Beauvoir's Constructivism

Sabina Vaccarino Bremner | sbremner@upenn.edu

Abstract: I claim that Simone de Beauvoir offers a novel argument for a variant of constructivism that aims to vindicate a relatively strong form of moral objectivity. On my interpretation, Beauvoir holds that, in acting, we simultaneously *create* and *satisfy others' future needs*. She argues that our attempt to do this is what confers value on our projects: without others' free recognition of their need for what we have produced through our practical activity, we have no reason to value our own agency. But since we can't anticipate who will need the products of our actions, we can't value the freedom of a restricted social group; we must value the freedom of all, including those we don't and may never know. In this way, Beauvoir grounds her moral universalism in the collective attempt to build a social world that affords ever greater possibilities to others. This offers a new vindication of a social concept of agency that improves on the traditional strategy of reciprocal recognition in several crucial respects.

§I. Introduction

Are there any features of agency or human life that we all share, and that can ground a universal and objective ethical point of view? And is there any identifiable connection between such a point of view and the social world that forms the context of action for each one of us? So far, it has looked as if the answers to both questions have been 'no': it is largely understood to be impossible to derive universal, objective features of morality from thin conceptions of individual agency.

In this paper, I take up this challenge. However, rather than looking to the views of Hume (Street 2010: 370; 2012: 41), Kant (Korsgaard 2003: 115-118), Fichte (Darwall 2009: 291-7), or Hegel (Walden 2018: 69-70, Samuel 2022), as other metaethical constructivisms have, I draw my proposal from an otherwise neglected figure: Simone de Beauvoir.[1] Beauvoir has the ambition of grounding a universalist constructivism of value, but her approach to doing so illuminates crucial features of who we are as social creatures, dependent on one another for

---

[1] Others also rightly advocate looking to Beauvoir for resources for metaethical constructivism (Dover and Gingerich 2024, Webber 2018: ch. 10, Eshleman 2009). However, since none of these accounts discusses the core argument from future needs I attribute to Beauvoir in §IV, the one prefaced with the claim that she will go on to attempt to define the "only point from which we can attempt to find a grounding for our actions" (PC 128/94), the argument I locate in Beauvoir, and the implications I draw from it, is very different from theirs. Dover and Gingerich read Beauvoir as subjectivist or relativist rather than universalist, while Webber takes Beauvoir's argument to rest on a hypothetical imperative. In §II and §IV, I address why I think neither can be Beauvoir's view.

our full agency.

The solution advanced in Beauvoir's works derives the grounding of morality from two sources: first, the contribution of each agent in collectively building the social world (which she frames in terms of the anticipation of others' future needs); and second, each agent's reciprocal reliance on the contributions of others in constituting the social world. On her proposal (as against Hegelian views), the ethical perspective is a necessarily *individual* perspective: she argues that we lose the ethical point of view altogether if we construe agency in terms of thickly shared or collective agency. But Beauvoir construes the individual perspective as one that is inherently socially embedded and oriented toward a future extending beyond one's own lifetime (§§II-III), thus avoiding the concerns that have plagued Kantian constructivisms that center on maximally thin conceptions of individual agency, on which the agent is conceived as relating first and foremost to herself, and only derivatively to other people. Thus, while she thereby vindicates a new variant of so-called 'social constructivism' (Walden 2012, Samuel 2022), she does so by appealing to a form of agency that is at once individual and structural, rather than interpersonal or shared.

Thus, I argue in §IV that Beauvoir aims to vindicate an objective and universal grounding for value in the freedom of humanity as an end-in-itself. However, I establish in §§V-VI that she sets herself apart, first, from Kantian (and Humean) constructivisms by appealing directly to the other-regarding grounding for all socially situated human actions—in particular, to the way in which our actions derive their meaning from the attempt to anticipate others' needs (§V). But Beauvoir also distinguishes herself from Hegelian constructivisms insofar as she develops her view of human action not by taking recourse to the reciprocal recognition of one particular *subject* by another; instead, her view appeals to the perpetual anticipation of others' future recognition of their need for the *objects* of the agent's practical activity (§VI). Beauvoir holds, *in nuce*, that what makes our actions meaningful is that others might need them; and reciprocally, that the possibility of having choices in acting at all presupposes that we, in turn, need what others have done for us. We can reconstruct the resulting argument as follows:

1. Insofar as we choose to be alive, we can't refrain from choosing to act

2. Thus, as long as we are alive, we must choose to act

3. We can't understand action in terms of isolated ends dissociated from their means; instead, action must be understood in terms of projects, or means-ends unities

4. Choosing and undertaking a project entails adopting a certain relation not only to the present, but to the future—in particular, it presupposes a commitment to the existence of *future others* to continue valuing our projects past the point of our own deaths

5. In acting—in contributing to projects temporally extending into the

future—we simultaneously *create* and *satisfy* others' future needs

6. Without future others' free recognition of their need for the objects of our current activity, we have no reason to value what we value, or to value our own individual agency

7. Therefore, our ability to simultaneously create and satisfy others' future needs gives our end meaning: it confers value on it

8. But we can't anticipate *which* others will need the results of our actions. Thus, it's not enough to value the freedom of a restricted group of other people: we need to value the freedom of *all* others, including currently unknown others

9. In choosing to act, we must value not only our own freedom, but the freedom of everyone

While there's been increasing attention to Beauvoir's ethics, the particular argument I focus on has been neglected in the metaethics literature and the Beauvoir scholarship alike, despite the fact that Beauvoir situates it as the argument that grounds her ethical point of view in her two main early ethical writings, *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *Ethics of Ambiguity*.[2] I conclude by showing how the form of constructivism Beauvoir derives from this argument constitutes a genuine alternative to the others currently on offer (§VII): it can successfully diagnose the *practical incoherence* of the perspectives of the oppressor and exploiter, showing why the suffering of others is wrong, while evading many of the objections to Kantian, Humean, and Hegelian constructivisms.

§II. Beauvoir's Commitment to the Mind-Dependence of Value

Metaethical constructivism is the view that normativity is grounded in features of human or rational agency, thereby avoiding the metaphysically puzzling commitment to a mind-independent source of value. A *strongly ethically objective constructivism* holds that these features commit us to substantive moral judgments universally binding on everyone.[3] The most well-known and best-developed account of a strongly objective or universalist metaethical constructivism is

---

[2] Others who have attempted to reconstruct Beauvoir's ethics do not address the *Pyrrhus and Cineas* argument I analyze here (Bergoffen 1996: ch. 3, Arp 2001: 22-26, Vintges 1992: ch. 5, Anderson 1979: 46-65, Mahon 1997: 41-45, Eshleman 2009). Several more recent engagements with Beauvoir have focused on questions of complicity, submission, and ambiguity, rather than engaging directly with her ethical writings (Knowles 2019, Garcia 2018, Melo Lopes 2023). Some have even dismissed these early writings as "disqualifie[d]… from serious independent philosophical consideration" due to their unclear argumentation (Bauer 2001: 140, see also Le Dœuff 1995: 64).

[3] Or else that morality gets its grip on us by virtue of certain features of our agency: see Samuel 2022: §1.2 and Schafer forthcoming: 8 on normative alienation. So understood, however, metaethical constructivism would be consistent with certain variants of realism (Hussain and Shah 2006), since it would set aside the problem of normativity's source. On weak and strong metaethical objectivity, see Street 2016: 164-5.

Christine Korsgaard's Kantian constructivism,[4] which aims to show that the categorical imperative is binding on all agents in virtue of minimal and noncontroversial features of human agency, such as the commitment to take the means to one's ends,[5] or the capacity to step back and reflect on one's own inclinations and motives. In particular, Korsgaard argues that core features of agency like these commit any agent to taking their actions as *laws* for themselves rather than merely contingent whims, insofar as they must be able to accept them not just in the present, but also throughout future moments in time (2008: 58, 1996: 113).

Yet it is now broadly accepted that objective, universal morality cannot be vindicated from a sufficiently thin and minimal conception of agency (Enoch 2006, Street 2010: 370, Tiffany 2012, Schafer 2015: 692, Samuel 2022: 1452). In particular, Korsgaard's argument famously faces the *individualism objection*, or the problem of motivating the step from valuing one's own individual rational agency to valuing the agency of others (Darwall 2007: 56; Walden 2012: 71, 2018: 79; Samuel 2022: 1455-6; Webber 2018: 174; Dover and Gingerich 2024: 192). Korsgaard has revised the argument for this step repeatedly over the years, but as one recent version has it, since we can't anticipate the preferences of our future selves that we are committed to legislating our actions *for*, the reasons for our actions must be ones any agent would accept; hence, we can only will *universal* laws of action for ourselves, or principles of action that are public and binding for all agents rather than just for us (2009: 204, 2007: 10-11). Thus, Korsgaard's argument grounds morality in the agent's relation to herself rather than to others. Among other problems that have been raised about this argument's soundness (Darwall 2007: 55-56, Walden 2018: 73-76), there is this: if there is some immutable fact about me that doesn't apply to other agents (like the color of my skin, or whether I'll be personally affected by events 50 years in the future), there seems to be little way for any consideration as to how that feature might differently impact others to factor into my practical deliberation, since my deliberation is directed only to myself.

There is another tradition in Western philosophy—the tradition of existentialist ethics, of which Beauvoir offers what is often seen as the best-developed exemplar (Webber 2018: 169-170, Anderson 1979: 45-6, Kruks 1997, Bauer 2001: 137, Eshleman 2009: 65)—which undertakes a project very similar to analytic constructivism's attempt to naturalize morality by grounding it in features of human agency.[6] Consider these quotes from Beauvoir that assert the mind-dependence of value: "It is desire which creates the desirable, and the project which sets up the end. It is human existence which makes values spring up in the world" (EA 14/20). For instance, "the word 'useful'… can be defined only in the human world

---

[4] I leave aside here just how Kantian Kantian constructivism is; see discussion in Guyer 2019.

[5] See, e.g., Korsgaard 2008; 2009: §4.3.

[6] Arguably more similar even than Kant's, given the grounding of his metaphysics of value in the phenomenal/noumenal distinction. Thus, there is much debate on whether Kant is a constructivist at all, or is instead a realist: see, e.g., Guyer 2019.

established by man's projects and the ends he sets up"; outside this human world, "nothing is useful, nothing is useless" (EA 10/16-17). Thus, Beauvoir clearly begins with the attempt to show how to construe the human constitution of value without mysterious metaphysical resources. She rejects a value realism that attributes the source of value somewhere outside the perspective of human agency and instead takes up a constructivist commitment to *agency* as the source of value. She frames this commitment in light of the question introduced by Dostoevsky of whether, if God doesn't exist, everything is permitted: does this mean man is free to "choose whatever he likes and act however he likes?" (EA 15/21). In response, she claims that God's absence actually makes the weight of human responsibility all the more painful: man "bears the responsibility for a world which is not the work of a strange power, but of himself, where his defeats are inscribed, and his victories as well. A God can pardon, efface, and compensate. But if God does not exist, man's faults are inexpiable" (EA 15/22). Without God, there is no higher power who can judge and pardon our actions; this renders our actions "definitive, absolute engagements" (EA 15/22).

Yet this raises the question of how to confer meaning or value on our actions, if no external source can do so. Beauvoir frames this question in terms of Plutarch's story of Pyrrhus and Cineas, the namesake of one of her main ethical tracts: Pyrrhus tells Cineas of his plans to conquer Greece, and then Africa, and then Arabia, and India—only to return home to rest. To which Cineas responds: "Why don't you rest right away?" (PC 90/9). Beauvoir comments, "Cineas seems wise. What's the point of leaving if it's only in order to come home? What's the point of starting only to stop?…. All human projects seem absurd, since they only exist by setting themselves limits, and those limits can always be overstepped by asking: 'Why only up to that point? Why not farther? What's the use?'" (PC 90/9).[7]

Beauvoir's response to this problem is that there can be no external grounding of freedom outside the agential point of view. But rather than that point of view being absurd or meaningless, human freedom grounds itself, insofar as it grounds all evaluative facts: freedom "cannot ground a denial of itself, for in denying itself, it would deny the possibility of any grounding" (EA 24/32).

§III. Beauvoir's Commitment to the Priority of the Project

In what does Beauvoir's conception of the self-grounding of freedom consist? Beauvoir begins by analyzing the core features of human agency—features that

---

[7] Setiya identifies this "structural absurdity" of our relation to value as the dilemma at the root of the midlife crisis: "Your engagement with value is self-destructive. The way in which you relate to the projects that matter most to you is by trying to complete them, and so to expel them from your life. Your days are devoted to ending, one by one, the activities that give them meaning" (2014: 12). Even succeeding in attaining our practical aims extinguishes the activities we find meaningful: thus, even in "getting what you want… success can seem like failure" (2014: 3).

she takes to pertain to any (socially embedded) agent's attempt to act at all. Thus, Beauvoir, unlike other constructivists like Korsgaard or Street, holds that the moral point of view arises only for social actors who grow up sharing relations with other people.[8] Beauvoir rejects the idea that restricting the constitution of morality to socially embedded agency entails a commitment to a full-blown process of reciprocal recognition, as Hegel and his followers argue: being inculcated into a social or cultural way of life need not mean that the other people an agent interacts with positively affirm who they are, or acknowledge their identity as a subject.[9] Instead, Beauvoir is committed to a more minimal conception of the social constitution of agency and, with it, of morality: an agent in isolation, such as a feral child[10] case of an agent who grows up with no human interaction with anyone else, might have the instrumental agency necessary to secure their own survival, but would not be able to stand back from their inclinations and reflectively pose themselves questions of how they ought to act: they would therefore not develop the practical point of view necessary to entail moral conclusions.[11] As such, Beauvoir has an answer to the question of why *this* is the conception of agency relevant for metaethical construction (Enoch 2006, Schafer 2015: 692): while other kinds of creatures might experience relatively more primitive evaluative attitudes (such as taking pain to be bad and pleasure to be good, Street 2006), a commitment to objective *morality* follows only from the perspectives of beings like us who systematically relate to one another within a given social order. Beauvoir holds that it is only insofar as we are initiated into these systematic relations with others and the agential perspective that follows from them that the moral commitment to valuing one another's freedom becomes binding on each of us.[12] Morality, according to Beauvoir, follows from the normative attitudes intrinsic to *socially embedded* agency, rather than from individual agency considered in abstraction.

Indeed, since cases of agents who lack the relevant socialization are exceedingly rare (only one case every two hundred or so years: Rymer 1992a: 67-8), Beauvoir's

---

[8] As Eshleman 2009 notes, Beauvoir holds that "a world with only one free person might include values but those values would not be moral values" (89); for instance, I would add, such a person could hold merely instrumental values.

[9] See §VI.

[10] Or 'wild child' (Truffaut 1970).

[11] Consider the 1970 case of Genie, an apparently cognitively normal girl who spent the first 13 years of her life alone in a dark room with no social contact: she was eager to form social attachments, but never learned how to reflect on her own behavior: even after over a year, "she would attach herself to strangers whom she found interesting, grabbing their arms… Or she would attach herself with equal fervor to their possessions" (Rymer 1992: 80, 44). She never acquired the ability to speak full sentences, live independently, or pose moral questions, "declin[ing] into… organic, biological dementia" in a care home by the age of thirty-five (1992: 76).

[12] Nevertheless, I take Beauvoir's argument to apply not only to modern social forms, since she argues that human beings developed tools and iterated on one another's achievements quite early on in human prehistory: see the "History" section of the *Second Sex*, and discussion in Lundgren-Gothlin 1996, Vaccarino Bremner 2022, Kirkpatrick 2025.

conception of constitutive agency aims to universally bind everyone else—all social actors, that is, the rest of us. Thus, Beauvoir takes the normative perspective and the commitments she derives from it to be inexorable for all socially embedded human agents. The first step in her argument to this normative perspective consists in the claim that any choice, even the choice not to choose, entails a commitment to a given normative point of view: "Even our passivity is willed: in order not to choose, we would still have to choose not to choose; it's impossible to escape" choice and its normative presuppositions (PC 126/90). She critiques the nihilist, one of the morally deficient types she diagnoses in *Ethics and Ambiguity*, for thinking he can evade a commitment to *some* evaluative perspective. Beauvoir argues that this is normatively mistaken, insofar as the mere fact of choosing to remain alive necessarily entails such a commitment: "It is possible that a man may refuse to love anything on earth; he proves this refusal by carry[ing] it out by suicide. If he lives, the reason is that, whatever he may say, there still remains in him some attachment to existence" (EA 171/195). Hence, even the nonsuicidal nihilist is committed to at least one value, existence over nonexistence. Only a suicidal nihilist can occupy a normatively coherent evaluative point of view in rejecting all commitment to value; eschewing any evaluative point of view whatsoever entails that one has most reason to end one's own life rather than to carry on living. Thus, one has to make a choice: stop living, or authentically assume one's perspective as a valuing agent. If one opts to continue living, it is incoherent to renounce any commitment to value. Beauvoir concludes that "nihilism is unstable" (EA 73/97): one's nihilistic claims are, by Beauvoir's lights, normatively mistaken and objectively false.[13] If, on the other hand, one ceases to remain alive, one also ceases to be an agent at all. Thus, insofar as one chooses to be alive, one must affirm a commitment to valuing *something*, and thus a commitment to having a normative perspective on the world.

But what does this perspective consist in? First, Beauvoir insists that any philosophy of action must include an analysis of the agent's relation to time. That is, we can't make sense of action in terms of singular, disconnected choice-points of adopting static ends frozen at the moment of choice; instead, Beauvoir argues that all actions unfold over time, and should be understood and evaluated in light of the longer time horizon that relates each choice to the broader arc of the agent's practical activity. She claims that "it is through time that the end is undertaken and freedom is confirmed, and this presupposes that the end is realized as a unity in the unfolding of time" (EA 26/35).[14] The diachronic horizon

---

[13] For consideration of similar cases of agents' normatively incoherent and hence mistaken value judgments given their evaluative commitments—such as the anorexic's self-undermining desire for a figure "plump enough to sustain life"—see Street 2009: 278, 294. Thus, I disagree with Arp's conclusion that inconsistency "seems too slight a foundation to bear the weight of an entire moral theory" (2001: 88-89): appeals to evaluative consistency are precisely how theorists like Street or Rawls have construed normative objectivity.

[14] This facet of Beauvoir's view concurs with the idea held by contemporary philosophers of action that "all agency is temporal" and is thus essentially "diachronic" (Ferrero 2021: 336, Bratman 2000: 42-3) or "prospective" (Morton 2024).

of action Beauvoir emphasizes here has crucial significance, as we will see, for how she takes agency to be constitutive of value.

Beauvoir defines a *project* in terms of what she describes in this passage: as a 'unity in the unfolding in time', comprising the agent's end along with her pursuit of the end undertaken through discrete actions. One way to understand a project is in terms of Anscombe's account of the most general description of any given action, in the way that the specific action of "moving [one's] arm up and down" can be redescribed in more general terms as "poisoning the inhabitants" of the house (1953: 41), which embeds the specific end of moving one's arm as a means to the broader end (poisoning the inhabitants) for the sake of which that end is done. A project, for Beauvoir, is therefore not limited to one discrete end taken in isolation, but picks out a kind of means-end chain, or a unity of specific means and general end, that unfurls over time: taken proleptically, Beauvoir argues, "means and ends form an indivisible totality" (MI 190).[15] The project of developing new forms of architecture will thereby organize the activities of getting an architecture license, making floorplans, and visiting construction sites, and each of these specific ends—which in turn serve as means to my broader project— necessarily comprise more specific ends internal to them (e.g., getting on the train that will take me to the building site), that are therefore also means.

As this example bears out, Beauvoir argues that, understood in the form of a project, "it becomes impossible to disassociate the end from the means. The means can be understood only in light of the desired end, but inversely, the end is inseparable from the means by which it is carried out" (MI 184). For instance, she raises the example of how "a democracy which defends itself only by acts of oppression equivalent to those of authoritarian regimes" can no longer be understood to hold the end of defending democracy, since it instead "precisely denies all these [democratic] values" through the means it has adopted (EA 134/154). Conversely, if the end lies far into the future, "the means itself becomes the targeted aim", or the proximal end (EA 134/154). Thus, she concludes, "the end is defined by the means, which in turn receives its meaning from the end. An action is a signifying whole that unfolds across the world, across time, and whose unity cannot be broken. It is this singular totality that we must construct and choose at every instant" (MI 190). Thus, the process of ethical reflection is not over and done once I first make the choice to adopt my end, since, in taking up an end "far off in the future", "divergent means offer themselves" to me, "and certain ones come to be seen as contrary to their ends" (EA 142-3/164); instead, it accompanies the whole temporal unfolding of carrying out my project, extending over time.

---

[15] Projects are therefore closer to what have been called 'plans' as "intentions writ large" (Bratman 1987: 29) or 'plan-states' (Ferrero 2021)—though note Morton's insight, to which Beauvoir would be sympathetic, that "sometimes, the best manifestation of our prospective agency involves responding to deviations from our plans, reconsidering the ends we were after, and adopting new ends" (2024: 241).

This point directly impinges on which argument for grounding morality is attributed to Beauvoir. On some ways of reconstructing Beauvoir's constructivism, her view is grounded in a kind of hypothetical imperative—namely, in the argument that our ends are used by others as means to their own ends (Webber 2018: 180), or that freedom is the necessary means to all of our own individual ends (Eshleman 2009: 79). But I have argued that Beauvoir grounds action in projects, not in means and ends taken in isolation. Whether or not there are also actions that are otherwise dissociable from projects, Beauvoir takes the project to be the primary locus of human freedom, such that the moral point of view arises within the perspective of an agent undertaking a given project; any isolated action or associated end we undertake, including akratic action, is one we inevitably relate to our broader projects.[16] In fact, she diagnoses the rigid distinction between means and ends as a kind of normative mistake, rejecting the idea that "the end [is] something static, closed in on itself and separate from the means that is also defined as a thing, a simple instrument" (MI 184). Thus, as shown in §§IV-V, on my reconstruction, Beauvoir's argument appeals to the role of *projects* as means-ends wholes that we share with others, that often extend beyond our own lifetimes, and which we therefore can't achieve in isolation; as a result, her argument can't rely on any hypothetical imperative that clearly dissociates ends from means.[17]

As Beauvoir articulates this view through the voice of Pierre, one of the protagonists of her novel *She Came to Stay*, "time is not made of a lot of small fragments that you can lock yourself up in one by one. While you think you're living in the present, you're involving your future, whether you like it or not" (I 58/63). Pierre continues by giving the example of deciding to attend a concert: if your end is to go to the concert, you're committed to taking the means to get there. If you instead adopted your ends based wholly on your whims or subjective inclinations in each discrete time-slice, you would never actually end up at the concert, because "the idea of walking or taking the metro [would] strike you as unbearable" (I 59/63). But then you would never satisfy your subjective inclinations, either: "ten minutes later… you find yourself sitting in an armchair, bored stiff" (I 59/63), in which case "you [would be] no longer in the least free": you'd be merely a kind of wanton rather than an agent, prey to each successive whim (I 59/63). If, in every second, I change my mind about what my project is, there is a sense in which, Beauvoir holds, I'm no longer an agent.

Beauvoir's argument here therefore recalls not only Frankfurt's (1971) argument nearly three decades later against the wanton who, in experiencing only first-

---

[16] But what about an agent who doesn't have any projects? I take it that Beauvoir thinks it is possible to be such an agent, but that there is also something deeply self-undermining and hence incoherent about that point of view, which I discuss in §VI. See also my discussion of particularistic willing below.

[17] While I differ on my interpretation of Beauvoir's specific argument, Webber 2018 and I are in complete agreement about Beauvoi's commitment to moral objectivity and to universalism.

order desires, would lack a definitive feature of personhood, but also Korsgaard's argument against particularistic willing—namely that the efficacy of adopting means to ends is contingent on the agent's capacity to act in accordance with temporally consistent commitments rather than being continuously moved by competing contingent whims (2009: 78).[18] But while Frankfurt and Korsgaard employ these arguments to establish agency's presupposition of a self-reflective human person or a stable, unified subject, Beauvoir employs them to establish the subject's commitment to a particular vision of the future—in particular, to the unity of a particular project, rather than to a particular conception of themselves.[19] Thus, for instance, Beauvoir claims that moral questions only begin to present themselves to children once they are capable of recognizing themselves in the past and envisioning themselves in the future (EA 27/35). However, Beauvoir thinks that we're not only committed to willing our *own* future or our *own* freedom, such as our own instrumental freedom, and its perpetuation into the future through our continuing bodily existence. Instead, we're committed to willing *the future as such*, even beyond our own death, which she takes to ultimately commit us, as we will see, to valuing the freedom of others.

As scholars have begun to recognize, Beauvoir's arguments can be productively compared to Samuel Scheffler's view in *Death and the Afterlife*. Scheffler argues that the news of the infertility of the human race would not only make us feel "profound dismay", but also that our current plans and activities seem less important, and no longer worth pursuing (2013: 23). The activities we would be least motivated to pursue would be those whose potential success lies farther off in the future, like engaging in cancer research or raising children—activities which may also strike us as among the most *valuable* of our endeavors. Scheffler concludes that the fact that many of our activities continue to matter to us even in the face of our own or our loved ones' deaths, but cease to matter once faced with the prospect of humanity's destruction (26), demonstrates that the "nonexistence of future people whom we do not know and who, indeed, have no determinate identities" seems to matter more to us than the nonexistence of ourselves and of everyone we love (45).

Beauvoir raises considerations directly along these lines; they help to motivate one of her central theses, that "it is only by [freedom's] prolonging itself through the freedom of others that it manages to surpass death itself and to realize itself

---

[18] The story Korsgaard invokes to illustrate this argument is virtually identical to the one Pierre tells Xavière (2008: 59n).

[19] Compare Street's 'problem of attachment and loss', as the "problem of a mismatch between the world as it is and the world as that agent would like it to be" (2016: 166). Yet Street's construal of this problem obscures the distinction between the past-directed and future-directed aspects of this mismatch, since, as she presents it, it can also be past-directed. Beauvoir, by contrast, thinks only the future-directed aspect of this mismatch is normatively significant in grounding our values, since we can't change the past: only a future state, not a past state, of the world can be shaped through our practical activity. Beauvoir does, however, think the past is normatively significant in shaping the context for our action (see §V).

as an indefinite unity" (EA 33/45-6). She, like Scheffler decades later, emphasizes that people pursue goals they don't expect to be achieved during their lifetime, showing that the prospect of one's own death doesn't constitute the ultimate horizon of one's values: "When one fights for the emancipation of oppressed indigenous groups, the liberation of Blacks in America, the construction of a Palestinian state, or the socialist revolution, one is obviously aiming at a long-range goal, and is still aiming at it concretely beyond one's own death, through the movement, the league, the institutions" (EA 138/158, compare Scheffler 2013: 27). Instead, knowledge of an impending death is liable to make agents care *more*, not less, about realizing their ends before they die—showing that what we value most isn't the prospect of our own deaths, but the continuation of our own values through others. Beauvoir can accommodate this observation quite well given her emphasis on the priority of projects over isolated means and ends. In acting, I undertake a *project* stretching indefinitely into the future, and therefore often isn't one I can realize by myself. In fact, our grandest projects tend to be ones we *can't* accomplish wholly on our own.

What I value therefore seems to be, at bottom, not so much whether *I* achieve my end, but instead the way in which my end fits into a larger project that isn't only my own. Even if I fail in my attempts to realize my end, my actions might still open up possibilities for a future agent that enable her to persevere where I failed. For instance, even if I fail in my end of accurately reconstructing Beauvoir's position, my contribution can still be valuable as a potentially productive failure, in that identifying where it goes wrong can prove helpful for future efforts to successfully understand her view. In undertaking this end, I build on the work of many others, and am motivated by the prospect of others building on my work. I therefore understand and value my end not only as an egoistic endeavor of being the one to get it right—even if a part of me might value that as well, that can't suffice to fully confer meaning on my action—but insofar as it fits into a collective project of this sort.

§IV. Beauvoir's Metaethical Objectivity

However, as I'll attempt to show in §V, Beauvoir also gives us reasons to understand *why* we care about future others in such a deep and thoroughgoing way—why it's, to take up Scheffler's strong claim, "a condition of other things mattering to us" (2013: 26), or the ground of our other values, without which we have no reason to value those (contingent) values, or to value our own agency. As I first address here, in advancing this response, Beauvoir also gives us an additional, and I think more successful, reply to the question of what grounds a universalist constructivism, by answering the individualism objection to Kantian constructivism. Crucially, universalism is both where the experiments Scheffler raises point to (since a condition on whether our activities matter to us is the ongoing

existence of humanity as such),[20] and what Beauvoir herself wants to show.

Beauvoir insists on this very commitment on virtually every page of *Ethics of Ambiguity*: as she claims, she wants to establish "a principle of action whose range will be universal" (EA 23/31), that freedom is a "universal" and "absolute" end (EA 23/31, 24/32, 62/74, 84/98, 93/108, 96/112, 121/140, 144/166, 150/172, 153/176, 156/179, 169/193, 171/195, 172/197, 173/197), that her ethics of ambiguity will show how "individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all" (EA 17/24-5), that "being a subject is a universal fact" (EA 16/23), that "every man is originally free" (EA 25/33), and that human beings are "the supreme end to which all action should be subordinated" (EA 7/13). She aligns herself repeatedly with the universalist traditions of Kantianism, 'Christian charity', and the 'Epicurean cult of friendship' (EA 145/167; see also 16/23, 169/193, MI 189).[21]

Thus, I depart from the interpretation that Beauvoir only establishes a *subjectively* universal grounding of value in the feelings of joy and anguish, as likened to Kant's grounding of aesthetic judgments (Dover and Gingerich 2024: 197-8).[22] As Dover and Gingerich note, Kantian aesthetic claims are subjectively universal in the sense that they only make a *claim* to universal validity, rather than actually *securing* universality (see, e.g., Kant 1790: 5:216). But Beauvoir asserts that she would not be satisfied with such a weak claim to objectivity and universality. Indeed, as we've seen, she repeatedly claims that her ethics is universal in scope, rather than merely expressing a subjective *hope* for universality. Moreover, she suggests that her ethics is *objective* rather than subjective: "There are many who charge existentialism with offering no objective content to the moral act. It is said that this philosophy is a subjectivism, even a solipsism.… But this [criticism] shows much bad faith" (EA 16/23). From this, she immediately goes on to claim that "it is rather well-known that the fact of being a subject is a universal fact", and that "by affirming that the source of all values resides in the freedom of man, existentialism"—which she also refers to as a "humanism"—"merely carries on the tradition of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel" (EA 16/23). She also makes a point of separating her ethics from aesthetics, arguing against "aesthetic justification" in ethics by raising the example of how a beautiful book on "children working in sweatshops" can enchant us such that "we forget the horror of sweatshops or even start admiring it. Will we not then be inclined to think that if death, misery, and injustice can be transfigured for our delight, it is not an evil for there to be death,

---

[20] Indeed, Scheffler's and Beauvoir's conclusions could be taken to point in a Kantian, rather than a Hegelian, conclusion: what matters to us is the ongoing existence, not of particular others who we personally know and recognize, but of unknown and faceless others (Scheffler 2013: 45)—a universal, rather than particularized, conception of humanity.

[21] On Beauvoir's Kantian influences, see Bair 1991: 271, Le Dœuff 1989: 129, Vintges 1992: 68, Eshleman 2009: 81, 89, Webber 2018: ch. 10.

[22] While my interpretation differs from Dover and Gingerich's, it remains that theirs is one of the most sophisticated accounts so far of how to situate Beauvoir's project within contemporary analytic metaethics. For a variant of the subjectivist interpretation they endorse, one positioned in conversation with Beauvoir scholarship, see Arp (2001: 95).

misery, and injustice?" (EA 83/97). These considerations show that her aim is to establish an *objectively* universal constructivist grounding for values, rather than a merely subjective one.

While Dover and Gingerich rightly acknowledge that Beauvoir aims to delineate "universal features of human life" as the locus for "any universal normativity ethics might turn out to have for human beings", they attribute to her the view that "it is misguided to aim for metaethical objectivity, even of the attenuated sort that comes only in the form of determinate procedural rules"; they hold that Beauvoir would regard this aim as mistakenly "identif[ying] us exclusively with our positive rational agency… rather than with our ambiguous subjectivity as a whole" (2024: 195-7). While I agree that Beauvoir would likely be skeptical of the idea of a determinate procedure or test, proceduralism isn't the only way to construe the prospect of metaethical objectivity, nor is it the only way to do so while entailing minimal commitments to the nature of agency. Street, for instance, argues that "the commonly accepted *proceduralist characterization* of constructivism in ethics… fails to capture what is philosophically most interesting and distinctive about the view", and "explicitly reject[s]" the proceduralist terms in which she had earlier characterized her own view (2010: 364, 381n5). In its place, Street advocates what she calls "the *practical standpoint* characterization", where normative truths are entailed by what follows from the set of evaluative commitments comprising the point of view of a valuing agent (2010: 364, 367). Street argues that moving from a proceduralist to a standpoint-focused conception of constructivism can nevertheless still secure objective metaethical judgments: "On a constructivist account, there is still normative truth and objectivity. It's just that… the standards of correctness that determine what are and aren't errors are *ultimately* set by the normative judgments of the person whose reasons are in question" (2016b: 332). Thus, Street holds that even the very thin agential standpoint presupposed by her Humean view can vindicate metaethical objectivity over relativism—albeit a weaker form of objectivity than Kantian constructivism.

Like Street, I take Beauvoir to share the idea that objectivity can be secured, not through procedural rules, but relative to an agent's normative perspective taken as a whole. We've already seen that Beauvoir rejects the nonsuicidal nihilist's renunciation of any claim to value: as long as we are making a choice to be alive, we are valuing life over death, and thus are committed to some normative point of view or other. Much more strongly than Street, however, Beauvoir takes particular core features of this normative perspective to hold universally for all socially inculcated agents. And, while Beauvoir certainly gives a prominent place to subjective feeling and aesthetic response in her ethics, I don't take her to position them as directly *grounding* her conception of freedom and, with it, her metaethics. Instead, they play a role in accounting for the 'invention' of what she calls '*contingent values*' (Vaccarino Bremner 2022), rather than in establishing the universal and objective value of human freedom. Thus, as established in §VII,

Beauvoir's position demonstrates that the Kantian emphasis on specifically *rational* agency isn't the only way to secure universal metaethical objectivity.

Consider, then, how the steps in Beauvoir's argument we've considered so far are arguably already more other-regarding than the arguments of Korsgaard: the conditions for moral agency, as she establishes them, aren't the stability of the subject, or action in accordance with self-given laws, but an agent's commitment to an indefinite future and to the unity of a given project, the horizon of both of which extends considerably beyond oneself and one's own actions.

While less self-regarding, however, neither condition seems sufficient yet to fully account for our valuing of the future of humanity. For instance, we don't seem to value the final realization of our projects in themselves without the presence of valuers to appreciate them. If the human race were suddenly infertile, but in response, we programmed advanced robots to complete our project of sending a spaceship to a newly discovered galaxy years after humanity's nonexistence, our intuition might be to say we wouldn't value the completion of this project if no one were left to appreciate it; without observers and potential beneficiaries of our achievement—without other valuers—our projects would no longer seem valuable in their own right. Hence, it's not sufficient to say we value our projects *beyond* our own individual contributions to them; there must be something valuable about them stemming specifically from *others'* perspectives on those projects.

§V. The Argument from Future Needs

Indeed, Beauvoir advances the very argument needed to establish what it is about others' perspectives on our projects that confers value on them in this way. She does so in a section of her book *Pyrrhus and Cineas* prefaced with the claim that she will there attempt to "define what is my situation in the face of others", as the "only point from which we can attempt to find a grounding for our actions" (PC 128/94), and refers back to it in *Ethics and Ambiguity*, where she claims that she has "tried to show in *Pyrrhus and Cineas* that every man needs the freedom of other men" (EA 77/90).

So what's the link Beauvoir takes to inhere between a commitment to our values persisting in the future, beyond our own deaths, and our valuing of humanity? Beauvoir's ultimate claim is that our practical activity both *creates* and *fulfills* the future needs of other people. To argue for this claim, she starts by asserting that the world is full of voids and gaps, appealing to the ontological idea of *negativities*:[23] things that are missing, although we usually can't discern in advance *what* is missing until we're already faced with the new object or invention that fills them. She gives the example of our stupefaction in retrospectively looking

---

[23] Sartre defines a negativity as a lack or negation of existence, such as a hole; see 1943: ch. 1.

back at new innovations at how people could have lived without them: "How could one do without the railroad or the airplane? How could one conceive of French literature without Racine, philosophy without Kant?" (PC 128/95). But the agents who lived before trains, planes, Racine, or Kant had no way of anticipating what was to come. Instead, "the book that I write does not come to fill a void by precisely embracing its form in advance. The book is first; and once it exists, it is up to the reader to grasp this presence as the reverse of an absence: his freedom alone decides" (PC 128/95). It's only once the new invention satisfies an end the agent didn't even know she had that she conjures a past need to account for the now-obvious gap: "Beyond his present satisfaction, man projects behind himself, retrospectively, a need. And indeed, now that it exists, the airplane responds to a need; but it is a need that it has created by existing, or more precisely that men have freely created from its existence" (PC 128-9/95). Thus, it is the freedom of others that "carve[s] out" a place for the object created by my action in the present: "this place did not exist, nor are we the ones who have made it; we have only made the object that fills it" (PC 129/95). Yet, reciprocally, it is my freedom and ingenuity that was requisite to create the needed object in the first place.

Thus, Beauvoir attributes two dimensions to fill a negativity in the world: one positive—creating the object that can fill the void, which is something that only I as an agent can do—and one negative: the *recognition* of the void as being such, which is something I can't do on my own; only others can do so in response to my creation. Therefore, while we can single-handedly act in such a way as to fill a negativity, we're dependent on others to *recognize* its fulfillment: "Only the other can create a need for what we give them… in order for the object I have created to appear as a good, others must make it their good: then I am justified in having created it" (PC 129/95). The ultimate justification for my own actions, therefore, is the freedom of other people; only they can "necessitat[e] my being" (PC 129/95). Thus, others need me to satisfy the needs they don't yet know they have; and I need, as a condition for my own evaluative perspective, that there are others around me who are free to recognize my satisfaction of their need. We "write books, we invent machines that weren't demanded anywhere" not for ourselves, but for others, and therefore, "we need others to ground our existence and make it necessary" (PC 129/96). Being needed by others (and, as discussed in §VI, needing them in turn) is one crucial way in which we participate in the ongoing construction of the social world, one which gives a point to our actions: in taking up any particular choice, we "help to fashion history" (EA 133/153). And it is for *that* reason that "it's only if the end of the world is announced, not my own death, that my project loses all meaning" (PC 129/95), and that we can therefore properly account for Scheffler's observations about how deeply future unknown others matter to us.

Notice that Beauvoir's argument doesn't take as its starting point the recognition of individual subjects encountering one another, as some recent 'social construc-

tivisms' have (Samuel 2022: 1474, Moland 2011: 372-4, Bird-Pollan 2011: 377-9; see also Darwall 2009). This positions her view as significantly departing from the currently predominant accounts of the social constitution of agency, which typically rely on Fichte's and Hegel's accounts of mutual recognition. On these theories, morality is grounded in actual sociohistorical realizations of recognition in "institutions, practices, norms, and so on" (Samuel 2022: 1479). But since, on these views, those individuals who can't "identify with the contingent form of social life in which they are embedded" lack the conditions to realize and develop their agency, such agents will therefore "not be comfortable with the apparent conservatism of Hegelian constructivism"; as a result, the appeal to recognition "reveals the specter of a new kind of alienation: that between the individual and her social world" (Samuel 2022: 1479). Thus, on this picture, the grounding of morality is not universal or objective, but contingent and empirical. Without already existing moral practices of recognition, individuals cannot become full moral agents, and lack the resources to even criticize the social order that has marginalized them.[24]

Beauvoir, in contrast, is repeatedly critical of traditional understandings of reciprocal recognition. She thinks Hegel's system precludes the possibility of ethics, because he takes ethics to have no independent role to play in the ultimate realization of spirit, which would presuppose a state of the world in which nature and morality wholly coincide; instead, Beauvoir is skeptical that the gap between *is* and *ought* can ever be fully bridged (EA 9/15-16).[25] Moreover, she takes issue with Hegel's view that an abstract collective subject, rather than the individual agent, is the locus of normative reasoning. Referring to Hegel, she writes, "the ethical theories which have given solutions by effacing the fact of the separation of human beings are not valid precisely because there *is* this separation" (EA 9/17). Among other criticisms (EA 9/17), she claims that Hegel's "whole system appears as a vast mystification" (EA 114/131). It sacrifices individual subjects in favor of spirit as collective subject—but the individuality of subjects is a necessary condition for any social whole: "Through all this clever dialectic, we return to the sophism I have denounced: if the individual is nothing, society cannot be something" (EA 114/131).[26] Thus, she explicitly rejects a social ontology like Hegel's that treats the social world as a collective mind or group individual—an ontology that, more generally, poses significant problems for making sense of social normativity (Fraser 2023).

Thus, Beauvoir argues that the appropriate starting point for metaethical construction can't be an *interpersonal* one of two agents confronting each other for

---

[24] On the conservatism objection, see also Walden 2012: 72, 2018: 69; Dover and Gingerich 2024: 189, 192, 194.

[25] She therefore shares Korsgaard's contention that "Hegel's view barely distinguishes moral theory from social thought more generally" (2011: 393).

[26] For other criticisms of Hegel's system, see EA 90-1/105-6, 111-3/128-32, 131/151, 172/196; PC 111/55-6, 112/58, 129/96, 138/117.

the first time, since no one lives in a world of two. Instead, it must be a *social* or *structural* one of the individual, yet socially embedded, human being, who relates to an already established social world. As Beauvoir concludes her argument for grounding the normativity of action in others' freedom, "It is not a matter, as Hegel believes, of being recognized as the pure abstract form of myself; instead, it is my existence in the world that I aim to preserve, as realized in my acts, my works, and my life. It is only through these objects that I bring into existence in the world that I can communicate with others. If I bring nothing into existence, there is neither communication nor justification" (PC 129/96). Thus, what establishes the possibility of a moral perspective is our relation to one another through the *products* of our actions, where the 'others' who retrospectively find their needs fulfilled by my projects are people I can't anticipate in advance, and whose freedom I can't control. This entails that the ultimate horizon of my normative perspective is anchored by humanity as such, by *future* and *unknown* others, rather than, as against contemporary recognition theory (e.g., Honneth 1992: ch. 5; 2011: ch. 6.1), by the particular others who have already happened to recognize me. Thus, Beauvoir endorses a metaethical starting point in the normative conditions arising from the broadest possible horizon of socially embedded subjects who *don't,* and indeed *can't*, already know or recognize one another.

In other words, Beauvoir's site of recognition is not two agents recognizing one another's *subjectivity*; instead, it's a collectivity of singular agents, ranging over humanity as such (both past and future), who freely recognize the *objects* of one another's free, practical activity.[27] Where Beauvoir's reappropriation of the master/slave dialectic in the *Second Sex* has attracted serious attention resulting in several highly sophisticated scholarly interpretations (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996: chs. 3-4, Bauer 2001, Direk 2011, Garcia 2018: 203), there has been virtually no attention to Beauvoir's argument in *Pyrrhus and Cineas* for retooling recognition in terms of the *objects* of one another's practical activity. Beauvoir affirms that the ground of morality for her is not the recognition of one another's subjectivity (at least not directly), but the recognition of social artifacts, traditions, and ultimately of the entire social world, as products of the realization of others' free activity—as well as the anticipation that future others can be aided and supported, in currently unknown ways, by our choice to undertake specific actions in the present.[28]

However, my contributions can only be built on in the future in a genuine way, and thereby culminate in the realization of my project along with its enduring

---

[27] Beauvoir invokes the general idea of recognition at PC 116/68, 133/105; S 74-5/116-7.

[28] We could therefore conclude that Beauvoir implicitly lodges the *subjectivist objection* against prevailing forms of constructivism: constructivism, including social constructivism, is unduly focused on the agent's status as a *subject*, rather than on the *objects* brought about by one's practical activity. Given that agency can be, and historically has been, defined analytically as our capacity to *bring about objects*, to be "the cause of the reality of [a given] object" (Kant 1790: 20:206), rather than as being a mere means for identifying ourselves *as subjects*, the former is arguably a more promising candidate for the sufficiently minimal and uncontroversial conception of agency constructivists seek.

value in the eyes of others, if those others are in the position of *freely recognizing* their efficacy, rather than just being deluded or mistaken about their value. Insofar as I'm committed to valuing the continuing existence of future human beings who can potentially esteem the normative significance of my projects, I'm committed to valuing their free agency. Even if we could force or mystify future others to continue working indefinitely on the projects that matter to us after our own deaths, that wouldn't make our projects actually matter to them. I could undertake a propaganda campaign to delude everyone into accepting my academic scholarship at face-value, but doing this would remove much of what confers meaning on my enterprise in the first place, such as the opportunity to contribute to the collaborative building of knowledge. Thus, Beauvoir insists that we can't force others to value what we value, or to recognize the value of our projects (PC 109/51-2): an enslaved army of ideologically deluded, brainwashed automata would represent the closing down of my project's horizon of value, rather than its indefinite continuation into the future. While we might succeed in *achieving* our own projects by employing such automata, we would fail to indefinitely confer *value* on our project beyond the horizon of our own lifetimes. Yet since I can't anticipate *who* will freely find my project valuable in the future, I have to will the freedom of *everyone,* not just of my own particular closed group.

Thus, Beauvoir suggests a way to integrate *all* of our activities into an ongoing process of *co-constituting the social world*, by contributing to an *open nexus of human needs* or a *continuous network of helping one another across time* on which I, as an agent, am also dependent. As such, Beauvoir's argument from new needs fills out her constructivist grounding of value. If knowledge of an impending death is liable to make agents care *more*, not less, about realizing their ends before they die, what they value most isn't their own ongoing, embodied existence or their own security, but the continuation of their own values, through the future human beings whose evaluative point of view, like ours, is the source of normativity. This is why, without the existence of others, we have no reason to value our own agency as individuals—why, without the prospect of mattering to "posterity", we "lose the taste for [our] own existence", which only "seemed so precious to [us] through others" (EA 68/80).[29] If my project isn't taken forward by someone else through *their* practical activity in the future, it dies, and the value I attributed to it dies along with it. Without them, my horizon of value is foreclosed. As Beauvoir puts it, in order for a completed project to "remain alive, a human intention must animate it again, transcending it toward the future in recognition or admiration"; when we die, we therefore surrender our "whole life into the hands of men; the only meaning it will have will be the one they confer upon it" (EA 67-8/80). What we will when we act is therefore an "open future" which would allow for the infinite continuation of our freedom by "extend[ing] itself by means of the freedom of others" (EA 65/124). This is the link that helps Beauvoir

---

[29] Beauvoir is describing the 'adventurer' here, one of her moral types—the one who is already on the way to a 'genuinely moral attitude' (EA 65/124).

to establish why "the freedom of other men must be respected and [why] they must be helped to free themselves": because they, through their current and future evaluative perspectives that can extend our projects, are the condition for us to value anything at all. Thus, "no action is conceivable without this sovereign affirmation of the future" (EA 65/124).

§VI. Social Dependence as a Condition of Freedom

Is Beauvoir therefore committed to a utilitarian position—that projects are valuable just in case they produce utility in the future? To see why this is not her view, it's crucial to remember that her conception of freedom *isn't restricted* to agency's presupposition of anticipating others' needs. Recall that, in her argument from new needs, Beauvoir had claimed that "now that it exists, the airplane responds to a need, but it is a need that it created by existing, or more exactly, that men *freely created* based on its existence" (PC 129/95). It is not me, but the *others* whose needs I respond to who 'freely create' the need. As such, the difference between merely generating utility and genuinely meeting other agents' needs is that the latter requires that those agents are in a position to *freely acknowledge* that their needs have indeed been met. As Beauvoir goes on to claim, "human freedom must… carve out a place for this new plenitude that we cause to spring forth in the world" (PC 129/95). We cannot make the void, the negativity, that we fill by creating the object—only others can do that. Without them, there is no gap for the objects of our practical activity to fill: "Only the other can create a need for what we give him; every appeal and every demand comes from his freedom" (PC 129/95). Thus, if our actions are to truly meet others' needs, we cannot only exercise our own freedom—we must also depend on theirs. How can we explain her use of the term 'freedom' to apply to the merely *receptive* condition of others in her argument?

As this begins to bring out, Beauvoir has a much more capacious conception of freedom than the mere identification of it with practical activity or agency. She endorses a *dual-aspect* conception of freedom as receptive as well as active, on which we exercise freedom also by *recognizing* that *others* have met our needs—and with it, recognizing that our agency presupposes our social dependence on others. Thus, any practice that interferes with others' ability to *freely* identify the satisfaction of their needs—slavery, manipulation, exploitation, etc.—is wrong, by Beauvoir's lights.

To arrive at this conception of freedom, Beauvoir argues that although the world we encounter might appear as if it's already there, external to us, and therefore not up to us, it is in fact already a *social* world, one that is the product of many sedimented layers of free (as well as unfree) human activity.[30] That world there-fore constitutes a kind of crystallization of human freedom, at least among those

---

[30] On sedimentation and Beauvoir, see Garcia 2018: 210, Webber 2018: ch. 7.

with the powers sufficient to exercise their freedom.[31] Beauvoir thereby takes up Marx's argument that what seems to be a given and objective world impervious to human activity is instead a *humanly made* world that could more fully reflect the effects of human freedom,[32] insofar as human subjectivity presupposes the ability to "create an objective world through [one's] practical activity, to rework inorganic nature"; while the animal produces "one-sidedly" (only "what it immediately needs for itself or its young"), "man produces universally… even when he is free from physical need, and only truly produces in freedom therefrom" (MER 1844: 76).

Beauvoir analyzes child development in terms of the dawning awareness that what initially seemed to be a given and fixed world is one that human beings are ultimately responsible for—including the child himself. "The child's situation is characterized by finding himself cast into a world he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him", such that "in his eyes, human inventions, words, customs, and values are given facts, as inevitable as the sky and trees" (EA 37/47). Thus, the child is "happily irresponsible", since his actions don't materially affect anything in the world, and therefore don't really matter: "he knows that nothing can ever happen through him; everything is already given" (EA 39/49). Eventually, however, the maturing child discovers cracks, "flaws" and "contradictions", in the reality around him that had appeared to be absolute (EA 41/51-2):

> Men stop appearing as if they were gods, and at the same time the adolescent discovers the human character of the reality about him. Language, customs, ethics, and values have their source in these uncertain creatures. The moment has come when he too is going to be called upon to participate in their operation; his acts weigh upon the earth as much as those of other men. He will have to choose and decide. It is comprehensible that it is hard for him to live this moment of his history, and this is doubtless the deepest reason for the crisis of adolescence. (EA 41-2/52)

What the adolescent discovers, in other words, is that the world he encounters is a *humanly made* world, one created by the free, yet finite and limited, human subjectivity of beings just like him: "the adolescent finds himself cast into a world which is no longer ready-made, which has to be made" (EA 42/52). Thus, the 'languages, customs, ethics, and values' that seemed to be external and impervious to human subjectivity instead presuppose it. This entails that *he* also has to help make the world—that he, too, will be responsible for the ongoing co-constitution of the world. This is the moment of "moral choice", of the revelation of his freedom, which gives him the "misfortune" of being "nostalgic" for the rest of his life for his childhood, "for the time when he could ignore [freedom's] exigencies"

---

[31] Beauvoir invokes Descartes' distinction between the infinity of freedom and the finitude of human powers (PC 124/86).

[32] Beauvoir speaks approvingly of Marx's views at EA 18-22/25-29, 90-3/105-9, 127/146, 159/183; for more on Beauvoir's relation to Marx and Marxism, see Kirkpatrick 2024, 2025; Lundgren-Gothlin 1996: chs. 5-8.

(EA 42-3/53).[33]

But this also means, correlatively, that just as much as we're responsible for contributing to producing the world of the future and for responding to the retrospective needs of future others, we're also *dependent* on others, including those of the past, for constructing the social world that we now rely on. Thus, we also depend on all of human history and the traditions of the past (EA 27/35, 102/118; PC 108-9/50-2, 110/55, 113-4/61): the *past* and *current* existence of others is a precondition for the possibility of action. Crucially, however, and as pointed out above, Beauvoir insists that our *dependence* on others, in particular on the ways in which others have already anticipated our *own* needs, *is no less a site of freedom* than our own active, practical engagements in our own projects, and she develops a theory to explain why this is the case.

Beauvoir holds that our dependence on the actions of others—the passive dimension of the human condition, or what she calls 'immanence'—is a *necessary condition* for our own practical agency in pursuing projects, or what she calls our 'transcendence': we have no freedom without relying on others; no transcendence without immanence. She calls these reciprocally active and passive dimensions of human freedom '*ambiguity*', a concept she positions at the core of her ethical view: "the ambiguity of man's condition" consists in the fact that "he is at the same time a freedom and a thing, both unified and scattered, isolated by his subjectivity and nevertheless coexisting at the heart of the world with other men" (EE 258), or at once "a sovereign and unique subject" who is in turn "an object for others [and] nothing more than an individual in the collectivity on which he depends" (EA 6/12). While "men have all felt this tragic ambiguity of their condition… as long as there have been philosophers… most of them have tried to mask it"; Beauvoir instead tasks herself with illuminating the essential ambiguity of our condition (EA 6/12). Thus, Beauvoir holds that both poles, active and passive, that together generate the intrinsic tension of the human condition, are necessary conditions for freedom. Freedom does not stem only from agency or subjectivity, but from the fact of being merely one in "a universe of objects... for others", "an individual in the collectivity on which he depends" (EA 6/12).

In what sense is our ambiguous reliance on others a condition of freedom? Beauvoir argues that we never act in a vacuum; we're always responding *to* an already given situation, and thus to a world that isn't up to us: a human being "is free, but not in the sense of Stoic abstract freedom—he is free in a situation" (PC 124/85-6). I don't prefer one kind of fruit to another in the abstract; I prefer it within a given situation, and in relation to a given end: thus, I might prefer one kind of fruit if my aim is to eat it, and another if my aim is to paint it (PC 127/92). This example shows that "if I'm transported outside of any situation, all givens will seem equally indifferent to me" (PC 127/92). Since I need to be in a

---

[33] Insightful analyses of the implications Beauvoir draws from child development can be found in Garcia 2018 and Bauer 2001.

situation in order to act in the first place, I'm reliant on others to create and maintain a world in which my situation finds its source—a world, in particular, in which a new and varied set of possibilities is opened up to me. If, by contrast, I were living on a desert island with no tools, resources, or knowledge acquired fro others, my options would be limited: the only project available to me might be survival. But by coming into a world that has been created and sustained by the activity of many generations of human beings, I find that I have many more possibilities open to me than if I were in that solitary world. Thus, while I might think that I can conduct even apparently solitary and individual actions all by myself, like unlocking my bike or making a cup of coffee, each presuppose the past activity of others in developing and producing bikes, mugs, and tea. Insofar as we are social subjects, nearly all of our actions are possible only on the same condition: we build on the past efforts of other people. My normative perspective can only be consistent, then, if I acknowledge this essential precondition for my action: my dependence on others who have worked historically over generations to create the socially embedded context for my own activity. The past actions of others are therefore preconditions for my own agency in the present.

Thus, the past projects of others are what give me a jumping-off point, a 'springboard', for my own future projects:

> In each human being, in each of his actions, the entire human past is inscribed and is immediately surpassed in its entirety towards the future. Reflecting on old technologies, the inventor invents a new technology and, pushing off from this springboard, the next generation invents a better technology; it is his own project whose success the innovator hails in this future humanity which surpasses him only by relying on him. (PC 108/50)

The inventor is only able to invent a new technique insofar as he can rely and build on the technologies of the past, generating a new starting point for the next generation to build off in turn. Insofar as the inventor participated in this effort, he participates in the same project as the inventors of the future: they're taking up the context of action he helped to create for them, and they carry out and preserve his very same end, even well after his death. As such, Beauvoir claims that, in every action, the "entirety" of "human transcendence can be grasped in each moment": every action preserves the situation that preceded it, which is the crystallization of all previous enactments of human freedom (PC 108/50).

Beauvoir's crucial concept of ambiguity has been understood to be limited to the fact of "our embodiment or our situatedness", including the existential significance of one's own death and the anxiety that eventuality provokes (Dover and Gingerich 2024: 182; see also Moi 2008: 149-150, Bauer 2001: 233). But such a construal of Beauvoir's concept does not meaningfully disambiguate her view from Heidegger's commitment to the agent's anxiety towards her own being-towards-death. This leaves it unclear why she would opt to center her whole ethical position around a concept that, as she states, other philosophers have not

yet acknowledged, and that she clearly understands to be her own philosophical innovation. Instead, the resources I have developed here can allow us to more precisely articulate where ambiguity figures in Beauvoir's ethics. We are *ambiguous* insofar as we at once need others, and also are motivated by the prospect of others needing us in turn. Thus, I find myself working with others to build up a context of action over the course of human history in which more action-possibilities are afforded to humanity as a whole than there would be otherwise. When I act, concretizing my freedom in realized ends such as "discoveries, inventions, industries, culture, paintings, and books", I can create situations for others that "open concrete possibilities for mankind"—and I find myself, in doing so, relying on others who have already done the same for me (EA 113).

§VII. Objections and Replies

Does Beauvoir actually succeed in securing her strong claim to an inescapable normative point of view for all socially situated agents? Here, we might have doubts, which I will now address in turn.

First, is this conception of agency identified unduly with creative, productive agency? While, as we have seen, Beauvoir identifies agency not only with purposive, object-producing action, but also with recognition of one's need for others' purposive actions, we might suspect that this is only one side of the coin, such that a fully realized agent will engage with both the productive and receptive aspects of their freedom. This is the view that Beauvoir primarily endorses. She takes issue with any division of labor in which an agent is restricted only to repetitive, reproductive labor rather than engaging in creative, transformative, productive activity (S 640/480), diagnosing this as a regrettable limitation of one's agency (S 650/495). This critique is one central aspect of her diagnosis of women's oppression in the *Second Sex*, but it is a predicament she takes to also characterize the widespread condition of many men under capitalism as well: the myriad men subjected to "the bureaucratic world described by Kafka" are "destined, like women, to the repetition of daily tasks [and are] alienated in ready-made values" (S 661-2/511-2).

However, the ongoing sustaining of the world as it is also constitutes a necessary precondition for one's own practical activity; reproductive activity is, like productive activity, also a way of anticipating others' future needs. Hence, even if we take issue with Beauvoir's own productivist construal of agency,[34] there is room in her general metaethical position to integrate other expressions of agency as well. The maintenance of the world in its current state is the necessary product of continual human effort, even if we don't freely recognize it. Yet insofar as we rely on this stable practical reality as the context for our action, this is self-undermining.

---

[34] For feminist critiques along these lines, see Moi 2008: 154-167, Simons 1984: 355, Lundgren-Gothlin 1996: 81, 98, 122-3.

Beauvoir attributes the inability to recognize our need for this kind of work to patriarchal mystification, since it is mostly women who "must ensure the monotonous repetition of life in its contingence and facticity": "The engineer, so precise in making his plans, behaves like a demigod at home: one word and his meal is served, his shirts starched, his children silenced… he sees nothing surprising in these miracles" (S 644/486, 650/495). Thus, Beauvoir's conception of agency can accommodate both the sense in which reproductive labor constitutes an instantiation of human freedom, as well as why the lack of acknowledgment of the importance of such labor is morally objectionable.

Second, given her universalist aspirations, can Beauvoir capture what is wrong about a social actor who doesn't see value in practical activity—either their own, or the activity of others? Beauvoir charges such agents with a particular kind of practical inconsistency: she likens them to parasites. This emerges most clearly in her portrayal of Xavière in *She Came to Stay*.[35] Xavière is presented, as discussed in §III, as a kind of wanton who, in aiming to actively desire what she is doing in every moment, ultimately does nothing at all. By the end of the novel, she remains shut up in her room, sleeping throughout the day (I 40-1/43), and is wholly materially supported by her lovers, the playwright Pierre and novelist Françoise. She is presented as emanating "hatred like a dense vapor, as corrosive as an acid" towards everything around her, as "existing only for herself, entirely self-centered, reducing to nothingness everything for which she had no use", and as exemplifying "capriciousness, intransigence, arrogant selfishness" (I 289/316, 403/440, 375/409). Thus, Beauvoir portrays Xavière as occupying an entirely negative evaluative perspective in that she cares about no one but herself; she is ultimately rendered capable of doing little besides the bare minimum to keep herself alive: "confined within her illusory and empty world, Xavière was now but a futile, living pulsation" (I 375/409). Yet, while Xavière's ability to sustain herself in this manner is conditioned on her dependence on other people, she remains wholly unappreciative of the generosity of, among others, Françoise and Pierre. As a result, as Françoise attempts to express to Pierre, rather than not needing anyone else (as in Xavière's self-image), Xavière's mode of agency is entirely parasitic on others' efforts: "Xavière had to work for her own sake and for theirs; she could not go on living for years as a parasite" (I 131/141).

Xavière's expressed commitments to self-reliance, wantonness, and misanthropy while continuing to live parasitically on others' efforts amount to a self-undermining normative point of view that, on Beauvoir's analysis, therefore proves to be mistaken. The way Xavière lives her life evidences an implicit evaluative

---

[35] Thus, where some scholars see this early novel (Beauvoir's first publication) as exemplifying a wholly different philosophical position than the one adopted in her later ethical writings (e.g., Arp 2001: 21-22), I take her position to be consistent throughout this period (on this, see also Fullbrook 2005). On my reading, Xavière, and Françoise's relation to Xavière, serves as a kind of cautionary tale, not as a model to be emulated—as is brought out by Xavière's ultimate fate in the novel's dramatic conclusion.

preference for relying on other people and allowing them to meet her needs: her deeper motivational commitment, the one she actualizes in practice, is to value depending on others; hence, her claim to preferring selfishness is, by Beauvoir's lights, objectively false.

Beauvoir reiterates the self-undermining evaluative standpoint of the parasite in her ethical writings. She argues that seeking to deny one's dependence on the freedom of others in generating my action-context devolves the agent into a "parasite" who "fails to understand the human character of the objects he uses" and who "lives in the midst of a foreign nature, among inert things, crushed by the enormous weight of things…. In the tools, the machines, the houses, and the bread he eats, [the parasite] does not recognize the mark of any freedom"" (PC 132/104). In other words, such an agent commits herself, once again, to an internally inconsistent normative perspective: she benefits from, and hence implicitly values, the products of others' freedom, while at the same time contra-dictorily claiming that she *denies* their value. Beauvoir raises the example of the "parasitic societies", such as Roman or Antebellum Southern slaveowning societies, that "try their best to defend the masters against the consciousnesses of the creatures whom they are exploiting" by refusing to recognize them as full human beings, while at the same time relying on them to generate the context of action that serves as a necessary condition for slaveowners' own freedom (PC 132/103). The evaluative attitude of denying the humanity of others therefore commits the agent to "mak[ing] himself a thing among things" (PC 132/104). Yet the moment any such agent finds themselves relying on the practical context generated, in part, by the past and present efforts of these human beings in freely undertaking their own action, they undermine their implicit commitment to understanding themselves and others as things.[36]

This argument extends, then, to Beauvoir's response to a third objection one might raise against her view: namely, whether Beauvoir has the metaethical resources to make sense of how other instances of exploitation, dehumanization, or infliction of suffering can be objectively wrong, and thus whether Beauvoir can make good on the problem considered at the outset of providing a philosophical account that can explain why an agent who sees the "suffering others… as counting for nothing" is normatively mistaken (Street 2016: 165).[37] As Beauvoir characterizes her own position, "one is not free to treat others as things, as one likes" (PC 133/104). I can only consistently act in such a way as to contradict or undermine the foundation of my own agency by refraining from being an agent

---

[36] Langton analyzes this issue in terms of Beauvoir's problem of solipsism (2009: chs. 1, 14), and Bauer 2001, Garcia 2018, Knowles 2019, and Melo Lopes 2023 in terms of Beauvoir's problem of otherness. All accounts draw out the underlying logical and practical incoherence in the evaluative framework of any subject who denies the freedom of other subjects by treating them as objects.

[37] Although she does hold that we have reason to violently intervene against the oppression of others; given her commitment to the ultimate value of the *maximal freedom* of others, she doesn't take violence to be categorically wrong (EA 104/121).

any longer. Insofar as I continue to sustain and actualize my own agency, I am also committed to sustaining and affirming what grounds it. With it, I must also affirm the freedom of others which constitutes one core condition on which my own freedom rests.

Notice how Beauvoir arrives at the Kantian conclusion that exploiting, objectifying, and dehumanizing others is wrong insofar as it contradicts one's own agency (or, for Kant, one's will), but without sharing Kant's premise that the source of the contradiction lies in defying the lawfulness of my own rational nature. As we saw, this premise, when naturalized in Kantian constructivism, runs afoul of the individualism objection of motivating the step from valuing oneself to valuing others. But Beauvoir doesn't think we arrive at the value of human freedom merely by *presupposing* that others share our own agency, as already fully-fledged without them; instead, she holds that *we really do rely*, as an empirical matter, on the products of others' activity as a condition for our own agency. Thus, my agency is itself directly *conditioned* on their agency, a premise that neither Kant nor Kantian constructivists would allow. As a result, Beauvoir doesn't face the individualism objection: rather than moving from the value of oneself to the value of others, she argues that one's own agency *already* presupposes a commitment to valuing others.[38]

As such, Beauvoir establishes an argument for the sociality of agency, and for a strong metaethical objectivity, that rests on quite different premises than other proposals in analytic metaethics. Beauvoir argues that moral agency must be conceived as embedded within a social world that is already populated by sedimented artifacts that are the products of past manifestations of human freedom, a world that we also actively participate in building, whether we're cognizant of it or not. Since we intrinsically rely on this world as a condition for our agency, and also derive the value of our own actions from the ongoing contributions we can and do make to this world, we face Beauvoir's moral imperative not to restrict the freedom of *any* human agents who might recognize the value of our efforts in the future, or open up valuable possibilities for others in turn.

Works cited

References to Beauvoir are cited by the abbreviations given below, with page numbers first in English and then in French; most in-text translations are mine.

Anderson, Thomas. 1979. *The Foundation and Structure of Sartrean Ethics*. Kansas.

Anscombe, GEM. 1957. *Intention*. Harvard.

Arp, Kristana. 2001. *The Bonds of Freedom: Simone de Beauvoir's Existential Ethics*. Open.

Bair, Deirdre. 1991. *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography*. Touchstone.

---

[38] On the distinction between Beauvoir's intersubjective metaethical grounding and Kant's individual metaethical grounding, see Eshleman 2009: 81, 89, Vintges 1992: 69-70.

Bauer, Nancy. 2001. *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism*. Columbia.

Beauvoir, Simone de. 1943 [1999]. *She Came to Stay*. Norton. Translation of *L'invitée* (Gallimard: 1970). ['T']

———. 1944 [2004]. "Pyrrhus and Cineas." In *Philosophical Writings*. Illinois, 77-150. Translation of *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (Gallimard, 1986). ['PC']

———. 1945 [2004]. "Moral Idealism and Political Realism." In *Philosophical Writings*. Illinois, 165-194. ['MI']

———. 1947 [2018]. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Open Road. Translation of *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* (Gallimard, 1963). ['EA']

———. 1946 [2004]. "Eye for an Eye." In *Philosophical Writings*. Illinois, 237-260. ['EE']

———. 1949 [2011]. *The Second Sex*. Vintage. Translation of *Le deuxième sexe* I-II (Gallimard, 1949). ['S']

Bergoffen, Debra. 1996. *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*. SUNY.

Bird-Pollan, Stefan. 2011. "Some Normative Implications of Korsgaard's Theory of the Intersubjectivity of Reason." *Metaphilosophy* 42.4:376–380.

Bratman, Michael. 1999. *Intention, Plans and Practical Reason*. CSLI.

———. 2000. "Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency." *Philosophical Review* 109.1:35–61.

Darwall, Stephen. 2007. "Reply to Korsgaard, Wallace, and Watson." *Ethics* 118.1:52–69.

———. 2009. *The Second-Person Standpoint*. Harvard.

Direk, Zeynep. 2011. "Immanence and Abjection in Simone de Beauvoir." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 49.1:49-72.

Dover, Daniela and Gingerich, Jonathan. 2024. "Toward an Existentialist Metaethics." In *Analytic Existentialism*. Oxford, 180–205.

Enoch, David. 2006. "Agency, Shmagency." *Philosophical Review* 115.2:169–198.

Eshleman, Matthew. 2009. "Beauvoir and Sartre on Freedom, Intersubjectivity, and Normative Justification." In *Beauvoir and Sartre: The Riddle of Influence*. Indiana, 65–89.

Ferrero, Luca. 2021. "Diachronic Agency." In *Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Agency*. Routledge.

Frankfurt, Harry. 1971. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." *Journal of Philosophy* 68.1:5–20.

Fraser, Rachel. 2023. "IV—The Limits of Immanent Critique." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 123.2:97–125.

Fullbrook, Edward. 2005. "An Introduction to 'Two Unpublished Chapters of *She Came to Stay*.'" In *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, Illinois, 35-40.

Garcia, Manon. 2018. *On ne naît pas soumise, on le devient*. Climats.

Guyer, Paul. 2019. *Kant on the Rationality of Morality*. Cambridge.

Honneth, Axel. 1992. *The Struggle for Recognition*. MIT.

———. 2011. *Freedom's Right*. Columbia.

Hussain, Nadeem, Nishi Shah. 2006. "Misunderstanding Metaethics: Korsgaard's Rejection of Realism." In *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 1. Oxford.

Kant, Immanuel. 1790 [2000]. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Guyer. Cambridge.

Kirkpatrick, Kate. 2024. "Femininity, Love, and Alienation: The Genius of *The Second Sex*." *Journal of the British Academy* 12:1-26.

———. 2025. "The Opium of the Lasses: Beauvoir's Revaluation of Love in *The Second Sex*." *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 99.1:167–188.

Knowles, Charlotte. 2019. "Beauvoir on Women's Complicity in Their Own Unfreedom." *Hypatia* 34.2:242–265.

Korsgaard, Christine. 1996. *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge.

———. 2003. "Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy." *Journal of Philosophical Research* 28: 99–122.

———. 2007. "Autonomy and the Second Person Within: A Commentary on Stephen Darwall's *The Second-Person Standpoint*." *Ethics* 118.1:8–23.

———. 2008. "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason." In *The Constitution of Agency*. Oxford.

———. 2009. *Self-Constitution*. Oxford.

———. 2011. "Natural Goodness, Rightness, and the Intersubjectivity of Reason." *Metaphilosophy* 42.4:381–394.

Kruks, Sonia. 1997. "Simone de Beauvoir: Teaching Sartre about Freedom." In *Sartre's French Contemporaries and Enduring Influences*. Routledge.

Langton, Rae. 2009. *Sexual Solipsism*. Oxford.

Le Dœuff, Michèle. 1989 [1991]. *Hipparchia's Choice*. Columbia.

———. 1995. "Simone de Beauvoir: Falling into (Ambiguous) Line." In *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*. Penn State, 59–66.

Louden, Robert. 2000. *Kant's Impure Ethics*. Oxford.

Lundgren-Gothlin, Eva. 1996. *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's the* Second Sex. Wesleyan.

Mahon, Joseph. 1997. *Existentialism, Feminism and Simone de Beauvoir*. Palgrave.

Marx, Karl. 1844. "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844." In *Marx-Engels Reader*. Norton, 66-125.

Melo Lopes, Filipa. 2023. "What Do Incels Want? Explaining Incel Violence Using Beauvoirian Otherness." *Hypatia* 38.1:134–156.

Moi, Toril. 2008. *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*. Oxford.

Moland, Lydia. 2011. "Agency and Practical Identity." *Metaphilosophy* 42.4:368-375.

Morton, Jennifer M. 2024. "Trapped in the Present." *Political Philosophy* 1.2:237-263.

Rymer, Russ. 1992. "A Silent Childhood, I-II." *The New Yorker*. April 13th (41-81)-April 20th, 1992 (43-75).

Samuel, Jack. 2022. "Toward a Post-Kantian Constructivism." *Ergo* 9.53:1449-84.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1943. *Being and Nothingness*. Washington Square.

———. 1946 [2007]. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Yale.

Schafer, Karl. 2015. "Realism and Constructivism in Kantian Metaethics, I-II." *Philosophy Compass* 10.10:690-713.

———. Forthcoming. "Intelligibility, Idealism, and Alienation in Post-Kantian Metaethics." *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*. https://philarchive.org/rec/SCHIIA-13

Scheffler, Samuel. 2016. *Death and the Afterlife*. Oxford.

Setiya, Kieran. 2014. "The Midlife Crisis." *Philosopher's Imprint* 14.31:1-18.

Simons, Margaret A. 1984. "Motherhood, Feminism and Identity." *Women's Studies International Forum* 7.5:349–359.

Street, Sharon. 2006. "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value." *Philosophical Studies* 127:109–166.

———. 2009. "In Defense of Future Tuesday Indifference." *Philosophical Issues* 19:273–298.

———. 2010. "What Is Constructivism in Ethics and Metaethics?" *Philosophy Compass* 5.5:363–384.

———. 2012. "Coming to Terms with Contingency." In *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*. Oxford, 40–59.

———. 2016. "I—Constructivism in Ethics and the Problem of Attachment and Loss." *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 90.1:161–189.

———. 2016b. "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Rethink It." In *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 11. Oxford, 293–334.

Tiffany, Evan. 2012. "Why Be an Agent?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90.2:223–233.

Truffaut, François. 1970. *L'enfant sauvage.* Artistes associés.

Vaccarino Bremner, Sabina. 2022. "On Moral Unintelligibility: Beauvoir's Genealogy of Morality in the *Second Sex*." *The Monist* 105.4:521–540.

Vintges, Karen. 1996. *Philosophy as Passion: The Thinking of Simone de Beauvoir*. Indiana.

Walden, Kenneth. 2012. "Laws of Nature, Laws of Freedom, and the Social Construction of Normativity." In *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 7. Oxford.

———. 2018. "Morality, Agency, and Other People." *Ergo* 5.3:66–101.

Webber, Jonathan. 2018. *Rethinking Existentialism*. Oxford.