Chapter 1

Material Life

Bergsonian Tendencies in Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy

ALIA AL-SAJI

Recent years have seen renewed debate concerning the place of materiality and life in feminist thought. The term "material feminism(s)" describes the move within feminist theory to rethink matter's generative and active potential.[1] Although material feminists are by no means a homogeneous group (including such thinkers as Elizabeth Grosz, Karen Barad, Claire Colebrook, and Elizabeth Wilson), and though these thinkers reconceive matter in multiple ways, a common gesture can be discerned.[2] Both organic and inorganic matter, it is argued, have too frequently been thought under the mantel of passivity, inertia, and sameness. The argument is not only that this reenacts the subordination of the feminine, traditionally identified with reproduction and life; it also elides the dynamic and immanent, constitutive ground of the very experiences, structures, and subjects that feminism is trying to describe. Material feminism, as I understand it, is not merely a call to take matter or life seriously, nor does it simply consist in their revaluation (since such a reversal can occur without

substantially altering the identification of the material and vital with passivity). The call is rather for a thoroughgoing *rethinking* of life and of materiality—as movement, force, activity, even agency[3]—a rethinking that would allow for a new ontological reconfiguration of feminism.[4]

Such a reconfiguration has at least three implications. First, it goes along with a critique of feminism's reliance on the paradigm of social or linguistic constructivism. In its figuring of the material and vital as a neutral or blank surface awaiting inscription and representation, constructivism represses the generative power of materiality and life, the ways in which they are themselves meaning-making. Second, the ways in which the nature–culture, matter–representation, or biological–social divides have been drawn in feminism must be questioned. And third, the turn to the biological, evolutionary, and material aims to think them in their complex and open-ended processes *beneath the level of what is available to consciousness.* Life is hence thought dynamically and actively, but this activity cannot immediately be taken to belong to a lived body, as a unified conscious and intentional subject.[5]

In this context, the relation between material feminism and phenomenology—in particular feminist phenomenology—remains to be worked out. Where feminist phenomenology would endorse the first two implications of material feminism, it may have difficulties with the third. Phenomenology and material feminism seem to meet on the terrain of embodiment, but material feminism takes bodies to be individuated and situated within the movement of life, whereas phenomenology ostensibly treats the body as expression of individual existence or as the situation of consciousness.[6] It is not clear that the bodies to which these philosophies refer are the same: the material and living body, on the one hand, and the lived, experiential body, on the other.[7] Moreover, though phenomenology acknowledges a prereflective level of experience and affect, it is unclear that it can

account for unconscious forces and processes that, while not experienced as such, work to ground and form experience. However, to the degree that feminist phenomenology is enacted through a critical rehabilitation of phenomenology—which questions its reliance on the philosophy of consciousness—feminist phenomenology pushes against these bounds. As a text that precedes and prefigures feminist phenomenology, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* presents this tension in productive ways. Material bodies and lived bodies coexist on the pages of *The Second Sex*, a text which offers descriptions (sometimes contradictory, sometimes generative) that assume this entanglement.

In this essay, I ask after the place of material life principally in Beauvoir's *The Second* Sex—although I also draw on *The Ethics of Ambiguity* in order to complicate the question of life, possibility, and oppression in Beauvoir's philosophy. My turn to *The Second Sex* comes from a view, admittedly anachronistic, to gauging the response this text may offer to material feminist debates, but it also stems from a desire to see how Beauvoir's theorizations of life may be imbricated with her discussions of oppression (and whether and how they may speak to a thicker, situated and intersectional understanding of oppression). While my question is admittedly anachronistic—since Beauvoir's text predates both material feminism and the social constructivism that it opposes, as well as feminist phenomenology as an explicit undertaking—it may be this very anachronism that allows *The Second Sex* to present the *virtual meeting point* of multiple tendencies within feminist thinking, tendencies that would come to appear incompatible in their developed forms. My reading may hence be engaged in a retrospective logic that Henri Bergson calls "the retrograde movement of the true," but my claim is not that Beauvoir has any one worked-out feminist methodology as the basis of her theorizing. Rather, I see her as experimenting with multiple methodologies (as yet nascent and implicit); there is a productive ambiguity and

multiplicity in her work.[8] This is the source of both the tensions and potentials of *The Second Sex*. And it is for this reason that this text can be read as prefiguring a number of very different feminist developments.

Reading Beauvoir with Bergson, I uncover one such methodological and philosophical direction—that of a nascent philosophy of life. In this vein, Margaret Simons's suggestion that, in addition to Beauvoir's early work, *The Second Sex* may hold Bergsonian themes is particularly promising.[9] Bergson's philosophy has offered a generative ground for rethinking life and matter, as evidenced by the appropriations of Gilles Deleuze and Elizabeth Grosz. Although these readings sometimes come at the cost of minimizing Bergson's own ambivalence with respect to matter—an ambivalence that can itself be productive for reading Beauvoir's own ambiguity—they do successfully bring to light the ways in which both life and matter are becomings, makings and undoings [*se faire* and *se défaire*], in Bergson's philosophy.[10]

I thus trace Bergsonian tendencies in *The Second Sex* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that allow for the problematization and productive reconfiguration of the relation of life and existence in Beauvoir's philosophy. In reading Beauvoir with Bergson, I claim neither clear-cut influence nor conscious appropriation; the proximity of Beauvoir and Bergson in these texts remains speculative in my view. My aim, rather, is to offer a reading that makes sense of what were hidden or contradictory aspects of the texts. To be precise, I find in *The Second Sex* a tension between two philosophical directions or commitments: on the one hand, a philosophy of existence, which privileges conscious existence and transcendence as the taking-up and surpassing of materiality and life, and, on the other hand, a tentative philosophy of life and of time that understands life in terms of ramified tendencies subject to social–historical elaboration and actualization (so that existences emerge within nonlinear processes that are at once material, vital, and social). Which philosophical—indeed

temporal—frame is at play makes a difference for how some of Beauvoir's most important claims are to be understood. Is the claim that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, woman"[11]—or that *"to be* is to have become, to have been made"[12]—to be read as the endorsement of social construction, or of the role of recognition in situated existence, or is there a more complicated becoming at stake here? In the last part of the essay, I extend this method of reading to *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* using Bergson's understanding of the creation of possibility as a lens through which to read Beauvoir's concept of wanting to disclose being [*vouloir dévoiler l'être*]. In so doing, I question Beauvoir's understanding of oppression, and problematize it in light of her equation of Arab and Muslim women with the trope of life.

1.1. *THE SECOND SEX* AS PHILOSOPHY OF EXISTENCE

The explicit framework for *The Second Sex,* and the one in which Beauvoir inscribes her own work, is that of a philosophy of existence. More specifically, this is the framework of existentialist ethics:

> The perspective we have adopted is one of existentialist morality. Every subject posits itself as a transcendence concretely through projects; it accomplishes its freedom only by perpetual surpassing toward other freedoms; there is no other justification for present existence than its expansion toward an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation of existence into 'in-itself', of freedom into facticity.[13]

These themes of individual transcendence, project, freedom, and futurity, as well as the risks of enclosure and stagnation in immanence

and facticity (often bodily in form), are familiar to readers of *The Second Sex.* That Beauvoir's analyses can often be read as structured by the operative distinctions of transcendence–immanence, activity–passivity, and consciousness–facticity, which function to explain the current state of women's and men's existence as well as the differences therein, should not occlude other operative concepts at play in the text.[14] From the existential–phenomenological perspective, life is relegated to the side of immanence, passivity, and facticity. Material and biological processes, bodily events and flows, are givens [*données*]; they are part of women's situation.[15] Although these have motivating force, and though the subject must contend with them, their force and meaning are functions of *how* they are taken up by that subject. They are constituted phenomena, and only in this sense do they have an effect. Life has meaning in being taken up and transcended, in being subsumed to an individual (or social) existence aiming at projects; meaning-making is on the side of existential subjects.

But Beauvoir does not follow this existential schema faithfully (as many of her readers have already shown).[16] Indeed, her material calls for different and more nuanced analyses. Not only are women often closely related to (and constituted as) life, but this life seems to have its own entangled tendencies, elaborated, divided, and sometimes truncated and rigidified in social existence, but not entirely overcome. What is less familiar in *The Second Sex,* and what troubles the dominant existential frame, is the dynamic and temporal presence of life: biological and material processes, but also bodily transformation, crisis, and aging. This is life not merely as a given, but as movement and becoming; moreover, this is life in the multiple, with its own rhythms, directions, and tendencies. Although these temporalities of life, for women, are often presented by Beauvoir in terms of a cyclic time of sameness and under the trope of repetition (as Sara Heinämaa and Penelope Deutscher

have shown), it is also the case that such repetition and walking in place [*piétiner*] can be read as arising through the social reduction of life for women.[17]

One may ask of *The Second Sex* whether, from a temporal perspective, walking in place is the same as standing still—whether the former doesn't already point to the experience of difference in repetition. One may also ask whether the temporality of repetition indeed belongs to life or whether it is symptomatic of a life become feminine social existence. Beauvoir's account is ambiguous in this regard. To the mechanical or bare life in which the future repeats the present—in a seemingly flat, self-same, and undifferentiated linearity (in maternity and housework for instance)—she contrasts a time of open futurity that belongs to subjects. This is a time of newness that arises out of freely chosen projects; it has its source in the creativity and movement of transcendence of conscious existence, not in the movement of life. The duality of life and existence is thus reenacted in terms of time, so that life is again divested of its power to create, to make a difference, or to matter and become meaning. To complicate this picture, we must look more closely at Beauvoir's treatment of life in *The Second Sex.*

1.2. A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE FOR *THE SECOND SEX?*

At the beginning of *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir makes clear that she does not intend "to propose a philosophy of life."[18] My claim is not that *The Second Sex* constructs or assumes a systematic theory of life, but that in listening carefully to the givens of biology and to the biological sciences, *The Second Sex* contains the traces of a nonsystematic and dynamic concept of life, a life that makes possible and opens onto social, historical and cultural existence. That Beauvoir's method

in the chapter on biology is to first listen to the nuances of the *données* is clear:

> The idea here is not to propose a philosophy of life or to take sides too hastily in the quarrel between finalism and mechanism. Yet it is noteworthy that physiologists and biologists all use a more or less finalistic language merely because they ascribe meaning [*sens*] to vital phenomena. We will use their vocabulary. Without coming to any conclusion about life and consciousness, we can affirm that any living fact [*fait vivant*] indicates transcendence, and that a project is in the making in every function: these descriptions do not suggest more than this.[19]

The result of listening to life, and to those who study it, is a different sense of *transcendence* than that associated with consciousness. Although still technically transcendence in immanence, this is more properly transcendence *within,* or *of,* immanence. Immanence, in other words, need not be understood as devoid of difference, movement, becoming, or even transcendence. This is not the transcendence that takes immanence (body, past, or situation) as its point of departure, only to give it meaning and deposit it as a remainder; this transcendence is rather the differential becoming of the sphere of immanence itself (which means that the in-itself can never simply be itself). To the degree that transcendence and immanence traditionally define a dichotomy, both notions are here destabilized and reconfigured. Moreover, to the degree that biological processes are seen by Beauvoir as *projects* in the making, life takes on an active, even agential, force whereby meaning is not merely ascribed to it, but at least partially produced by it.

But this activity and transcendence of life is held in abeyance in *The Second Sex.* As a transcendence that does not belong to a subject,

but rather to what would normally fall on the side of body, matter, or object, it troubles the existential framework of *The Second Sex*. In this sense, it falls into the shadows once the *true* transcendence of conscious existence comes into focus.[20] What is emphasized in *The Second Sex* is the ambiguity of life, nature, and biology. Beauvoir makes clear that these are not deterministic givens, nor do they constitute a destiny or fixed teleology: "In truth, nature is no more an immutable given than is historical reality."[21] But the comparison to history also cuts the other way: for Beauvoir is careful not to treat biology as an indifferent stuff, nor to make of life a neutral or blank slate for social or individual inscription. There is even a temporality and becoming to life. However, the suggestion that Beauvoir finds in biology by which life has formative power and transcendence is not developed as a positive account in *The Second Sex*. This is not to say that such life is absent from the text: Beauvoirian life can be traced through what it disavows. Indeed, Beauvoir's text operates, for the most part, to clear the space for a nonreductive and dynamic sense of life, even while leaving it otherwise undefined. Beauvoir broaches life, for the most part, in terms of what it is *not; The Second Sex* gives us a sketch of life in the negative.

This makes the task of tracing a concept of life in *The Second Sex* difficult. That Beauvoir does not renounce life, but reminds us that "[t]hese biological data [*données*] are of extreme importance: they play an all-important role and are an essential element of woman's situation" compounds the difficulty.[22] We have, on the one hand, the chapter on biology with a multitude of contingent "facts" and nascent tendencies and, on the other, an account in which life is subsumed to its meaning for social existence. At this juncture, reading Beauvoir with Bergson may prove productive for allowing a glimpse of what life might become in between these "facts" and negations.

1.2.1. Beauvoir and Bergson: Élan vital and Tendency

In a segment of her diary dated May 6, 1927 (and in which Margaret Simons rightly sees Beauvoir's early Bergsonism), Beauvoir notes the following regarding her own life:

> It is very complicated. I must bit by bit kill all but one of these possibilities [*possibles*] in me. This is how I see life: thousands of possibilities [*possibles*] in childhood fall by the wayside bit by bit, and so much so that on the last day there is no longer anything but *one reality;* you have lived *one life.* But it is Bergson's *élan vital* [vital impetus] that I am rediscovering here, that which divides, letting go of one tendency after another so that a single one can be realized [*réalisé*].[23]

Here Beauvoir brings together the experience of life as childhood and aging with Bergson's description of life as *élan vital.* In *The Second Sex* too, we find conjoined a description of the lived experience of childhood with an account of how life is elaborated into socially inhibited or reduced modes. Lest this conjunction of individual living with evolutionary life seem questionable, I note that Bergson uses the image of duration, maturation, and aging to introduce the question of the temporality of life at the beginning of *Creative Evolution.*[24] For Bergson, as for the early Beauvoir, the temporalities of individual existence and that of life are not opposed; they are both defined by *tendency.*[25]

But what is life as tendency? In Bergson's hypothesis of life as a vital impetus, or *élan vital,* this impetus holds a multiplicity of tendencies that, insofar as they are virtual, coexist in complementarity and mutual implication. These tendencies, however, cannot grow beyond a certain point without becoming incompatible.[26] This means that the unity of the *élan* is retrospective. Its movement is one of dissociation

and division whereby tendencies are actualized through continual divergence.[27] This divergence stems, in part, from the internal multiplicity that characterizes life as tendency and, in part, from its need to work with matter and take material form as it actualizes itself.[28] The push of the *élan* is therefore neither serial nor cumulative, so that evolution cannot be understood to aim at a harmonious whole as in the finalist picture.[29] Evolution is a movement, not of addition, but of differentiation and divergence. In any given line of evolution, some tendencies will be actualized at the expense of others. But nonactualized tendencies are not thereby erased; rather they remain as virtual memories or traces that haunt that line and that may lead to different actualizations (and solutions to vital problems) when the conditions permit.[30] Significantly, tendencies change and diverge in growing. Whether in aging or in evolution, a qualitatively differentiating temporal movement is at stake, one whose finality is unpredictable, so that both life and existence are characterized by an open futurity.

Bergson's image of *élan*—which should be understood as both impetus and momentum—expresses the weight of the past. And it is this weight of the past that can allow us to understand tendency. Since time is creation and invention for Bergson, tendencies cannot be understood to be given once and for all as completed realities.[31] Although it is the past as a virtual whole that pushes on each present, actualizing itself there, this past is not a self-same idea, but is *reconfigured* through the passage of events. This is the import of Bergson's image in *Creative Evolution* of the past snowballing on itself:[32] not the accumulation of events in a container, enlarging the past as thing, but the continuous immanent transformation of directionality and force that is the past as tendency. From this follows the irreversibility of the *élan* and the significance of aging;[33] for the past not only makes a difference in each present (as actualization), it also makes a difference for itself virtually. It is in this sense that the unity of the *élan* lies behind us for Bergson. As duration, tendencies do not simply repeat

(even when they give the appearance of repetition);[34] they transform as they age and grow, diverging to give different actualizations and evolutionary lines.[35] But since, to a certain extent, life is *what it does,* this contingent differentiation is not exterior to its definition but modifies it internally.[36] This means, I would argue, that the effort of creation, which is life, must be understood as at once actual and virtual creation. Significantly for my reading of Beauvoir, Bergson emphasizes, "in duration, considered as a creative evolution, there is perpetual creation of possibility and not only of reality."[37] This creation of possibility is intimately linked to the reconfiguration of life (in its pastness and presence), an ontological reconfiguration of being.

I believe that this follows from the way in which Bergson identifies life—whether individual or evolutionary—with tendency and becoming (indeed with multiple tendencies). Tendency connotes not simply directionality, but "*nascent change of direction.*"[38] It implies, as in Deleuze's formula, that the whole is not given—that there is no completion or closure for an enduring reality.[39] This applies both to the future in Bergson's philosophy, and, I would argue, to life as such.[40] Life makes and undoes itself, to use Bergson's terms, but this winding and unwinding of life is neither revision nor erasure.[41] It should be understood irreversibly, so that every reconfiguration and differentiation of life (whether repetition, divergence, or forgetting) leaves a trace—so that no life, individual or evolutionary, can be posited or grasped once and for all. It is this nature of tendency that is central to understanding life not only for Bergson, but also, I think, for Beauvoir.

But Beauvoir transforms Bergsonian tendency by means of an important supplement: In *The Second Sex* life undergoes social and historical elaboration. It is this elaboration, which can also take the form of (artificial) selection and reduction, that I believe explains the reification of life in the repetitive, and seemingly frozen, forms of existence which define the feminine for Beauvoir.[42]

1.2.2. *The Tendencies of Life in* The Second Sex

In the chapter on biology in *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir identifies two intertwined movements within life: maintaining [*maintenir*] and creating [*créer*]. It is important to note that Beauvoir is not simply following Bergson here, but is introducing her own account of life:

> There are two movements that come together in life, and life maintains itself only by surpassing itself. It does not surpass itself without maintaining itself; these two moments are always accomplished together.[43]

Yet, as life develops, these movements tend to diverge and, in those species that reproduce through sexual differentiation, to be incarnated in different sexes:

> In the [more elaborated] forms of life, reproduction becomes production of differentiated organisms; it has a twofold face: maintenance of the species and creation of new individuals . . . It is thus striking that these two moments of perpetuation and creation divide.[44]

Moreover,

> The most complex and concretely individualized life is found in mammals. The split of the two vital moments, maintaining and creating, takes place definitively in the separation of the sexes.[45]

It would be possible to read Beauvoir as presenting a naturalist, even essentialist, theory of the genesis of sexual difference here. It would also be possible to negate the weight of her attention to biology by reading her claim at the end of this chapter, "that if the body is not

a *thing*, it is a situation," as nascent social constructivism.[46] I think both approaches miss the complexity of Beauvoir's account. For she is not claiming that maintenance and creation are predefined or stable activities; the forms they take are contingent, as is the genesis of sexual difference itself for Beauvoir. Although one may be tempted to divide these movements along lines of activity and passivity, or of permanence and change, Beauvoir sees them as different ways of conjugating continuity and discontinuity in time.[47] They are different attempts to solve the fundamental problem of life, that of temporal becoming. It is in this sense that these two movements may be characterized as tendencies; for Beauvoir discerns in each a different rhythm or temporality:

> But it is true that in both these active operations—maintaining and creating—the synthesis of becoming is not realized in the same way. Maintaining means denying the dispersion of instants, affirming continuity as they emerge; creating means exploding an irreducible and separated present within the temporal unity. [translation modified][48]

Lest we take Beauvoir to be defining the two sexes in terms of essential rhythms or temporalities here, it must be recalled that tendencies, precisely because they are temporal becomings, transform as they develop. Indeed, Beauvoir's story of the development of these tendencies instantiates just such qualitative change, repetition, and ramification. For in its historical becoming, the tendency to maintain is itself transformed and ramified: In early human societies, maintaining group life becomes a matter of active production and of risking life, an activity that men take on, whereas women maintain life through its repetition in the form of biological reproduction.[49] Maintaining thus splits into production and reproduction. According to Beauvoir, while the former opens the possibility for the creative

surpassing of life in social and individualized existence, the latter rivets life to biological repetition.[50] Women's existence thus seems to problematically conjoin the two vital tendencies of maintenance and creation by reducing them both to the function of biological reproduction, or repetition. Although these tendencies transform in fluid ways, the result of their permutations seems to provide a naturalistic basis for the subjugation of women. This, however, would be to forget a crucial part of Beauvoir's story of life: its opening onto historical and social elaboration.

1.2.3. Life in the Making and Life Elaborated

As life makes and unwinds itself for Bergson, so Beauvoir notes that "humanity is constantly in the making [*en devenir*]."[51] To take seriously the temporality of life as tendency is to understand this becoming as both a process of actualization and virtualization, as the creation not only of the present situation, but of the possibilities of the present and its opening to a future. In other words, to say that women's potential has not yet been fulfilled is still to misunderstand that potential as a preformed essence; it would be more accurate to say that this potential has not yet been created. As Beauvoir notes,

> Woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming; she has to be compared with man in her becoming; that is, her *possibilities* have to be defined: what skews the issues so much is that she is being reduced to what she was, to what she is today, while the question concerns her capacities; the fact is that capacities manifest themselves clearly only when they have been realized: but the fact is also that when one considers a being who is transcendence and surpassing, it is never possible to close the books.[52]

Several Bergsonian themes are woven within Beauvoir's argument: (1) When comparing living beings, it is tendencies or

becomings that must be compared, not states or things. To attend only to states and attributes is to reify and reduce what is a moving reality. (2) Tendencies cannot be grasped merely in their nascent form; to understand a tendency is to follow its becoming, to see it in its process of actualization and becoming. (3) Tendencies are without finality, without stoppage or end; they transform and internally differentiate as they develop. This is a transformation not only of the actual but of the virtual conditions of actuality. Hence in Beauvoir's terms, we should not merely say that "in the present state of education and customs,"[53] women's capacities have not been realized, but also that these capacities have as yet not been made possible. In other words, their possibility has not yet been created (the full sense of this will become apparent in Section 1.3).

For Beauvoir, there is another sense in which women's becoming has been inhibited, in both its possibilities and its actuality. For, in the case of women, the social and historical elaboration of life has reduced, flattened, and selected out its tendencies. This sheds new light on Beauvoir's well-known claim:

> One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates [*élabore*] this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine.[54]

This notion of *elaboration* should not be equated with construction, for elaboration assumes a nascent, immanent life awaiting explicitation, actualization, or development in civilization and culture. In this sense, civilizations and cultures rework, select, and transform life.[55] As Elizabeth Grosz notes, "perhaps we may understand culture as subtractive: culture diminishes, selects, reduces nature rather than making nature over."[56] This certainly seems to be the way in

which patriarchal cultures function, in Beauvoir's account, to at once impoverish and fix women's relation to life. It is in this sense that life can be understood to be reduced to physiological destiny and women to that deterministic figuration of life; life is hence naturalized. "The question," as Beauvoir says, "is how, in her, nature has been taken on [*reprise*] in the course of history; the question is what humanity has made of the human female."[57] This elaboration of life takes place through the socialized and historicized relations that are established for men and women with their bodies and biologies.[58] In childhood and maternity, as well as through housework and the conflicting roles imposed upon women, a repetitive elaboration and reduction of life comes to be sedimented. Since "in the human species nature can never be separated from artifice,"[59] this means that, for women, the biological and material body is made into, and comes to be experienced as, an inert and repetitive thing. Such repetition is not the time of life as such (as if we could locate life in such a pure state), but the time of socially and historically elaborated life for women. In this way, Beauvoir offers resources to understand both the materialization and phenomenology of feminine oppression.

1.3. CREATING POSSIBILITY AND RECONCEIVING OPPRESSION

The Bergsonian turn, which I have traced in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex,* can offer a more complex lens through which to understand freedom and oppression in her philosophy. To develop this point, I turn back to *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and to another bifurcation of tendencies that can be witnessed in that earlier text: the tension between wanting to be [*vouloir-être*] and wanting to disclose being [*vouloir dévoiler l'être*].[60] I argue that this differentiation can be understood in new ways, if we read it in light of Bergson's concept of creating

possibility; more so, this can at once problematize and reconfigure Beauvoir's theory of oppression.

1.3.1. The Ethics of Ambiguity: *Disclosing Being and Creating Possibility*

In contrast to the reductive intentionality of the will to be, which seeks to possess and coincide with being, a possession that inevitably fails, the will to disclose being is a more complex attitude that resists univocal representation. Wanting to disclose being is articulated by Beauvoir in different registers in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*; it has phenomenological, affective, ontological, and agential implications.[61] It embraces and sustains the tension that makes existence an opening for meaning to appear in the world; the failure to coincide, the distance to being, is for it a success. This desire to disclose being is linked by Beauvoir at once with existence and with freedom [*se vouloir libre*].[62] Some of its richest expressions can be found in her phenomenological descriptions of how the world comes to appearance through us, how we lend the world the means with which it expresses itself—how it *becomes* a world through the dimensions of sense that this desire makes possible.[63]

But Beauvoir also associates the desire to disclose being with *possibility*, and this, I would argue, moves disclosure to an ontological and temporal register. Beauvoir notes,

> The goal toward which I surpass myself must appear to me as a point of departure toward a new surpassing [*un nouveau dépassement*]. Thus, a creative freedom [*une liberté créatrice*] develops felicitously without ever congealing into unjustified facticity. The creator relies on previous creations in order to create the possibility of new creations . . . . At each moment, [his project] discloses being in order to allow a further disclosure; at each

> moment, freedom is confirmed through all creation. [translation corrected][64]

The language of freedom alternates subtly with that of the creation of possibility. Here Beauvoir's account of how possibility is *created*—and not simply realized or fulfilled—has unmistakable Bergsonian resonances. Beyond the registers of consciousness and of "human signification," this disclosure can be understood as vital and material; it forms another way of "living" [*vivre*] that is held in tension with the tendency of life to "maintain itself" [*se maintenir*], a tendency in which "living is only not dying."[65] While foreshadowing the vital tendencies that Beauvoir identifies in the chapter on biology in *The Second Sex,* the function of repetition in perpetuating life is nevertheless nuanced and potentially justified in *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* under the condition that this effort be integrated into life's disclosive surpassing.[66]

In this vein, we can understand Beauvoirian creation as *normative*—as the creation of values and norms *according to which* phenomena can appear, meaning can be made, and further disclosure and creation can happen. Here, norms are not merely linguistic and conceptual, but perceptual, practical, vital, and material. Creation is not simply meaning-making, but the *rendering possible* of meaning-making. And while the creation of values sounds like a reinscription of anthropocentric and humanist perspectives (which it certainly also is), we should recall the vital and material registers in which Bergson reads norms in *Creative Evolution*: from the interval it takes sugar to dissolve in water, to the tropisms of plants, and the instincts of insects in their intercorporeal attunements.[67] All this brings Beauvoir closer to material feminisms, despite her disavowal of lives that simply maintain themselves, which she describes as "indistinguishable from absurd vegetation."[68]

Moreover—and despite standard readings that understand Bergson to have rejected the idea of possibility—I contend that

the concept of possibility has a generative sense in his philosophy (as we already glimpsed in Section 1.2). Attending more closely to Bergsonian possibility allows a rereading of the tension between the two tendencies (to want to be and to want to disclose being) that are so fundamental to Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. In his late essay on "The Possible and the Real," Bergson argues against the common misconception whereby the possible is an *unreal idea* that preexists its realization.[69] This mistakes, he claims, the logical sense of possibility for which something was possible in that nothing impeded it in theory—a negative and empty sense of possibility without efficacy (as "not impossible")—with a substantive sense of possibility; thus possibilities are thought to preexist as idea, ready-made, and waiting to be realized, whereas they still need to be created.[70] What this misconception occludes is a generative and ontological sense of possibility, in which the generative conditions (of possibility) are immanent to, and inseparable from, the creative movement itself.[71]

When possibility is taken to prefigure and delimit the real, the openness and unpredictability of the sense of futurity are lost. The future would then be no more than the *realization* of possibles already given in the present, a selection and copy of that which has been mapped and defined in advance (but is not yet real). Here time is construed as linear progression: from present to future, from possible to real. I think that Beauvoir's concept of the will to be follows this linear schema; being is taken to be predefined, and one desires to coincide with it, to realize it, in a mimetic logic that elides its unpredictable becoming. But the open-endedness of this linear arrow of time is illusory. Wanting to be has a closed logic in which futurity is anticipated based on presence and possibility is modeled on what is already given.

However, the creative movement of generative possibility that is the desire to disclose being has an inverse directionality that destabilizes the linear logic of the will to be. This corresponds, I believe, to

what Bergson calls the "retrograde movement of the true": the logic by which an event, once posed, begins at that very moment to *have been possible*.[72] In my reading of Bergson, this retrograde inscription of possibility is not simply a psychological reinterpretation of the past, but an ontological reconfiguration.[73] This is not a mere addition of events to the past, as if it were a container; for the past is not a closed sum of events, but a virtual whole that is incomplete and open (as we saw in Section 1.2). The past is dynamically reconfigured as events pass and are virtually inscribed within it. Significant events act as magnetizing elements, as norms, reorganizing the web of past relations and affectively redistributing them—making prominent, in this way, previously concealed relations and structures.[74] The past is thus recast simultaneously with the present in a *nonlinear time*. In this way, what was unimaginable can become possible; the past comes to hold new possibilities, inscribing different virtual planes and dimensions of sense.

Returning to Beauvoir's account of creative freedom, this means, I think, that disclosive events and creative actions are transformative in a deep ontological sense. They make themselves possible at the same time as they become real; these actions are also imaginary inscriptions.[75] It is noteworthy that, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, generative possibility is a movement that does not call for the realization of what it makes possible (in a continuity that would see it become a stable acquisition), but that asks to become the ground for further efforts of opening possibility. It confirms itself in a repetition that is destabilizing and autocritical ("autocontesting" in Deutscher's sense), a continuity that is woven out of discontinuity.[76] And it is in this way that it "develops felicitously without ever congealing into unjustified facticity."[77] This reference to congealed facticity reminds us that, while the desire to disclose being destabilizes the pretension to be, it can also be undermined by it. Neither tendency is definitive, nor can either one be effaced. Every reconfiguration of being

leaves an irreversible trace: whether in disclosing a new normative level according to which actions, hitherto unimaginable, become possible, or in attempting to congeal and stabilize being by repeating routes already mapped out, so that they become felt as the only "possible" routes, ruts according to which habituated action takes place. Whether as buoyancy, making possible further creation, or as painful weight that delimits and maps my practical possibilities, the past is felt and materialized in the present and shapes my horizon of futurity.

Here Beauvoir provides a crucial supplement to Bergson's account of possibility. The action of realizing possibles, taken to be mapped in advance, is not simply an illusion; it too is a tendency that confirms itself through its repetition, materializing these possibles in bodily habits, weighing us down in them, and rendering them intractable and even more probable. Thus the seeming fixity, passivity, and naturalization of women's situations reflect the ways our possibilities have been managed and lived. This brings us back to the reserve with which Beauvoir articulated women's possibilities and capacities in *The Second Sex*: how the possibilities of women, as becomings, have yet to be defined;[78] "how the present situation of woman makes her full development [*épanouissement*] difficult";[79] and "that when one considers a being who is transcendence and surpassing, it is never possible to close the books."[80] From this Beauvoirian and Bergsonian theorization of possibility, I can now critically reexamine the ways in which Beauvoir understands, and recognizes, oppression.

1.3.2. Rethinking Oppression: Muslim Women and Life as Trope of Racialization

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* Beauvoir offers what seems, at first sight, to be a clear-cut definition of oppression in terms of inhibited transcendence: " . . . every man transcends himself. But it happens that this

transcendence is condemned to fall uselessly back on itself because it is cut off from its goals. That is what defines a situation of oppression."[81] This transcendence is not without limits, but for these limits not to be experienced as oppressive, transcendence must have only those limits that the subject assigns itself.[82] Again, " . . . a man keeps his future at his disposal, if the situation still opens possibilities to him. If his transcendence is cut off from its goals, if he no longer has any hold on objects which could give him a valid content, his spontaneity is dissipated without founding anything. Then he is prohibited from justifying his existence positively and he feels its contingency with wretched disgust."[83] A closer reading hence reveals that it is not simply transcendence that is at stake, but also the resources, possibilities for creating possibilities, offered by one's situation. From an existential perspective, it can be argued that these two factors are inseparable, since the facticity of the situation takes on meaning in light of one's project. But Beauvoir also seems to assign weight and resistance (beyond the passivity of the Sartrean "coefficient of facticity") to situations; they have limitative and agential power, a vague materiality.

We thus have, on the one hand, a universal principle of transcendence, whose contents and goals are necessarily particular and finite, but which manifests a form of surpassing that Beauvoir seems to assume is (externally) recognizable as transcendence (except in the case of the active ignorance of an oppressor). On the other hand, we have a multiplicity of concrete situations of oppression that Beauvoir believes can continue to offer the resources and means for resistance, if not in the form of the creation of new possibilities, then in the mode of negative action and oppositional revolt.[84] If this resistance and revolt can be read as modes of transcendence, as I believe Beauvoir intends, then the tension between the universal principle of subjectivity and its embodied, situated positionality seems resolved. But there is an exception that troubles this reconciliation and exposes fault lines in Beauvoir's theory of oppression: This is the

case of Muslim and Arab women in both *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex.*

In discussing the child-like world of the oppressed in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*—an analogy questioned later in the text—Beauvoir notes,

> [T]he Black slave of the 18th century, the Muslim woman enclosed in the depth of a harem, do not have any tools that allows them to attack, be it in thought, be it by astonishment or anger, the civilization that oppresses them. Their behavior is defined and can only be judged within this given situation. [translation corrected][85]

Eliding the intersectional existence of Black Muslim slaves, while using slavery as a trope from which to generalize women's oppression—which Kathryn Gines has so thoroughly problematized—Beauvoir understands the infantile world of oppression to be imposed on eighteenth-century slaves and ahistorical Muslim women, but not on contemporary Western women whom she takes to have chosen to consent to, and to be complicit in, their relative oppression.[86] I would argue that this reference to the complete submission of Muslim and Arab women is not an omission on Beauvoir's part. *The Second Sex* confirms this view of Muslim worlds as unable to offer tools for resistance and allows us to glimpse some troubling reasons as to why Beauvoir thought this:

> [The Muslim world's] structure is feudal in that there has never been a state strong enough to unify and dominate the numerous tribes . . . . The religion that was created when the Arab people were warriors and conquerors professed the utmost disdain toward women . . . . The Muslim woman, veiled and shut in, is still today a kind of slave in most levels of society. I recall an underground cave in a troglodyte village in Tunisia where four women were squatting . . . . For the old withered creatures [wives], for

> the young bride doomed to the same degeneration, there was no other universe but the murky cave from which they would emerge only at night, silent and veiled.[87]

Actively ignoring her own positionality as colonial traveler—and aside from the assumption that her tourist's anecdote is representative of a culture, let alone a religion with many cultures and historical empires—the disturbing element of this reasoning is its conflation of past and present, across 1,400 years of civilizational history. Islam and Arab cultures in general are seen as without progress; they are stuck in a homogeneous, perpetual past—projected backward in the linear colonial construction of time, which Beauvoir repeats in her narrative and which was part of the self-justification of French colonialism. Theirs is a congealed facticity that does not offer normative levels upon which further creation of possibility and meaning can occur. In contrast, Western modernity, while patriarchal, is understood as open to this possibility of creating possibilities—offering tools for autocritical, potentially feminist analyses. Thus,

> For Arabs and Indians, and in many rural populations, a wife is only a female domesticated animal [*une femelle domestique*] appreciated according to the work she provides, and who is replaced without regret if she disappears. In modern civilization, she is more or less individualized in her husband's eyes; but unless she completely renounces her self . . . she suffers from being reduced to pure generality. She is *the* mistress of the house, the wife . . . . But the modern Western woman, by contrast, wants to be noticed by others as *this* mistress of the house, *this* wife, *this* mother, *this* woman.[88]

Western modernity offers the means of individuation, and ultimately of resisting oppression, that Islam and other cultures cannot. The bracketing of judgment, despite Beauvoir's reserve in *The Ethics of*

Ambiguity, does not extend to a recognition of the cultural difference by which gender itself is formed.[89] This is because the very way in which Beauvoir conceives *the* Muslim world to be stuck in the past precludes its becoming a cultural resource for resistance. Indeed, it means that this is a world that deforms life, rendering it monstrous and "disfigured" (as in the description of the Tunisian women in the cave) and less than human (*femelle domestique*). This is no longer life as fluid, plastic, able to become and transcend; it represents, rather, the withering away and atemporal reduction of life.

This dimension in Beauvoir's texts is underdeveloped in the secondary literature, and her readers might be excused for wanting to avoid it: For how could a philosopher who resisted flattening existence to a single register of sense fail so utterly when it came to the lives of Muslim and Arab women who were her contemporaries—especially since so many were the very *indigènes* living under French colonial rule, the colonized peoples in revolt whose colonial and racial oppressions her texts deployed to analogize "women's" oppression? An obvious objection to this line of critical interpretation is to point to Beauvoir's later activism on behalf of Djamila Boupacha, the Algerian woman tortured and raped by the French in the context of the Algerian war (or *les événements* as they were officially called).[90] Yet Beauvoir's radical awareness of her colonial positionality and complicity—which she makes explicit in her interventions on behalf of Boupacha—does not seem to have led to a revision of her views on Islam.[91] Her subsequent blanket statements about the oppression of women "in all the Muslim countries" make it seem that her internalization of the colonial, racializing discourse on Muslim worlds remains unquestioned.[92]

Finally, this shows how life can itself become a trope to racialize *other* women. At first view, the frameworks of existence and life work by proxy to define modern, Western civilization in opposition to its colonized cultural others (in need of civilizing and saving). The abjection of Muslim and Arab "female" life forms the vital

backdrop—the material foil—to modern, Western "women's" existence. But we should be wary of assuming that reading Beauvoir from the lens of a philosophy of life, as a material feminism, would save her philosophy from this racializing and colonial dissonance. I have just shown how the concept of life can itself admit of differences in kind, as well as in degree: between fluidity and change, on the one hand, and repetitive deformation, on the other. What is needed is a critical approach to life that takes seriously the experience of creating possibility without prejudging the normative bases and milieu from which it can emerge. Creating possibility cannot be predicted in advance, and the futurity it speaks to is, as Beauvoir realized, one that cannot be abstract or ideal, but necessarily local, concrete, living, and finite—a futurity emerging from a deep attunement to the material and intercorporeal, diverging and ramifying, tendencies of one's own situation.[93] That these tendencies may not always follow recognizable schemas of sexual difference, or familiar and generalizable, easily disentangled, lines of oppression is an idea *The Second Sex* was willing to think, if not enact.[94]

NOTES

1. The term "new materialism" appears to owe to Myra Hird's "Feminist Matters: New materialist considerations of sexual difference," *Feminist Theory* 5.2 (2004). See also the anthology titled *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).
2. *Material Feminisms* are more assemblage or rhizome than category. To see how heterogeneous the thinkers, to whom this term is ascribed, may be, compare Karen Barad's "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter" in *Material Feminisms* with Elizabeth Wilson's "Organic Empathy: Feminism, Psychopharmaceuticals, and the Embodiment of Depression" in the same volume and her "Gut Feminism" in *Differences* 15.3 (2004). Since the focus of this essay is *material life*—by which I mean materializing life and living materialities, not limited to the lives and matters that are typically recognized as organic bodies—my viewpoint tends to come closer to Wilson's.

3. The extent of this *rethinking* of materiality is what is at stake in the debate regarding material feminism on the pages of the *European Journal of Women's Studies:* between, on the one hand, Sara Ahmed ("Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the 'New Materialism'" in 2008) and, on the other hand, responses by Iris van der Tuin and Noela Davis (in 2009). Whereas Ahmed seeks to emphasize feminism's ongoing engagement with the material and biological, Davis points to the transfigured relation to, and meaning of, materiality in material feminisms. Although ostensibly about biophobia in feminism, biophobia is here evaluated in terms of how the biological and material are thought—what activity and power they are allowed.
4. For the importance of this new ontology for feminism, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
5. Rather than phenomenology (with its apparent reliance on consciousness), material feminisms often draw on the sciences of life and matter to mediate their relation to these unconscious processes.
6. To read the following well-known statement by Beauvoir phenomenologically: "that if the body is not a *thing,* it is a situation." Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Knopf, 2010), 46; ibid., *Le deuxième sexe* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1949), vol. I: 73.
7. The latter is a materiality lived and made conscious—a phenomenologically experienced materiality. These are those aspects of the living and material body that can be available to consciousness.
8. Here, I agree with Penelope Deutscher in her method of reading Beauvoir: to not minimize the theoretical inconsistencies and "conflicting registers in her writing"; rather to deploy their intermeshing to complicate Beauvoir's philosophy and draw out its autocontesting potential. See Deutscher, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 12, 17, 82, 188.
9. Margaret A. Simons, "Bergson's Influence on Beauvoir's Philosophical Methodology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir,* ed. Claudia Card (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 107–128.
10. For an analysis of Bergson's ambivalence with respect to matter, see Al-Saji, "Life as Vision: Bergson and the Future of Seeing Differently," in *Bergson and Phenomenology,* ed. Michael Kelly (Bathingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
11. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 283; *Le deuxième sexe* II, 13.
12. The full quotation: "The same vicious circle can be found in all analogous circumstances: when an individual or a group of individuals is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that he or they *are* inferior. But the scope of the verb *to be* must be understood; bad faith means giving it a substantive value, when in fact it has the sense of the Hegelian dynamic: *to be* is to have become, to have

been made as one manifests oneself." Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 12; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 25. (See also *The Second Sex*, 14; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 28.)

13. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 16; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 31. Beauvoir adds: "Every individual concerned with justifying his existence experiences his existence as an indefinite need to transcend himself" (*The Second Sex*, 16–17; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 31). Individual possibilities are defined by Beauvoir not in terms of happiness, but freedom.
14. It might even be possible to always read Beauvoir in this way—if one has the will to ignore aspects of the text that might trouble such a reading.
15. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 46; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 73-4.
16. To name a few whom I cite elsewhere in this essay: Debra Bergoffen, Penelope Deutscher, Sara Heinämaa, and Margaret Simons. To these, I add Moira Gatens, "Beauvoir and Biology: A Second Look," in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*; and Gail Weiss, *Refiguring the Ordinary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). Contrast these more positive, recuperative readings of Beauvoir with her critique by Genevieve Lloyd in *The Man of Reason: "Male" & "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
17. Sara Heinämaa gives a complex phenomenological reading of how Beauvoir understands, and why she is critical of, repetition as genealogy and experience; Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 103–105. Deutscher draws out conflicting threads in Beauvoir's diagnosis of repetition, showing how she elides the difference in repetition (*The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, 94–130).
18. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 26; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 43.
19. Ibid. Immediately preceding this, Beauvoir notes, "Rejecting any a priori doctrine, any implausible theory, we find ourselves before a fact [*fait*] that has neither ontological nor empirical basis and whose impact cannot a priori be understood. By examining it in its concrete reality, we can hope to extract its significance: thus perhaps the content of the word 'female' will come to light." (*The Second Sex*, 26; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 43)
20. See Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 73–75; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 112–115.
21. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 8; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 18.
22. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 44; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 71. Intriguingly, she continues: "we will be referring to them in all further accounts. Because the body is the instrument of our hold on the world, the world appears different to us depending on how it is grasped, which explains why we have studied these data so deeply; they are one of the keys that enable us to understand woman" (*The Second Sex*, 44; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 71). Here material and lived bodies come together.
23. Simone de Beauvoir, *Diary of a Philosophy Student: Volume 1, 1926–27*, ed. Barbara Klaw, Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, and Margaret A. Simons, with

Marybeth Timmermann (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 247. See also Margaret A. Simons, *Beauvoir and the Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 193–196.

24. In *Beauvoir and* The Second Sex, Margaret Simons notes Bergson's influence both with respect to childhood becoming (193) and with respect to the appropriation of the idea of *élan vital* (195), but she does not bring them together.
25. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1998), 5–7; *L'évolution créatrice* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1907), 5–7.
26. Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 53; *L'évolution créatrice,* 53.
27. Ibid., *Creative Evolution,* 89; *L'évolution créatrice,* 90.
28. Ibid., *Creative Evolution,* 99; *L'évolution créatrice,* 100.
29. Ibid., *Creative Evolution,* 117; *L'évolution créatrice,* 118.
30. Ibid., *Creative Evolution,* 118; *L'évolution créatrice,* 119–120.
31. Ibid., *Creative Evolution,* 13; *L'évolution créatrice,* 13. See also Keith Ansell Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life* (London: Routledge, 2002), 80, 95–96.
32. Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 2, 4; *L'évolution créatrice,* 2, 4.
33. Ibid., *Creative Evolution,* 6; *L'évolution créatrice,* 6.
34. Pure repetition is an abstraction for Bergson (*Creative Evolution,* 46; *L'évolution créatrice,* 46).
35. Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 99; *L'évolution créatrice,* 100. The multiplicity of tendency should not be understood as numerical; rather, life can be understood as virtual difference within itself and actual divergence from itself, as developing "in the form of a sheaf [*gerbe*]." (Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 119; *L'évolution créatrice,* 119).
36. Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 7; *L'évolution créatrice,* 7.
37. Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind,* trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1992), 21; *La pensée et le mouvant* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1938), 13.
38. Bergson, *Creative Mind,* 188; *La pensée et le mouvant,* 211.
39. Gilles Deleuze, *Le bergsonisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 108.
40. For his account of the future, see Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 339–340; *L'évolution créatrice,* 339.
41. "*[U]ne réalité qui se fait à travers celle qui se défait.*" Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 248; *L'évolution créatrice,* 248. See also 245; 246.
42. Artificial in the sense of the French "artifice": "in the human species nature can never be separated from artifice." (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 548; *Le deuxième sexe* II, 362)
43. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 28; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 47. According to Beauvoir, these tendencies are seen already at the reproductive level, in species that

reproduce through sexual differentiation: "Without the egg's prescience, the sperm's action would be useless; but without the latter's initiative, the egg would not accomplish its vital potential. The conclusion is thus that fundamentally the role of the two gametes is identical; together they create a living being in which both of them lose and surpass themselves." (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 29; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 47) But she adds that superficially the male element is identified with change and the female with stability.

44. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 33–34; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 54–55.
45. Ibid., *The Second Sex*, 34–35; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 56.
46. Ibid., *The Second Sex*, 46; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 73.
47. "Their opposition is not, as has been claimed, one of passivity and activity: not only is the ovum nucleus active, but the development of the embryo is also a living process and not a mechanical one. It would be too simple to define this opposition as one of change and permanence: the sperm creates only because its vitality is maintained in the egg; the ovum can only exist by surpassing itself or else it regresses and degenerates" (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 38; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 61).
48. "*Maintenir c'est nier la dispersion des instants, c'est au cours de leur jaillissement affirmer la continuité; créer c'est faire éclater au sein de l'unité temporelle un présent irréductible, séparé.*" Beauvoir continues: "and it is also true that for the female it is the continuity of life that seeks to realize itself in spite of separation, while separation into new and individualized forces is brought about by male initiative" (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 38; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 61).
49. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 72; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 111. And *The Second Sex*, 75; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 115.
50. Ibid., *The Second Sex*, 74; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 113–114.
51. Ibid., *The Second Sex*, 44; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 71.
52. Translation corrected. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 45–46; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 73.
53. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 279; *Le deuxième sexe* II, 9.
54. Ibid., *The Second Sex*, 283; *Le deuxième sexe* II, 13.
55. This could also be articulated by means of Beauvoir's understanding of situation: "Biological and social sciences no longer believe there are immutably determined entities that define given characteristics like those of the woman, the Jew, or the black; science considers characteristics as secondary reactions to a *situation*" (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 4; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 12). In other words, the biological is given form in negotiation with the environmental and the cultural.
56. Grosz, *Time Travels*, 48.
57. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 48; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 77.
58. See Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 5; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 14–15. In Heinämaa's reading of Beauvoir, "women's subjection is a human formation founded on and sustained by nothing else than repeated acts of devaluation and oblivion." But

there is also a "contingent basis" of this repetition, in sexual differentiation according to reproductive labor. (*Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference,* 103–104.)

59. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 548; *Le deuxième sexe* II, 362.
60. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1948), 12; *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1947), 17. I note that Beauvoir uses the language of "tending toward *[tendre vers]*" in this context (13;18). See also 23; 31.
61. For an elaboration of several of these registers, see Debra Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 76–77.
62. For existence, see Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* 30; *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté,* 39–40. For freedom, see *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* 24, 70; *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté,* 31, 89.
63. Beauvoir, *Ethics,* 41; *Pour une morale,* 54.
64. Ibid., *Ethics,* 27–28; *Pour une morale,* 36–37.
65. Ibid., *Ethics,* 82–83; *Pour une morale,* 104.
66. A surpassing that must, moreover, have only those limits that it sets itself. Beauvoir, *Ethics,* 83; *Pour une morale,* 104.
67. Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 9, 106–114, 146–147; *L'évolution créatrice,* 9, 107–115, 147.
68. Beauvoir, *Ethics,* 83; *Pour une morale,* 104.
69. In Bergson, *Creative Mind,* 91–106; *La pensée et le mouvant,* 99–116.
70. Bergson, *Creative Mind,* 102–103; *La pensée et le mouvant,* 112–113.
71. "Generative possibility" is my own term that I develop by extending Bergson. Of Bergson's readers, it is Vladimir Jankélévitch who also addresses possibility, calling it "organic possibility" or germ. See Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 216–218.
72. Bergson, *Creative Mind,* 22, 101; *La pensée et le mouvant,* 14, 111.
73. Bergson is sometimes ambivalent about the "retrograde movement of the true," which leads to its being read as psychological illusion. In my reading of Bergson, this movement becomes an illusion when it follows a mimetic logic that is projected onto the future. See Al-Saji, "When Thinking Hesitates: Philosophy as Prosthesis and Transformative Vision," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50.2 (2012): 351–361.
74. Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire: Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1896), 184–185, 190.
75. An example from Bergson helps clarify this: When he was asked to predict what the next great dramatic work of the future would be, Bergson famously replied that had he been able to conceive it, he would have written it. The work was not yet possible; it would become possible, once it was created. See *Creative Mind,* 100; *La pensée et le mouvant,* 110.

76. Deutscher, *Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, 17.
77. Translation corrected. Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 27–28; *Pour une morale*, 36.
78. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 45; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 73.
79. Ibid., *The Second Sex*, 556; *Le deuxième sexe* II, 372.
80. Beauvoir uses the language of realization to describe capacities just before she adds this important caveat (*The Second Sex*, 46; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 73).
81. Translation modified. Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 81; *Pour une morale*, 102.
82. Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 83; *Pour une morale*, 104. It is unclear how to reconcile this with Beauvoir's view that, in situations of complicity or bad faith, oppression may so mutilate one's capacities and possibilities that its limits are internalized and naturalized to the situation.
83. Translation corrected. Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 30; *Pour une morale*, 40.
84. Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 81, 83, 84; *Pour une morale*, 102, 104, 106.
85. Ibid., *Ethics*, 38; *Pour une morale*, 51. The analogy is questioned on 141; 175.
86. Ibid., *Ethics*, 38; *Pour une morale*, 51. See Kathryn T. Gines, "Comparative and Competing Frameworks of Oppression in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 35.1–2 (2014): 251–273.
87. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 92; *Le deuxième sexe* I, 139–140. I chose only two quotations that I think are representative of Beauvoir's views on Muslim worlds from *The Second Sex*, but there are a number of others that confirm this line of analysis.
88. Translation corrected. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 570; *Le deuxième sexe* II, 390–391. *"Femelle domestique"* carries the sense of both domesticated animal (understood as less than human) and subservient or servant in French; the combination of the two senses is what makes this term particularly pejorative, which the 2010 translation as "female servant" misses.
89. See Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 68.
90. Simone de Beauvoir, "Pour Djamila Boupacha," *Le Monde*, June 2, 1960. Available at http://www.lemonde.fr/archives/
91. It was, after all, possible to read the decolonial struggle of the FLN in Algeria as political, socialist, and revolutionary—to bracket Islam as religion and take it out of this equation.
92. Caroline Moorehead, "A Talk With Simone de Beauvoir," *New York Times*, June 2, 1974. Available at http//www.nytimes.com/1974/06/02/archives/ Beauvoir's later interventions with respect to the Iranian, explicitly Islamic, revolution in 1979 raise similar questions.
93. Beauvoir, *Ethics*, 128; *Pour une morale*, 159.
94. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 765; *Le deuxième sexe*, 661.