles are examined critically? Does it still help us to understand the nature of oppression, or should we dispense with the concept altogether? If we do, does Beauvoir’s philosophy lose its subversive potential? How can we reconcile her existentialist insights on freedom and oppression with a phenomenology of animality and nonhuman nature that escapes crude simplifications and human exceptionalism?

To find even a tentative answer to these questions, it is necessary to scrutinize the Hegelian undercurrents of Beauvoir’s philosophy once more. I start by analyzing Beauvoir’s concept of immanence in light of earlier feminist analyses, after which I elucidate G. W. F. Hegel’s and Alexandre Kojève’s views on the emergence of individuality and self-consciousness. These analyses provide a basis for my subsequent discussion of the intertwining of immanence, oppression, and biological life in Beauvoir’s works from *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* to *The Second Sex*. At the end of the article, I raise the possibility of reconciling Beauvoir’s description of oppression as a deprivation of transcendence with more plausible ways of understanding animal and plant life and biological functions in general.

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<sup>2</sup> *PMA*, p. 104; *EA*, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> *PMA*, p. 104; *EA*, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe, t. I*, Paris, Gallimard, 2008 [1949], and *Le Deuxième Sexe, t. II*, Paris, Gallimard, 2008 [1949], translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier as *The Second Sex*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2010. Subsequent references to these works are indicated respectively by the abbreviations *DSI*, *DSII*, and *SS*.

## 1. Feminist Discussions of the Concept of Immanence

Scholars do not agree on the exact meaning of Beauvoir's concept of immanence and its relationship to the concept of transcendence. Earlier feminist critics interpreted these concepts in light of Hegel's and Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophies. Genevieve Lloyd, for instance, argues that Beauvoir accepted the opposition set down by Hegel between individual consciousness and the inchoate generality of life, adopting the Hegelian-Sartrean concept of transcendence.<sup>5</sup> This transcendence, in turn, would be precisely transcendence from life and the female body. Eva Lundgren-Gothlin likewise suggests that the concepts "transcendence" and "immanence" are contradictory and mirror the most problematic aspects of Beauvoir's anthropology, including the associations of men with the struggle for recognition and women with species life.<sup>6</sup>

Since the turn of the millennium, more favorable analyses have appeared. According to Andrea Veltman, immanence "refers neither to facticity nor to Sartre's *en-soi* but to the negative labor necessary to maintain human life or to perpetuate the status quo."<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Beauvoir's distinction between transcendence and immanence could be seen as one between constructive work and maintenance labor.<sup>8</sup> Christine Daigle and Christinia Landry agree with Veltman that immanence should not be understood as the Sartrean in-itself, but in contrast to Veltman, they define it as "the original moment of being [...] which grounds and fashions transcendence."<sup>9</sup>

It is true that, for Beauvoir, immanence is not identical with the in-itself, which is the mode of being of things and, as such, plenitude. Nor is it merely the lack of transcendence, even if she describes it almost exclusively in negative terms as the absence of transcendence.<sup>10</sup> This irreducibility to the deprivation of transcendence can be observed in the following passage from *The Second Sex*: "In truth, all human existence is both transcendence and immanence at the same time; to go beyond itself, it must maintain itself; to thrust itself toward the future, it must integrate the past into itself."<sup>11</sup> On the basis of this and other passages in which she uses these concepts, immanence and transcendence can be defined as two aspects of existence, namely, one that is self-maintaining, self-enclosed, and remains within the given, and another that is future-oriented and surpasses the given. Therefore, the distinction between immanence and transcendence cannot be reduced to that between maintenance labor and constructive work, as Veltman suggests, even if the latter distinction is implied in it.

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<sup>5</sup> Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*, London, Methuen, 1986 [1984], pp. 100–101. See also Michèle Le Dœuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, trans. Colin Gordon, London, Athlone, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, *Kön och existens: Studier i Simone de Beauvoirs Le deuxième sexe*, Göteborg, Daidalos, 1991, pp. 322–323, 327, translated by Linda Schenk as *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex"*, London, Athlone, 1996, pp. 230, 234.

<sup>7</sup> Andrea Veltman, "Transcendence and Immanence in the Ethics of Simone de Beauvoir" in *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays*, ed. Margaret A. Simons, Indiana, Bloomington University Press, 2006, 113–131, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Christine Daigle and Christinia Landry, "An Analysis of Sartre's and Beauvoir's Views on Transcendence: Exploring Intersubjective Relations," *PhaenEx*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2013, 91–121, pp. 91–92.

<sup>10</sup> See Lundgren-Gothlin, *Kön och Existence*, p. 328; *Sex and Existence*, p. 233.

<sup>11</sup> *DSI*, p. 33; *SS*, p. 443.

Given that immanence is a necessary aspect of existence, Beauvoir does not object to it as such, but rather to the *confinement* of a human being to immanence, for this implies being deprived of transcendence, and, consequently, oppression.<sup>12</sup> It follows from this that, for Beauvoir, immanence and transcendence are ethically relevant concepts. In an oft-cited passage of *The Second Sex*, she writes:

Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation of existence into “in-itself,” of freedom into facticity; this fall is a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if this fall is inflicted on the subject, it takes the form of frustration and oppression; in both cases it is an absolute evil.<sup>13</sup>

The subversive potential of Beauvoir’s analysis lies precisely in her insistence that oppression implies deprivation of the other’s transcendence. As we saw, however, she problematically links oppression and immanence with animal life, biological functions, and maintenance labor, and suggests that human existence emerges from animal life through aggressive “male” activities.<sup>14</sup> Many researchers locate the source of this view in her Hegelianism and more precisely in Hegel’s master–slave dialectic, which allegedly introduces controversial dualisms to her thinking.<sup>15</sup> Others suggest that the problem is, in fact, that she is not Hegelian enough, but follows too readily Kojève’s and Sartre’s versions of Hegel’s dialectic.<sup>16</sup>

The inner tensions within Beauvoir’s work have sometimes been attributed to an effort to develop a new method of doing philosophy. Penelope Deutscher, for instance, argues that Beauvoir cites, undermines, borrows, and converts the ideas of different thinkers, allowing something new to arise through those productive collisions and intersection.<sup>17</sup> There may be truth to this analysis, but to describe Beauvoir as an architect of postmodern textual strategies may be to overly intellectualize what actually goes on in her works.<sup>18</sup> In comparison to Donna J. Haraway, for instance, who factually draws from a variety of discursive styles to enable their conflicts, Beauvoir’s style is more “traditional,” systematic, argumentative, and synthesizing. In the

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<sup>12</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, “Pyrrhus et Cinéas,” in *Pour une morale de l’ambiguïté suivi de Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, Paris, Gallimard, 2003 [1944], 199–316, p. 208, translated by Marybeth Timmermann as “Pyrrhus and Cineas” in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons with Marybeth Timmermann and Mary Beth Mader, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2004, 89–149, p. 92. Subsequent references to these works are indicated respectively by the abbreviations *PC* and *PCE*.

<sup>13</sup> *DSI*, p. 33; *SS*, p. 16. For the normative use of the concept, see Lundgren-Gothlin, *Kön och Existence*, p. 324, *Sex and Existence*, pp. 231–232, and Veltman, “Transcendence and Immanence,” p. 127.

<sup>14</sup> For recent work on Beauvoir’s discussion of biology and animals, see Shannon M. Mussett, “Nature and Anti-Nature in Simone de Beauvoir’s Philosophy,” *Philosophy Today*, vol. 53, Supplement, 2009, pp. 130–139; Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 155–174; David Peña-Guzman, “Beauvoir’s Reading of Biology in *The Second Sex*,” *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2016, pp. 259–285.

<sup>15</sup> See Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*; Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*.

<sup>16</sup> Kimberly Hutchings, *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy*, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 2003, p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> Penelope Deutscher, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> It must be admitted, however, that Deutscher does not deny the possibility that Beauvoir’s strategies may not always be consciously intended. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

process of synthesizing, Beauvoir occasionally fuses together elements that remain in a frictional relationship.<sup>19</sup>

Alia Al-Saji traces this friction back to the conflicting theoretical pulls of Beauvoir's philosophy of existence and her "tentative philosophy of life."<sup>20</sup> Al-Saji hypothesizes Bergsonian influences in Beauvoir's discussion of the transformations of the body, as it emphasizes nonlinear processes that are simultaneously material, vital, and social. In contradiction to this, Beauvoir's philosophy of existence "privileges conscious existence and transcendence as the taking up and surpassing of materiality and life."<sup>21</sup>

It is true that Beauvoir recognizes the generativity of biological life while at the same time viewing it in terms of immanence and repetition. This is reflected by her discussion of the concept of a project: a project is both "in the making in every function" and nonexistent in the activities of animals and in women's activities such as suckling an infant.<sup>22</sup> In the lack of textual evidence, however, it is difficult to estimate the extent of Bergson's influence, as Al-Saji admits, whereas explicit references to Hegel are numerous.<sup>23</sup> In fact, even the conflict mentioned by Al-Saji might be explained by "different Hegels" or different interpretations of Hegel's work, possibly that of Kojève on *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Beauvoir's own interpretation of *Philosophy of Nature*. In order to understand the friction that seeps into her work through these different Hegelianisms, it is necessary investigate the idea of individuality in Hegel's and Kojève's philosophies.

## 2. Hegel and the Birth of Individuality

Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* (1817), a work written after the more famous *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), consists of a meticulous description of the inanimate and animate forms of nature. The succession from inanimate nature to more and more complex forms of animate beings can be read to reflect the gradual generation of individuality, freedom, and awareness among natural beings, and through this awareness, the Spirit's becoming aware of itself.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For Beauvoir's tendency to synthesize the problematic aspects of psychoanalysis in her general scheme, see Erika Ruonakoski, "Interdisciplinarity in *The Second Sex: Between Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis*," in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Humanist Thinker*, ed. Tove Pettersen and Annlaug Bjørnsnøs, Leiden, Brill/Rodopi, 2015, pp. 41–56.

<sup>20</sup> Alia Al-Saji, "Material Life: Bergsonian Tendencies in Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy," in *Differences: Rereading Beauvoir and Irigaray*, ed. Emily Anne Parker and Anne van Leeuwen, New York, Oxford University Press, 2018, 21–53, p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* For Bergsonian influences in Beauvoir's work, see also Margaret A. Simons, "Beauvoir and Bergson: A Question of Influence," in *Beauvoir and Western Thought from Plato to Butler*, ed. Shannon M. Mussett and William S. Wilkerson, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2012, pp. 153–170.

<sup>22</sup> *DSI*, pp. 45, 114; *SS*, pp. 26, 73.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Saji, "Material Life," p. 24. Henri Bergson is mentioned only in passing in "Pyrrhus and Cineas" and not at all in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*, but quotations from and references to him can be found in Beauvoir's discussion of "the social self" and "the deep self" in *Cahiers de jeunesse 1926–1930*, ed. Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, Paris, Gallimard, 2008, pp. 56–62. See also *PC*, p. 236; *PCE*, p. 105; Simons, "Beauvoir and Bergson."

<sup>24</sup> Hegel's philosophy of nature has been published in two forms: as a tripartite work entitled *Philosophy of Nature* (1817), and as the second part of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817). The latter consists of an "outline" of the whole of Hegel's system and was intended as a pedagogical aid for listeners to his lectures. There are two explicit references to *Philosophy of Nature* in *The Second Sex*, and they both identify §369 of the third part (*Organics*) of the tripartite *Philosophy of Nature* as their source: See *DSI*, pp. 41, 44; *SS*, pp. 23, 25. It can be confusing for readers of Hegel's work to notice that Beauvoir's quotations and the whole discussion of sexual differentiation and "sex-relationship" are absent from §369 in some editions. In the edition of *Organics*

According to Hegel, plants have no self-awareness, but they manifest a degree of self-organization, or as he puts it, “subjectivity,” in their relationship to their environment, as can be seen in their functions of self-preservation and reproduction.<sup>25</sup> Subjectivity occurs to an even greater degree with animals, which have a point of view on their surroundings. In Hegel’s words, an animal “finds itself within itself”: only in animals does the self possess being-for-self.<sup>26</sup> Driven by a feeling of lack, animal reproduction is, according to Hegel, the highest form of natural being.<sup>27</sup>

In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel points out that the plant “does not attain to a being-for-self but merely touches the boundary-line of individuality.”<sup>28</sup> According to him, self-consciousness proper comes into the world when a consciousness desires to be recognized by the other. Already an animal can desire food and negate it by eating it, but desiring a natural object is not enough to produce self-consciousness. This idea of Hegel’s should not be interpreted as a total denial of animal awareness: an animal has self-feeling (*Selbstgefühl*), but it does not have self-consciousness (*Selbstbewusstsein*).<sup>29</sup> In the language of Husserlian phenomenology, a nonhuman animal has a prereflective self-awareness but not a reflective self-awareness.<sup>30</sup> In other words, an animal has an unthematized experience of itself as a center of all its experiences, but it does not take a reflective attitude toward this experience. For Hegel, the mediation of the other is needed for self-consciousness proper to be born: a “self-consciousness is for a self-consciousness.”<sup>31</sup>

In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the encounter of two consciousnesses ends up in a struggle for recognition. The struggle has to take place because both “must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth, both in the case of the other and their own.”<sup>32</sup> When one of them refuses to put his life at risk, his opponent becomes his master, and he becomes the slave (or “bondsmen”).<sup>33</sup> Yet neither of them achieves self-consciousness proper, for one of them (the slave) is not recognized by the other, whereas the other (the master) acquires recognition only by force. Later, the slave transcends himself through his work, whereas the master becomes

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used here, this discussion can be found in §368, pp. 172–176. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature, Volume III, Organics*, trans. M. J. Petry, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1970; *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature: Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences, Part Two*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004. Subsequently these versions are referred to as *Organics* and *Encyclopaedia II*. It can be of interest to the reader to compare the different translations that these versions represent. See also A. J. Findlay, “Foreword,” in Hegel, *Encyclopaedia II*, v–xxvi, p. xxiv; Heikki Ikäheimo, “Hegel’s Psychology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, ed. Dean Moyar, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 424–449.

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, *Organics*, §337, pp. 343–345.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, §351.

<sup>27</sup> Hegel, *Organics*, pp. 169–170; Hegel, *Encyclopaedia II*, §363, pp. 409–410.

<sup>28</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977 [1807], §246, p. 149.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, §258, p. 157.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of prereflective self-awareness and inner time-consciousness, see Edmund Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie: Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925*, ed. Walter Biemel, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1968, 390–430, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, Gallimard, 1998 [1945], pp. 476–477. Merleau-Ponty makes an explicit connection between perception of self and Hegel’s self-feeling (*sentiment du soi*) in *Le visible et l’invisible*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997 [1961], p. 303, translated by Alphonso Lingis as *The Visible and Invisible*, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1968, p. 249.

<sup>31</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, §177, p. 110.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, §187, pp. 113–114.

<sup>33</sup> I use the masculine pronoun because Hegel refers to two male subjects, *Herr* (master) and *Knecht* (bondsmen or slave).

dependent on the slave's efforts.<sup>34</sup> The ultimate endpoint of societal development, disclosed by Hegel's own philosophy, is the situation in which all human beings recognize one another. In Hegel's view, the nature of humanity is, in fact, to seek agreement and to form a "community of minds": "[H]uman nature only really exists in an achieved community of minds. The anti-human, the merely animal, consists in staying within the sphere of feeling, and being able to communicate only at that level."<sup>35</sup>

Beauvoir appears to have been intrigued by Hegel's ideas of mutual recognition and human specificity. Her relationship to Hegel's philosophy, however, is anything but one of simple absorption. For one thing, she thinks that Hegel's system enables the celebration of the progress of reason and freedom in the history of humankind only through a denial of the fundamental ambiguity of life.<sup>36</sup> In *The Second Sex*, she insists that she is *not* proposing a finalistic philosophy of life, or any definite view about life and consciousness, both of which are attributes of Hegel's philosophy.<sup>37</sup>

Beauvoir's discussion of *Phenomenology of the Spirit* is well known, but it is also possible to detect a kind of continuum between *Philosophy of Nature* and *The Second Sex* in the narrative of the development of individuality and freedom in animal organisms, as well as in the detailed description of the animate organisms, even though there are few explicit references.<sup>38</sup> In this respect, *The Second Sex* differs from Beauvoir's earlier works *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, in which the discussion of individuality and animals is much more straightforward, reflecting, possibly, Kojève's "existential Marxism" rather than the actual content of either *Philosophy of Nature* or even *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

According to critics, Kojève overemphasizes the role of the master–slave dialectic both within *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Hegel's philosophy in general, and deviates from Hegel when he stresses that the properly human action is constituted by the transformative means of work, battle, and risk-taking.<sup>39</sup> From our point of view, it is particularly interesting that Kojève draws a parallel between animal life, plant life, and inanimate objects. According to his interpretation of Hegel, every human being who is truly human wants to see himself as unique—"one of a kind"—and he also wants to be recognized as such by the greatest number. To achieve this goal, he has to live and act as a recognized citizen of a state. In other words, a truly human existence differs radically from animal life, in which no recognition is sought and

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<sup>34</sup> 179–196, pp. 111–119.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, §69, p. 43.

<sup>36</sup> *PMA*, pp. 12–13; *EA*, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> *DSI*, p. 41, 45; *SS*, p. 25–26.

<sup>38</sup> See *DSI*, p. 41; *SS*, p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> This was an accusation that Kojève himself, in fact, admitted was justified. See Patrick Riley, "Introduction to the Reading of Alexandre Kojève," *Political Theory*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1981, 5–48, p. 22; Alexandre Kojève, "Lettre de Kojève à Tran-Duc-Thao," in *De Kojève à Hegel: 150 ans de pensée hégélienne en France*, ed. Gwendoline Jarczyk and Pierre-Jean Labarrière, Paris, Éditions Albin Michel, 1996, pp. 64–66. For analyses of the master–slave dialectic in Beauvoir's work, see Meryl Altman, "Beauvoir, Hegel, War," *Hypatia*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2007, pp. 66–91; Nancy Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2001; Hutchings, *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy*, pp. 56–111; Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence*; Susanne Moser, *Freedom and Recognition in the Work of Simone de Beauvoir*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2008; Shannon M. Mussett, "Conditions of Servitude: The Peculiar Role of the Master–Slave Dialectic in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*," in *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays*, ed. Margaret A. Simons, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, pp. 276–293. Following Marx, Kojève strips Hegelianism of its theological inclinations and focuses on the culture-altering impact of the slave's work. He adopts the emphases on freedom and being-towards-death from Martin Heidegger.



no political action is present. Kojève argues that an animal is always just another representative of a natural species, and, as such, is interchangeable with other representatives of that species—just like inanimate objects can be replaced by other exemplars of the same kind. A human being, on the other hand, is “not only a simple ‘exemplar’ or another representative of a natural ‘species,’ interchangeable with other representatives.”<sup>40</sup>

Hegel’s gradualism regarding the birth of individuality is then lost in Kojève’s interpretation of his philosophy. As the following section demonstrates, echoes of Kojève’s dualist philosophy can be found both in *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

### 3. Plant and Animal Life in *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

At first sight, Beauvoir’s references to animals and plants in *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* may seem purely metaphorical. It is true that she does not present her own philosophy of animal and plant life in these essays. When examined in more detail, her references to plants and animals turn out to be less motivated by everyday beliefs than by Hegel’s and Kojève’s discussions of human specificity, individuality, and freedom. When she refers to “plants,” “ants,” and “cattle,” she evokes life in its nonindividuated, repetitive forms. Plants and animals perpetuate themselves but do not transcend the here and now. A human life, on the contrary, seeks justification for itself, and this can be attained only if self-perpetuation is integrated into a surpassing, the only limits of which are assigned by the subjects themselves.<sup>41</sup>

As we have seen, this view coheres better with Kojève’s sharp distinction between human and nonhuman life than with Hegel’s discussion of the gradual development of individuality in natural beings. In *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, Beauvoir explains how things become one’s own only through action that manifests transcendence: “[A]s long as I am a simple given in the midst of nature, nothing is mine. A country is not mine if I only grew there like a plant. What is built up upon me, without me, is not mine.”<sup>42</sup> This passage is consistent with Kojève’s insistence on the significance of transformative action, and the role of the working man in the dialectic.

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir describes confinement to immanence in terms of oppression:

Reduced to pure facticity, congealed in his immanence, cut off from his future, deprived of his transcendence and of the world which that transcendence discloses, a man no longer appears as anything more than a thing among things which can be subtracted

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<sup>40</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on “The Phenomenology of Spirit,”* trans. James H. Nichols, Jr., Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1980 [1947], pp. 235–236, p. 244, note 32. Kojève points out, however, that even within the state, there are roles that make the individual in some ways “interchangeable” after all. To further realize his individuality, he goes on transforming the given political reality. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>41</sup> *PMA*, p. 104; *EA*, pp. 82–83. See also Mussett, “Nature and Anti-Nature,” p. 133.

<sup>42</sup> *PC*, p. 208; *PCE*, p. 92. See also Simone de Beauvoir, “Idéalisme moral et réalisme politique,” in *L’Existentialisme et la sagesse des nations*, Paris, Éditions Nagel, 1948 [1945], 13–54, p. 80, translated by Anne Deing Cordero as “Moral Idealism and Political Realism,” in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret A. Simons with Marybeth Timmermann and Mary Beth Mader, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2004, 175–193, pp. 183–184.

from the collectivity of other things without its leaving upon the earth any trace of its absence.<sup>43</sup>

In this passage as well as elsewhere in the book, she expresses a concern for the fate of the victims of World War II, especially concentration camp prisoners and deportees, who were deprived of the core of their humanity: “[T]hrough sickness, pain, hunger, and death, they no longer saw their comrades and themselves as anything more than an animal horde whose life or desires were no longer justified by anything, whose very revolts were only the agitations of animals.”<sup>44</sup>

In other words, when people are demeaned and driven into a state of misery, it is easier to see them as deserving of that misery. Due to this breakdown of human intersubjectivity, their lives have no purpose outside survival. In the same passage, Beauvoir points out that even the revolts of these people were only “the agitations of animals” (*soubresauts de bêtes*).<sup>45</sup> The word “*soubresaut*” can be translated also as a “twitch,” “jolt,” “jerk,” or even “convulsion”—all references to a movement that is almost involuntary and without any orientation. A revolt described by this metaphor would then be only a reaction to an immediate stimulus. It would involve no long-term future orientation or visions of a better world.<sup>46</sup>

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir argues that the tyrant wants to reduce his victims to immanence, assert himself as a transcendence, and arrogate “to himself the right to treat them like cattle.”<sup>47</sup> In *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, she similarly introduces the metaphor of a herd of cattle (*bétail*) in reference to oppressed human beings:

If I make a group of men into a herd of cattle, I reduce the human reign accordingly. And even if I oppress only one man, all of humanity appears in him as a pure thing to me. If a man is an ant that can be unscrupulously crushed, all men taken together are but an anthill.<sup>48</sup>

Beauvoir here returns to the idea that individuality is born through recognition. For Hegel, the animal herd is the mode of being together before the emergence of self-consciousness proper, and Beauvoir suggests that it is possible to throw human beings back into herd-like existence by means of oppression, that is, by depriving them of an organized societal form that is based on recognition. That they now form a herd of “cattle” implies that they are not a self-organized unit that sets its own goals and participates in mutual recognition, one that would form an opening to an indeterminate future of intersubjectivity. Instead, they

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<sup>43</sup> *PMA*, p. 125; *EA*, p. 100.

<sup>44</sup> *PMA*, p. 126; *EA*, p. 101.

<sup>45</sup> *PMA*, p. 126; *EA*, p. 101.

<sup>46</sup> I base my discussion of orientation on Husserl’s definition of the body as “a zero-point of orientation to the world.” Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Zweites Buch: Phänomenologischen Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, ed. Marly Biemel, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 158–159, translated by Richard Rojekewicz and André Schuwer as *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book, Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, pp. 165–167. For a feminist discussion of the phenomenological concept of orientation, see Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2006.

<sup>47</sup> *PMA*, p. 127; *EA*, p. 102.

<sup>48</sup> *PC*, pp. 309–310; *PCE*, p. 138.

are driven by an exterior force and treated as a mass. It is this attempt to destroy the other's individuality and transcendence that, according to Beauvoir, defines oppression.

At this phase, Beauvoir appears to ignore the possibilities of individuality, suffering, and even a need for some kind of recognition (being seen and considered by others) in the lives of many nonhuman animals. Her indifference could be discarded as symptomatic of her time, if it were not for her contemporary Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who, despite the fact that his early philosophy was also deeply influenced by Kojève, presents a more nuanced discussion of nonhuman animals.<sup>49</sup> For instance, whereas Beauvoir points out that an ant can be crushed "unscrupulously," Merleau-Ponty evokes the figure of a drowning fly in his early work, *The Structure of Behavior*, arguing that animal behavior is not experienced as empty of meaning or as machine-like but as referring to another existence and as orienting toward goals in the animal's surrounding world.<sup>50</sup> Here Beauvoir resembles less Merleau-Ponty than Kojève, who claims that "it does not seem evil at all to kill or destroy some representative or other of an animal or vegetable species" whereas "the extermination of an entire species is considered almost a crime."<sup>51</sup> As I suggested previously, this is because animals do not, according to Kojève's interpretation, manifest individuality: they never say "I," and their desire never acquires a nonnatural object, namely the other's desire.

*Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* profess this view without wavering. *The Second Sex*, however, allows for an emerging individuality and even traces of transcendence and a project in nonhuman animals, as is demonstrated in the next section.

#### 4. Species Life in *The Second Sex*

In *The Second Sex*, the description of animal life is intertwined with an analysis of the role of women as the absolute Other. In the introduction, Beauvoir discusses different kinds of otherness at length, agreeing with Claude Lévi-Strauss's view that the passage from nature to culture is defined by the human tendency to think of biological relations as systems of oppositions. Social reality is then, in a way, built on oppositions and dualities. She combines this Lévi-Straussian insight with the Hegelian dialectic, emphasizing the inherent hostility between consciousnesses as the basis of those oppositions.<sup>52</sup> As is well known, she suggests that interaction between different groups generally ends up in the resolution of this hostility and in abandoning the idea of the absolute Other, whereas, in the case of women, whose solidarity is primarily with men of their class and race rather than with women of other classes and races, the position of the absolute Other has persisted.

Beauvoir rejects Hegel's rationalistic explanation of the sexes as each other's opposites and of sexuality as their mediation but follows his analysis of the emergence of individuality

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<sup>49</sup> See Erika Ruonakoski, *Eläimen tuttuus ja vieraus: Fenomenologisen empatiateorian uudelleentulkinta ja sen sovellus vieraslajisia eläimiä koskevaan kokemukseen* (Familiarity and foreignness of animals: A reinterpretation of the phenomenological theory of empathy and its application to our experience of non-human animals), Helsinki, Tutkijaliitto, 2011, pp. 181–185.

<sup>50</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La structure du comportement*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1990 [1942], p. 137, translated by Alden L. Fisher as *The Structure of Behavior*, Pittsburgh, PA, Duquesne University Press, 1998 [1963], p. 127.

<sup>51</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to Hegel*, p. 234.

<sup>52</sup> *DSI*, p. 19; *SS*, p. 7.

and freedom.<sup>53</sup> Now she presents a more detailed description of animal life than she did earlier, subscribing to the argument of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* that individuality arises gradually with the development of more complex organisms. In the chapter "Biological Data," she writes, "One of the most noteworthy features when surveying the steps of the animal ladder is that, from bottom to top, life becomes more individual; at the bottom it concentrates on the maintenance of the species, and at the top it puts its energies into single individuals."<sup>54</sup>

In the same chapter, she introduces the concept "prey of the species" (*proie de l'espèce*), which refers to the subordination of the living being to the reproductive functions and survival of the species. She argues that at the lower steps of the animal scale, among the simplest of animals, maintenance of the species is the only function of life. Such an animal is little more than a reproductive organ, and the sexes hardly even exist as separate individuals: the female and the male function almost as a single organism. In the edriolydnus (a parasitic crustacean), the male is attached "beneath the female's operculum and is without a digestive tube of its own; it is solely devoted to reproduction."<sup>55</sup> According to Beauvoir, however, the female is equally enslaved as the male, "a slave to the species" (*asservie à l'espèce*), for it is consumed by the production of eggs.<sup>56</sup>

Beauvoir also points out that even if female insects often live longer than the males do, this is only because fertilization takes a short time and ovulation and incubation of eggs take considerably longer. The fate of drones may appear dire, as they die soon after "the nuptial flight," but the fertilized female also has "a sad fate," for if she succeeds in reconstituting a colony, she will spend the next twelve years ceaselessly laying eggs.<sup>57</sup> In Beauvoir's view, it is of little importance that in insects and spiders the female is often bigger and stronger and sometimes devours the male, for these females do not manifest individuality—their whole lives are dedicated to reproduction. The drone, on the other hand, lives a useless and gratuitous life, aside from coitus. It is this gratuity and uselessness that, according to Beauvoir, allows individuality to evolve in the male.<sup>58</sup>

Beauvoir suggests that among human beings it is precisely the woman who remains trapped, more than the man, in her reproductive functions. Beauvoir appears to inherit the idea of women's particular subordination to the species from Hegel, who, according to her, is right in at least one sense when he sees "the subjective element in the male, while the female remains wrapped up in the species."<sup>59</sup> Beauvoir rejects Hegel's idea that a woman's lot is to be the passive one while a man is active, but she admits that the aggressive tendencies in male behavior contribute to the male's individuality.<sup>60</sup> Here she refers explicitly to Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, but it is also possible to detect echoes from his *Philosophy of Right* (1820) in her discussions. In this work, Hegel compares the difference between men and women to that of animals and plants. Women correspond to plants, because the underlying

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<sup>53</sup> *DSI*, p. 41; *SS*, p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> *DSI*, p. 51, *SS*, p. 31.

<sup>55</sup> *DSI*, p. 54; *SS*, p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> *DSI*, p. 54; *SS*, p. 32.

<sup>57</sup> *DSI*, pp. 54–55; *SS*, p. 32.

<sup>58</sup> *DSI*, pp. 55–56; *SS*, p. 33.

<sup>59</sup> *DSI*, p. 62; *SS*, p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> *DSI*, p. 62; *SS*, p. 37.

principle of their development is “the rather vague unity of feeling.”<sup>61</sup> Unlike men, they “cannot attain the ideal.”<sup>62</sup>

Even though Beauvoir’s account of the birth of individuality may appear to differ here from that of her early ethical essays, the basic idea remains the same: like aggression that expresses a nonnatural desire in its aspiration toward the recognition of the other, gratuity and uselessness also point toward a detachment from mere survival of the species and reproduction.<sup>63</sup> In the history of humanity, as Beauvoir interprets it, it has been the males who have put themselves in danger and discarded life as a supreme value, whereas woman’s “worst curse” is her exclusion from warrior expeditions.<sup>64</sup> In a well-known passage, Beauvoir crystallizes her view: “[I]t is not in giving life but in risking his life that man raises himself above the animal; this is why throughout humanity, superiority has been granted not to the sex that gives birth but to the one that kills.”<sup>65</sup>

I agree with Sara Heinämaa that what is at stake here are not acts of violence or “killing” as such—certainly nonhuman animals also kill each other—but the fact that one risks one’s own life to achieve something that is more than this individual life.<sup>66</sup> In the master–slave dialectic, however, it is not for the good of others that the to-be-master risks his life, but for the recognition of the other, that is, for his desire for the other’s desire. Just as Kojève emphasizes the negating action of human beings in battle, risk-taking, and work, Beauvoir also sees value in aggression as a departure from a life of subsistence and repetition: it is a means of changing the status quo and making history.<sup>67</sup> There are numerous examples of this claim, starting from her description of the history of women all the way through the second volume of *The Second Sex*, in which she claims, among other things, that violence “is the authentic test of every person’s attachment to himself, his passions, and his own will.”<sup>68</sup>

According to Beauvoir, women’s ability to bear children has never been able to make them hierarchically superior, for “humanity is not a simple natural species: it does not seek to survive as a species; its project is not stagnation: it seeks to surpass itself.”<sup>69</sup> As we recall, this is quite near to what both Hegel and Kojève argue. For Beauvoir, the moment in which humans—or men—transcend animal life is decisive for the formation of gender hierarchy:

Here we hold the key to the whole mystery. On a biological level, a species maintains itself only by re-creating itself; but this creation is nothing but a repetition of the same Life in different forms. By transcending Life through Existence, man guarantees the repetition of Life: by this surpassing, he creates values that deny any value to pure repetition. With an animal, the gratuitousness and variety of male activities are useless because no project is involved; what it does is worthless when it is not serving the

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<sup>61</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. S. W. Dyde, Kitchener, ON, Batoche Books, 2001 [1820], §166, p. 144.

<sup>62</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox, Oxford, Clarendon, 1953, §166, p. 168.

<sup>63</sup> See also Kojève, *Introduction to Hegel*, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> *DSI*, p. 115; *SS*, p. 74.

<sup>65</sup> *DSI*, p. 115; *SS*, p. 74.

<sup>66</sup> Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir*, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, p. 107.

<sup>67</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to Hegel*, pp. 218–227.

<sup>68</sup> *DSII*, p. 92; *SS*, p. 343.

<sup>69</sup> *DSI*, p. 114; *SS*, pp. 72–73.

species; but in serving the species, the human male shapes the face of the earth, creates new instruments, invents and forges the future.<sup>70</sup>

Beauvoir's conception of "project" is similar to that of Heidegger and Sartre: it refers to the constant surpassing toward the future, throwing oneself toward the future in all one's activities. In *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, not only is the human being such a project, but each person's thoughts, pleasures, and feelings are also projects.<sup>71</sup> In many other passages of *The Second Sex*, however, Beauvoir argues that men escape the life of repetition even when they serve the species, whereas in nonhuman males those behaviors that do not fit into the pattern of reproduction are useless. These behaviors do not involve a project, that is, they do not open up toward a future. Domestic work, however, also locks women in repetition and immanence.<sup>72</sup>

Beauvoir admits that women, like men, sorely wish to transcend the sphere of mere repetition, but they do not have projects of their own. That is why they have to transcend themselves through the projects of others, through those of men. According to Beauvoir, giving birth and suckling infants are not activities but natural functions, and as such they do not involve a project.<sup>73</sup> There is, of course, an ethical dimension to women's lack of projects, for it implies a specific suppression of oneself as a project and transcendence. At the same time, the idea of women lacking projects of their own appears to be in conflict with Beauvoir's earlier view that every human feeling and expression is a project: if a smile projects a future before the one who smiles, one would expect with even more reason that breastfeeding one's child would achieve the same. A concession is made elsewhere in *The Second Sex* when Beauvoir argues that "all living things indicate transcendence" (*tout fait vivant indique une transcendance*) and that "a project is in the making in every function" (*en toute fonction s'empâte un projet*).<sup>74</sup> This view could more easily combine with the one of *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, except that in the latter, "project" is attributed only to human existence.

Considering the gradualism of Beauvoir's descriptions of the birth of individuality in *The Second Sex*, she may have assumed that the project-nature of a living being could be lived and fulfilled more or less completely: the behavior of all living bodies would then manifest a project, but nonhuman animals and oppressed people would not, for different reasons, evolve fully as projects. A poor child's smile radiates transcendence and projects a future before the child, because the child has not yet understood how limited his possibilities are.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in the second volume, "Lived Experience," Beauvoir describes the life of little girls as a state of relative freedom: it is only later that they interiorize the limitations of their sex.<sup>76</sup>

All in all, it can be argued that what exists in embryo in *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, namely, the idea that oppression implies the other's confinement to immanence, becomes one of the driving forces of *The Second Sex*. This explains, among other things, why Beauvoir so persistently denies the possibility of an altered hierarchy of the sexes

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<sup>70</sup> *DSI*, pp. 115–116; *SS*, p. 74.

<sup>71</sup> *PC*, pp. 221, 315; *PCE*, pp. 98, 140; *PMA*, p. 127; *EA*, p. 102.

<sup>72</sup> *DSI*, p. 114; *SS*, p. 73.

<sup>73</sup> *DSI*, p. 114; *SS*, p. 73.

<sup>74</sup> *DSI*, p. 45; *SS*, p. 26.

<sup>75</sup> See *EA*, p. 102; *PMA*, p. 127.

<sup>76</sup> *DSII*, pp. 13–144; *SS*, pp. 283–382.

in some nonhuman animals, and why she saw the mother's role in such negative terms that the chapter on motherhood starts with a defense of abortion.

It is good to remember, however, that Beauvoir does not understand immanence *merely* in terms of biological functions, animality, or domestic work. In her view, even the consumption of literature by housewives can be more indicative of immanence than transcendence:

literature takes its meaning and dignity when it is addressed to individuals committed to projects, when it helps them surpass themselves toward greater horizons; it must be integrated into the movement of human transcendence; instead, woman devalues books and works of art by swallowing them into her immanence.<sup>77</sup>

This, however, is one of the passages in *The Second Sex* that raise questions about the possibilities of an outsider to tell whether the other's activities can be "integrated into the movement of human transcendence". Another important question is whether the basic character of consciousness to always go beyond itself already qualifies as transcendence, or whether the movement of transcendence always has to involve the "greater horizons" mentioned by Beauvoir. Depending on this, and provided that nonhuman animals lack the imagination and means to strive for a different kind of future, their activities can be seen either to manifest transcendence or remain within the realm of immanence.

## 5. Immanence or Suppressed Transcendence?

As we have seen, for Beauvoir the liberation of the oppressed hinges on their ability to escape confinement to the sphere of immanence, repetition, and animality.<sup>78</sup> This does not mean overcoming immanence but being allowed to realize both aspects of one's existence: immanence and transcendence. Beauvoir takes many things about animal life and the sphere of life in general for granted, however, when she discusses the emergence of human existence from animal life. In light of the contemporary study of animal behavior, recent phenomenological discussions on animals and intercorporeity, and the Derridean discussion of the plurality and alterity of animals, Beauvoir's early equation of animal and plant life with "mere subsistence" seems outdated.<sup>79</sup> Even a superficial analysis of perception shows us its

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<sup>77</sup> *DSII*, p. 473; *SS*, p. 635.

<sup>78</sup> True enough, at times she herself describes female eroticism as a metamorphosis into a plant-like, spongy existence. See Simone de Beauvoir, *Le sang des autres*, Paris, Gallimard, 1982 [1945], pp. 105–106, translated by Yvonne Moyse and Roger Senhouse as *The Blood of Others*, Harmondsworth, UK, Penguin Books, 1976, pp. 79–80; Jo-Ann Pilardi, "Female Eroticism in the Works of Simone de Beauvoir," in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, ed. Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989, 18–34, p. 21. Nevertheless, even then this metamorphosis presents a threat to the subjectivity and transcendence of the female protagonist. Here we can detect echoes of Sartre's discussion of "viscosity," but this time the feminine mucous or wetness is seen from the point of view of the female subject herself.

<sup>79</sup> For such discussions, see, for example, Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, eds., *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2003; Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Willis, New York, Fordham University Press, 2008; Leonard Lawlor, *This Is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007; Corinne Painter and Christian Lotz, eds., *Phenomenology and the Non-Human Animal: At the Limits of*

vagueness: when a plant is flourishing, it is able to grow and orient toward light, whereas people who “merely subsist” are not flourishing and may have lost their ability to be connected with the surrounding world and to be oriented toward it.<sup>80</sup> In the case of nonhuman mammals, for instance, it is even clearer that in favorable circumstances they do much more than subsist: they appear to have longings and pleasures, and they behave in a specific manner in anticipation of specific results.

As Merleau-Ponty already pointed out, it is impossible to understand the behavior of most animals without viewing them as oriented toward their surrounding world: they catch prey, walk toward a goal, and run away from danger.<sup>81</sup> In its operative intentionality, the animal manifests an orientation to the near future and even goals that are not triggered by what is present here and now.<sup>82</sup> This orientation could happen, for instance, through “phantasmatic scenes,” which enable us humans—and, according to Dieter Lohmar, possibly also nonhuman animals such as apes—to go through the alternative scenarios of action in our stream of consciousness.<sup>83</sup> In other words, the life-worlds and temporal possibilities of nonhuman animals need not be as limited as Beauvoir suspected.

In reality, the criteria Beauvoir gives for being “trapped” within immanence and manifesting transcendence appear to fluctuate slightly and are somewhat arbitrarily constructed to explain women’s subordination despite all possible anomalies. For one thing, the situations of a death-camp prisoner and an American “mom” who reads only to escape the narrow horizon of her everyday life are so different that to define their lives in the same terms is questionable. It is likewise quite difficult to tell whether an action indicates transcendence in the sense that it becomes a visible building block of the history of humankind or whether it is doomed to peter out in silence.<sup>84</sup>

This said, Beauvoir’s analysis of oppression as a deprivation of transcendence remains valuable. Indeed, this is how we should understand oppression: through possibilities that are taken away, and not as a return to anything, be it biological functions, servitude to the species, or animality. Such an approach also makes it possible for us to see the different ways and

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*Experience*, Contributions to Phenomenology, vol. 56. Dordrecht, Springer, 2007; Peter H. Steeves, ed., *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999.

<sup>80</sup> For brief phenomenological discussions on the flourishing and orientation of plants toward light, see, for example, Edith Stein, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*, Halle, Buchdruckerei des Waisenhauses, 1917, pp. 76–78, translated by Waltraut Stein as *On the Problem of Empathy*, Washington, D.C., ICS Publications, 1989, pp. 63–64, and Erika Ruonakoski, “The Object and Limits of Empathy in Stein’s Philosophy,” in *Celebrating Teresa of Avila and Edith Stein: Two Seminars Organised by the Secular Order of the Teresian Carmel in Helsinki in 2015 and 2016*, ed. Heidi Tuorila-Kahanpää, Helsinki, OCDS Finland, 2017, 25–38, pp. 34–35.

<sup>81</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *La structure du comportement*, pp. 164–168; Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, p. 157; Erika Ruonakoski, “Phenomenology and the Study of Animal Behavior,” in Painter and Lotz, *Phenomenology and the Non-Human Animal*, pp. 75–84.

<sup>82</sup> See Erika Ruonakoski, “Kiintymyksen lähteillä: koira ja ihminen matkalla tulevaan” (At the sources of affection: Dogs, humans and futurity), in *Eläimet yhteiskunnassa* (Animals in society), ed. Elisa Aaltola ja Sami Keto, Helsinki, Into, 2015, 261–283.

<sup>83</sup> Dieter Lohmar, “How Do Primates Think? Phenomenological Analyses of Non-language Systems in Higher Primates and Humans,” in Painter and Lotz, *Phenomenology and the Non-Human Animal*, 57–74.

<sup>84</sup> In *Adieux*, Beauvoir herself acknowledges that only a select few can in fact experience that their work will continue in the work of others. Simone de Beauvoir, *La Cérémonie des adieux, suivi de Entretiens avec Jean-Paul Sartre: août–septembre 1974*, Paris, Gallimard, 1982, p. 536, translated by Patrick O’Brian as *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*, London, André Deutsch, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1984, p. 426. See also Sara Heinämaa, “Transformations of Old Age: Selfhood, Normativity, and Time,” in *Simone de Beauvoir’s Philosophy of Old Age: Gender, Ethics, and Time*, ed. Silvia Stoller, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2014, 167–189, pp. 185–186.



degrees to which a living being's transcendence—understood simply as transcending the given—can, in fact, be suppressed. People in situations of war, torture, and captivity can be deprived of their possibilities to make independent choices, of their morality even, and of all hope.<sup>85</sup> When your only concern is to survive, whether you are a human or a nonhuman animal, you are truly living the life of mere subsistence.

There are situations, however, in which subsistence is guaranteed, but in which initiative and orientation toward diverse goals are made difficult. These situations may or may not imply what Beauvoir calls complicity. In her view, a housewife without projects of her own may suffer from frustration, but she may also enjoy a financially secure position and be secretly relieved that she will never need to put her abilities to the test.<sup>86</sup> The door of the housewife's prison may be open or closed, but there are certainly other instances, such as sex slavery, in which a woman who attempts to leave her prison risks her life in doing so.<sup>87</sup> In the case of nonhuman animals, this situation is the equivalent of caged animals that are given food and provided some activities but that cannot freely orient toward their surrounding worlds, or get food with their own efforts. Falling into apathy due to limited possibilities is not merely a human phenomenon. It would be erroneous, again, to define this kind of limited life as a level of "animal life" or even as "biological life."

When "living is only not dying," as Beauvoir puts it, our ability to make long-term plans is damaged, as is our spontaneous orientation toward the near future. The surrounding world has lost its aspect of promise: nothing is looked forward to and nothing inspires. To say the least, it is of utmost importance to discern the intertwining of ethics and temporality related to the idea of deprived or suppressed transcendence, which is implicit in Beauvoir's discussion of biological life. It seems undeniable that limiting people's possibilities of realizing themselves as projects is intrinsic to oppression. Yet a consistent description of human and nonhuman life would require that we give up the idea of nonhuman life as mere repetition. A focus on staying alive does not "reduce us to animals," for the life of mere subsistence is also exceptional for nonhuman animals, a situation in which their flourishing is hindered. In the face of ongoing ecological and humanitarian crises, it is still possible to sensitize oneself to the movement of transcendence in its different forms, and to act in order to save this richness rather than to suppress it voluntarily or through negligence.

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<sup>85</sup> See, for example, *EA*, p. 101; *PMA*, p. 126.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, *DSI*, pp. 617–619; *SS*, pp. 742–743.

<sup>87</sup> See Nadia Murad with Jenna Krajeski, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight against the Islamic State*, New York, Tim Duggan Books, 2017.