Simone de Beauvoir and the Scene of Religion

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Contents

Abstract

Simone de Beauvoir, existential philosopher, avowed atheist and award-winning novelist, has received substantial analysis as a philosopher in her own right, but scant treatment of the theme of religion in the body of her work. This study demonstrates that not only is “religion” a persistent figure in her writing, but that her existential ethic is constituted by a relocation of faith, situating it firmly in her philosophy of ambiguity. I am arguing that the unavoidable presence of faith in her philosophy emerges from the fact of Beauvoir’s own social, intellectual and historical context, a context that I am introducing as a theoretical figure called the "scene of religion." Beauvoir's writings testify to her rejection of the vertical tradition of faith in an unattainable transcendent heavenly Other, and to her horizontal relocation of the coordinates of existence. The transcendent is now addressed between free persons, and faith is the condition of their response to one another. Drawing on the theoretical resources of Jacques Derrida and Michel de Certeau, I cultivate a description of “the scene of religion” that offers both a site and a play of forces at work in Beauvoir’s philosophy. In this scene, Beauvoir's philosophy operates as an agent of auto-immune resistance, and, at the same time, enjoins one to acts of religion in its call to originary faith.

This study contributes to a hitherto neglected theme in Beauvoir studies. As well, it situates her thought within a viable, if marginalized, *theoria* for the study of religion, bringing together for perhaps the first time these three French intellectuals. This reading of the existential faith required in Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy provokes

different thinking of the play of religion in the contemporary world, and offers renewed resources for the analysis of religion in the broader context of global capitalism.

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Introduction

"'May I not be separated from thee.' Not without thee."

Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*[1]

The title of this study invokes its central problems: how does one understand the "scene of religion"? What is given in the writings of Simone de Beauvoir that places her thought in the scene of religion?

The name "Simone de Beauvoir" generally evokes "feminism," "existentialism," and "atheism," but rarely "religion." A prolific writer of novels, philosophy and criticism, her body of work comprises a continuous engagement with figures that can be identified with what is popularly called "religion." For example, her autobiography details her own deeply pious Catholic girlhood and her subsequent rejection of that tradition, usually read as a movement away from religion. This study is moved in part by a desire to interrogate religion as a situated historical scene; it is also moved by the questions that arise in Beauvoir's texts regarding the persistence of figures in her thought that can best be situated in this scene of religion. Beauvoir continues to deploy the images and language of her early 20th-century French Catholic education throughout her five decades of literary production. Even more saliently, she engages a structure of relationship in her ethics and reflections that clearly emerge from her particular context, the European context that performs the scene of religion.

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[1] Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 1.

What is the scene of religion? The academic study of religion is concerned with the problem of defining religion, from within a variety of functional and critical perspectives. For reasons given more fully in subsequent chapters, I am following a discourse about religion offered in Derrida and Certeau, in order to understand the tropes of religion in Beauvoir. I am introducing a figure I am calling the scene of religion as both historically situated and as a performance. This scene is, according to my reading of Beauvoir against Derrida and Certeau, the culmination of those impulses toward identity, unity and totalization, often "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy," that gather in the Greek and Roman worlds, and rise and fall in momentum in the institutions of Christianity. These impulses continue to evolve into the present techno-liberal capitalist economic and political hegemony of our contemporary world, wherein demands for social and political conformity are always already undone by the play of teeming heterogeneous forces. Exhibiting a logic of *différance,* the machinery that reproduces this scene involves a binary of resistance that creates and dismantles identities, a binary that Derrida observes as involving "faith" and "knowledge" in a play of autoimmunity. In this play, the desire to protect, preserve and indemnify a certain knowledge, and its power, produces resistance against that which threatens it, a thrusting out, which ironically produces the very disturbance that the attempt to indemnify seeks to prevent. Beauvoir and her *Ethics of Ambiguity* are an instance of this resistance. The desire that drives this play is at the same time the desire which opens into faith, and the response to the other that she claims founds the meaning of our lives.

Certeau offers a detailed reading of this play in the moment of the mystic turn, a moment that can be seen as the prologue to the present economic and political hegemony. The mystics of 16th and 17th century Europe rebel against a dogma and orthodoxy that ceases to speak to them the living word of the One who is absent: their resistance takes the form of a “manner of speaking,” which is itself a performance of a kind of faith, a commitment to communicate truly their knowledge of that which is absent, a commitment which must be expressed heterogeneously. A consequence of this mystic turn is the failure of the mystics to restore the "Body” of the One - either as the Church “faithful”, or in scriptural exegesis, or in history. They are doomed to wander in search of that absence, and to identify that which is not the One. At the same time, the institutions of European Christianity push back against the mystic incursion on their hegemony and, in the process, they incorporate the mystic forms, if not their spirit. These tropes of the mystic discourse are then subject to the same play of indemnification and resistance, a play which produces the iterations that constitute the social and political context of Beauvoir’s life: the bourgeois French Catholic milieu of the early 20th century.

Beauvoir inherits this post–mystic iteration of the Catholic Church, a Church which further saw the surrender of its power to the emerging economic and political matrix of the modern state, and which redoubles its efforts to gather and bind dogma and practice. She also inherits the self-as-subject, freighted with the Enlightenment’s focus on the autonomy of the rational self, especially from Kant and Hegel. Beauvoir’s philosophical reflections lead her to the figure of ambiguity, which acknowledges,

among other things, that a human is both singular subject and at the same time social object, and that meaning can only ever arrive for the individual through her engagement with others.

The particular iteration of the scene of religion that manifests in Beauvoir's writing exhibits an unending desire for union with an "other,"[2] at the same time that her philosophy asserts the impossibility of any absolutes. She also enjoins us to an act of faith with the other that, contingent and fraught with risk, is the condition for any relationship. Like the Mystics of the 16th and 17thcentury that Certeau situates, Beauvoir resists a Word, an institution, a practice that no longer speaks truth, while struggling to discover, through her discourse, a regime that can. In locating Beauvoir in the scene of religion offered by Derrida and Certeau, we face a double injunction: on the one hand, her own texts and especially her ethic, are subject to the very logic of *différance* that deconstruction reads; on the other hand, Beauvoir exhibits an awareness of and sensitivity to the aporetic in her existential philosophy, an awareness of what she calls "ambiguity," one that exceeds the machinery of autoimmunity. This reading of Beauvoir's ethic intends to show that the figures and tropes of the scene of religion - the call of and response to the other - move in the philosophy of an existential atheist. This movement in Beauvoir's philosophy enjoins a re-thinking of religion as it is commonly deployed as a category, and especially its use in the critique of contemporary social and political conflicts.

[2] Throughout this dissertation, I will frequently refer to the philosophical concept of the "other," sometimes in lower case, sometimes in upper case, and sometimes within quotation marks, following its treatment by the author in question.

In the opening pages of *the Mystic Fable,* Michel de Certeau quotes the medieval Christian prayer, the *Anima Christi: "May I not be separated from thee."* [3] In the ancient prayer, the antecedent for the pronoun "thee" is the divine being; for Certeau, in *The Mystic Fable,* the antecedent is One who is missing, the Other that drives desire in the mystic discourse. Certeau's text remains ambivalent regarding the "identity" of the One, here pointing toward the historic empty tomb in Jerusalem, there implying the One as cipher for *tout autres.* Perhaps this is a fitting epitaph for this study and a figure that can assist us in thinking together "Beauvoir" and the "scene of religion." Beauvoir's philosophical ethic takes as its axiom that we live in a world that no longer offers a unified order of meaning, but that we can make our own meaning. However, meaning can only be located in relationships, with "others." "Not without thee" in the context of Beauvoir's philosophy expresses that axiom - that there is no meaning, "without thee," without the other to whom we respond in risk and faith. "Naught, without thee" might be an existential iteration of the ancient prayer. Beauvoir's considered reflections upon the Other, the failure of metaphysics, the erosion of the traditional authorities, and the implications of the ambiguity of human existence produce an ethic, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* that is located in the scene of religion, and which appropriates the figures of religion's performance.

Chapter One surveys the state of Beauvoir scholarship as well as rehearsing the recent interrogations of the category of religion. I will show how, despite the ubiquitous engagement in Beauvoir's writings with figures of religion, there is at present a gap in

[3] Ibid.

Beauvoir scholarship which this study aims to fill. The breadth of contemporary academic discourse on religion will be reviewed in order to place Derrida and Certeau within it. Chapter Two will present the case for reading Beauvoir against Derrida and Certeau, primarily by demonstrating how their proximities to one another, educationally, intellectually, linguistically and perhaps temperamentally, show the latter as rich resources for reading Beauvoir and the scene of religion. Chapter Three will present the "scene of religion" that can be read in specific Derrida texts, including "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion at the Limit of Reason Alone," "Passions: An Oblique Offering," and *The Gift of Death.* I will then locate Michel de Certeau's *The Mystic Fable* within the scene of religion in order to examine the mystic performance which, I argue, is enacted in Beauvoir's thought. Chapter Four will survey the figure of religion in Beauvoir's autobiographies and novels, in order to establish its shape throughout her corpus, and how this iterates the themes of the scene of religion. [4] Chapter Five rehearses the emergence of the "other" as the key figure in Beauvoir texts, in her own experience and through her engagement with Hegel. It then analyses how this figure operates within her philosophical ethic. This analysis leads to a discussion of another inflection of the other in her texts - the other as a locus of unending, impossible desire - even as this other is the justification for each person's existence. Chapter Six will consider what the scene of religion performed in the ethic of Beauvoir implies for the academic discourse about religion at present.

[4] I am citing Beauvoir in English translations for the purpose of this dissertation. These translations are, to the extent of my knowledge, the best currently available.

CHAPTER ONE

The State of Scholarship: Beauvoir, Religion and the Mystic.

The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir, edited by Claudia Card, was published in 2003 as a welcome addition to scholarly discourse on the texts of Simone de Beauvoir. This volume, part of a series of "companions" to the works of select modern philosophers, emerges at the end of a decade of resurgent interest in Beauvoir, including her inclusion at last in the most prestigious edition in France, La Pléiade. It is perhaps not surprising, at first, that the Index to this book lists neither "faith," nor "religion," nor "mysticism" among its subjects when we consider that she very publically avowed her atheism. However, because Beauvoir's existential philosophy and ethic are predicated on an explicit contesting of the assumptions of metaphysics, and in particular, the metaphysics of French Roman Catholicism, the omission of these subjects in a major reference work about her thought is noteworthy. The omission of religion as a topic here is an index of the absence of any sustained examination of religion in Beauvoir's thought.

The dearth of any scholarly treatment of religion in Beauvoir's discourse can be understood, in part, within the context of the first wave of academic analysis of her work. The early focus of Beauvoir scholarship was *The Second Sex* and its significance for feminist theory, with little attention given to the fact that it is a work of philosophy by a French philosopher, and part of the philosopher's greater body of work. Fortunately,

there is now a growing body of scholarship about Beauvoir as a philosopher in the context of the European tradition. Arp, Bergoffen, Heinämaa, Holveck, Kruks, Simons and Tidd have pioneered the critical assessment of Beauvoir's engagement with and departures from the tradition of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger. The recent anthology edited by Shannon Mussett and William Wilkerson, *Beauvoir and Western Thought: from Plato to Butler,* featuring these scholars and many other established feminist philosophers, studies the pervasive influence of Kierkegaard, Marx, Bergson, Nietzsche, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty in her philosophical treatises. Mussett has also edited a collection that interrogates Beauvoir's novel, *The Mandarins,* as a philosophical discourse. Other critical studies show how Beauvoir responds to the inheritance of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche with a fearless, steady and broad critique of the bourgeois capitalist hegemony in which we dwell.[5] What all of these studies confirm is that while Beauvoir refused to be labelled a "philosopher," by which she understood someone who devises a totalizing system, she is, according to a broader understanding of the word, a serious, well read and able philosophical thinker.

Some of these studies bear more directly on the reading of Beauvoir that I propose, and merit a brief review. In the past 20 years, with the publication of Beauvoir's letters and student diaries, there has been a re-evaluation of Beauvoir's philosophy in relation to Sartre's, with a growing body of evidence to suggest she had already established her own existential framework before she met him. A Sorbonne

[5] Penelope Deutscher's *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008*)* focuses on her engagement with the "masters of suspicion." Sarah Bakewell, *At the Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being and Apricot Cocktails* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2016) gives a comprehensive treatment of the philosophical traditions that underwrite the existentialism of Beauvoir, Camus and Sartre.

educated *lycée* teacher of philosophy, she was clearly influenced by her own readings of the canon, especially Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche. She was encouraged to read Husserl by Sartre, and her engagement with phenomenology was also deepened by her friendship with Merleau-Ponty. [6] Bergoffen and Weiss each treat Beauvoir's debt to phenomenology and in particularly Merleau-Ponty in her discourse of embodiment. Bergoffen presents a comprehensive analysis of Beauvoir's appropriation of Husserl, Hegel, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Bergoffen argues that Beauvoir's understanding of the themes of the subject and of intersubjectivity is forged in a three-way conversation between her, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, with the result that she establishes the "erotic as a philosophical category." [7] She claims that Beauvoir saves us from Cartesian dualism by a phenomenological approach that appeals to the *erotic* subject. Where Husserl recognized that "perceptual experience reveals the necessary embodiment of the subject and the necessary intersubjectvity of the world," [8] Beauvoir notes that the fact that these subjects are sexually desiring goes unnoticed. [9] Here, Beauvoir seizes on Merleau-Ponty's temporally and spatially lived body, one that "restores to us the lived/living world." [10] This corresponds to one of the figures of ambiguity, that one is both subject and object, and the body is both lived and represented. Tracing her rejection of Sartre's "*pour-soi/en-soi"* opposition, as well as her rejection of the

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[6] See Christine Daigle and Jacob Colomb, editors, *Beauvoir and Sartre*: *The Riddle of Influence* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).
[7] Deborah Bergoffen, *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997), p. 5.
[8] Ibid., p. 15.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., p. 20.

Cartesian dualism that "cuts the body off from intentionalities of disclosure and renders it available for exploitation,"[11] Bergoffen argues that Beauvoir's turn toward the erotic is at the same time a turn away from Sartre's privileging of the "look." She claims that Beauvoir treats sight as "that which presents my body," whereas touch "blurs the boundaries." [12] Bergoffen's insight regarding the performance of touch in intersubjectivity may be a fruitful opening into Beauvoir's insistence that meaning is founded in reciprocity.

While Beauvoir insists that the other is and remains absolutely other, Bergoffen suggests that she builds a bridge across the divide through the appeal of our projects, which is also an appeal to the future. Once proposed, our projects fall into the hands of others, and in this there is risk. As Bergoffen puts it, exhibiting a Derridean insight, "the meaning of one's transcendence is its undecidability,"[13] in which one risks rejection and misappropriation. But this same risk is also the condition for recognition, and by extension, a foundation for meaning. Reflecting that, for Beauvoir, paradoxes are puzzles to be understood, not solved, Bergoffen argues that she exhorts us to face the ambiguity of intersubjectivity with a generosity that escapes calculation, a gift freely given.[14] In this, Beauvoir grounds Kant's good will in an ethic that is, unlike Kant's, radically contingent and always situated. This is the primary example of the figures of the "scene of religion" which I argue her ethic performs.

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[11] Ibid., p. 31.
[12] Ibid., p. 35.
[13] Ibid., p. 52.
[14] Ibid., p. 63.

Gail Weiss limits her discussion to the affinities between the philosophies of Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty. She observes that their connection is one of "reciprocal influence," as they were born in the same year, lived in proximity to one another, became college friends and both loved "Zaza."[15] The three common philosophical themes that Weiss identifies are that the essential ambiguity of the human condition implies ethical contingency as well as the possibility of new perspectives; that subjectivity is grounded in and arises out of intersubjective experience; and the need to address the powerful influence of social/historical contexts in shaping meanings for individuals.[16] Weiss is interested in both delineating the different paths each philosopher takes from their shared premises as well as establishing that their reciprocal influence on each other pre-dates Sartre's and is perhaps more important to understanding Beauvoir's philosophy. She wants to demonstrate that their "quite different descriptions of the essential ambiguity of human existence "complement rather than oppose each other."[17] Where Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the ambiguity of perception, a "phenomenological elucidation of a lived experience," Beauvoir is more interested in "the range of responses human beings display in the face of this ambiguity."[18] Weiss suggests that Merleau-Ponty provides for Beauvoir a strong ontological foundation for her ethical project, and that both of them regard situated intersubjectivity as the locus of

[15] "Zaza" is the pseudonym given to Elizabeth Mabille, Beauvoir's beloved childhood friend who died of suspected meningitis when only 20 years old.
[16] Gail Weiss, "Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty. Philosophers of Ambiguity." *Beauvoir and Western Thought from Plato to Butler,* edited by Shannon M. Mussetttt & William S. Wilkerson (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), p. 172.
[17] Ibid., p.178.
[18] Ibid.

one's concern and the source of meaning. Quoting Merleau-Ponty, "all our actions have several meanings. . . because others are the permanent co-ordinates of our lives." [19]

Beauvoir's insistence on addressing the particularity of each human existence, its particular situation at a given moment, its singularity in an existent person, is addressed in a recent study by Emily Ann Parker, in which she explicates the technical function of the term *singularité* in Beauvoir's ethic, and compares her relational existentialism to Camus' *l'homme solitaire.*[20] Parker alerts us to the misleading translations of this term into English, and argues for its function in the overall scheme of ambiguity that drives Beauvoir's ethic. She makes the claim

> that the will to disclose being is only properly understood if it is the singularity of the other that the will to disclose being reciprocally supports. My claim is that singularity is necessary for an adequate understanding of both ambiguity and the will to disclose being. Ambiguity is a figure for the mutuality of disclosure of singularities. Authentic freedom discloses the other as other, not the other as I would prefer that she be. Existential freedom in Beauvoir is a word for ubiquitous becoming: without an origin or an end, with the necessity of symbiotic disclosure of "strange, forbidden" others. [21]

Parker's close reading of "singularity" reinforces the all-encompassing ambiguity Beauvoir responds to in her philosophy as well as cautioning against the temptation to

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[19] Ibid., p. 184.
[20] Emily Anne Parker, "Singularity in Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 53, Issue 1 (March 2015): 1- 16.
[21] Ibid., p. 6.

homogenize her exhortations, which must of necessity address the heterogeneous and contingent conditions of our relations to others.

These selections are gleaned from the long list of critical discourse on Beauvoir's philosophical writings, a list whose growing length stands in stark contrast to the almost non-existent study of "religion" in her thought. Amy Hollywood, Eliane Lecarme-Tabone and Shannon Mussett provide three exceptions.

Amy Hollywood organizes her study, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, around the curious attraction of four French atheist intellectuals to the mystic writers of the European tradition. In three sections, she reads the engagement with mystic writers in the works of George Bataille, Simone de Beauvoir, Jacques Lacan, and Luce Irigaray, situating the former within the discourse of the latter. One of the shorter chapters, "Mysticism is tempting," presents Beauvoir's approbation of Teresa of Avila in her own discussion of "The Mystic" in *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir, according to Hollywood, sees Teresa as an example of a mystic who, while given over to embodied ecstasy, never conflates this with the mere "erotomania" of her "lesser sisters," clearly testifying to these ecstasies as the embodied response to a sublime divine that is also apprehended intellectually. In this, Hollywood sees Beauvoir's account of Teresa as challenging the common figure of the woman mystic who is drawn only to embodied mystic performances. In the course of presenting Beauvoir's discussion of Teresa, Hollywood also reads Beauvoir's own admission to "mystic" experiments, drawing a tangent between Beauvoir and Bataille in her claim that

she "wanted to be everything."[22] Hollywood presents Beauvoir's life and work as fraught with ambivalence, the avowed atheist existentialist who nevertheless remains attracted to an absolute. She claims that in Beauvoir's discussion of "religiosity," woman functions as man's other, and man and "god" function for women in much the same way,[23] an observation that is important to Beauvoir's philosophical response to alterity. While Hollywood seems to aim at a disruptive reading of the figure of female mystics as presented in Beauvoir, she seems most interested in arguing that "Beauvoir's early fascination with mysticism is tied to her uneasiness with limitation and mortality,"[24] a thesis with a much different scope than what I aiming for here.

Lecarme-Tabone takes up the figure of "conversion" in Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter,* in which she argues that Beauvoir subverts the term, moving away from "religion," toward the light of existentialism, at the same time that she exhibits precisely the characteristics of con-version, a turning with and through a new insight.[25] She observes how Beauvoir repeats this re-appropriation of the tradition in her inversion of Pascal's wager: Pascal exhorts us to wager there is a god and to live accordingly, in order to keep our eligibility for the promised heaven; Beauvoir rejects this, wagering instead that the world is too beautiful to ignore now for a heaven that may not exist. Here we are introduced in a succinct way to a persistent movement in Beauvoir's

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[22] Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 120.
[23] Ibid., p. 122.
[24] Ibid., p. 123.
[25] Eliane Lecarme-Tabone, "Introduction," *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée de Simone de Beauvoir (Essai et dossier)* (Paris: Gallimard Collection Foliothèque, no 85, 2000).

thought - a dialectic of resistance and transformation that does not negate or sublate the original thesis but rather transforms it to new function.

Shannon Mussett also explicitly addresses the figure of the "absolute" in Beauvoir's *The Mandarins.* According to Mussett's reading of Beauvoir's philosophical discourses, while Beauvoir rejected the "serious" given constructs of the Absolute, she also acknowledges there is an absolute that, if it serves as both

> the foundation and goal of our actions, is to be embraced. This absolute is freedom. As Beauvoir makes explicit in her ethical works, freedom is the only absolute that does not stand over against the subject as a dominating and authoritarian force, but rather forms the very basis of the existent's praxis. [26]

Mussett then examines the "contradictions" that necessarily flow forth from this freedom in the character of Anne Dubreuilh, the protagonist of *The Mandarins,* tracing how Anne's character trajectory replicates Beauvoir's description in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* of how one might "slide" toward a genuine acceptance of her freedom and the choice it offers, to make meaning in a meaningless world. This sensitive reading does not, however, explicitly connect the function of freedom as an existential "absolute" with Beauvoir's persistent and contradictory longing for a *transcendent* absolute that is other than her own freedom, although clearly Mussett is aware of this.

Beauvoir regularly speaks of "religion," although she does not interrogate the term "religion" in any explicit way in her autobiographical account of growing up in a

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[26] Shannon Mussetttt, and Sally J. Scholz, *The Contradictions of Freedom,* p. 135.

French Roman Catholic bourgeois milieu. She simply assumes of her reader a familiarity with that tradition - its teachings, practices, expectations - as well as an implicit understanding that it belongs to the self-evident category, "religion," and then witnesses her own responses to it. As well, in *The Second Sex, All Said and Done* and *The Coming of Age,* she writes about "religion" as an object of examination with scholarly sophistication, although, unfortunately, she does not document her sources except in a most general way. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir gives a psychological and sociological analysis of "mysticism" based on her own readings of the mystic tradition of the 14th - 17th centuries, one that anticipates Amy Hollywood's schematic approach to mysticism in her study, *Sensible Ecstasy*.[27] In *All Said and Done,* she explicitly addresses the issue of her own atheism, with regard to those who lamented she had not had a proper exposure to "real Christians" or "an intelligent priest."[28] She assures us that she can quote Gospel passages by heart and that her "religious instruction was in fact very thorough."[29] In *The Coming of Age,* her review of the subject of old age in the "ethnological" and historical records, she refers to what, at that time, the late 1970s, was state of the art scholarship on ancient near eastern myth as well as critical biblical scholarship. She is thoroughly acquainted with critical exegesis, and with its interdisciplinary reliance on archeological, historical, textual, formal and source criticism. However, she shows no sympathy towards the essentialist, universalist assumptions of

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[27] Hollywood's study aims, in part, in interrogating the relationship between gender and "mystic" mode in *Sensible Ecstasy*, testing the claims of a corollary between woman with erotic/embodied "mysticism," versus man with cerebral/spiritual "mysticism," enlisting psychological, sociological and political criticism.
[28] Beauvoir, *All Said and Done,* translated by Patrick O'Brian (New York: Paragon House, 1993), p. 459.
[29] Ibid., p. 459.

Mircea Eliade and others who take a *sui generis* approach to religion. She does acknowledge a certain indebtedness to the "ethnologists," and in particular her friend and colleague Claude Levi-Strauss.[30] This acknowledgement suggests both her structuralist and sociological approach to much of this "data," as she views these traditions and their narratives as iterations of the uncritically received "serious" worldview that her philosophy consistently rejects.

It is important to acknowledge that the un-interrogated figures of religion that feature in Beauvoir's work, presented above, are not easily reconciled, if at all, with the treatment of religion that I am engaging. However, the point here is to acknowledge that although Beauvoir writes persistently about religion, her own experience with it as well as an intellectual examination of it, this theme has hitherto received scant critical attention. That said, to examine religion in Beauvoir, and its attendant, the mystic, requires locating the method and theory of my approach.

In the past 30 years, the discipline of Religious Studies in North America has undergone a theoretical revolution.[31] Thirty years ago, nascent departments of Religious Studies in North American universities struggled to establish a disciplinary identity, distinct from Faculties of Theology. Early on, departments sought to demonstrate the "science" in the study of religion as object, through multi-disciplinary

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[30] Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age,* translated by Patrick O'Biran (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996), pp 44 - 45.

[31] It must be noted that the study of religion as an object of inquiry has a much longer tradition, perhaps beginning with Humbolt and Schliermacher in the late 18th and early 19th century and their fascination with the texts of India and the ancient Near East, respectively. The currents of European philosophical thought in the 19th century, two world wars, and the intellectual response to this, profoundly influenced the study of religion there, and the "discipline" in Europe has had a different trajectory. See Hans Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) for this history. There is no doubt that the study of religion in North America echoes developments in Europe, but slowly, and in a very different context. See Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) for a review and critique of the North American version of discipline.

approaches: anthropology, archeology, psychology, philosophy, sociology and literary criticism. However, the implicit and uncritically appropriated *theoria* informing these approaches, variously called the *sui generis* or essentialist account of religion, was not broadly questioned. The structuralist essentialism of Mircea Eliade, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, served as the dominant paradigm for scholars of religion. This paradigm was an ideal choice for a relatively new discipline that needed to clearly distinguish itself from the confessional strictures of traditional theology, as it did not pose a threat to what was conceived of as a universal metaphysical truth to which all religious traditions responded.

The discourse of the linguistic turn of the 1960s and 1970s, especially that of Foucault and Derrida, continues the tradition of Critical Theory, interrogating the intellectual, political and social assumptions of the European Enlightenment. Broadly speaking, these discourses which aim at disruption and interrogation, supplant the discourse of the philosophy of religion by challenging and often dismissing its metaphysical assumptions. The lively debates that this entails lead to the emergence of new theoretical paradigms for the study of religion in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A new generation of scholars for the first time examine the classification "religion." J.Z. Smith famously declares, “there is no data for religion,”[32] not only no way of verifying or measuring the essentialist, metaphysical claims of many traditions called “religion”, but also no way of escaping the constructed character of the very categories we name to determine the genus. In this, Smith echoes a similar aporia well known in the discipline

[32] J. Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion. From Babylon to Jonestown,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.3.

of history, that the researcher only ever finds that which she is predisposed to look for in the material. Smith's insight opens the way for a range of interrogations of religion, leading some scholars to conclude that religion is a species of human behaviour, one that is not categorically different from other human behaviours. Those scholars who accept this proposition are faced with the decision to either study human traditions, labelled 'religion,' as anthropological, psychological or sociological data, or else, as Anne Taves [33] has argued, through ascription, to study these things as data that the practitioner "deems to be religious," and so finding a way to reflect the apparent popular notion of religion as a response to an essential and or universal truth, one that gives meaning and guidance to life.

Another fertile paradigm, resonant of the genealogies of Michel Foucault, has been the interrogation of religion as a situated constructed category within the power structures of a given scene. For example, Russell McCutcheon argues that in the United States, religion is a category manufactured by the powerful as a tool for hegemony, domestically and internally.[34] A hierarchy of human types displays more or less religion, as well as better or worse religions within the former group. It creates a standard by which to categorize the "other," and to valorize the current capitalist status quo. Part of this instrumental use of the category of religion includes departments of religion teaching "world religions" in a manner that establishes certain American brands of Christianity as the norm against which all others are judged, and leading to, for

[33] See Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) in which her main argument is for ascription as a way out of the impasse presented by accepting the limits of coherent discourse on the metaphysical claims of traditions.
[34] Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse of Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

McCutcheon, a lamentable inability to reflect critically in the face of the exploitation by the powerful of this declared exceptionalism. On a much broader scale, Tomoko Masuzawa examines the genealogy of the world religions paradigm, showing that it appears as a category only as post-enlightenment European scholars, faced with the discovery of a civilization older and more complex than Christendom in the Vedas and Pali sutras, invents the category "world religions" in a way that reinforces the biases of their "Orientalism," while asserting Europe as the natural heir and presumptive improvement on India. Masuzawa argues that while putatively affirming a "universal essence" to which all religions respond, the category of world religions functions to perpetuate the stereotypes of Eurocentricity and its impoverished understanding of the other.[35] Hans Kippenburg reviews much of the same documentary evidence, but takes a more sympathetic tactic, calling the "discovery" of world religions a construct that helped post-enlightenment believers and skeptics to clarify their understanding of their own tradition and their own theoretical commitments in relation to it.[36] For Kippenburg, the very emergence of a discourse of world religions is the European intellectuals' response to modernity. As he notes, prior to the Enlightenment, no one would use the term "religion" to identify one's traditions and practices. One spoke of "nations" rather than "religion," a point that finds evidentiary support.

These various theoretical "offspring" of critical theory continue to multiply. A recent trend in the study of religion is a critical theory that inherits the habits of suspicion

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[35] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions or How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
[36] Hans Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 34.

and interrogation from its antecedent, the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, but is more directly indebted to the recent Continental traditions spurred by phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, pioneered by Derrida, Foucault, Levinas and others of this milieu. Craig Martin's recent *Capitalizing Religion*[37] observes that in the debate about what it means to be critical in the study of religion, two camps seem to emerge: those who interrogate both the assumptions of the researcher and the object of inquiry in order to inform *praxis*, and those who do so simply as a resource for others. Both groups of critical theorists are faced with the aporia of, on the one hand, disclosing the structures and systems that construct a given idea or practice and, on the other hand, recognizing there is no "outside" of the construction and its contexts - that we inhabit a constructed world. The point of decision seems to reside in deciding what to do with the products of these interrogations and the various answers themselves betray other theoretical commitments that in turn must be examined.

At present, there is no broad consensus about what it means to study religion, nor even what the word signifies. Many critically informed scholars continue to offer the World Religion Paradigm in their introductory courses, even while acknowledging its fraught political and theoretical history. Those who are committed to theoretical consistency may still endorse the essentialist view of religion and its metaphysical assumptions, while others who reject this view will persist in examining those things "deemed religious," without theorizing why this category, "things deemed religious,"

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[37] Craig Martin, *Capitalizing Religion: Ideology and Opiate of the Bourgeoisie* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014): p. 34 f.

require a distinct discipline. Some of the scholars cited here reject the entire idea of the discipline as a discrete field of inquiry, and argue the work of scholars of religion can just as effectively be carried out in other disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, history and cultural studies.

For example, some examine the category religion as a datum of history, from within the discipline of history. However, the theoretical perspectives engaged in historical approaches to religion are not easily or even necessarily disentangled from what I am calling "critical theory of religion" here. For example, Masuzawa's study, historically concrete and textually situated, is structured according to a critically informed interrogation of the category of religion as European construct and the assumptions of those who produced these historical texts. Kippenberg reads the "discovery" of the category World Religions as a response to the advent of European modernity, from within a metacritical perspective that seeks to affirm the importance of historical content in understanding religion, and as an apology for the discipline of comparative religion. McCutcheon analyzes religion in North America according to the heuristics of the interrogation of power in human society. These examples demonstrate the polyvalent intellectual threads at work in the study of religion, and suggest that the various foci of contemporary critical theory are indispensable to the situated historical objects of inquiry.

Similarly, the discourse of various critical theories of religion do not operate exclusively at the level of abstractions and universalizations, but can arise out of and be validated within situated historical data, data that includes the historical texts which

scholars like Bynum Walker, Kippenberg, Masuzawa, and Taves engage as the objects of their inquiry. Two salient thinkers who have, as philosophers and contributors to contemporary critical theory, deliberately critiqued religion as both an object in history and through philosophical theory are Jacques Derrida and Michel de Certeau. Derrida is the philosopher of "deconstruction," and Certeau is a historian educated as a philosopher. Both Derrida and Certeau approach religion through close readings of specific situated texts, and both apply to their analysis similar meta-critical theories of the marginal, of play, of repetition and difference, philosophical constructions that disrupt and challenge habitual understanding. The figure of the scene of religion, which will be cultivated here from their discourses, offers the most appropriate resources for reading religion in the philosopher of ambiguity, whose own philosophy disrupted the assumptions of her time.

Derrida has interrogated religion throughout his extensive writing career. The influence of Derrida is ubiquitous in the humanities, particularly in North America, and most often in departments of literature and philosophy. However, although there are several significant discourses about Derrida's reflections on religion,[38] including a full-length commentary on Derrida's "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion at the Limit of Reason Alone," by Michael Naas, this and most other critical treatments of

[38] In particular, see John D. Caputo's *The Tears and Prayers of Jacques Derrida* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Hélène Cixous' *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Hent de Vries' *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Martin Haaglund's *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life,* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008); John Llewellyn's *Margins of Religion: Between Kiekegaard and Derrida* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Dawne McCance's *Derrida on Religion: Thinker of Difference* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2009); and Michael Naas' *Miracle and Machine: Jacques Derrida and The Two Sources of Religion, Science and the Media* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

religion in Derrida come from philosophers and literary critics. In the past 20 years, the most comprehensive discussions of Derrida on religion have been written by John D. Caputo, Hélène Cixous, Martin Haglund, Hent de Vries, Mark C. Taylor, John Llewellyn and Dawne McCance. Of these, four are philosophers and one is a literary critic: only Taylor and McCance are scholars of religion. Taylor, although a scholar of religion, appropriates Derrida's philosophical tropes; McCance is one of the only scholars of *religion* to produce a focused study of Derrida on religion as such. Even so, it is a study that does not situate Derrida in the broader critical discourses on religion, explaining, instead, approaches to his recurring figures of thought. The point of this observation is to situate Derrida within the study of religion per se: Derrida seems to have little critical traction in departments of religion in North America; however, there is significant treatment of religion in his thought by philosophers and literary critics. As a consequence, the framing of the question of religion in Derrida by these non-religionists does not specifically engage the theoretical concerns of the discipline given in the earlier summary. Nevertheless, Derrida - "Adorno's other son"[39] - can be understood as inheriting the approaches descended from the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. Winner of the 2001 Adorno Prize, he carries on the critique of metaphysics, characterized by Adorno and Horkheimer as "identity logic," and develops Adorno's intuitions in *Negative Dialectics* about a logic of play. I want to approach his work on religion on his own terms, which always involves reading specific texts and situating

[39] See. Jean Phillipe Deranty, "Adorno's Other Son: Derrida and the Future of Critical Theory," *Social Semiotics* vol. 16, issue 3 (2006): pp. 421 - 433 for a discussion of Derrida's affinity to Adorno and the Frankfurt School.

those texts - linguistically, historically, psychologically - and particularly those ways in which he comes to close to and/ or offers a perspective on Beauvoir.

Thirty years after his death, Certeau is undergoing a renaissance of interest. Philosopher, historian, member of the École Freudienne and Jesuit priest, like Derrida he exerts a broad influence in the humanities and amongst theologians. However, like Derrida, he has received little critical treatment among scholars of religion. *Spiritual Spaces: History and Mysticism in Michel de Certeau* (Leuven: Peeters Publishing, 2013) edited by Inigo Bocken, gathers 11 contributors to reflect, on the 25th anniversary of his death, on his thesis of the affinity between the rise of the "mystic" in 16th and 17thcentury Europe and the emergence of the "modern." Of these contributors, the majority are European professors of "spirituality" and theology, although three are identified as professors for Psychology of Religion, albeit in departments of Theology. In the early reception to Certeau, a great emphasis was placed on what is called a secular reading of his works, particularly his social anthropology in *The Practice of Everyday Life.* According to Bocken, there is now an interest in reading Certeau as a "historian of spirituality," and as a Jesuit faithful to his tradition to the end. It is not certain that such a confessional turn in Certeau criticism is needed or possible. For Certeau, reader of Derrida, Levinas, and Lacan, the dominant figure in Christianity is the empty tomb which orders faith as an incessant wandering, fuelled by endless desire. The insights of Certeau's discourse of "heterology" are very close to those of Derrida and Beauvoir, and while his thought is not adequately theorized within the discipline of religion, it again offers theoretical resources that illuminate Beauvoir's thought. In the

next chapter, I will give a comprehensive rationale for reading Beauvoir against Derrida and Certeau.

CHAPTER Two

The Margins of Faith

Why theorize "religion" in Beauvoir by engaging with Derrida and Certeau? The simplest answer is that these three French intellectuals, inhabiting a common intellectual scene, sharing a common education, demonstrate deep affinities in their thought. It is not inappropriate that the "thinker of *différance*" and the "historian of heterology"[40] should illuminate the thought of the "philosopher of ambiguity." Out of their common French intellectual context, these three thinkers each address the problem of the Other as the primary focus of their intellectual engagement, and with it the chain of appeal and response, promise and inheritance. All three of these thinkers engaged deeply with Roman Catholic thought: Beauvoir and Certeau raised in the practice of the institution, Derrida discoursing with the "Christian existentialists" of the 1950s; and all three are readers of the 17th century "mystic" tradition. They all exhibit a distrust of institutional orthodoxy, and seem drawn to the margins. Inhabiting and proceeding from some iteration of the existential perspective, their engagements with Otherness inevitably reflect on the location of meaning, the appeal from and towards which it is produced, the risk inherent in the appeal and the 'unending desire' that perpetually relaunches it. But whereas Beauvoir's philosophy treats the proposition that the appeal and the response are the location of meaning as axiomatic, this is theorized

[40] "Heterology" is a term used by Certeau to describe his project, but which is never precisely defined. One may infer that he understands it to mean the interrogation of "otherness" and the "other" in a field of inquiry, its attendant disruptions, and the recursive effects of this.

in Derrida and Certeau. Therefore, Derrida and Certeau offer sympathetic resources by which to examine what I claim is a relocating of the tropes of religion in Beauvoir's discourse. As I shall show, these three read and reflected on much the same philosophical canon, although in different decades of the 20th century. While it is possible to show a tangential influence of Beauvoir upon Derrida, through Sartre, and a more robust direct engagement between Certeau and Derrida, it is affinities, rather than influence, that are the object in this discussion, affinities which I wish to analyze through the theoretical structures I am reading in Derrida and Certeau.

The following rehearsal of the 20th century French intellectual milieu in which Beauvoir, Certeau and Derrida developed as thinkers is meant to provide the context for what I argue is the theoretical importance of examining religion in an atheist existential philosophy. Post-modern Europe is the conclusion to a process marked by the erosion of ecclesiastical and aristocratic authority, its brief replacement by a certain enlightenment ideal, and the critique of this ideal in the late 19th century. This movement of displacement or "perpetual departures" includes a movement away from identities constructed within the hegemony of various social practices, and toward a valorizing of the experience of the autonomous subject. This is noteworthy here because on the one hand, Beauvoir adamantly insists on the situated individual as the only possible starting point for her ethic. Therefore, it would seem that any traces of religion or mysticism in her writing would fit into a very narrow and recent discourse of

religion as private individual experience.[41] However, Beauvoir also insists on the ambiguity of the human condition, including "the truth of my solitude and my bond with the world." [42] There is no meaning within her existential perspective apart from the others to whom we appeal and to whom we respond. In a silent universe, in front of Certeau's "empty tomb" which points to the absent One, the question is this: to what do we direct the longing that characterizes our experience, given the fact of this absence? With what resources do we find meaning, meaning which can no longer be supplied by a petrified tradition or impotent institutions? Beauvoir argues for what she claims is the only possible opening - toward the others with whom we share the privilege "of being a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects . . . in turn an object for others, he is nothing more than an individual in a collectivity on which he depends." [43] Beauvoir assumes that the production of meaning is possible in the human world and, as we have seen, undertakes a substantial analysis of its requirements, at once logical and lyrical. What Derrida and Certeau offer to this discourse is a meta-theoretical scene of religion and modernity which supports Beauvoir's existential intuitions and her grasp of the responsibility of ambiguity.

Beauvoir, Certeau and Derrida are each concerned with the problem of morality, a problem predicated on the inescapable fact of our being in the world with others: as Beauvoir notes, "I concern others and they concern me. There we have an

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[41] This is the view associated with William James and one which continues to exert much traction. See G. William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997).

[42] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* translated by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1948, 1978), p. 9.

[43] Ibid., p. 7.

irreducible truth."[44] In Beauvoir, the "other" is always concrete, embodied and situated; in Derrida, the "other" also manifests as the opening, the impossible possibility, the "*umweg*" of the machinery that is the play of *différance,* that which disrupts the machine even as it reveals it. He reflects near the end of his life that "what I call 'deconstruction' even when it is directed toward something from Europe, is European; it is a product of Europe, a relation of Europe to itself as an experience of radical alterity."[45] For Certeau also, "I is other. . . . The 'problem of history' is for Certeau 'inscribed in the place of this subject, which is itself a play of difference, the historicity of a non-identity with itself.' "[46] Certeau's historiography conceives of the construction of history as an engagement between the historian and an absent past, an "other" which must be constructed, where the resulting narrative is a simulacrum of that which is now always absent. At the same time, the Other as absence is also the site in Certeau's thought of what Phillip Sheldrake terms "unending desire," a desire that Derrida sees as "a number of yes" to the impossibilities, the undecidabilities, or, in Beauvoirian terms, the contingencies and ambiguities of life.

To consider, first, the affinities between Beauvoir and Derrida: both reject the essentialism of traditional metaphysics; both react to Sartre's existentialism; both immerse themselves in Husserl, and the practice of phenomenology, but along different paths; both critique Heidegger, along similar lines. Both consider the possibility of

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[44] Ibid., p. 72.
[45] Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview* (New York: Melville House, 2007), p. 44.
[46] Marian Füssell, in "Writing the Otherness – The Historiography of Michel de Certeau SJ," quoting Certeau, p.31, in *Spiritual Spaces: History and Mysticism in Michel de Certeau*, edited by Inigo Bocken (Leuven, Peeters Publishing 2013).

ethics in a post-modern philosophical milieu. Both reject "determinate" religion, and yet are open to an "infinite horizon."

Beauvoir's diaries testify to her persistent engagement with the philosophical currents of her time. As Simons, Bergoffen, Weiss, Tidd and others have demonstrated,[47] Beauvoir read Husserl and found she had discovered "something true" there, something she would practice in her own philosophical discourse. Weiss has convincingly demonstrated that, contrary to the popular view of Beauvoir as "grande Sartreuse," her phenomenology is much closer to Merleau-Ponty's, and this is an important element in her drive to describe an "existential ethic." Beauvoir engages with the theories of her time, especially phenomenology, and assumes them to explore new theories of her world; Derrida engages with phenomenology and theorizes the limits of this theory. Beauvoir rejects religion, sharing with Derrida a profound mistrust of institutions, and yet nurtures faith – in others. Derrida theorizes religion, and there reveals an originary faith. Beauvoir and Derrida exhort us to responsibility, and despite the gap between them in procedure and assumptions, adopt the same attitude toward the moral problem, a moral problem that can only ever be be situated in human relationships.

In this regard, Certeau shares a common focus with Beauvoir and Derrida. Certeau's literary executor, Luce Giard, observes that he was driven by the question,

[47] See *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Wendy O'Brien and Lester Embree in *Contributions to Phenomenology* volume 43 (Springer Netherlands, 2001).

> how are lasting social communities able to associate conflicting individuals: how could "union" be made acceptable between persons and social groups separated by their "differences" and eager to preserve them? The phrase *l'union dans la différence* was the subtitle of his first book. [48]

In light of this we may understand his persistent engagement with "heterology," and in particular the mystic expression. Like Beauvoir and Derrida, Certeau is the product of the robust French system of higher education in the first half of the 20th century, studying philosophy before turning to the discourse of history and the Jesuit priesthood. Derrida and Certeau were intellectually engaged with one another in a direct way. Giard narrates how Certeau, having been blinded in a car accident, complained of having a difficult time reading the book in his backpack:

> When remembering the dark days spent at the hospital after the accident (for a few days, physicians could not tell if he would survive), he would say: "I was afraid that I had turned idiot and nobody was telling me the truth. I had a book in my bag on the day of the crash, I tried again and again to read it but I could not make sense of the words." Well, that book was Jacques Derrida's newest, *De la Grammatologie,* which did not provide the easiest reading-test for a patient with several

[48] See Luce Giard, "Michel de Certeau's Biography: Petite Bibliographie en anglais." Jesuites.com, February 5, 2006. http://www.jesuites.com/histoire/certeau.htm#bio. Website 12 March 2017.

> fractured bones, recovering from serious surgery on his face, and waiting for another delicate operation on his eye. [49]

Even Certeau's diction is resonant of Derrida's, appropriating the language of trace, difference, margin, desert, limit and deconstruction in his discourse. As Certeau is a reader of Derrida, Derrida also pays homage to Certeau in his essay, "A Number of Yes," which he begins by stating

> Yes, in a foreign land. We must have come across each other most often in a foreign land. These encounters retain an emblematic value for me. Perhaps because they took place elsewhere, far away, but more surely because we never separated without a promise; I have not forgotten. Nor have I forgotten what Michel de Certeau writes of writing in the mystical text: through and through, it is also a promise. [50]

The essay proceeds as a careful reading of Certeau's *Mystic Fable* and the questions that arise from what Derrida characterizes as the "scene of yes," the scene that is the ground of everything. Elsewhere, Derrida's encounter with Certeau is present in the 1993 "*Sauf le Nom,"* [51] in which Derrida considers the undecidable role of apophasis in deconstruction, through a reading of Angelus Silesius that can only be described as Certeauian. In short, the intellectual culture inhabited by Beauvoir, Certeau and Derrida brought them into close intellectual proximity of one another, and inclined them toward similar intellectual problems.

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Jacques Derrida, "A Number of Yes," *Qui Parle, 2.2* (Fall 1988): p. 120.
[51] Jacques Derrida, *On the Name,* translated by David Wood (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1993).

For an efficient review of 20th century French intellectual history, I turn to Edward Baring's *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy,1945 - 1968*.[52] Baring examines the unpublished archives of Derrida's early student writings and, as a historian of ideas, places Derrida in the specific context of French higher education and intellectual culture. His perhaps unexpected findings show that Derrida was strongly influenced by both Sartre and the Christian existentialists during this period, and he argues that Derrida's interest in "mysticism" and "God" persists throughout his life.[53] He begins his study by observing the context in which Derrida's philosophical career began:

> As the final shots of the Second World War rang out, Michel Foucault was eighteen, Jean Baudrillard was sixteen, Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida were fifteen, while Gilles Deleuze was twenty. They all emerged into philosophical consciousness at the height of the existentialist explosion in French philosophy and culture, a philosophical movement unrivalled in its ability to appeal to young students and which initiated a "golden era" in French intellectual history as philosophers wrestled over its legacy.[54]

At the end of World War II, Beauvoir was 38, and in full career of her literary project, having seen the release of *L'Invitée* (1943), *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (1944) and *Le Sang des*

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[52] Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy,1945 – 1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[53] Ibid., p. 5f.
[54] Ibid., p. 2.

autres (1945), and already 17 years into her life-long relationship with Sartre, who had published *Being and Nothingness* in 1943.

In this atmosphere, the young Derrida "aligned himself - though as we shall see, not without some reservations, - with Sartre."[55] Baring observes that Sartre and Sartre's reading of Husserl and Heidegger exerted an enormous influence upon the thought of the young Derrida, as Sartre did upon Beauvoir, although both Beauvoir and Derrida eventually depart from the Sartrean. More importantly, his study reveals to us that Derrida and Beauvoir are pursuing the same question, the moral question: what morality is possible in an existentially conceived world? Beauvoir and Derrida arrive at different answers while using similar scaffolding and, in the end, they articulate profound resonances, although in different modalities.

Baring demonstrates that Derrida's education and philosophical development,

> show that he was the product of the wider French intellectual community . . . not the protégé of a particular school or movement, but was nourished by several: he was engaged by existentialism, drew on the strengths of phenomenology, and learned from the rigour of structuralism. . . institutionally and intellectually he occupied a central position in French intellectual life." [56]

According to Baring, "two important axes" in French intellectual life during this period are the "dual strands of communist and Christian thought," and the move from "humanism to anti-humanism," vague terms of which "nobody really knew exactly what

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[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., p. 3.

they meant," but whose vagueness "reached across political and philosophical divides."[57] The term "humanism" was, in 1945, embraced by communists, Christian existentialists and atheist existentialists, notably Sartre. Later, the "anti-humanist" movement - largely a reaction against Sartrean humanism, "allowed for rapprochement between structuralist Marxism, Christian Heideggerianism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis."[58] Baring observes that while Derrida followed these broad intellectual trends, he "cleaved closer to the Christians, for whom the humanist assertion of Man's need for God and the anti-humanist rejection of the autonomous self were never so dramatically opposed," possessing a kind of philosophical humility that Derrida, too, demanded.[59]

Baring insists that the young Derrida's thought can and should be understood within the context of French Catholic philosophy, largely because this was the milieu in which he received his education, "the milieu in which deconstruction first developed." [60] However, Baring is not arguing that Derrida should be seen as "substituting one religious identity for another," but rather that his thought developed within a Christian philosophical genealogy "at a particular moment of French intellectual history."[61] He notes the attention paid to Derrida's "Jewish" identity, an identity Derrida claims to have had a conflicted engagement with,[62] as well as recent claims that "religion" is a theme that only emerges in Derrida's thought in middle-age. Baring wishes to counter this. It

[57] Ibid., p. 4.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., p.5.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., p. 7.
[62] See Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally,* p 39.

is necessary to note that, as a historian of ideas, Baring is not sensitive to the problem of the term "religion" per se, and so does not interrogate it. His intention in tracing the influence of French Catholic philosophy, and especially Christian existentialism, is that it provides "new means for understanding the stakes of deconstruction."[63]

Baring contests some recent work which presents Derrida as a "radical atheist,"[64] a claim he does not find supported in Derrida's work. That said, Baring argues that the "religious resources that Derrida relied upon were used to destabilize the thought of Man, and not to construct a thought of the divine." [65]

> . . . . the religious genealogy of Derrida's thought can never be the ground for a simple rejection - or indeed embrace - of deconstruction. Even at his most religious, Derrida's appeal to the resources of a Christian tradition always arose from an internal critique of secular thought. Derrida probed first Sartre's existentialism, then a phenomenology of science, and finally Althusser's Spinozist Marxism, and for internal reasons found them all wanting. God was an axiom Derrida could do without; his anti-foundationalism was consonant with religious tradition criticizing human arrogance, but he never proposed substituting a final religious ground. [66]

In the section titled "Derrida Post Existentialist," Baring situates the young Derrida's early thought squarely in the jaws of Sartre's famous lecture, "Existentialism is

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[63] Baring, *The Young Derrida,* p. 7.
[64] Baring disputes the thesis of Martin Haaglund's *Radical Atheism* as an astute mis-reading of Derrida.
[65] Ibid., p. 8.
[66] Ibid., p. 9.

a Humanism." Within the intellectual context of this lecture, different "humanisms" competed against each other: the Catholic existentialists, of whom Gabriel Marcel was a proponent, used the term as "a tool for opposing other parties,"[67] and accepted a version which still held to a certain metaphysical theism and they rejected the atheistic humanism of Comte, Marx and Nietzsche.[68] On the other side, post-war French Marxist humanists, a marginal group before the war, now became a useful resource to the Communist Party by deploying the "word of the minute."[69] These would be cast in relief against the "existential humanism" of Sartre. In the writing of Henri Lefevre, Marxist humanism differed from Sartrean "humanism" in that it did not ignore how the alienation produced by modern division of labour "reduced Man to his product" [70] and did not allow for the degree of freedom Sartre argued. Lefebvre accused Sartre's "humanism" of being the "narcissism of the pure intellectual" that gave no hope for changing material conditions. Baring asks us to consider this intense political context for Sartre's lecture when considering Derrida's engagement with Sartre.

In this reading of Sartre's lecture, Sartre brilliantly navigates these political camps, by "sneaking" subjectivity into the Marxist camp, arguing that materialism was in fact the real source of objectification of human beings; and arguing for his existential project because it is predicated on a shared condition: not a human essence, but the limitations of our shared finitude and mortality.[71] The desire to change the world, to

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[67] Ibid., p. 29.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., p. 27.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., p.32.

"surpass such limitations," is a universal to which he appealed, both as a source of solidarity and as a means of facilitating subjective freedom.[72] On this basis, Sartre argues that this "existential humanism" is also the Communists' goal, a "desire to realize freedom concretely, to ensure the conditions for its occurrence in the world was also the desire to will it for all."[73] According to Baring, this return to a kind of Kantian formalism produced "strategic demands" about how one could "socialize existential freedom, which remain a focus for his ongoing thought up through his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* fifteen years later."[74] Yet, at the same time that Sartre attempted to bring the Marxists in, he exhibited great hostility to the "Christian existentialists," arguing atheistic existentialism was more coherent, for whom "atheism was an axiom, never a conclusion."[75] Baring observes that despite this, the Christian existentialists would not necessarily disagree with Sartre's understanding of the demands existentialism places on us. His attempt to co-opt existentialism purely for atheists "had no purchase on the Christian existentialists,"[76] a possible explanation of Derrida's continued engagement with existentialism despite his critique of Sartre, and of the specific influence of the Christians on his thought.

Derrida came to philosophy, according to his own admission, through a "broadcast about Camus that set him on his path."[77] In the late 1940s and early 50s, in

[72] Ibid., p. 33.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., p. 34.
[76] Ibid., p. 34.
[77] Ibid., p. 49.

the French academic system, "for or against existentialism, nobody could ignore it." [78] In this milieu, "from his earliest extant essays, those written when he was only sixteen, Derrida showed an allegiance to existentialist philosophy, with an almost total reliance on Sartre's vocabulary," [79] although at the same time, he "did not spare Sartre himself from criticism. " [80] Baring asserts that existentialism was attractive to Derrida because it announced the possibility of a moral philosophy. In this description, Baring explicitly links Derrida to Beauvoir, in that they both seized on the opportunity to develop a moral philosophy:

> Derrida's emphasis on morality was not a lone response to Sartre's corpus. It was a focal point for numerous supporters and opponents, whether Francis Jeanson or Simone de Beauvoir's attempts at the construction of an atheistic existentialist morality or the Christian criticism of that very possibility.[81]

Derrida cites Sartre's "mantra" - "Man's existence precedes his essence" as a "path beyond moral nihilism."[82] For Derrida, at this stage, "a will constrained to act in a particular way could not be regarded as moral," [83] a phrase reminiscent of Beauvoir's assertion, that "moral consciousness can exist only to the extent that there is a disagreement between nature and morality. It would disappear if the ethical law became the natural law,"[84] since natural law exceeds the precincts of choice and the freedom it

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[78] Ibid., p. 50.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., p. 51.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 10.

is founded upon. While Sartre's affirmation of absolute human freedom offered a philosophical basis for morality, one that could transcend nihilism, at the same time, Derrida saw Sartre as giving up on the possibility of outlining a moral system, and the possibility of transcendent value.[85] For this reason, although deeply marked by Sartre's account of the existential human condition, Derrida began to turn away from Sartre.

> For Derrida, Sartre erred when he went beyond the sure ground of phenomenological description and started to infer a deductive conceptual system, positing the ontological opposition between Being and Nothingness . . . Existentialism, for Derrida, arose from the recognition that human knowledge is limited; existential [*sic*] description was intended to challenge any given ontology, not inform one.[86]

At the École Normale Supérieure, Derrida also encountered the Christian existentialism of Gabriel Marcel, the thinker "credited with coining the term "existentialism" itself in his *Journal Métaphysique*.[87] "Marcel applied himself to real and concrete confrontations with existence, confrontations that challenged rather than reinforced our faith in reason to explain and dissect."[88] Marcel's objection to Sartre's ontology was that it moved "away from his enlightening existential analysis," and this was precisely what Marcel attempted to disrupt. Marcel accused Sartre of deliberately denying the "we-subject," resulting in a "philosophy failure."[89] However, Marcel remained committed to the possibility of transcendence:

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[85] Baring, *The Young Derrida,* p. 52.
[86] Ibid., p. 54.
[87] Ibid., p.58.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

> where it opens, not perhaps upon but toward a supra-human experience that probably cannot become ours, authentically and durably, this side of death, but of which the reality is attested to by the mystics, and the possibility is guaranteed by a reflection that refuses to be prisoner of the postulate of absolute immanence.[90]

Simone Weil, another early touchstone for Derrida, echoed Marcel, and it was her "meditations on philosophical and mystical questions (*La pesanteur et la grâce*) that particularly entranced the teenage Derrida."[91] She observed the confrontation with "experience exceeding our understanding,"[92] one that emphasizes our human limitations and from which, she argued, we can only be freed by the grace of God.

Baring suggests that Marcel and Weil, in their challenging of the pretensions of philosophy, inspired the young Derrida to do the same. He undertook in these early years to critique materialism "as a "nihilism of fullness", refusing humans the free space to act; idealism was a "nihilism of emptiness," where freedom was so total and without direction as to be meaningless. Here, Derrida discovers the same moral aporia: philosophy cannot avoid nihilism. Existentialism seemed to offer an escape[93] when properly regarded: "reflective thought, by showing the necessary limitations of human knowledge should lead us to recognize what exceeds it: belief." [94] Turning his attention to the unavoidability of nihilism, Derrida hoped to show that "even if nihilism was

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[90] Marcel quoted by Baring, *The Young Derrida,* p. 59.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., p.60.
[93] Ibid., p.60.
[94] Ibid., p.61.

philosophically unavoidable, practically it was impossible. . . existentially false."[95] The example he uses is suicide, in which a person committing suicide is ostensibly exercising her absolute freedom at the very moment she is declaring life valueless, awarding herself "ultimate power and jurisdiction. Suicide could not be nihilistic," [96] in this view. Baring observes that this is just one of many examples that Derrida unravels to affirm that on balance, hope trumps despair. In this, Derrida turns away from "Sartre's 'pessimistic" conclusions,' [97] and towards, for a time, the hope that existentialism should "lead us toward God." [98]

Baring's research into Derrida's student writings reveal a deep and critical preoccupation with the idea of God. In Derrida's reflections during this time, he examines theology from "pagan" times through Christianity and Judaism, discovering a philosophical dialectic that, in its attempt to "systematize and rationalize God, ended by denying his existence." [99] The "Masters of Suspicion," Comte, Marx, Nietzsche, and Sartre, "merely displaced His divinity into society, history, or the human subject."[100] Following Marcel and Weil here, Derrida observes that "to find God and religion again, Simone Weil talks of a purifying atheism (*athéisme purifcateur*); one must lose God. . . to find him again."[101] In this instance, faith would "no longer be naive," but instead be a conscious choice, an exercise of one's freedom par excellence.[102] Observing God as

[95] Ibid., p.62.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., p. 63.
[100]Ibid.
[101]Ibid.,
[102]Ibid.

"the object of love, and thus uncharacterizable," [103] Derrida asserts "I believe because it is absurd. . . . a voluntary and courageous act," an assertion in which Derrida is using Sartre's language of authentic choice against Sartre himself: Derrida, parodying Sartre, asserted that Man "was condemned to be an optimist." [104]

Derrida further develops this line of inquiry by pursuing the question of whether the mystery can be thought, rather than simply accepted, as in Marcel. Baring notes that his arguments along this line were difficult and unsatisfactory to his mentor, Étienne Borne, but they do give two clues to his thinking: his assertion that artistic creation "spiritualizes" the secret by "restituting" it - giving it a sense; and, secondly, Derrida's own description of his thought as "*spiritualisme existentiel*," a third way between idealism and materialism.[105] Baring observes that

> Derrida had turned to Husserl and Heidegger because of their importance in Sartre's work. In brief, we can say that Derrida was a phenomenologist because Sartre was a phenomenologist, and it is no coincidence that both built their thought on the same two German philosophers.[106]

Baring's observation also suggests how Derrida is indirectly touched by Beauvoir. Beauvoir's reading of Husserl and Heidegger are the subjects of prolonged discussions with Sartre. It is Beauvoir's protracted *têt- à-tête* with Sartre about these two thinkers that finally shapes Sartre's interpretation, an interpretation not entirely shared by

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[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid., p.65.
[106] Ibid., p.67.

Beauvoir. Derrida read Husserl and Heidegger through Sartrean eyes, and only much later came to develop his own independent critique of both, after he had finally parted intellectually from Sartre. [107] In his critique, he saw that Heidegger

> erred in effacing the essential movement of the *réalité-humaine,* rendering it passive before Being, Sartre erred by making it absolute. Just as in his contemporary essays, Derrida hoped to use phenomenology to leave open the possibility of transcendent values, without ever defining them fully,[108]

a hope we may also precisely observe in Beauvoir and her *Ethics of Ambiguity*. Like Beauvoir, in addressing humanism, Derrida tries to find an opening between the moral aporia of freedom and finitude: "The very acknowledgement of our insufficiency, our finitude, according to Derrida, marked the possibility of our surpassing it . . . With the possibility of transcendence, we could never recognize any particular measure as insufficient."[109] This is akin to Beauvoir's description of the need for philosophy to embrace the ambiguities of our human condition. Baring says of Derrida's insight, "we are left caught between the dual immanence and transcendence of the measure; we are never certain of the legitimacy of any particular value, but in our constant desire to overcome our limitations, we continually reach for something better."[110] Similarly, for Beauvoir, human freedom justifies itself in the projects it undertakes, the shape and meaning of which are contingent and particular. She argues these "projects" constitute

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[107] Ibid., pp. 74-75.
[108] Ibid., p.78.
[109] Ibid., p.79.
[110] Ibid., p.80.

the only transcendence the existential consciousness can affirm: "The goal toward which I surpass myself must appear to me as a point of departure toward a new surpassing. Thus, a creative freedom develops happily without ever congealing into unjustified facticity."[111]

Baring sums up this period in Derrida's intellectual development, as the period of "existentiel spiritualism:"

> The movement and progress of philosophy required both the recognition of our own limitations and the faint glimmer of an Absolute that would constantly incite us to cast off our earthly shackles and seek a deeper relationship with the divine. It was this tension between an immanence that could never full entrap us and transcendence that we could never fully achieve that constituted Derrida's "existentiel spiritualism."[112]

This label "existentiel spiritualism" might also fit the philosophy of Beauvoir. It may be that here we reach the limit of a demonstrable shared intellectual milieu - as the influence of existentialism and Christian thought on Derrida would not last, once he entered the École Normale Supérieure in 1952. Where Beauvoir adopts phenomenology as her method, Derrida, at the ENS, adopts Husserl's phenomenology as his object of study.[113] Nevertheless, despite refocussing his intellectual gaze, the problem of morality revealed in the existential consciousness, and an attendant attraction to "mysticism," continues to spur Derrida's investigations.

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[111] Beauvoir *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p 27.
[112] Baring, *The Young Derrida,* p.80.
[113] Ibid., p.82.

The point of departure between Beauvoir's intellectual touchstones and Derrida is also the point of contact and it involves Husserl. The "Problem of Genesis," the title of Derrida's ENS *Mémoir* begins with Husserl's last work, *The Origin of Geometry*," and through a discursive review of all of his texts, concludes that Husserl can never resolve the aporia between the "world" - as constituted, and the relationship to the subject as "constituting." This unresolvable problem in Husserl captures Derrida's attention, to the extent that his *avant-propos* to his project is entitled "History of Philosophy and Philosophy of History," [114] wherein he explains that his aim "was to show how philosophy both was anchored in its time and transcended it, was both constituted and constituting."[115] According to Baring, while Derrida began his *Mémoire* as "a classic Normalien project, a study of the conditions of the possibility for scientific objectivity,"[116] his turn to Husserl provided him with "a vehicle for discussing older themes," especially what Baring terms "mysticism." Derrida begins by investigating the connection between scientific objectivity and psychology, and through his engagement with Husserl, makes his central problematic "the articulation of truth and time, science and history. Or in French: *épistémologie*." [117]

The shape of the phenomenological affinity between Derrida and Beauvoir shows Beauvoir seizing on Husserlian phenomenology as method, with gusto, open to its reformulations in Merleau-Ponty, whereas Derrida seizes on its central problematic, the epistemological aporia of the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived,

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[114] Ibid., p.142.
[115] Ibid., p.143.
[116] Ibid., p.144.
[117] Ibid., p.145.

whether the phenomena is constituted or constituting. He soon turns to other resources for articulating this aporia and its attendant consequences. This is clearly the first of an eliptical cycle of figures in Derrida's thought that is ultimately construed as the logic of *différance,* the non-negotiable play of differences that, in perpetual movement, destablize all identities, all "presences," and which therefore command recognition. The problem of the constituted and the constituting in Husserl, seized upon by Derrida, can also be described as a figure of "ambiguity." But where Beauvoir, the ethical philosopher, exhorts philosophy to embrace the ambiguity as an axiom for acting responsibly, Derrida, the philosopher of epistemology, interrogates it - its figures, its mechanisms, and its limits. His interrogations offer a structure of performance within which to understand Beauvoir's displacement of "religion" as she composes her existential ethic.

Although Derrida's philosophical focus at this point detours into *épistémologie,* we also observe from Baring's study that, like Beauvoir, Derrida affirmed an existential perspective. Although Baring characterizes Derrida as moving beyond existentialism *per se,* the axiom of individual *responsibility* provided in existentialism remains, an unavoidable figure of European thought that he will examine in *The Gift of Death.* Like Beauvoir, Derrida persistently returns to religion, mysticism, and faith as objects of inquiry throughout his career because they constitute part of the inheritance he responds to. Like Beauvoir, Derrida was suspicious of institutional religion, but did not tire of interrogating it. The figure of response, omnipresent in Beauvoir's philosophical

writings, is also ubiquitous in Derrida, and his treatment of it provides a rich theoretical resource for analyzing Beauvoir.

If Sartre provides the locus of the common intellectual scene for Beauvoir and Derrida, then Hegel and the mystics provide it for Beauvoir and Certeau.[118] Certeau's magnum opus, *The Mystic Fable,* and his previous study of Jean Joseph Surin, inquisitor at Loudun, in *The Possession at Loudun,* consumed much of his academic career. Like Beauvoir and Derrida, Certeau developed a deep attraction to psychoanalytic theory, even becoming a founding member of Lacan's École Freudienne, despite never undergoing a psychoanalysis. Like Beauvoir, Certeau devoted himself to reading Hegel, according to Giard, joining "the special one-year program dedicated to Hegel's philosophy: the "happy few" spent one full year, for six hours every day, in close reading and commenting of Hegel, read in the German text."[119] This echoes Beauvoir's observation, "That is why reading the Hegelian system is so comforting. I remember having experienced a great feeling of calm on reading Hegel in the impersonal framework of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in August 1940." [120] Beauvoir and Certeau are both impressed by the Hegelian account of the self and the other, a figure that drives each of their projects. Marian Füssell observes that

> The dialectics between ego and other, identity and alterity clearly show the influence of Hegel and Lacan on Certeau. Like many other French

[118] Derrida's essay "*Sauf le Nom*" is a reading of Angelus Silesius' *The Cherubinic Wanderer* in *On the Name*. Beauvoir attests to her long engagement with the 16th and 17thcentury mystical texts in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter,* translated by James Kirkup (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005) as well as devoting a chapter to the "mystics" in *The Second Sex,* which I will examine in Chapter Four.
[119] Giard, "Michel de Certeau's Biography: Petite Bibliographie en anglais."
[120] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 158.

> Jesuits of his time, he was affected by Joseph Gauvins' reading of Hegel and he was a member of Lacan's École Freudienne for many years. I is other . . . The 'problem of history' is for Certeau 'inscribed in the place of this subject, which is itself a play of difference, the historicity of a nonidentity with itself. [121]

Although a member of the Jesuit community until his death, Certeau exhibits a sympathy and dexterity with what might be called an existential perspective in his writing. William Friijhoff claims

> Certeau's faith was for him a kind of "existential imperative" on both fronts: as a believer and, as some have characterized him, as a mystic. He stood at a far remove from the rationalism of the God-deniers - for Certeau a chimerical struggle without an object - but also from the Christianity of emotions, from the sacral claims of the established churches, and from their legalistic, politicized, or moralistic behavior.[122]

Recognized as a brilliant polymath, in his critical stance toward the limits of historiography, in his insistence on situating the object of inquiry despite these limits, in his sensitivity to the embodied experience of living

> Certeau lived his life and shaped his scholarship out of everyday experience, the conviction that life, and therefore history as well, is

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[121] Marian Füssel, "Writing the Otherness," p.31.
[122] Willima Frijhoff, "Michel de Certeau (1925 – 1986) – A Multifaceted Intellectual," *Spiritual Spaces: History and Mystcism in Michel de Certeau*, edited by Inigo Bocken (Leuven: Peeters Publishing, 2013), p. 17.

> essentially a practice, an *acte de faire* realized in the act of appropriation by the subject. His definition of culture was therefore an active one . . . [123]

Certeau's investigations as a historian of "heterology," indebted to the Hegelian dialectic, to Lacanian psychoanalysis, to deconstruction and a certain historiography culminate in *The Mystic Fable.* It is to Certeau's own account of this project that I will now turn, as a succinct account of the forces that result in the scene of Beauvoir's intellectual life, and, for Certeau, our own.

Two practices deserve emphasis in this review of resonances between Certeau and Beauvoir: the insistence on acknowledging and honouring the singularity and *situation* of one's own perspective; and a coherence in their understanding of history. With regard to the first practice, Beauvoir argues in her critique of Hegelian totality that "in order for this world to have any importance, in order for our undertaking to have a meaning and to be worthy of sacrifices, we must affirm the concrete and particular thickness of this world and the individual reality of our projects and ourselves." [124] Like Certeau, Beauvoir consistently places herself and her own particular situated voice into her discourses, declaring "one cannot have a point of view other than his own." [125] Although she never explicitly delineates a historiography as such, she discusses the scene of the past in terms that resonate with Certeau. She argues against those who

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[123] Ibid., p.18.
[124] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p.106.
[125] Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cineas* in *Philosophical Writings*, edited by Margaret Simons (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2004), p.112.

advise turning away from the past that "to abandon the past to the night of facticity is a way of depopulating the world. I would distrust a humanism that was too indifferent to the efforts of men of former times," [126] since doing so condemns the efforts of those alive in this moment to a similar fate. Rather, she claims that

> The fact of having a past is part of the human condition; if the world behind us were bare, we would hardly be able to see anything before us but a gloomy desert. We must try to turn to our own account that freedom which was undertaken in the past and to integrate it into the present world. [127]

However, she does not consider the datum of the past as a singular "precious" narrative. It is a legacy that concerns us "not as a brute fact, but insofar as it has human signification,"[128] a legacy that must be responded to, refused or upheld. Not articulating a historiography per se, she exhibits sensitivity to the insights of Certeau when she says

> At bottom, it matters very little, practically speaking, whether there is a Science of History or not, since this Science can come to light only at the end of a future and since at each particular moment we must, in any case, maneuver in a state of doubt.[129]

She is speaking specifically of a Communist doctrine of history as Dialectical Materialism here, but the salient point is that "history" is not something that can be viewed as a totality and in a fundamental way eludes the viewer, leaving her to

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[126] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 92.
[127] Ibid., p.93.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid., p.123.

"maneuver in a state of doubt," an observation we will see echoed in Certeau. Certeau understands that the scene of his inquiry, 16th and 17thcentury "mystics," exceeds any boundary and bleeds into the present, a scene that seems to continue into our present, as a haunting, as an absence.

Certeau's sustained reading of the "mystic fable" finds a wandering after an absence that resonates throughout the 17th century, and inaugurates the conditions for our own time. As Certeau puts it, in drawing an analogy between the advent of *mystics* and the advent of *psychoanalysis,* "the elements that are thus repeated, in practices and in words, from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, could not be pure coincidence,"[130] and the same may be said for the philosophy that is the object of study here. He introduces his project by immediately inserting himself into what is a lyrical evocation of the scene of his text. "One who is missing moves it to be written. This story continues to be written during travels through a country from which I'm away." [131] A few lines on, he observes the discovery that such a "journey," a journey toward that which is missing, "afflicts us in a region we cannot identify," [132] now drawing the readers of his text into the scene. This is part of Certeau's historiography, the acknowledgement of the "I" that constructs a simulacrum of the now absent past out of the resources chosen.

> Historiography is a contemporary form of mourning. Its writing is based on an absence and produces nothing but simulacra, however scientific. It

[130] Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable,* p.8.
[131] Ibid., p.1.
[132] Ibid.

> offers representation in the place of bereavement. Doubtless it is not certain that we know the present any better than the past nor that equivocalness is any less prevalent in present-day communication. At least in the present we can nourish the illusion of overcoming what the past has rendered insurmountable. Thus is it that the historian of the mystics, summoned as they are, to *say the other,* repeats their experience in studying it: an exercise of absence defines at once the operation by which he produces his text and that which constructed theirs.[133]

Certeau here draws an identification between himself as the historian, the history invoked as “the other” and a certain repetition occasioned in the discourse between them. Both the historian of mystics and those who produced the texts studied are moved by an absence - for the former, the past in its finitude; for the latter, the unending desire for the one who is not there. The "practice” of the historian mourns that which is not there as in longing for that which can never “be” in the sense of reified static Being, that which is, as Derrida would say, always already something other than what it seems: N + 1. Now this insight is not obviously present in Beauvoir’s thought, but it will provide a productive path for examining what I argue is a mystic tendency in her thought.

The intersection of absence brings together these three thinkers, brings them together as French-speaking Europeans, heirs of the “mystic fable”, of the histories that belong to it, the religion of the post-Enlightenment Catholic Church. The economics of the mystic tradition sees the decline of the body of ecclesiastic authority and the ascent

[133] Ibid., p.11.

of the erotic; it sees the eclipsing of Mystic locations centred in the ritual and the scripture by the visionary and apophatic individuals or alterior communities. The scene of the mystic is a scene that Certeau claims is still inhabited by a wandering after an absence, after One who is not here, emblematized in the post-modern movement of perpetual departure.

Although technically preceding the post-modern, Beauvoir is very much in the tradition of this wanderer. And the “it” that she seeks, an “it” she bears witness to in her earliest childhood memories, may constitute that knowledge - that known experience which she wants to make "holy,” and to indemnify. The problem is that she openly acknowledges the impossibility of this “being at one”, even as she repeatedly is drawn by desire for it. This requires a reading of the autoimmunity of religion in Beauvoir. The thing indemnified will escape, will exceed the boundaries of the "sacred space": it will not remain *heilig,* holy, unscathed, any more than the cell that exerts itself to ward off disturbance can avoid the disturbance it has caused itself. At the same time, it is not negotiable that one should *not* respond to the invitation of that experience of oneness, evanescent though it is.

I want to read Beauvoir’s religion as an iteration of Derrida’s account of religion; I want to further explore the intersection between the originary faith that opens religion, the response that constitutes that faith, and the unending desire, Certeau's “perpetual departures,” that moves the scene of religion. I want to read closely Beauvoir’s *Ethics of Ambiguity,* Derrida’s *Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion at the Limit of Reason Alone, The Gift of Death*, “Passions: An Oblique Offering”*,* and Certeau’s

Mystic Fable in concert in the next chapter in order to outline the scene of religion she inherits and responds to.

Chapter Three

The Scene of Religion: "Religion is the response"[134]

I. Between the Ethical and the Religious

The scene of religion, a play upon Derrida's figure of the scene,[135] is - like any scene - subject to repetition, its roles played out in scripted movements, always the same yet different. It also invokes its Greek etymology, from σκηνη - the screen behind which the masked actors in classical Greek theatre exited and entered. The figure of such a scene suggests the repetitions of a script played out through the binary of the seen and the unseen, its players themselves masked. These features connote immediately a play of *différance* at work in the social and historical epoch of religion, a pageant of entrances and departures of established roles inhabited by an ever-changing cast of players, according to the tropes of a script at once ancient and still to come. The figure of the scene of religion offers a site in which to present my treatment of religion in Beauvoir's ethic.

The Derrrida and Certeau texts that present the scene of religion, which I want to read in Beauvoir, are elliptical, each possessing implications which cannot all be addressed here, if at all. I propose to limit the description of this "scene" to that which inhabits a specific serial historical context and which at the same time performs the

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[134] Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone" in *Acts of Religion,* edited by Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 66.

[135] The most direct antecedent for this figure is Derrida's "scene of writing," a figure which is itself a play on Freud's "primal scene." See Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

relationship between the "self" and the "other." In a way, this is an unavoidable discussion, as the Greco-Roman-Christian world that hosts this performance is, at the same time, implicated in the emergence of the self-conscious "self" that moves the performance. The "other" in this scene is traditionally named "God," a naming which the readings of Derrida and Certeau interrogate. Derrida and Certeau are both attuned to the play of heterogeneity at work in apparently homogenous institutions, and both are very close to Hegel's dialectic of self-consciousness.[136] An affinity for certain insights in Hegel makes possible the thinking together of Beauvoir with Derrida and Certeau, specifically in the binary of the self and the other mutually recognizing each other and, therefore, depending upon each other for identity and meaning. According To Ludwig Siep[137] in the introductory chapter of his commentary, "The Ambition of *Phenomenology of Spirit:"*

> The traditional religious oppositions between the here and the beyond, between finitude and the infinite, are, for Hegel, untenable. Our knowledge of nature, man, and God not only involves the same categories; it is knowledge of the same thing – only at different stages of development or different levels of complexity. The concept adequate to this common topic is "spirit." And to be

[136] My reading of the dialectic of self-consciousness follows Beauvoir and other French existentialists, as well as Derrida and Certeau. For recent treatments, see Ludwig Siep's commentary, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit,* translated by Daniel Smyth (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), and Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[137] Siep's study, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit* offers a comprehensive review of Hegel's entire philosophical output prior to the *Phenomenology,* as well as locating Hegel in his historic and social context. In doing this, Siep aims to overcome what he believes are serious (although sometimes fruitful) misunderstandings of Hegel. One of his complaints, one shared by Robert Pippin, is the degree to which Hegel's 20th century interpreters tend to ignore the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology.* What I find striking is the degree to which the treatment of Hegel in Beauvoir, Certeau and Derrida corresponds with Siep's observations.

> spirit means, as Christian dogma illustrates, albeit in a figurative manner (creation, incarnation, salvation), to become another (*Sich- anderswerden*: "becoming-other-than-oneself") and to recognize oneself in that other. Knowledge of the laws governing material spatiotemporal systems is just as much a level (or "appearance") of spirit in this sense as is knowledge of the development of rational moralities and constitutional states in the temporal formations of human culture, the complex totality of which we call "history." [138]

The definition of "spirit" ascribed to Hegel here by Siep, "to become another," and "to recognize oneself in that other," is the salient point of this passage, instituting spirit in the dialectic of self-consciousness and the "I-Other" binary. Although Beauvoir, Derrida and Certeau do not employ the term spirit in the same way that Siep does here, his reading of Hegel's dialectic is supported by all three, in that the play of desire, of "becoming an other," and of recognition is understood to be the locus of what we term religion, and as Siep suggests, "the complex totality of which we call "history." While Beauvoir, Certeau and Derrida reject the teleological movement of Hegel's thought, they each take up the play of the dialectic of self-consciousness as axiomatic. They all carry the figure of desire in their philosophies, a desire which Hegel presents as constituent of self-consciousness. In the texts we will follow here, the other figures in many iterations: both as singular persons located in the world, and as a sign for "all others," for the space of "otherness," or as Derrida puts it, "*tout autre est tout autre.*"[139] Derrida sees in

[138] Ibid., p. 9.

this dialectic a play of *différance*. On the one hand, it is the desire to sublate the other, to make the other the same, to gather and bind that which is other into a homogeneity, a totality; on the other hand, this gathering and binding is undone by the logic of *différance*: that is, the desiring self can only find fulfillment in destroying an other self-consciousness; and yet, the self becomes aware of her dependence on that other self-consciousness and by inference, its otherness. It is aware of the other's awareness of the self - that is, it experiences *recognition.* Thus, the desire to sublate or unify is undone in its own movement. Following this logic in Hegel's dialectic, the logic of the inherent requirement of recognition for the self and the other, one must recognize the other in order to define the self. This heterogeneous movement at play undermines the drive to homogeneity, as well as opening onto the future, to possibilities, to "messianicity without the messiah."[140]

Certeau assumes this heterogeneous movement as axiomatic, and reads the mystic discourse as an iteration of this play. The mystics reject the totalizing movements of European Christianity, which are akin to the desire of the self to sublate the other in Hegel's scheme. The mystics express their rejection of this totalizing impulse through their heterogeneous attestations to seeking "one who is absent."

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[139] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift* of *Death* and *Literature in Secret,* translated by David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995; 2008), p. 69.

[140] Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," p. 83 f. Derrida again suggests a structuring play at work that exceeds all determinate situations: here, the movement of "messianicity" which exceeds all instances of "messianism," suggesting that this movement is an openness to the possibility of an opening out of oppression, hegemony, totalizing, binding and gathering forces, an openness he also calls "*l'avenir,"* which at the same time includes the "possibility of radical evil, without which the good would be for nothing*"* (p.83). This openness is itself built into the play of *différance,* here presented in the figure of automimmunity.

Beauvoir follows them, driven by desire for that which can be never possessed, but without which meaning is not possible. She declares of its counterfeits and phantasms, "it is not this." In this, she, like they, expresses fidelity to the ambiguous truth of religion, and participates in the undoing of the drive to hegemony, critiquing the very possibility of knowledge. In a similar vein, Derrida notes, "as always, recourse to knowledge is temptation itself,"[141] the temptation to believe one *knows* what one believes as well as what *knowing* means, a temptation one must resist, given the inescapable iterability of all things.[142]

A summary of Beauvoir's ethic will help to organize the discussion of this scene. This summary provides structures and themes which can be referred to those found in the theoretical discourses of Derrida which specifically treat religion, and in Certeau's *The Mystic Fable*. These themes resonate in the scene of religion that I am reading in Derrida and Certeau.

Beauvoir's ethic is predicated on these observations: human beings are not determined, but ontologically free; meaning is found in embracing our freedom, and therefore embracing responsibility for our choices; and this responsibility is literally a response to the Other, without whom there can be no meaning. "I concern Others as they concern me. They are as inseparable as subject and object."[143] However, human life is fraught with ambiguities that must be embraced. The very Other that founds

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[141] Ibid., p. 68.
[142] Both Beauvoir and Derrida, in contesting the assumptions of the metaphysical tradition, must also contest *knowledge* as it was conceived in that tradition – as the apprehension of those Forms or Ideas which are absolute and eternal, existing only as archetypes in an intelligible realm, transcending the phenomenal realm of becoming. In their discourses, *"knowledge"* is a sign of that which must be preserved unscathed – "mummified," as Nietzsche would say.
[143] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 78.

meaning for Beauvoir registers a tension within the existential condition of the human being: one is singular - undetermined, ontologically free, finite, concrete and embodied, and yet one longs for an absolute union with an Other - which entails a movement toward totality. Beauvoir argues that there is no given meaning to life, but this does not exclude our capacity to make our own meaning. She argues that the only defensible basis for meaning is our relationships with others - we are unavoidably concerned with each other, with each other's ontological freedom and with our mutual projects. The way we conduct our relations with others founds/justifies our living. She also establishes the ambiguities or contradictions that structure our human being, including a profound desire to become one with an other at the same time that we are utterly thrown discrete beings. The person who embraces her freedom and its implications of responsibility automatically embraces the freedom of the other, and will not act to circumscribe that freedom. Implicitly contesting Kant, she asserts this is the only "imperative." This is a relationship between contingencies, however, and must be constantly renegotiated and reevaluated. It therefore hinges on trust, on believing the other and expecting the other to believe you, what Derrida observes as the "originary faith" that underwrites all human relations, one of the two sources of "religion." For Beauvoir, negotiating mutually liberating relationships is a way to satisfy the persistent desire of human beings to be united to an other: while she insists on acknowledging the non-assimilable otherness of the Other, its absolute otherness, the trust we offer each other gives custody, if not satisfaction, to the longing to become one with the Other.

In Beauvoir's ethic, the figures of the self and the other, the appeal and the response, freedom and responsibility, the longing of the "useless passion", and of the absence that drives this passion, are paramount. These figures play out in Beauvoir's existential ethic, not only in response to those who argue that existentialism is nihilistic or ethically bankrupt, but also in response to the social, economic and political crises of our time. Beauvoir despised her own socio-economic class and its prescriptions, and sought, unsuccessfully, to transcend its grip, a fact she acknowledged and reflected upon throughout her life.[144] However, her commitment to the critique of capitalism, colonialism, sexism and racism is indisputable. She engaged her instrument of choice - writing - in a lifelong effort to promote social, economic and political justice.

Beauvoir also insists on the singularity of each individual's life and death, a singularity which entails a specific context. Her ethic is not intended as an abstract recipe for behaviour in some indeterminate universal situation. She attempts to found the basis of ethical decision, which I argue is the scene of religion, in a manner which precisely acknowledges the specificity of any choice undertaken. At the same time, the very act of thinking such an ethic, one that must be determined by each individual, emerges specifically in the space of post-enlightenment Europe. The genealogy of religion read by Derrida explicitly links the site of religion with the "passage to responsibility,"[145] a passage that arrives at the existential ethic of Beauvoir.

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[144] For example, see Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance I: After the War 1944-1952* (New York: Paragon House, 1992), p. 288 where she explains how before the war she lived in a kind of ignorant haze of self-absorption. The experience of the war educated her to the unavoidability of engagement with the political, and caused her to feel considerable shame about her former dispassion toward it.

[145] Derrida, *The Gift of Death* and *Literature in Secret*, translated by David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995; 2008), p.5.

The following explications aim to draw together those texts by Derrida and Certeau which provide the theoretical apparatus I am calling the scene of religion. In *The Gift of Death,* Derrida reads the *Genesis* narrative of Abraham and Isaac, and in doing so, shows the inauguration of the tropes of religion: appeal and response; gathering and binding; faith and risk; self and "other." In "Passions: An Oblique Offering," he focusses on the conditions of response – on its possibilities and impossibility, and the need for a certain generosity. All of these figures are assumed in his most fulsome reflection on religion, given in "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion at the Limit of Reason Alone." Here, he draws the space inhabited by the scene of religion, its machinery, and its implications. Certeau's *The Mystic Fable* offers a sustained investigation of the mystic movement of resistance against the hegemony of the learned Ecclesia in the 16th and 17thcenturies, unveiling the desire that inaugurates all attempts to formulate knowledge. In the course of erecting this theoretical scaffolding, I will situate the relevant discourse from Beauvoir.

II. "Religion" and the "Self:" A Genealogy

In *The Gift of Death* and "Faith and Knowledge," Derrida considers "responsibility" and draws a direct line between the Greco-Judeo-Christian theology of the first century and the figure of capitalist economy. Derrida is not unique in insisting that religion is an affect of the European world: Kippenberg, Masuzawa, and Said have each interrogated the history of the European imperial exportation of the idea of religion

upon the non-European colonized cultures, and the consequences of this.[146] However, Derrida, the philosopher of *différance,* reads the European figure of religion with a different intention and apparatus.

The historical context for the scene of religion establishes the scene that Beauvoir inhabits: it is not past, but prologue for what is to come, and continues to operate in our contemporary world. He also invokes the play of the "self" and "other" in its Greco-Roman European iteration, and sees the emergence of this self accompanying the emergence of Roman Christianity and religion. Consonant with the "*spiritualisme existentiel*"[147] detailed by Edward Baring, Derrida argues, like Beauvoir, for an acknowledgement of the singularity of the self, and the absolute alterity of the other, at the same time that each player requires the other for her identity. The movement of Derrida's thought in *The Gift of Death* examines the dynamic between the self and the other[148] given in the Judeo-Platonic-Christian tradition, in which the other operates as a phantasm or spectre of authority, law, duty and responsibility. Derrida argues that this dynamic, which he characterizes as "idolatrous," can also be read as the play of the emergence of subjective responsibility and conscience.[149] It is this iteration of the other as mover of responsibility and conscience that serves as a

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[146] See Hans Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*; Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*; and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1979).
[147] Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida,* p 65.
[148] These themes are also examined in "Force of Law," *Spectres of Marx, Rogues*, and of course "Faith and Knowledge," but as is always the case, Derrida is always reading a specific text, and therefore the analysis yields to the specificity of the text in question. See Michael Naas, *Miracle and Machine*, especially Chapter 8, for a review of these themes in these texts.
[149] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death,* p. 108 f., discussing the "idolatrous stereotype" that this reading of the Gospel of Matthew and Kirkegaard's Abraham discourse disrupts.

resource for situating Beauvoir's ethic in the scene of religion. Derrida continues to investigate this play in "Faith and Knowledge," where he argues that the "faith" that is one of the two sources of religion is not limited to any "determinate religion," but is present in every human relationship, and is the condition of any openness to the "event"[150] or that which is to come.

Although some want to periodize Derrida's oeuvre and identify a "religious turn" in his thought,[151] or on the other hand, argue that Derrida was always a "radical atheist,"[152] Derrida has consistently reflected on the figure of religion, woven as is it with the key figures of his thought, such as sovereignity, the phantasm, inheritance and mourning, figures that offer sympathetic resources for analyzing Beauvoir and religion. As we have seen, Baring shows that his concern with religion can be traced back to his school days in Algeria.[153] McCance[154] also shows that Derrida has been consistently concerned with the figure of religion throughout his works, as it is embedded in the tradition he "deconstructs," or to quote her succinct formulation: "He set out to contest what is deadly in tradition and to affirm what in it gives life."[155] Let us take some time to reflect on some of the figures that will later lead us in and out of religion in Beauvoir:

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[150] The "event" is "a rupture and a redoubling," un-anticipatable happening that is also a repetition, an aporia similar to his affirmation of the "yes, yes" in which the second yes beckons the first. It is perhaps best approached through the figure of *play* as structure. The event is the (im)possibility of the messianic or that which is to come (*l'avenir).* For a concentrated discussion see "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in *Writing and Difference*, p 278 f.

[151] Edward Baring contests this idea of "periodization" in Derrida's career, citing Geoffrey Bennigton's *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p.13, as an example of this attempt to denote "periods."

[152] See Martin Haaglund, *Radical Atheism.*

[153] See Chapter Two for the account of Derrida's youthful pre-occupations in a summary of Edward Baring's *Young Derrida.*

[154] Dawne McCance, *Derrida on Religion.*

[155] Ibid. p. 2.

différance, the phantasm, mourning, autoimmunity, faith, inheritance, responsibility and *l'avenir.*

Some preliminary acknowledgement of the scope of the "different logic" disclosed by Derrida's deconstructions of texts, deconstructions grounded in his thorough familiarity with the philosophical tradition, is required. Every figure in Derrida's lexicon is an iteration of *différance*, the non-negotiable logic of every "N" implying or promising a "+1," an *alter*native, an other possibility, that exists whether taken or not, an alternative that is always a threat as well as an affirmation.[156] *Différance* suggests both to differ - as in to be different, to be other than, as such, as well as to defer - to delay carrying the import, meaning, or consequence of the thing in question. It is crucial to accept that *différance* is something written, that the "a" in its spelling cannot be perceived by the ear when pronounced. The odd spelling is only accessible in its written/read form. In a move that alludes to *Of Grammatology,* and the argument there in which speech, and the chain of privilege afforded to it - presence, being, and, ultimately, static eternal metaphysics - is contested, the emphasis here on this distinction which is only detectable in writing is a performance of this very logic. This logic demonstrates that presence (and its entire chain of meanings) is an illusion; that all things are, like writing, already coursing another path, separate from the moment of the undertaking, already deferred, for another, later reader and reading. Locating this different logic in writing is of course also a performance oft he assertion that we might turn our attention toward writing as a more adequate figure for understanding our world. It is movement, both

[156]Jacques Derrida's "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) for this specific account of the logic of *différance.*

spatial and temporal: the production of differances, of that which differentiates and of delay, deferral, and detouring. Peggy Kamuf notes his "economical, idiomatic and therefore untranslatable expression of this in "Plato's Pharmacy," where he states:

> Locating this different logic in writing is of course also a performance of the assertion that we might turn our attention toward writing as a more adequate figure for understanding our world. It is movement, both spatial and temporal: the production of differences, of that which differentiates and of delay, deferral, and detouring. Textuality being constituted by differences and by differences from differences, it is by nature absolutely heterogeneous and is constantly *composing with* [emphasis added] the forces that tend to annihilate it. (98) [157]

This figure of *writing* as "composing with the forces that tend to annihilate it" is, as Kamuf notes, untranslatable – but a succinct performance of the machinery of this logic. It is the figure that perhaps offers an accessible structure for understanding the manifold other figures in Derrida's prolific body of work, such as *khora,* the *pharmakon,* autoimmunity, spectrality, mourning, inheritance, messianicity, to begin a list too long to continue.[158]

An example of *différance* can be detected in an observation about the simple cell. In his reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Derrida notes Freud's

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[157] Quoted in Peggy Kamuf, "Composition Displacement," *MLN* volume 121, number 4 (French Issue)(September 2006): p. 878.

[158] See Dawne McCance, *Sleights of Hand,* (Vernon, BC: The Kalamalka Press, 2008) and Michael Naas, *Miracle and Machine* for a thorough yet succinct presentation of these and other figures in Derrida.

observation that the most primitive cell desires stasis - to remain undisturbed - and is equipped with a protective mechanism that enables it to ward off the threat of disturbance.[159] At the same time, in the effort of protecting itself, the cell exerts itself and thus disturbs itself, fulfilling the disturbance it sought to avoid. Derrida calls this mechanism (and indeed refers to it as the "machine") "autoimmunity." This figure is one of many he offers to suggest a truth denied by the traditions of metaphysics given in the European and Mediterranean contexts: that everything is always already contingent and unstable; that there is always already, as a logical proposition, more than one way; that stasis is inevitably its own undoing; that resistance to change ironically produces change; that change is life and stasis is death, and we are driven to both. [160]

Derrida, in contesting the metaphysics of Euro-Mediterranean philosophy, argues against the concept of "presence" and "self-presence" by revealing the machinery of *différance* at work. A product of this path of contestation is the figure of the phantasm. Michael Naas claims that "Derrida will, through an analysis of language and expression in Husserl, displace the transcendental ego within a more general structure of *différance* or of what will later come to be known as spectrality.[161] The phantasm bears the "graph" of the trace, the supplement, the remainder, and the deferral that, as "the law of its composition and rules of its game," is hidden in all texts worthy of the name.[162] The

[159]Jacques Derrida, "To Speculate: On Freud" in *The Post Card* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987*),* p. 347 f.
[160] Jacques Derrida, *Faith and Knowledge,"* p. 78 f.
[161] Michael Naas, "Comme si, comme ça": Phantasms of Self, State, and a Sovereign God." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* vol. 40, no. 2, a proceedings issue: *FOLLOWING ... DERRIDA: LEGACIES* (June 2007): p.5.
[162] Jacques Derrida*, Dissemination,* translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 63.

phantasm is the product of the attempt to ontologize the remains, to set as "essence," as the "proper," as the "law," or the archetype. As Marion Hobson observes,

> phantasm and fetish, on the other hand, are structures that have not fulfilled the conceptual possibilities they might have had of allowing undecideable and decideable statements to be related (*Glas* 235a, 210a). They have been made into stabilized units; they designate resultants of conditions of impossibility and possibility, which have turned into elements and where the shadowy status is used to privilege the 'effectiveness' it is compared with. [163]

In Derrida's texts, the phantasm [and the fetish] are understood as "designed to master the ideological formation they designated," [164]and so become, in a certain reading, the "law of the castle," of "the father," etc., as well as the illusion of a fixed "self." These are examples of the Derridean figure of the drive to "gather" and "bind" into a totality that is one of the two impulses of metaphysics.

Tracing the phantasm of the sovereign, Naas recalls Derrida's argument against a "pure" or essential self-presence: self-presence, traditionally proven by phonocentrism, or the phenomenon of the subject speaking to herself, is an illusion - a "phantasm, in that any speaking to itself "is compromised both by the relation to others who first give me my language and by a structure of *différance* that opens the purity of meaning to repetition and *différance*."[165] In this analysis, the self speaks to itself in

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[163] Marion Hobson, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* (London: Psychological Press, 1998), p.117.
[164] Ibid., p. 122.
[165] Naas, "Comme Si, Comme Ça," p. 6.

language provided by others and is thus already marked by another presence, which disturbs the phantasm of her inviolability. Moreover, Derrida recasts writing as "trace," the marking that even as it repeats leaves a remainder that exceeds the stroke, so that the words that the self repeats are always already iterable. The phenomenon or appearance of the purity of the "self," the sovereignity of the self who would *vouloir dire* in *Speech and Phenomena*, "is thus an effect of *différance,* not that which precedes and commands it,"[166] with the result that the concept of self-presence is a phantasm, and by inference, so is the sovereignity of the self. What is the "self," then if not "self-present," if not "sovereign" as such? This is the undecideable question, undecideability occupying the prominent place in Derrida's philosophy.[167]

It is important to heed Naas's distinction, that a phantasm for Derrida is not merely an illusion: we must "take into account the force and tenacity of the phantasm that, metaphysically speaking, does not exist but that we believe exists, a phantasm that would be nothing other than a belief in a phenomenon that transcends itself, that spontaneously gives rise to itself . . . in its staying power, its returning power, I would be tempted to say its regenerative power." [168] Naas is "tempted" to say the phantasm has "regenerative" powers, but cannot because to do so would misrepresent the phantasm. The phantasms - of self-presence, of the "proper" order of things, of the law of the castle, of the will of God - are not capable of self-regeneration, as they are constituted as "dead" things, things perceived and perpetuated, through repetition, as unchanging,

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[166] Ibid.
[167] McCance suggests in *Derrida on Religion* that this is "what might be the key to of all keys to Derrida's work, certainly his work on religion: the notion of *undecideability," (*p. 6).
[168] Naas, "Comme Si, Comme Ça," p 6.

static, impregnable; things that are still and "move no more." Rather than being capable of "regenerative powers," the phantasm's staying power resides in the mechanism of re-pression - re-pressing the mark, the stroke, the spur - *bahnung* - seeming to repeat and strike the same note but, actually, always a little differently. The mechanism of repression is itself, according to a certain reading of Freud after Nietzsche,[169] a variation of the "pleasure principle," itself a disguise for the will to power, the pleasure of power. Following this chain, the "phantasm" in its various forms is a construction of the will to power, the desire for the pleasure that arises from control, the control that is exercised in a certain reproduction of a "still life," an assertion of a fixed tradition, law, order, archive, etc., but one which Derrida will later argue arises out of a lived experience that is initially "secret" and interior, one to which testimony will order to a sequence of repetitions, and so indemnity, and so bring to "death,"[170] even as it is at the same time being *iterated* - literally made other than.

The phenomenon of the phantasm that first arises, the phantasm of the self that coincides with itself, leads to a political phantasm, that of the sovereign, of the *archons* and the archive, and by extension, the sovereign state as well as "sovereign states." Such "sovereign states" include and perhaps in part constitute what Derrida calls "religion." In assigning to "religion" a sovereignity to which we comply and conform, we are granting sovereignity to yet another phantasm, a phantasm of gathering and binding powers towards a totality, a totality that is already being contested by its own

[169] See Jacques Derrida, "To Speculate: On Freud," especially pp. 403 -409, which I read as Derrida affirming that the "PP" of Freud's drive theory is, functionally, the same as Nietzsche's "will to power."
[170] See Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," p. 100.

mechanisms of indemnification. The figure of sovereignity, and the chain of meanings that include the phantasm, the spectre, the Father, the Law, and of course "God," figures prominently in Derrida's analysis of the genealogy of "religion" and the modern "self" in *The Gift of Death.*[171] Derrida's analysis of this chain of power figures resonates within Beauvoir, providing an analytical structure that informs the tensions of the play that she both appropriates and resists from the "scene of religion." Her rejection of metaphysics and all totalizing schemes, and the logic by which she does so, draws very near to Derrida's interrogation of the "phantasms" of the metaphysical enclosure, a logic that will be taken up more fully in Chapter Five.

The Gift of Death reads the "heretical" text of the philosopher Jan Patocka, in which Patocka argues that the history of "religion" is also the history of the "self." Derrida reviews the movement in Patocka's text concerning a passage from the pre-Platonic "demonic" and "orgiastic" mysteries, which are then incorporated into Platonism, to the Christian *mysterium tremendum,* in which the incorporated orgiastic and demonic are repressed. For Derrida, the point of interest is the play of both forces:

> Religion is responsibility or it is nothing at all. Its history derives its sense entirely from the idea of a passage to responsibility. Such a passage involves traversing or enduring the test by means of which the ethical conscience will be delivered of the demonic, the mystagogic, and the enthusiastic, of the initiatory and the esoteric. In the authentic sense of the word, religion comes into being

[171] Derrida elliptically references this chain of meanings throughout *The Gift of Death,* but most overtly in Chapter Four, "*Tout Autre est Tout Autre*," p. 82 f.

> the moment that the experience of responsibility extracts itself from that form of secrecy called demonic mystery. [172]

Derrida is not surprised that Patocka associates the “demonic mystery” with sexual desire, in a nod to Nietzsche’s “Dionysian.” The demonic is pre-responsible, as it “belongs to a space that does not yet resound with the injunction to respond, a space in which one does not yet hear the call to explain oneself [*répondre de soi*], one’s actions, or one’s thoughts, to respond to the other and answer for oneself before the other.”[173] This "demonic mystery," moved by a desire for absolute union, for a losing of oneself in the other by means of the other, literally "enthused," recalls Beauvoir's observation that this yearning is self-defeating, in that it would, if realized, render the world airless, spaceless, and horizonless in its totalizing force. Tracing Patocka's account of the emergence of “religion” out of the Greco-Roman-European context, Derrida observes that this

> will overlap with the genealogy of the subject who says “myself,” the subject’s relation to itself as an instance of liberty, singularity, and responsibility, the relation to self as being before the other; the other in its infinite alterity, one who gives without being seen but also whose infinite goodness gives in an experience that amounts to the gift of death [*donner la mort]*. For the moment, let’s leave the expression in all its ambiguity.[174]

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[172] Derrida, *The Gift of Death,* p.5.
[173] Ibid., p.5.
[174] Ibid.

To the extent that responsibility must be located in a singular individual conscience, and to the extent that Christianity involves the self in a relation to another before whom we must respond and be responsible, “The history of responsibility is tied to a history of religion.” [175] He argues that history is itself inextricably bound to responsibility, to faith and to the gift:

> To responsibility in the experience of absolute decisions that involve breaking with knowledge or given norms, made therefore through the very ordeal of the undecidable; to religious faith through a form of involvement with or relation to the other that is a venture into absolute risk, beyond knowledge and certainty; to the gift and to the gift of death that puts me in relation with the transcendence of the other - with God as selfless goodness - and that gives me what it gives me through a new experience of death. Responsibility and faith go together, however paradoxical that might seem to some, and should, in the same movement, exceed mastery and knowledge. The gift of death would be this marriage of responsibility and faith. [176]

The “gift of death” is multivalent – also "putting to death," as well as giving oneself or an other death. It is also the awareness in each individual of her own mortality, and of the irreplaceable singularity of her own death to the extent that the individual bears the weight of her choices, her projects. In a passage strikingly reminiscent of Beauvoir,[177] he explains

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[175] Ibid., p. 7.
[176] Ibid., p. 8.
[177] Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cineas,* p. 124.

> Because I cannot take death away from the other who can no more take it away from me in return, it remains for everyone to take his own death upon himself. Everyone must assume their own death, that is to say, the one thing in the world that no one else can either give or take: therein resides freedom and responsibility.[178]

Therein resides "freedom and responsibility" because in assuming one's own death, one assumes the finitude of one's existence, and therefore the weight of responsibility for one's choices. "In this sense, only a mortal can be responsible" (42), as only a mortal bears the weight of that specific finitude.

Clearly, Hegel informs this discussion, both explicitly (63), and more obliquely in Derrida's treatment of Kierkegaard as "de Silentio,"[179] on the sacrifice of Isaac and the links he makes between this and Christianity. In treating of "the Abrahamic," and especially the sacrifice of Isaac, Derrida describes a scene in which

> We fear and tremble because we are already in the hands of God, although free to do work, but in the hands and under the gaze of God, whom we don't see and whose will we cannot know, no more than the decisions he will hand down nor his reasons for wanting this or that, our life and death. We fear and tremble before the inaccessible secret of a God who decides for us although we remain responsible, that is to say free to decide, to work, to assume our life and death.[180]

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[178] Derrida, *The Gift of Death,* p. 45.
[179] The reference to Kierkegaard "de silentio" is Derrida's shorthand for the particular pseudonym Kierkegaard employs in *Fear and Trembling.*
[180] Ibid., p. 57.

Speaking of a passage in Paul to the *Phillipians*, Derrida argues for the double impulses of “passion” and responsibility, in response to the “unseen gaze” of one who is unknowable, and who therefore is the condition for one’s decision - in risk and “fear and trembling.” The "passion" refers to the Platonic "incorporation" of demonic mystery, where the "responsibility" is to the *mysterium et trememdum* of Christianity, the Platonic form of the Good, now a persona, that represses (repeats) the demonic mystery. Here, as in “Faith and Knowledge,” Derrida names the possibility of a discourse on “religion without religion” which he calls the “non-determined.”

At the same time, this discourse is also an examination of European responsibility that can only be Christian:

> On what condition is responsibility possible? On the condition that the Good no longer be a transcendental objective, a relation between objective things, but the relation to the other, a response to the other; an experience of personal goodness, and a movement of intention. [181]

Responsibility requires, structurally, a relationship between persons, between “points of view,” a requirement the abstract Platonic Form of the Good cannot fulfill. The person involved here is the One who calls Abraham, and the One who sacrifices “his” only son in the gospel narratives. This particular scene of an unseen unknowable Absolute Other, whose gaze establishes my “self,” and whose gaze demands response - secretly, without calculation, and with sacrifice of the one who is most beloved - is found in the story of Abraham and Isaac, and repeated in the Christian narrative of the

[181] Ibid., p. 51.

Passion. In describing the Absolute Other in the Christian narrative as an instance of "infinite love," he asks

> On what condition does goodness exist beyond all calculation? On the condition that goodness forgets itself, that the movement is the movement of the gift that renounces itself, hence a movement of infinite love. Only infinite love can renounce itself and, in order to become finite, become incarnated in order to love the other, to love the other of finite other. This gift of infinite love comes from someone and is addressed to someone; responsibility demands irreplaceable singularity. Yet only death, or rather the apprehension of death, can give this irreplaceability, and it is only on the basis of that one can speak of are responsible subject, of the soul as conscience of self, of myself, etc. [182]

Although he is describing a most determinate scene of "religion" here, Derrida visits the same figures that inhabit the existential perspective: the consciousness of finitude, which is the field of decision, and the response to the other on the basis of this finitude, on the basis of the singularity granted by "the gift of death." In this Euro-Christian reading, one that echoes Kant's "good without qualification," responsibility is "to respond as oneself and as irreplaceable singularity, to answer for what one does, says, gives; but it also requires that, being good and through goodness, one forgets or effaces the origins of what one gives."[183]

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[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid., p.52.

The “origins of what one gives” [the death of the son/god] is highlighted in the case of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac. In Derrida's reading, the story of Isaac is a “nocturnal mystery” of which, if we can speak of it at all, is “abominable” and at the same time, “also the most common thing:”

> Duty or responsibility binds me to the other, to the other as other, and binds me in my absolute singularity to the other as other. God is the name of the absolute other as other and as unique (the God of Abraham defined as the one and unique). As soon as I enter into a relation with the absolute other, my singularity enters into a relation with his on the level of obligation and duty. I am responsible before the other; I answer to him and I answer for what I do before him. But of course, what binds me thus in my singularity to the absolute singularity of the other immediately propels me into the space of risk or absolute sacrifice. There are also others, an infinite number of them, the innumerable generality of others to whom I should be bound by the same responsibility, a general and universal responsibility (which Kierkegaard calls the ethical order). I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others. Every other (one) is every (bit) other [*tout autre est tout autre]*; everyone else is completely or wholly other. The simple concepts of alterity and singularity constitute the concept of duty as much as that of responsibility. As a

> result, the concepts of responsibility, of decision, or of duty, are condemned, a priori to paradox, scandal and aporia." [184]

It is clear that this play between the self and the other - as a play of appeal and response - can be read in all other relationships, in all other situations of appeal and response, situations that are at the same time unique and singular.

Speaking specifically of Abraham, who could not speak about his duty to the Absolute, Derrida observes the double movement of, on the one hand, obeying his duty to the God he must love above all else, which founds his responsibility - his answering for himself before God; and on the other hand, because bound by secret command, he must sacrifice the person he loves most in the world, his only son, and so be seen as irresponsible and unethical in the eyes of his fellow human beings.

From this aporia, Derrida reads the inevitable logic of responsibility, that it always requires the sacrifice of someone. Every singularity before whom we are answerable excludes all the other possible singularities and thus, all responsibility is "condemned, a priori." Nothing can "justify" the choice of this singularity rather than that one: at the same time, "we also do our duty by behaving thus." [185] Sacrifice always already involves an inherent sacrifice in the choice of whom we respond to, in addition to any injunction we obey for the other. The inference of sacrificing for the "one who sees in secret," in whose "unseen gaze" you are held, is that this is performed at the expense of the living warmth across from you, the other person whose gaze you receive and return, recognizing and being recognized. This is the cost of responsibility to the phantasm

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[184] Ibid., p. 69.
[185] Ibid., p. 71.

named “God,” to exchange that person whose gaze you can return for one whose gaze remains invisible. Even if the relationship is between persons who see one another, there is still the fact of sacrifice in the response to the appeal: when I respond to this one, I have sacrificed all the others. This is remarkably close to Beauvoir’s observation of the same aporia in *Pyrrhus and Cineas and in The Ethics of Ambiguity*, the ambiguity that “working for some often means working against others”[186], an ambiguity without resolution, but one which is not an excuse for inaction. She observes that each individual is bound to all others as a condition of meaning, a condition that is “precisely the ambiguity of his condition: in surpassing toward others, each one exists absolutely as for himself; each is interested in the liberation of all, but as a separate existence engaged in his own projects.” From this she concludes that “in order to serve some men we must do disservice to others.” [187] This gives rise to the ethical question, “by what principle do we choose between them,” [188] and while such a principle is duly explored in her ethic, the fact of all response to the other entailing sacrifice is maintained.

Linking the scene of Abrahamic (and therefore Christian) responsibility to the tele-techno-capitalist regime, Derrida asks whether the sacrifice of Isaac is not “the most common event in the world,” due to the “the structure of the laws of the market” that

[186] Simone de Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cineas,* p. 127.
[187] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 113.
[188] Ibid.

> allows to die of hunger and disease tens of millions of children (those relatives or fellow humans that the ethics or the discourse of the rights of man refers to) without any moral or legal tribunal ever being considered competent to judge such sacrifice, the sacrifice of the other to avoid being sacrificed oneself. Not only does such a society participate in this incalculable sacrifice, it actually organizes it. [189]

Here, we are given the example of how choosing one involves sacrificing others. If we accept Derrida's account, wherein the Christian, emerging from the Platonic and Abrahamic, incorporates and represses the double injunction of responsibility - pure passion and duty before the other - now he will draw the line connecting the Greco-Roman-Christian and the tele-techno-capitalist. The contemporary order is "founded upon a bottomless chaos (the abyss or open mouth)," [190] one that speaks,

> a lexicon concerning responsibility that can be said to hover vaguely about a concept that is nowhere to be found, even if we won't go so far as to say that it doesn't correspond to any concept at all. It amounts to a disavowal whose resources, as one knows, are inexhaustible.[191]

Those who dare to "avow" the absence of true responsibility - for example, some philosophers - on behalf of this "order" founded on the "open mouth" are treated as "nihilist, relativist, even poststructuralist, or worse, deconstructionist, all those who remain concerned in the face of such a display of good conscience." [192]

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[189] Derrida, *The Gift of Death,* p. 86.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid., p. 85.
[192] Ibid.

He implies we should not be surprised at this, because the economy of the present order, which can be read as sacrificing tens of millions of children, is itself an iteration of a certain economy of sacrifice that Derrida reads in Christian theology. Reflecting on *Matthew* 5 f., Derrida observes the language of "profit," "sacrifice" and "reward:"

> . . . the question of remuneration will permeate the discourse on God the father who sees in secret and who will reward you (by implication with a salary). We need to distinguish between two types of salary: one of retribution, equivalent exchange, within a circular economy; the other of absolute surplus value, heterogeneous to outlay or investment. . . [193]

The suggestion here is that the structure of an "absolute" authority engaged in an economy of compensation – here "God" promising "compensation" in the hereafter – is the same structure at work in the global "economy" of capitalism – the absolute authority of "maximum sustainable profitability," expedited at the cost of the lives of the dispossessed, is obeyed and rewarded – for some, in the economy of equivalent exchange, for others, in the reward of surplus payment.

If we examine "religion" as "response" in its specific emergent context, we see also a play of conscience and consciousness. God the father, part of the chain of metaphysical absolutes - "Spirit," "Law," "Eternity," et cetera - who "sees in secret," enjoins us to respond, to do our duty. Hence, "he" inaugurates the scene of sacrifice and its inevitable guilt, as well as the aporia of being responsible - in secret - and at the

[193] Ibid., p. 105.

same time appearing irresponsible to others. Derrida goes so far as to suggest we abandon "idolatrous" concepts of God as "over there," and instead

> we might say: God is the name of the possibility I have of keeping a secret that is visible from the interior but not from the exterior. As soon as such a structure of conscience exists, of being-with-oneself, of speaking, that is to say of producing invisible sense, as soon as I have within me, thanks to the invisible word as such, a witness that others cannot see, and who is therefore at the same time other than me and more intimate with me than myself, as soon as I can have a secret relationship with myself and not tell everything, as soon as there is secrecy and secret witnessing within me, and for me, then there is what I call God, (there is) what I call God in me (it happens that [*il y a que*] I call myself God - a phrase difficult to distinguish from "God calls me," for it is on such a condition that I can call myself or be called in secret. God is in me, he is the absolute "me" or "self", he is that structure of invisible interiority that is called, in Kierkegaard's sense, subjectivity. . . . . That is the history of God and of the name of God as the history of secrecy, at the same time secret and without any secrets. Such a history is also an economy." [194]

Consonant with Patocka's thesis that the genealogy of "religion" is also the genealogy of "consciousness/conscience," here Derrida is explicitly suggesting that the "God who sees in secret," to whom we respond can be read as our own interiority, our putative

[194] Ibid., p. 108.

self-conscious "subjectivity," and as such produces the same economy of response, and the same ethical aporia as that given in the Abrahamic myth. Here is the same dynamic of Hegel's dialectic of consciousness, in which the self perceives itself as its own other: but we also see in this particular iteration the inference of both a "passion" or love beyond calculation, and of an economy of reward and debt that motivates the response. Derrida turns to an essay by Baudelaire, "The Pagan School," which he claims

> can always unmask a sort of sublime and secret calculation in the salary promised in heaven by the Father who sees in secret and will pay it back, that of him who "seeks to win paradise economically, as the narrator of "Counterfeit Money" puts it. The moment the gift, however generous it be, is touched by the slightest hint of calculation, the moment it takes account of knowledge [*connaissance*] or recognition [*reconnaissance*], it allows itself to be caught in transacting: it exchanges, in short it gives counterfeit money, since it gives in exchange for payment. Even if it gives "true" money, the alteration of the gift into a form of calculation immediately destroys, as if from the inside, the value of the very thing that is given. "[195]

Derrida concludes, in the face of today's "economy" and its sacrifices:

> One must keep in the gift "only the giving, the act of giving, and the intention to give, not the given, which in the end doesn't count. One must give without knowing, without knowledge or recognition, without thanks [*remerciement)* without anything, or at least, without any object. [196]

[195] Ibid., p. 113.
[196] Ibid.

We may note here the contrast between the Abraham and Isaac narrative and the gospel text in question. Abraham gives without knowing and without calculation. He is obliged to trust the One who calls him, in secret. The gospel discourse about "God the father" promises remuneration, and with this entails the kind of calculation which Derrida argues alters and destroys the gift. The suggestion here is that the incorporation of the Platonic "Good," of the gazeless object of the Good, into the Christian person of "God the father" bears within it a loss of generosity, as it also bears within it the chain of the "demonic" and "orgiastic" which, incorporated into the Platonic and subsequently incorporated into the Christian, "does not yet resound with the injunction to respond," even as the One -as "father" - enjoins us to "do our duty." Thus we are faced with another iteration of the aporia, that we must respond to the One who calls us to infinite love, even as the One is unmasked as a dealer or a banker in an economy of sacrifice. To further complicate this "scene," as Derrida reads Patocka, although it emerges from the particular chain of the Greco-Judaic-Christian, it has also been disseminated, at the same time, as the psychological drama of the contemporary "self." [197]

As we have seen, the idea of response is closely allied to the appeal of the other, and of the Absolute Other, the "other" which it is tempting to "know," to make "holy." According to the logic of *différance,* the thing indemnified will escape, will exceed the boundaries of the "sacred" space: it will not remain *heilig*, holy, unscathed, any more than the cell that exerts itself to ward off disturbance can avoid the disturbance it has caused itself. At the same time, it is not an option that one should *not* respond to the

[197] This is the main scaffold of Derrida's analysis of Patocka, most explicitly stated on p. 7 f.

invitation of that experience of oneness, evanescent though it is. As we have seen in the logic of sacrifice, it is only thus that we do our duty, and so we again are condemned to paradox, aporia, ambiguity. This is performed in Derrida's essay, "An Oblique Offering."

In this essay, Derrida bids us to imagine a scholar, invited to respond to 12 other scholars who have honoured him with published critical reflections. The honoree is of course Derrida, and the occasion is the gathering of the contributors to *Derrida: A Critical Reader*. The chief editor, David Woods, suggests to Derrida that he call his response "An Oblique Offering," a title Derrida claims he had not even seen until called to the gathering.[198] The first question that arises concerns this context, a context posed as a ritual context. Next, the ritual context involves a secret, even if it is a secret of the kind that everyone knows, a *secret de Polichinelle,* which prohibits acknowledgement in "polite" society as well as fidelity to the unspoken thing. [199]

In the midst of this contextualizing, the question that arises is how does one respond, not only here in this academic ritualized context, but in any context. Derrida or "the analyst" of the imaginative scene poses two hypotheses for the unfolding of this "ritual:" in the first, the scene unfolds as expected, perhaps after a detour or two, in which the contributor brings tribute to the other contributors. The ritual and its content are not disturbed or contested but on the contrary "confirmed, consolidated, augmented, embellished or intensified "[200] by the expectations. In the second hypothesis, the ritual

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[198] Ibid., p. 6.
[199] Ibid., p. 7.
[200] Derrida, "Passions: An Oblique Offering," in *On the Name* (Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 7.

is already disturbed and one of the "elements" must engage in "contradictory and incompatible things."[201]

At stake in this reading of this scene is the uncritically held assumption that the contributors have a standard expectation of the "ritual" and that they all share this expectation. This is of course an enormous and inaccurate assumption. But for the purpose of reflection, Derrida considers two possibilities: the first is that he refuses to "respond" to those gathered out of respect and friendship, out of an acknowledgement that he could never adequately treat each of the 12 scholar's texts, their sources, their arguments with the respect they deserve. Friendship and politeness, he claims, enjoins a double duty here: first, to avoid the language of ritual and the language of duty because it is

> neither friendly nor polite if it were purely and simply to obey a ritual rule. But this duty to eschew the rule of ritualized decorum also demands that one go beyond the language of duty. One must not be friendly or polite out of duty. We venture such a proposition, without a doubt, against Kant.[202]

Derrida, like Beauvoir, is responding to Kant, (whose language, she admits, she deliberately engaged in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* even as she sought to expose his deficits).[203] A further injunction in this attempt to articulate the duty of not obeying the

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[201] Ibid., p. 6.
[202] Ibid., p. 7.
[203] See William Wilkerson, "A Different Kind of Universality: Beauvoir and Kant on Universal Ethics" in *Beauvoir and Western Thought from Plato to Butler,* ed. Shannon M. Mussett and William Wilkerson (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), p. 56. In his analysis of Beauvoir's appeal to Kant, he cites her admission to biographer Deirdre Bair

duty of ritual leads to a further aporia. Citing Kant again as "our exemplary 'critical reader' . . . indebted as we are, as his heirs, to the great philosopher of critique,"[204] Derrida explains that we cannot even speak of the "ought" of friendship, an "ought" implicit in this attempt to honour friendship by refusing to give it out of or in conformation with duty: "As soon as it yields to the necessity of applying the generality of a prescription to a single case, the gesture of friendship or of politeness would be destroyed. It would be defeated, beaten, and broken by the ordered rigidity of rules, or, put a different way, of norms." [205] This evokes Beauvoir's observation that "Ethics does not furnish recipes any more than art or science:"

> Contrary to the formal strictness of Kantianism for whom the more abstract the act is the more virtuous it is, generosity seems to us to be better grounded and therefore more valid the less distinction there is between the other and ourself and the more we fulfill ourself in taking the other as an end. This is what happens if I am engaged in relation to others.[206]

Derrida says that although it may seem surprising to continue to link friendship with politeness in this text, as politeness seems to be more engaged with rules and duty to rules, "the internal contradiction in the concept of politeness, as in all normative concepts of which it would be an example, is that it involves both rules and invention without rule. Its rule is that one knows the rules but is never bound by them. It is

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that she finds *The Ethics of Ambiguity* her most irritating work, disavowing it for both its "Kantian language and its apparent abstract solution to human problems of action."

[204] Ibid., p. 8.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Beauvoir *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 144.

impolite to be merely polite, to be polite out of politeness." [207] This "rule" is recurrent - "structural" - and involves the notion of respect for the rule, rather than compulsion to it. Similarly, Beauvoir formulates the closest thing to an ethical "imperative" in this way:

> To put it positively, the precept will be to treat the other (to the extent that he is the only one concerned, which is the moment that we are considering at present) as a freedom so that his end may be freedom; in using this conducting-wire one will have to incur the risk, in each case, of inventing an original solution . . . [because] the Other is multiple and on the basis of this, new questions arise. [208]

Like Derrida, she looks to a "rule" of non-rule as the basis for a just ethic, and emphasizes the singularity of each situation that arises. Derrida early on declares that "justice" is what is at stake in this text, and, as he argues in "Force of Law," justice always exceeds determinate laws.[209]

Derrida reviews the movement of this discourse to this point, and observes the binary logic that a non-response is a response. One might not respond for the reasons outlined above - especially because to respond poorly or out of "duty" is neither polite nor friendly. He also observes that nothing could be worse than receiving an interminable discourse on the effects of non-response, as he playfully performs precisely *that*. Invoking apophasis, defined in a footnote as "a kind of Irony, whereby

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[207] Derrida, "Passions: An Oblique Offering, p. 9.
[208] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 143 -145.
[209] Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority," trans. Mary Quaintance, *Cardozo Law Review* volume11 (1989 - 1990): p.257.

we deny that we say or do precisely that which we especially say or do"[210] while making it clear it is not for "religious" purposes, he then raises the question: given the contradictions he has outlined in responding poorly, which leads to a non-response, which is yet a response (even the rule of the non-law is a law), he asks - what is the right course? He begins another tact - a series of paragraphs that begin with the italicized sentence: "*There is a secret,"* and finally, *"There, there is a secret."* Performing an apophatic litany of what the secret is not, he seems to suggest that in the space of this discourse on "responsiveness," there, in that space, the secret is - to recall his description from *The Gift of Death*- "that structure of invisible interiority that is called, in Kierkegaard's sense, subjectivity," [211] a subjectivity that is, according to the logic of *différance*, never present and, therfore, never fixed or unified. Accepting this premise, that the "self" is that "structure of invisible interiority," the question is, can one keep a secret from one's self? If that "self" in its multiplying iterations is the one who enjoins and the one who responds, then the "secret" is that there is no secret. The shape of the discourse in "Passions: An Oblique Offering" as a whole suggests that the "secret" is the play of undecideability, of indeterminateness, for example, the undecideability of Abraham's duty to sacrifice his son and thus keep faith with the one, and at the same time appear to be committing an abomination. Derrida also claims that although an "offering" as such, like the one he is making to his fellow contributors, is generally presented head on, ["Let's not beat around the bush!"], he cannot proceed in

[210] Derrida, "Passions: An Oblique Offering," note 11, p. 141, in which Derrida is citing *The Oxford English Dictionary*.
[211] Derrida, *The Gift of Death,* p.108.

such a way in this situation - a situation entitled “An Oblique Offering.”[212] He infers that which the text conceals is behind - outside of frontal vision or conscious apprehension, what David Wills calls “dorsality:” what is behind, at the back of - temporally, spatially - what is un-conscious.[213] Hence his turn to apophasis here, since he cannot speak of this oblique offering directly.

At the same time, this text testifies that the secret of responding is not a secret. In one of his illuninating endnotes, he explains the "secret" through the "exemplarity of literature": " . . . literature (among other things) is "exemplary": it always is, says, does something other, something other than itself. For example or par excellence: philosophy."[214] This quality called "exemplary" here is resonant of that figure that Beauvoir names "ambiguity." The gift of Derrida's discourse here, to our reading of Beauvoir, is that it exposes the structure of this ambiguity at play in her ethics, where response to the appeal of the other structurally embraces risk – the risk of failure, of rejection, of error, as well as the promise to the other founded in generosity.

Again, evoking Abraham and Isaac, Derrida explains that the response is always an offering; an offering up of the body, in that case - of oneself - to the other, offering up the body as “vulnerable,” weak, exposed to the other. This is also the risk of the “project,” the risk of the appeal to the other, for Beauvoir. Engaging the Hegelian figure of self/other/desire, Derrida asks

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[212] Derrida, “Passions,” p. 9 and p 12 f.
[213] David Wills, *Dorsality: Thinking Back Through Technology and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2001), p.5.
[214] Derrida, "Passions: An Oblique Offering," note 14, p. 142 f.

> What is it to respond to an invitation? To whom, to what, does this return, what does it amount to [*à quoi cela revient-il*]. An invitation leaves one free, otherwise it becomes a constraint. It should never imply: you are obliged to come, you have to come, it is necessary. But the invitation must be pressing, not indifferent. It should never imply: you are free not to come and if you don't come, never mind, it doesn't matter. Without the pressure of some desire - which at once says "come" and leaves, nevertheless, the other his absolute freedom - the invitation immediately withdraws and becomes unwelcoming. . . What we are glimpsing of the invitation (but of the call in general as well) governs by the same "token" the logic of the response . . . [215]

With a striking resonance to Beauvoir, who persistently asserts the absolute freedom of the self and the other in *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* Derrida here establishes absolute freedom [and its risks] as the condition for the "logic of the response," a condition that is, like Certeau's text, "also a promise."[216] It is invoked by the desire that moves all relationships and is satisfied only in recognition. This recognition is a prerequisite for the faith that is the subject of Derrida's mature reflections on the figure of "religion," "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone."

Published in 1994, in this text, Derrida locates his discourse, its discussants and himself in the multivalent particulars of its arising: in this case, a conference among European intellectuals, all male, all Jewish or Christian, on the island of Capri, not in

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[215] Derrida, "Passions: An Oblique Offering," p. 14.
[216] Derrida, "A Number of Yes," p. 1.

Rome but not too far from Rome. The theme of the meeting, we are told, emerges from Derrida without thought, "*la parole soufflée*," breathlessly, unexpectedly, in a move that resonates with his claim that the globalatinized capitalist world produced by "religion" is "running out of breath."[217] The essay is based on his reflections at the time of the conference as well as later, in California. Derrida proposes to interrogate a popular claim of that decade, that the world was seeing a "return to the religious," marked of course by the evidence of various violences performed in the name of some "religion," as well as the emerging political influence of certain "religious" sects in the United States. A telling feature of this essay is that it is presented in two fonts, each assigned to one half of the essay: first, "*ITALICS*," in italic font; second, "POST SCRIPTUM in Roman font. This seems to suggest a perspective that we, the readers, can partake in: that which is printed in the italic font perhaps allows us to see that which is printed in the Roman or Latinized font more clearly, as Capri might give those gathered scholars a perspective on "Rome," and as in acknowledging the distinction, we may intellectually give ourselves a *theoria* by which to view the ubiquitous heritage of Rome at play in our contemporary context.

Echoing his reading of Christian European responsibility in *The Gift of Death*, Derrida deconstructs the idea of religion and locates it: "religion" is clearly embedded in the "globalatinized" earth of techno-capitalism, a condition which belies any simple claim of a return to religion, when it seems, according to Derrida's understanding, "religion" is as inescapable to us as the ocean is to the fish who swim in it. He draws this

[217] J. Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," p. 75.

interpretation out of a consideration of Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone,* in which Kant asserts two forms of religion, the performative or "cultic" and the "reflective," the latter of which is deemed the only moral religion. Weaving the chain of "light," "enlightenment," "illumination" with the etymology of the divine, "*deivos*," - which denotes "luminous," and "celestial"[218] - to the theme of "reflection," Derrida insists "on the relation of all religion to fire and to light. There is the light of revelation and the light of the Enlightenment." [219] Early on, he observes that Kant's definition of "reflecting faith," a faith he identifies with Christianity, requires that in order to act morally in accordance with the categorical imperative, one must act as though God does not exist.[220] "Everything begins with the presence of *that absence."* [221] From this analyses, he will proceed to the observation that Christianity has always announced the death of god, and so has arrived at this contemporary state of "madness," of a globalatinzed capitalist world that is "already speaking Latin," [222] is "running out of breath."[223] It is "madness" to the extent that "*Religion* circulates in the world one might say like an English word *(comme un mot anglais)* that has been to Rome and taken a detour to the United States."[224] In its name is spread and imposed through capitalism and an imperial political-military hegemony that calls on the absent god to be its witness, a

[218] Ibid., p.46.
[219] Ibid., p. 77.
[220] Ibid., p.49.
[221] Ibid., p. 65.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid., p. 67.
[224] Ibid.

witness to things "which have always been and remain foreign to what this word names and arrests in its history." [225]

In the course of 52 uneven aphorisms, Derrida queries the term religion, a term his fellow discussants seem to use in a confident and self-evident way. He locates the term first in its two possible Latin roots, *religere* and *religare*, one denoting "to gather," the other denoting "to bind."[226] The question is, what is it that is gathered and bound? The answers are multiple, but as with any formulation of "essence," "presence", and "sovereignity," to gather and to bind is to attempt to make things "move no more," to enforce a comforting and false stasis upon a thing that will always exceed, according to the logic of *différance*, such attempts at containment. The impusle to gather and to bind is to constitute the phantasm, here in its filiations of father/son, high/low, eternal/temporal, heavenly/worldly, sinner/saint, male/female etc. Above all, it is to attempt to fix the thing, to make it stay the same. The logic of *différance* makes clear the impossibility of anything ever being utterly fixed, static, or the same, alerting us to the "phantasmic" character of much that we revere and indemnify in our various practices, while attending to the movement of this logic, which Derrida calls dissemination, the play of resistance and repetition.

The "religion" of the Roman empire, and its descendants, gathers and binds meaning, practice, and power. The term originally applied to adherents of a particular practice, an initially Christian practice. Christianity became the official religion of the Holy Roman Empire, and by extension, European imperialism, and capitalism: its tropes

[225] Ibid., p. 65.
[226] Ibid., p. 71.

continue to inflect that empire's descendants – the technocracy of contemporary global capitalism. To the extent that the structure of this religion continues to play in the globalatinized world, it is fair to say, as Michael Naas observes, that there is no return to the religious since there can be no turning away from its play. [227] Derrida acknowledges that he is not able to

> undertake here all the analyses required by distinctions that are indispensable but rarely respected or practiced. There are many of them (religion/faith, belief; religion/piety; religion/cult; religion/theology; religion/theiology; religion/ontotheology; or yet again, religious/divine-mortal or immortal; religious/sacred-saved-holy-unscathed-immune-*heilig*). But among them, before or after them, we will put to the test the quasi-transcendental privilege we believe ourselves obliged to grant the distinction between . . . [228]

In this, he acknowledges the breadth of what the interrogation of religion embraces, and reflects a sensitivity to the critical approaches of contemporary scholarship. Within the constraints of his text, however, the structure of religion that Derrida unfolds "at the limit of reason," is double:

> *on the one hand,* the experience of belief (trust, trust-worthiness, confidence, faith, the credit accorded the *good faith of the utterly* other in the experience of witnessing) and, *on the other,* the experience of sacredness, even of holiness, of the unscathed that is safe and sound

[227] Naas, *Miracle and Machine,* p. 30.
[228] Ibid., p. 72.

> (*heilig,* holy). These comprise two distinct sources or foci. "Religion" figures their *ellipse* because it both comprehends the two foci, but also sometimes shrouds their irreducible duality in silence, in a manner precisely secret and *reticent.*[229]

Religion, here, is thus both the experience of that which shall be indemnified, protected, made safe and sound, *heilig*, holy and, on the other hand, that faith which according to Derrida is the originary faith required in all human relations, the faith that proceeds from the promise to tell the truth to the other, and the other's faith in that promise, even when that promise is false or fails. This faith, he carefully notes, "*has not always been and will not always be indentifiable with religion, nor, another point theology. All sacredness and holiness are not necessarily, in the strict sense of the term, if there is one, religious."*[230] He further observes that these two foci do not belong to any determinate religion, (granting that religion only "properly" refers to Christianity).[231] In this, Derrida identifies an opening in the ellipse called religion for faith, and for knowledge, knowledge as the experience of that to which we might testify and protect. This iteration of faith and the knowledge, which exceeds the limits of religion, provides the condition whereby faith and knowledge can exceed the autoimmune response of the "machine" that is presently rendering the religion of the imperial capitalist technological hegemony "breathless," without "respiration," and

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[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid., p. 48.
[231] Ibid., p. 72.

therefore, ironically, "spirit." It is this iteration of faith, and its impossible relation to knowledge that informs my reading of Beauvoir.

Derrida explores the tension between these two sources of religion, the experience of that which is indemnified in tension to the originary faith in the promise of that which is yet to come. This tension produces a condition of "autoimmunity" which, on the one hand, threatens the very thing it seeks to indemnify and, on the other, produces an opening into that space of originary faith, which in other texts Derrida calls "*khora*," the "space" which is no space, from which all things generate.[232] It is here that the discourse about "revelation" and "revealability" are located, "revealability" as a quality that transcends any particular tradition, and which implies the figure of the "secret" – of a fealty to that which one cannot share, of an allegiance to some thing within, hidden, and thus "subjective" [only ever subjective], and which, at the same time, one wants to share and make binding to the other. This is the duality of "revelation:" the "light of truth" emanates from a nocturnal place, as Naas reads it, "a nocturnal source that is based on the inaccessibility of the other."[233] One's secret is that one is inaccessible in her otherness, as is the other, linked only by the cool hand of *fialibilté*. Revelation is the performance of the social bond, where the originary faith that connects our contingencies to one another reveals precisely the otherness of each individual, which Derrida names an interruption, at the same time it unites us in the bond of the promise, also called the *event* or "miracle." Derrida explains

[232] Ibid., p. 81 f.
[233] Naas, *Miracle and Machine*, p.87.

> There is no opposition, fundamentally, between "social bond" and "social unravelling." A certain interruptive unravelling is the condition of the "social bond," the very respiration of all "community." This is not even the knot of a reciprocal condition, but rather the possibility that every knot can come undone, be cut or interrupted. This is where the *socius* or the relation to the other would disclose itself to the secret of testimonial experience – and hence, of a certain faith.[234]

In this latter passage from "Faith and Knowledge," Derrida identifies the space of the originary faith, that it founds all social relations, including those involved in science, technoscience, and economics, and exceeds all determinate cultural traditions. He also makes clear that this faith inhabits every movement of the social, a double movement that teeters between bond and unravelling, a space of risk that compels faith. The figure of auto-immunity offers an analysis of this unstable space.

To illustrate autoimmunity at work in an iteration of contemporary religion, Derrida describes the example of the rise of the Fundamentalist Christian movement in the USA in recent decades, one which decries the moral peril of the contemporary technological context and its threat to "Christian values," even as it does so by means of the very technology produced by this same modernity. Christian Fundamentalists attempt to indemnify their "holy" and unassailable moral and social commitments through the use of a technology that is so ubiquitous in their lived experience, that this same technology conveys as well the "other" that they wish to escape, eroding the base

[234] Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," p. 99.

of their resistance. Ironically, the science which produces this technology, the science which threatens the indemnified and uncritically held tenets of this movement, is itself in part founded on the same originary faith as religion: it too believes in the promise to tell the truth, even if the promise is unfulfilled. [235]

Derrida suggests that the condition of autoimmunity is everywhere that globalatinization is. The world held in the grasp of globalatinization inherits religion, and its two sources, so that everywhere there arises the way of indemnification, a species of the phantasm of sovereignity, that is always already accompanied by and in tension with the "un-way" of originary faith.

The section called "Et grenades . . ." offers a double reading of this figure. The word *grenade* is French for "pomegranate," a fruit that typically features in the Passover Seder of the Sephardim of Algeria. A grenade is also an incendiary weapon. In Naas' reading, both connotations are present in this image: "Emblem of a still life: an opened pomegranate, one Passover evening, on a tray."[236] The image suggests the two sources of Religion, the promise that appeals to faith, given in the knowledge of the experience of that worth indemnifying, the "light of revelation." In presenting an image of that ancient Jewish ritual of remembrance, the Seder, it also evokes that which is protected through repetition; and yet, this act of indemnification is presented here as a "still life:" an act of mourning, of keeping things in their place. At the same time, there is still "life:" the faith of which such a practice is an affect persists. However, if the attempt to indemnify loses sight of the faith which transcends all particular practice and its

[235] Ibid., p.82 f.
[236] Ibid., p. 100.

implicit contingency and risk, it may lead to that other kind of "grenade," such as we see in the various conflicts around the globalatinized world. [237] Derrida observes

> This self-contesting attestation keeps the auto-immune community alive, which is to say open to something other and more than itself; The other, the future, death, freedom, the coming or the love of the other, the space and time of a spectralizing messianicity beyond all messianism. It is here that the possibility of religion persists: the *religious* bond (scrupulous, respectful, modest, reticient, inhibited) between the value of life, its absolute "dignity," and the theological machine, the 'machine for making gods.' "[238]

This passage, itself a performance of *différance*, insists that although the two sources of religion exceed any determinate tradition, the scene of religion at issue in this discussion is itself specifically Christian, self-contesting and open to the *event.* The figure of the "machine for making gods" enables us to think "religion" in relation to Beauvoir's critique of her context, in her sensitivity to the temptations of "metaphysics," and the "serious," and her exhortation to accept and *think* ambiguity. This figure warns of the unavoidable process of self-contestation that, seeking to indemnify something, at the same time launches a movement towards instability: "no *weg* without *umweg*."[239]

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[237] In addition to a general analysis of the violence begotten in the autoimmune performance, Derrida ends his essay by invoking *Genet at Chatila*, a memoir of the most horrific violence committed against Palestinian refugees in Beirut.
[238] Ibid., p. 88.
[238] Ibid., p. 87. Naas and Baring both address the influence of Bergson, the source of the quotation "machine for making gods" on Derrida, although he never explicitly treats a text by Bergson, except very briefly in passing in "Faith and Knowledge."
[239] Derrida, "To Speculate: On Freud," p. 354 f.

It bears observing that ambiguity is the fitting adverb for this tableau of the "grenade" and all of its inferences, an ambiguity that is the premise for Beauvoir's ethic. This review of the "scene of religion" in three of Derrida's texts shows that it is constituted by a play of "ambiguity," although he employs the language of undecideability, of autoimmunity, of *différance,* to describe this play. In these texts, this scene is both specific, involving singular persons located in a particular historical context, and indeterminate; the scene involves an appeal and a response, moved by desire and unconditional generosity and yet at the risk of a deadly calculability. The persons in this scene are free and must act in their freedom, trusting the other, believing in the other without calculation; at the same time, one risks the freedom of the other and therefore meaning, in the attempt to ontologize remains, in the attempt to indemnify and make "holy." Taken together, the elements of this play are also an inheritance, to which we are enjoined to respond. An integral figure in his discussion of inheritance is that of *mourning,* a figure that also draws us closer to Certeau.

The figure of mourning is inextricably linked to the phantasm and the spectre. In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida meditates on the first scene of Hamlet,[240] in which the ghost of Hamlet's father appears. The ghost, who sees but cannot be seen behind his visor, a figure Derrida names the "*visor-effect,"* [241] evokes the unseen gaze of the One in Derrida's account of the Matthew text in *The Gift of Death.* The ghost of Hamlet's

[240] This is an interesting echo of a passage in Certeau, in which Certeau reflects on the figure of "absence" by observing that Hamlet's father's ghost "once became the law of the castle" (Certeau, *The Mystic Fable,* p. 2), raising the possibility that Certeau's 1982 text, to which Derrida responded, resonates in Derrida's 1994 *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994) which begins with a prolonged reflection on Hamlet's spectral father.
[241] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx,* p. 6.

father, the phantasm, is "the basis of which we inherit from the law,"[242] and because unseen, is that toward which we must have faith - that this thing is the one we believe it is, that this one speaks truth. In approaching this "thing" that is neither here nor not here, he advises that mourning is always at work: "we will be speaking of nothing else," because it is the condition of knowledge.[243] According to this logic, knowledge is the attempt "to ontologize remains, to make them present," which is a case of being "caught up in the work of mourning but, as such, it does not yet think it." [244] To know is to know who and where, to have a clear and irrefutable location for the thing. It is to know, above all, where the "remains" are: ironically, "remains" are the one thing that cannot be fixed in place, the thing, like the hidden law of composition of every text that deserves to be called text. He offers this figure in explanation:

> One has to know [especially the Body] . . . to know is to know who and where - to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies . . . it is necessary (to know - to make certain) that in what remains of him, he remain there. Let him stay there and move no more! [245]

Against Freud, who argues for the closure successful mourning brings, Derrida doubts this is possible: "mourning is interminable. Inconsolable. Irreconcilable."[246] Mourning is inescapable in as much as we must continuously mourn the impossibility of mourning, as there is no presence, no body, no place that remains constant: to mourn is to mourn the instability of what is and was, to mourn the phantasm of that which is now gone from

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[242] Ibid., p. 7.
[243] Ibid., p.9.
[244] Ibid., p. 9.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Derrida, *The Work of Mourning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 143.

us and which was never present in some fixable state. At the same time, to mourn the phantasm is to leave an opening for that which may come, for that which is impossible, unconditional, which Derrida characterizes elsewhere as "messianicity with messianism."[247] Such an opening is never toward the teleological, or it would already be a closure of thought. The opening of the "to come," of the impossible, the unconditional, is precisely to that which is yet unthought, unknown, that which constitutes *the event* beyond our making or any sovereignity, beyond stasis, that which is, to inflect the metaphysical term, "transcendent."

III. Wanderers in a strange land

This figure of mourning is perhaps the most obvious intersection between Derrida's thinking on religion and Michel de Certeau's examination of mysticism. Certeau, who is both a reader of Derrida and a subject of Derrida's reading,[248] a systematic renegade, the "historian of alterity," reads the arising of the mystic tradition in Renaissance Europe as a response to the empty tomb, to the absence of the "One. " Certeau offers here a sustained reflection on the desire that Hegel suggests constitutes self-consciousness, at the same time that, as a historian and philosopher, he locates it in the specific context of late Renaissance Europe. Regarding the figure of the absent One, we might read this as the beginning of a recognition that there is not and cannot be a one that does not immediately infer a "+," a supplement or remainder. The figure of absence suggests that, far from obeying the demand to "move no more," the dead

[247] Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," p. 56.
[248] Derrida "A Number of Yes," pp. 118 - 133.

continue to move even as the quick, haunting us, appealing to us. Certeau characterizes the experience of this absence as follows:

> What should be there is missing. Quietly, almost painlessly, this discovery takes effect. It afflicts us in a region we cannot identify, as if we had been stricken by the separation long before realizing it. When the situation finds expression, it may still borrow the words of the Christian prayer: "May I not be separated from Thee." Not without Thee. *Nicht ohne.* But the necessary, having become the improbable, is in fact impossible. Such is the figure of desire. It is obviously a part of the long history of that *One,* the origin and metamorphosis of which so intrigued Freud. One sole being is lacking, and all is lacking. This new beginning orders a sequel of wanderings and pursuits. One suffers the pangs of absence because one suffers the pangs of the One. [249]

Although Certeau never specifically uses the word "mourning" in this introduction, it is inferred in his choice of language: "afflict," "stricken," "suffers the pangs of absence." Such are the affects of mourning. That which is mourned is the *One* who "should be there," but who is not. This is also the vocabulary of desire: this desire for the One eludes us, ordering a "sequel of wanderings and pursuit," an unending desire that recalls Beauvoir's discussion of the "*passion inutile*." Like Beauvoir, Certeau does not try to reconcile the aporia of longing for communion with the one, even as he accepts the absolute alterity of each person. As Marian Füssel observes, "The other is for

[249] Certeau, *The Mystic Fable,* p. 9.

Certeau 'the phantasm of historiography, the object that it seeks, honors, buries.' " [250] Certeau's treatment of the one as absence and as the object of desire brings us close to Hegel again, but closer to Derrida and ultimately, Beauvoir. Like the mystics whose discourse he studies, Certeau employs an apophatic style, saying only *where* and *what* the "one" is not. His insistence on an "absence" as the locus of desire suggests the rejection of metaphysical ontology, of Being, of presence, of absolutes. It suggests, unexpectedly from this Jesuit scholar, an acceptance of instability, of becoming, of play. According to such a premise, the mystics inaugurate an understanding of the direction of desire that puts in motion a scene of wandering, a scene that emerges out of religion. At the same time, Certeau remains close to Hegel in affirming desire as the defining action of the self.[251]

Certeau locates the mystic in a turn of the Christian European world, a world that constitutes the scene of religion. The old tripartite understanding of the Christian world - in which the "Body" of Christ existed in the tensions of the Sacrament, the Churchgoers and the "historic" body of the One who is absent - was replaced by a new binary: the Faithful and their practice (a hidden practice) is replaced by a hidden text, and the body is now an esoteric Text held in tension with the Sacrament. The historic body of the One, still absent, is removed from the understanding.[252] In this context, in which a gathering and binding of exegetical truth accrues to the divine experts, the Faithful are

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[250] Füssel, quoting Certeau 31.
[251] See Sieps, and Pippin, both of whose recent studies emphasize this premise in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit,* of desire as a figure that has been neglected in Hegel studies.
[252] Certeau, "A Topics: The New Science" (pp.75 -112) in *The Mystic Fable,* traces the transformation of a ternary theology of the "body" to a binary one, and observes how, in the resulting opacity in the church community, question arise regrding the "absent" one that interest the Mystics.

increasingly left to a silent and chaotic world, where the old assumptions governing and enabling communication are no longer functioning. The old unities dissolve, and the mystics - “spirituals" - devise a manner of speaking for their new science, in which the rhetoric is a performance. The rules governing this performance enunciated a will to speak to a particular other in a manner by which one could not be certain of the locutor or the recipient - as though the two parties spoke while hidden from one another.

Certeau infers that the mystics are, on the one hand, resisting ecclesiastical “binding” while, on the other hand, seeking to bring unity to the chaotic world. They devise “a manner of speaking,” a rhetorical performance, to make the Word speak again, a faith in the “Yes” that the god always only ever utters. The question they ask and attempt to answer is, according to Certeau, can a body be constituted by a word?[253] Their site is that of displacement, the displacement of that which no longer speaks by a discourse longing for communication, for a word. The displacement of the unified order reveals heterologies at the margins of the world. The mystics, undertaking a new “science,” a “manner of speaking” by which they will constitute another *ratio,* end up inaugurating a tradition emblemized by “Labadie the Wanderer,“ in which the seeker is doomed to wander, to seek for the one who is absent, in an unending desire.[254]

Certeau perfoms Derrida’s exhortation that to inherit is to respond in *The Mystic Fable,* tracing the history of the 16th and 17thcentury mystics as a response of disaffected faithful to the eroding of the sovereign Christian institution. The etymology of the word “response” is important here, inflecting both Derrida and Certeau. From the

[253] Ibid., p.81.
[254] Ibid., p.292 f.

Latin, “re” - again; “*spondere*” - to pledge: to pledge again, to promise again. These mystics pledge again their faith to the empty tomb, to the absence that has been displaced. They know not where to find the “one,” but they do know what it is not: it is not this. Thus, they wander, rejecting the phantasms of the Church, mourning the impossibility of mourning, pledging *again*. and in so doing echo the figure of faith given in Derrida, where he says of such faith, when demanded in testimony, it ”exceeds, through its structure, all intuition, and all proof, all knowledge.” [255]

Certeau’s treatment of mysticism is both atypical and influential. His study offers a close-up of the “scene” in which to situate Beauvoir. During the late 19th and much of the 20th century, influenced by William James, mysticism was understood, at least in North America, as a private, interior experience involving noetic qualities, transience, passivity and ineffability. In the past 30 years, however, the Jamesian model has been interrogated and somewhat displaced by more political, sociological, psychoanalytical and gendered readings. What has emerged from the various approaches taken is a truism of historiography: the scholar raises the question to which she is inclined to provide the answer. Thus, scholars of feminist and gendered readings of a tradition, such as Grace M. Janzen and Dyan Elliot, find a response to the disempowerment of women in the Mystic practice of the late Medieval and Renaissance eras, one that provides women with an avenue for social authority that will eventually be turned against them; discourse theorists like Michael Sells reads the Mystical languages of “unsaying” as profound performances of an embodied encounter; historian Caroline

[255] Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” p.98.

Walker Bynum finds a search for identity in the confusions of eroding institutions, at the cusp of the "modern;" while Anne Taves, enaging historical and psychological methods, finds Mystical performances marshalled in the service of authorizing or debunking the hetero-theologies of early America. [256]

All of these approaches have merit. However, many of them are present or anticipated in Certeau's study produced about a decade earlier. Certeau critically engages the historical record as an "other" of the scholar's conception, and informed by psychoanalytic theory, causes us to understand that we are involved in a repetition of a particular play of self and other: the self who desires the absent other. He reads the historical data of the 16th and 17thcentury European mystics through this theoretical apparatus, and while his social, political and economic analyses are echoed in the scholarship that follows him, noted above, his distinct contribution to the discourse on mysticism is in his delineation of the "mystic discourse" as "a manner of speaking," a

[256] See Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200- 1500,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 6 – 7, where she lays out her program, to "discern at least one link in the chain that unites the mystic to the witch: by analyzing the trajectory of the bride of Christ, perhaps the most important vehicle of female spirituality in the entire Christian tradition."; Grace M. Janzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, (Cambridge: Cambrideg University Press, 1995), p. xv – xvi, argues that "A connection can be traced between the domestication of women and the domestication of religion such that claims to religious experience become permissible for women in direct proportion to the decline of overt public importance of religion;" Michael Sells in *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) reads the apophatic discourse of seven mystics of the Plotinian tradition, to demonstrate how "Performative apophasis results from a particular intuition into the dilemma of transcendence and a particular response to it," (p. 5 – 6), a "performance" rather than an assertion of a "critical moment" of mystic insight (p.8); Carolyn Walker Bynum in *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001) argues "that intellectuals, religious leaders, and (insofar as we can glimpse them) ordinary people were fascinated by change as an ontological problem – not merely the birth and decay inherent in the life cycle, the economic and political opportunities attendant upon growth, the threat and promise posed by shifting gender relations and family structures, the efforts to position self-engendered by cross cultural contacts and emerging national identities – but also and preeminently change itself: the fundamental fact that something can become something else" (p.18). Ann Taves in *Fits, Trances and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) examines the evidence of 19th century Protestant sects' various accounts of "religious experience" and the attempts at "explanation" given in their various contexts. She explains on p. 12 that she hopes "this study of the interplay between experiencing religion and explaining experience will contribute to our understanding of what anthropologists refer to as "trance" and psychiatrists as "dissociation."

performance of resistance to what we can call, after Derrida, the phantasms of the European Church. His analysis, given through detailed and specific readings of mystic texts of the period, evokes a scene of longing and resistance and an acute sensibility regarding any discourse of truth. These features resonate throughout Beauvoir's discourse, and thus Certeau offers a site for reading her ethic. His reading of the Mystic - as a wandering after One who is not there - provides a site in which to interrogate Beauvoir's atheism and the ethics she proposes from the existential perspective.

Certeau offers the space of his "heterology" of Mystics as "a mourning" for One who is no longer to be found:

> One who is missing moves it to be written. The story continues to be written during travels through a country from which I'm away . . . One suffers the pangs of absence because one suffers the pangs of the One. [257]

For Certeau, the past always remains Other to the present, and in this he draws the scholar in this present close to the Mystics she studies. She longs to "speak to it," to that which is not [and never has been in any appropriate way] present. Yet the longing persists: "Hamlet's father's ghost becomes the law of the castle in which he was no longer present."[258] This echoes the drive of the Mystic practice, an unanswerable longing, a desire for that which is absent, and this is replicated in Beauvoir's attestation to her own unending desire for an absolute. Certeau wryly observes that the historiographical practice of reviewing the Mystic past is located in a tradition that began with the discovery of an empty tomb. The Church, when understood as the Body of

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[257] Certeau, *The Mystic Fable,* p.2.
[258] Ibid., p. 4.

Christ, sought for that which was absent through its practice, through its *mystikos* - closing the eyes, seeing beyond ocular vision. It subsequently required the sealing of the lips to the uninitiated and, later, it referred to the esoteric exegesis of scripture. Only as the "spoken word" of the "One" ceases to resonate does the Mystic become internalized, cut off from the Body of the Absent One, now relegated to a no-place of unsaying, a listening for the Word that does not come. [259]

In developing his analysis, he identifies four discourses within which to think the Mystic, to "square the Mystic circle" which always exceeds its interrogation: historiography, psychoanalysis, the Mystic Fable, and a link between "modern" Mystics and the emergence of a "new eroticism." His review of the contexts of the Mystic reveal that those whom we associate with the 16th and 17thcentury practice tended to emerge from social conditions of decline: impoverished nobility, dispossessed gentry caught in the great upheavals driving these societies toward the "secular," a secular that engenders a new eroticism. A practical consequence of this is that it provides an opening for women - traditionally identified as carnal, material, and emotional - in the otherwise masculine ecclesia, in which

> learned clerics became exegetes of womens' bodies, speaking bodies, living Bibles spread here and there in the countryside or in the little shops, ephemeral outbursts of the "Word" erstwhile uttered by the whole world. A humbled theology, after long having exercised its magistracy, expected and obtained from its other the certainties that had eluded it. [260]

[259] Ibid., p. 153.
[260] Ibid., p. 26.

In this context, Certeau wants to show a link between the arrival of the new erotic and the "manner of speaking" that characterizes the "modern" Mystics.[261]

The relevance of this criteria to Beauvoir requires some expansion. Certeau argues that this movement "was no mere coincidence. Both sprang from a "nostalgia" connected with the progressive decline of God as One, as object of love. Both are equally the effects of separation."[262] This displacement, or substitution, of One for an other, is part of a chain of production, of "maintaining some kind of relationship with presences that are all now vanishing, despite the replacement of the Missing One by an indefinite series" of others. [263] In the context of this chain, the ascent of the spiritualization of the erotic, manifested earlier in the Courtly Love Tradition, is measured by an equal descent in the currency of Church's orthodox spirituality: "Since the thirteenth century (courtly love, etc.) a gradual religious demythification seems to be accompanied by a progressive mythification of love. The One has changed its site."[264] "God" is replaced by woman, the divine word replaced by the loved body. This movement is strikingly at play in Beauvoir's chapter entitled "The Mystic" in *The Second Sex.* Here, she offers her own iteration of this analysis:

> Love has been assigned to woman as her supreme vocation, and when she addresses it to a man, she is seeking God in him: if circumstances deny her human love, if she is disappointed or demanding, she will choose

[261] Ibid., p. 4 – 5.
[262] Ibid., p. 4.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid.

> to worship the divinity in God himself. . . The Beloved is always more or less absent; he communicates with her, his worshipper, in ambiguous signs; she only knows his heart by an act of faith . . . [265]

I read this passage, the product of her own prolonged engagement with mystic texts, as a description of the 20th century, the consequent development of the earlier mystic scene, and the social and historical response to the displacement of the "divine" by the erotic. This correspondence between Certeau's analysis of the late Rennaissance "mystic" and Beauvoir's analysis of the 20th century development of that scene suggest fruitful avenues for analysis.

Returning to the theme of substitutions, Certeau claims they remain "as elusive as the vanishing God," and so organize a productivity in response to this persistent absence in two directions: on the one hand, "now proliferating conquests destined to fill an original lack, now returning to the principle of these conquests and wondering about the "vacancy" of which they are the effects." [266] He maintains that it is the latter that carried the Mystics of the 13th - 17th century, in its "manner of speaking," tracing the "ambiguous passage from presence to absence," bearing witness to "the slow transformation of the religious setting into an amorous one, or of faith into eroticism," telling how "the body, "touched" by desire, engraved, wounded, written by the other, replaced the revelatory didactic word." [267] The subject of the "body" is indeed the

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[265] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Maloway-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), p. 709.
[266] Certeau, *The Mystic Fable,* p.4.
[267] Ibid., p. 5. At the same time, in an apparent contradiction, their very practices, predicated on a longing for an absence, end up "producing an erzatz presence," making "true" Mystics "suspicious and critical of what passes for 'presence'. They defend the inaccessibility they confront."

question that consumes the Mystic writers of the 17th and 18th centuries." [268] What constitutes the "body," they ask: a divine word "which also had a physical nature and value," a lover's body "which is no less spiritual and symbolic in erotic practice," [269] a body as text or text as body, "engraved, wounded, written upon," [270] a community of the faithful, the body of that "fabula" invented for the Mystic tradition, or a matrix of all of these? All of these iterations bear on that which the Mystic seeks; some of these reflections haunt the texts of Beauvoir, particularly the body as the site of transcendent desire. She insists that the individual be regarded as whole, and that the body as a site of experience be valorized. Moreover, her own "conversion" away from Roman Catholicism and toward existentialism was itself accompanied by an erotic maturation, offering a singular repetition of that movement of the mystic history.[271]

The "manner of speaking" devised in the mystic discourse develops certain conventions according to Certeau's analysis. One in particular deserves treatment here, as it provides a genealogical link between the mystic practice, the Enlightenment assertion of "self," and Beauvoir's vision of the human being. "Mystic discourse itself had to produce the condition of its functioning as a language that could be spoken to others and to oneself,"[272] in their fragmented "Babel-like" context. The first convention to facilitate this communication is the *volo* - "I will," a practice that "erected places for speaking."[273] The preliminary condition for speaking required 1) a form of exclusive

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[268] Ibid., p. 80.
[269] Ibid., p. 5.
[270] Ibid., p. 4.
[271] Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* and *The Prime of Life* (New York: Marlow and Co., 1960).
[272] Certeau, *The Mystic Fable,* p. 164.
[273] Ibid., p. 165.

restriction [e.g. “an ‘only,’ a ‘nothing but,’ or a ‘no one except’”] [274], and a “will,” which “constituted the *a priori* knowledge could no longer supply.”[275] As a performative verb, the *volo* establishes the form of the discourse, whether “I want nothing,” or “I want only.” The *volo* “is absolute, not bound by any precise determination. It was defined by the disappearance of its objects.”[276] In a more relevant description, Certeau cites the major subject of his scholarship, Jean Joseph Surin, who characterizes the *volo* as

> ‘to form desire.’ A desire ‘bound to nothing,’ he added. In this discourse, this forming of desire as the 'I want,' is a wanting that is not determined, in which 'To want all' and ‘to want nothing’ coincide. [277]

Certeau argues that it inaugurates all discourse, positing

> from the very beginning what will be repeated in mystic discourse by many other verbs (to love, to wound, to seek, to pray, to die, etc.), itinerant acts among actors who may be positioned at one moment as subjects, at another as objects. Who loves whom? Who prays to whom? Sometimes God, sometimes the faithful. . . The *volo* then, as beginning and centre, vanishing point and keystone of mystic communication, is the operative principle (and a verb) that will exercise all language.[278]

Admitting that this is a truncated presentation of the *volo,* I nevertheless want to draw a line between this indispensable convention of the scene of mystic discourse, and figures in Beauvoir’s ethic. First, Beauvoir insists on the moral freedom of every individual,

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[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid., p. 166.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid., p. 169.
[278] Ibid., p. 170.

which infers the corresponding responsibility of every individual. Allowing that there are those who do not embrace their freedom, for those that do assume their freedom, the projects they launch, their *will*, is also the launching of their appeal to others. Here, the will is, as Surin suggests, "to form desire," to take that desire Beauvoir acknowledges as integral to the human condition, and to launch it at something.[279] The will of the individual also establishes the conditions for appeal and response, and therefore faith, the willingness to believe, to trust, even at the risk of deception or failure. At the same time that the will, as presented in Beauvoir, is contingently destined to projects, to appeals to others, it is also, ultimately, "bound to nothing" in that all of its objects are also contingent, finite, and evanescent. Finally, beyond Beauvoir specifically, the establishment of the *volo* as the erector of mystic discourse – the positing of the "I will" as the beginning and centre of this "manner of speaking" anticipates the truncated development of the "I will," as the sovereign autonomous subject in certain Enlightenment philosophies, the "self" whose emergence Derrida argues is coeval with the scene of religion.

Certeau's third "side of the square" compares the tropes of psychoanalysis to the function of Mystic practice, part of his more subtle agenda of arguing that we still inhabit the far shore of the Mystic landscape, a landscape Beauvoir also inhabits. In Certeau's comparison, the Mystic and psychoanalysis both emerge as a challenge to an intellectually bankrupt yet politically and socially powerful orthodoxy: psychoanalysis as a challenge to the Bourgeoisie; the Mystic as a challenge to Roman Catholic orthodoxy.

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[279] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p.11 - 26.

[280] According to his analysis, both contest the status quo and creatively push boundaries of insight; yet both end up being appropriated by the very bodies that they served to disrupt, a movement resonant of Derrida's "autoimmunity."

Finally, Certeau conceives the Mystic in light of the "Mystic Fable" itself - that the practice itself, a "manner of speaking," a thoroughly linguistic undertaking, created a "fabula" of the Mystic in establishing itself. It "creates" a Mystic tradition within which to situate itself: however, it "only assembles and orders its practices in the name of something that it cannot make into an object (unless it be a Mystical one)." [281] Inheriting the "self" inaugurated in the Abrahamic and Platonic moments, the mystic utterances take on

> a new locus, that of the *I,* and by the operation of (*spiritual)* exchanges that made communication hinge upon the question of the subject, and also by all the procedures, rhetorical or poetic, capable of organizing a field of allocution per se. [282]

In the world of the mystic scene, "the universe, be it compact or infinite, be it regulated by order or chance, is posited in principle as the vocabulary of a *dialogical* discourse between a *you* and an *I* that seek one another through language," [283]a position which instantiates the scene of the self and other through discourse, in particular through writing. This discourse is governed by procedures in which the circumstances of the

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[280] Certeau, *The Mystic Fable,* p. 8.
[281] Ibid., p. 77.
[282] Ibid., p. 161.
[283] Ibid., p.163.

utterance are as important as what is said,[284] given that this discourse is an *action,* specifically, a speech act. This act of the subject, "in a more discrete but insistent tradition"[285] is "marked by the "yes" - a "yes" as absolute as the *volo,* without objects, without goals."[286] Here the quality of the yes, a yes which exceeds knowledge as "knowledge delimits its content through a procedure that is essentially a "no," a labour of making distinctions" [287] functions like Derrida's gift, and like Beauvoir's "lucid generosity," unconditionally. This affirmation

> brings together separation and openness, the *No-Name of the Other* and the *Yes* of volition, absolute separation and infinite acceptance.
>
> *Gott spright nur immer Ja.*
>
> God always says only Yes [or: I am].[288]

Certeau reads this "conversar" not only as historical data, but as a space for the speaking subject, a space which "hollows out" the interiority of the self, and the dynamic between the desiring self and the absent other. This in turn infers that the scene of the mystic utterance is itself an iteration of the scene of religion, and in its proximity to Beauvoir, anticipates her arrival.

Certeau's concludes with a return to the space of his text. He observes

> He or she is Mystic who cannot stop walking and, with the certainty of what is lacking, knows of every place and object that it is not that; one cannot stay there nor be content with that. Desire creates an excess . . .

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[284] Ibid., p.164.
[285] Ibid., p.174.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Ibid., p. 175. This passage is the text which engages Derrida in his essay, "A Number of Yes."

> Given over to a nameless desire, he is a drunken boat. Henceforth this desire can no longer speak to someone. It seems to have become *infans*, voiceless, more solitary and lost than before, or less protected and more radical, ever seeking a poetic body or locus. It goes on walking then, tracing itself out in silence, in writing. [289]

This analysis of the multivalent sources of the Mystic – historical, intellectual, psychological, philosophical – provides a structure by which to approach Beauvoir. Her discourse is a testament to such a desire, an endless unassuaged desire, and her philosophy accepts and embraces the "wandering," "*infans*," that it entails. Her rejection of religion, in its aspect as a knowledge to be indemnified, is accompanied by a commitment to "originary faith," in her existential ethics. Her "nameless desire" sees her lifelong seeking of "poetic body or locus." Beauvoir turns away from religion, from the received "serious" given by her situation, and turns toward an exploration of her freedom, and its responsibility. She turns toward an inter-subjectivity that, in its potential for reciprocity, will found the meaning of her existence. However, in her articulation of how this reciprocity can provide the meaning for one's existence, the machinery of autoimmunity produces one of the sources of "religion at the limits of reason," a turn toward a faith, an elementary faith that is the foundation of all human experience.

Religion is the response: it involves risk, the risk of false commitments, of impossible sovereignties, as well as salvation, if we allow for the possibility of being

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[289] Ibid., p. 299.

saved from nihilism. For Beauvoir, the ambiguity of the human condition - the desire for union with other who is absolutely other - does not exhaust the appeal of the other, nor the response of the one who inherits this. It does not exhaust the mystic sojourn. The scene of religion is an iteration of this contingent and ambiguous human scene, and it performs at the heart of Beauvoir's philosophy.

Chapter Four

A Catholic Childhood, a Mystic Attraction: Religion to Follow

Beauvoir occupies the scene of religion, a scene that composes and is composed by the European even as it engages forces that annihilate it. It is the site of her account of her French Roman Catholic childhood, a tradition in which her longing for an absolute union with an other arises. This desire for an object that is forever receding from view might be called, following Certeau's discourse on the mystic, a "mystic attraction" in that the object of the attraction is unseen, ineffable and absent. I am arguing that despite the rejection of her Roman Catholic bourgeois culture, Beauvoir still inhabits the scene of religion, and so follows her conversion to existentialism with a play of religion in her existential ethic. This chapter will review Beauvoir's discourse about her own piety and disaffection, noting the ways in which this iterates the scene of religion as well as the mystic performance within that scene. These texts also testify to the relocation of the concept of transcendence, in which it ceases to refer to an untenable metaphysical condition and is instead redeployed as a performative category in her existential scaffolding. Transcendence, as a function of existence, will provide the conditions necessary for faith and the meaning which accrues to it in her ethics of ambiguity.

The scene of religion employed here as a theoretical apparatus is situated and disseminated in a specific determinate context, the context of the Greco-Latin – European- Christian empire and its descendants. As outlined in the previous chapter, it

also emanates from two sources that are not necessarily bound to the determinate situation of religion. As noted in Chapter Three, Derrida's interrogation of religion identifies the two sources at the limit of reason alone as "knowledge" - the experience of that which must be preserved and protected - of that which is "holy," *heilig,* indemnified; and "faith" - the originary faith that founds all relationships: the promise to tell the truth, the willingness to believe it and to act out of that belief, even with no guarantee. These two sources operate in a play of *différance* that Derrida names in this site "autoimmunity" – wherein the drive to protect knowledge, to indemnify that which is holy, is unavoidably complicit in undermining the holy thing. This is accomplished by a mechanism of resistance, in which the measures undertaken to make things "move no more" are already moving that thing which it seeks to protect. This determinate situated scene of religion, its two sources which exceed this determinate scene, and its autoimmune mechanism, all perform in Beauvoir texts.

Beauvoir is situated in the early 20th century iteration of the scene of religion, a social-political-economic matrix she resists. Beauvoir's texts bear witness to her own experience of something that she wished to preserve and protect, a recurring experience that she deems "mystic," the desire for which results in relocating faith - the willingness to believe in the Other and to act out of that belief. She moves with this desire away from the determinate tradition of French Catholicism to another site, the site of the ethics of ambiguity.[290] A review of her early fiction, *When Things of the Spirit*

[290] As noted earlier, Amy Hollywood, who has also written on Certeau in "Love Speaks Here: Michel de Certeau's *Mystic Fable," Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* volume 12, issue 2, (Fall 2012): pp.198-206, reviews Beauvoir's discourse on the "mystics," as well as her attraction to mysticism. However, Hollywood does not offer a

Come First, her autobiographies, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter, The Prime of Life, Force of Circumstance: Hard Times, All Said and Done,* as well as her celebrated novel, *The Mandarins,* and her groundbreaking study, *The Second Sex,* provide a coherent testament to the depth of her youthful piety, the rigor of her rejection of the tradition she receives, and her careful exploration of the implications of the existential stance. In this relocating of the faith she once directed to the divine, we see the operation of faith as that which exceeds determinate sites, as that which founds all relationships. We also see in this relocation of faith a movement of autoimmunity, in that her rejection of her religion and embrace of atheism re-aligns the faith and knowledge that are the source of the scene of religion, rather than abrogates them.

This poses a new aporia: can one who has rejected the tropes of religion by redeploying its sources be said to inhabit another scene? What is outside of the scene of religion, which is also the scene of globalatinized capitalism? Does Beauvoir show us in this play - in the treatment of knowledge as contingent, and in the deployment of faith in the project of meaning-making in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *Pyrrhus and Cineas* - an opening within this binary? We will return to these questions concerning the implications of Beauvoir's iteration of the scene of religion in the conclusion.

The scene of religion that Beauvoir inhabits is also inflected by the mystic tradition and the Enlightenment it borders upon. Her descriptions of her "religious" experiences resonate with the tropes of the mystic proposed by Certeau. In many

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critical framework for her treatment of "religion" or "mysticism," treating both as self-evident categories of discourse. Eliane Lecarme-Tabone's insight - that Beauvoir's account of her rejection of her tradition inverts the terms of Pascal's wager – although also lacking a theoretical account of "religion," points in the direction of a relocation of the tropes of "religion" that I am developing here.

ways, it seems the material and intellectual circumstances that enable and define the mystic discourse of the 16th and 17thcenturies are repeated in the particular circumstances of Beauvoir's context, a repetition which helps to confirm the continuation of the broader scene of religion in which the mystic discourse began and, perhaps, continues. If one reads Beauvoir as inhabiting and resisting the hegemony of her situation, like the mystics of the 16th and 17thcenturies, then Certeau's explication of the mystic moment illuminates Beauvoir's experience, offering a theoretical framework for that which the mechanism of religion seeks to indemnify and make into knowledge, that ambiguous something that cannot be bound, a something that is the source of endless desire.

Beauvoir's many reflections about religion and mysticism show that these words, as they appear in her texts, are uninterrogated. Beauvoir assumes that the words religion - in particular, French Roman Catholic religion - and mysticism refer to self-evident things. To paraphrase Ann Taves, we will approach the evidence of Beauvoir's texts as instances of "things she deems to be religious and mystical."[291] We will accept her commonplace use of the word religion and its attendant - mysticism - at face value for the time being, as an entry into the question. At the same time, the theoretical premise of this study - that Beauvoir inhabits the scene of religion, that is, the French capitalist bourgeois precincts of her childhood which sought in manifold ways to "gather" and "bind" its society into a comprehensive, conventional unity - is maintained. By the

[291] Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered.* This is Taves' main claim: that there are no "religious" experiences, only experiences deemed to be religious. Therefore, the scholar of religion can approach these "deemed experiences" ascriptively, without needing to wade into the aporia of defining religiosity. While indebted to the economy of this formula, I am not endorsing all of its implications.

20th century, this socio-economic hegemony is abetted by a Roman Catholic institution that has been assigned the task of disciplining the thoughts and actions of its charges. However, at the same time that Beauvoir inherits the bourgeois offspring of the various European Enlightenments, she is moved to a state of wonder and ecstasy by her engagement with the Other she meets through the Church, as the following will demonstrate. In these two very different turns of the religious, she performs a repetition of the tension between faith and knowledge in the scene of religion, and its annihilating effects on the church and society that have harboured them.

The following survey of her texts will proceed, on the whole, chronologically in order of production: from her earliest fiction, *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, to her final autobiography, *All Said and Done*. They reveal a consistent and very self-conscious witnessing of the ambiguities that inform her philosophy: an impossible longing for union with an Absolute by a subject whose existence is governed by the finality of mortality; a desire for an experience of transcendence while knowing only the possibility of earthly delights; a longing for "being" even while acknowledging the absence of "Being." From her adolesence onward, Beauvoir consciously and thoughtfully rejects what she terms the "serious" cultural values of her bourgeois upbringing, an early 20th century French iteration of the scene of religion, even as she reports with a bemused honesty the persistence of the attitudes and impulses that had once driven her to seek divine union. This coherence in her experience may be read as a turning of what Derrida calls the logic of "auto-immunity:" the endless desire for union with the other persists after her conversion to existentialism, undoing the first site in

favour of another site. This move paradoxically serves to undermine the orthodoxy that gave rise to this desire in the first place. These texts also show that her attraction to what she terms mysticism, one which continues after her conversion to an existentialist philosophy, remains entirely consistent with the reading of the mystic offered by Certeau.

Between 1934 and 1938, Beauvoir undertook her first work of fiction, five loosely connected stories, each focusing on a young woman whose life in some way has been circumscribed and distorted by the constraints of bourgeois French Catholic values. Never published until 1972, this collection, *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, narrates the experience of protagonists who either reject their bourgeois culture or who are consumed by it. It is here that Beauvoir first inscribes her own watershed experience of leaving faith and challenging the expectations of her social class. In the Chapter, "Marcelle," we are told: "She stopped believing in god: with the immensity of human suffering before her, she felt quite sure that Providence did not exist." [292] The final Chapter, "Marguerite," echoes the experience that Beauvoir will recount in detail in her autobiography. The protagonist explains how

> I certainly had a natural aptitude for the mystic life; I would often lock the lavatory door and whip myself with a little gold chain; I also rubbed my thighs with pumice stone, which made red places that Mama dressed with ointment. The Abbe Mirande allowed me to take Communion three times a week and I made my confession to him every fortnight. He told Mama I

[292] Beauvoir, *When Things of the Spirit Come First: Five Early Tales* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p.15.

> had a beautiful soul. . . The older I grew, the greater my love of God became, but less and less did I think of sin. . . [293]

This passage echoes similar accounts given in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter,* published nearly nine years later, which culminate in a wrenching epiphany about her confessor, Abbé Martin [sic],[294] in which, realizing he was "an imposter whom for years I had taken as a representative of God on earth" makes her wonder if "perhaps God was stupid!" [295] Abbé Martin provides a model for the following fictional passage, in which the protagonist Marguerite realizes one day, during confession, that the abbé she had regarded as a direct emissary of god was no more than a prying gossip, and is aghast she had confused him with God. Compare her fictional assessment to Beauvoir's autobiographical one, of a God "so ridiculous that soon I began to doubt his existence . . . in the midst of a great silence it appeared to me the world had suddenly grown empty."[296] After this "epiphany," Marguerite explores the life previously forbidden to her - including night life. She reflects upon the jazz bar:

> I went there once as I had gone to Mass, with the same ardour, and I had scarcely changed my God - the jazz moved me as deeply as the great voice of the organ in earlier days. Ever since Denis had told me that piece about sin being the space yawning wide for God, vice had given me the same ecstatic feeling I had felt as a child before the real presence of the

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[293] Ibid., p. 170.
[294] Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter,* p. 134.
[295] Ibid.
[296] Beauvoir, *When Things of the Spirit Come First,* p. 172.

> Holy Sacrament. . . In my own way, I too was serving the things of the spirit. [297]

This frank fictional account of the conversion of a pious bourgeois girl into an existential free spirit is echoed throughout the first volume of Beauvoir's autobiography. She also gives a prescient assessment, in the passages above, of the function of those things she used to ascribe to "religion" and which she now ascribes to the "spirit" of the jazz club: that of filling a "yawning" space, "a great silence," with "things of the spirit," functions that will continue to operate for her long after her rejection of the Catholic tradition.

In *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, in which Beauvoir details her early pious bourgeois upbringing by an ultra-orthodox Catholic mother and an atheist father, she assumes that her audience understands the demands of Catholic piety, and focusses instead her private reflections on god and her relationship with Him. She does mention in passing the requirement that she say prayers daily and that she attend Mass frequently, as well as her experiments with what she calls mysticism, and later, her own readings of the *Lives of the Saints*, the Gospels, and the Mystics. In short, she had a childhood saturated in both the literary and ritual traditions of French Catholicism. As she recalls much later in *All Said and Done,"* My religious instruction was in fact very thorough: as for the Gospels, I knew long passages by heart." [298] Describing the ardour of her piety as a child, Beauvoir's narrator in *Memoirs* writes of God, "I loved him with all the passion I brought to life itself . . . I ardently desired to grow closer to God, but I didn't

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[297] Ibid., p. 182.
[298] Beauvoir, *All Said and Done,* p.459.

know how to go about it." [299] Increasingly, her love of this earthly paradise becomes identified with the God she loved so much:

> One day something inside me would find itself in harmony with the scent of the honeysuckle . . . From dawn to dusk there hummed over the unchanging plains a life that was everlastingly renewed. In the face of the changing sky, constancy was seen to be something more than routine habit, and growing up did not necessarily mean denying one's true self.[300]

This leads her to the discovery that "the harder I pressed myself against the earth, the closer I got to him, and every country act was an act of adoration." [301] At the same time, she reveals that "it seemed to me that He needed my eyes in order that the trees might have their colours," [302] suggesting that she understands her relationship to the Divine as one of reciprocity, a theme that will reemerge in her existential philosophy. This suggests that the function of her Beloved creator is integrated both with her physical adoration of the earth itself, and with her belief in her own primacy as the object of divine affection. The desired Creator is found by the ecstatic child in His very own Creation, the creation she loves as much as Him, and to Him, she remains the adorer whom He loves as much as his creation. Here, she also echoes the kind of relationship she analyses later in her chapter "The Mystic" in *The Second Sex.* There, she observes "human love and divine love melt into one another not because the latter is a

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[299] Beauvoir. *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* p.74.
[300] Ibid., p. 125.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.

sublimation of the former but because the former is also a movement toward transcendence," [303] a generous admission regarding the attraction of "mysticism" in a chapter that otherwise mocks its subjects for their unconscious obedience to sexist expectation. As she notes immediately thereafter, "the woman in love has to save her contingent existence by uniting with the Whole incarnated in a sovereign Person," [304] dryly satirizing the inconsistency of that which is expected of woman by religion – to join an infinite absolute absolutely when, as the philosopher has argued, we are finite contingencies. Satire aside, clearly Beauvoir accepts this aporia, an aporia that is itself the articulation of a mystery.

Certeau's formulation of the mystic explicates this mystery in a manner consonant with Beauvoir: " 'May I not be separated from thee.' *Nichte Ohne.* Not without thee,"[305] a phrase that suggests "One sole being is lacking, and all is lacking."[306] Beauvoir's insight into the "mystic" aporia – of the contingent being longing for the impossible absolute – will find its resolution in her existential ethic. It may be that the "mystic" inaugurated here is located in her own grasp of ambiguity - that for every insistence upon our freedom and moral autonomy, there is the check of the necessary entanglement with others - others who, although we are told each must strive to preserve our freedom as they strive to preserve their own, are the "limit" of our situation and so in this way constitute a boundary, an enclosure that contradicts our ontological freedom. It may be that Beauvoir flees religion only to reinvest religion in her ethics of

[303] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* p. 709.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, p. 2.
[306] Ibid.

the appeal and promise, consciously rejecting the absolute while repeatedly seeking to regain it, something of which she is very aware, reminiscent of Simone Weil's "purifying atheism," losing God to find God again.[307] This last fact - her awareness of her attraction to the absolute - contradictory as it is, is perhaps at the same time the admission that she continues to accept in some way the possibility of a transcendence, at least as an "undecidable."

As she grows up, she "began to reject a dry-as-dust morality in favour of a more lively mysticism." [308] Although this "mysticism" is again not defined, only implied, it seems to include unspecified experiments in mortifications of her flesh and a vicarious reveling in the "mystical" accounts of the saints. However, she admits that when she had performed these experiments, she

> never had the impression I was growing any closer to God. I longed for apparitions, ecstasies; I yearned for something to happen inside or outside me; but nothing came, and in the end my spiritual exercises were more and more like make believe.[309]

As she begins to experience questions of doubt regarding church teaching, she is drawn more and more to intense experiences of sublime beauty and overwhelming dissolution into an Other, one she identifies at first with her God. Nevertheless, her vivid, embodied joyous communion with nature lead her to eventually conclude, in an inversion of Pascal's wager, that she would prefer to love this beautiful earth now, rather

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[307] As cited previously in Baring's discussion of Weil's influence on Derrida. See Baring, *The Young Derrida,* p.63.
[308] Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter,* p.134.
[309] Ibid.

than forgo it for a heaven that may not be. Inevitably, one evening at the family summer home at Meyrignac,

> I dipped my hands into the cherry laurel leaves. I listened to the gurgling of the water, and I knew then that nothing would make me give up my earthly joys. 'I no longer believe in God,' I told myself, with no great surprise. That was proof: if I had believed in him, I should not have allowed myself to offend him so light-heartedly. I had always thought that the world was a small price to pay for eternity; but it was worth more than that, because I loved the world, and it was suddenly God whose price was small: from now on, his name would have to be a cover for nothing more than a mirage. . . That is why I felt so little surprise when I became aware of his absence in heaven and in my heart.[310]

Concluding that "god was no longer relevant to me," she nevertheless acknowledges throughout her long writing career her persistent attraction toward an impossible absolute, and recurring encounters of joyous communion with the beauties of the earth. However, these encounters are evanescent, and her longing for a union with an unknown Other is persists. After her conversion away from theism and piety and into atheism, she describes how, to soothe the turmoils of adolescence

> I entered into exalted trances, as on those evenings that I used to gaze upon the sky full of moving clouds behind the distant blue of the hills. I was both the landscape and its beholder: I existed only through myself,

[310] Ibid., p.137.

and for myself. I was grateful for an exile that had driven me to find such lonely and such lofty joys . . . [311]

Struggling to locate herself and her "lofty" longings in her post Roman Catholic condition, she briefly considers, under the influence of Plotinus and her friend Merleau-Ponty, "cultivating a mystical theology." She asks "why shouldn't a mystical theology be possible? 'I want to touch God or become God' I declared in my journal. All through that year I abandoned myself intermittently to these deliriums." [312] Still attracted to the ecstatic reveries afforded to her by the earthly paradise, she describes how, while at La Grillière, the family's country estate, to prepare for her *aggrégation,*

> In those woods and meadows undisturbed by man, I thought I touched that superhuman reality I aspired to. I knelt down to pick a flower and suddenly I felt riveted to the earth, with all the weight of heavens on my shoulders; I couldn't move: it was both an agony and an ecstasy which brought eternity within my grasp. I returned to Paris convinced that I had passed through a mystical experience, and attempted to bring it on again. I had read St. John of the Cross: 'In order to go the way thou knowest not, thou must go the way thou knowest not.' Reversing this phrase, I saw in the obscurity of my ways a sign that I was moving toward fulfilment. I would descend into the very depths of my being, and rise toward the zenith in in which I embraced the Whole. . . . . it was tempting

[311] Ibid., p. 191.
[312] Ibid., p. 261.

> to let myself believe that I had attained the Unknown. I cultivated these states with the utmost complacency. [313]

Here, the "mystical" practice is directed at achieving a transcendent state, one that is "superhuman," eternal and obscure, in which she could grasp the "Whole" and attain the "Unknown." The theme of this passage is that of transcendence, transcendence understood as that experience which exceeds quotidian experience and rationality. She shares these mystical experiences with "Pradelle" - her pseudonym for her close friend Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who retorts that he finds it "not of the slightest interest." Thereafter, she "did not try to bring them on again." [314] Eventually, she determines never to call upon god again, [315] and will experience the replacement of her former piety with a passion for literature. As LeCarme Tabone observes, "L'écriture, pourtant, se substitue bien, en fait, à la foi religieuse . . . "[316]

This attraction to the Absolute Other, this longing for mystic union, is never entirely absent from her various texts and finds another site in her passion for writing, in which she can experience another kind of transcendence. In *The Prime of Life,* which recounts her early career as a teacher and her relationship with Sartre, she describes the two of them as "a couple of mystics. Sartre had an unqualified faith in Beauty, which he treated as inseparable from Art, while I attached supreme importance to Life."[317] The inference in this passage is that she is using "mystic" as a term for the

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[313] Ibid., p. 267.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Ibid., p. 272.
[316] Lecarme-Tabone, "Introduction", p. 85.
[317] Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life,* p. 26.

ideal and evanescent object of one's longing: "beauty" for Sartre, and "Life" for herself. She qualifies this somewhat when recalling her reflections on her vocation as a writer:

> I had rejected the notion of divinity but not all aspects of the supernatural. Obviously I knew that a work wrought on earth can only communicate in earthly terms. But there were some that seemed to me to have broken free from their creator and absorbed something of the meaning he had tried to put into them. There they stood, four-square and independent, dumb, inscrutable, like huge abandoned totems: in them alone I made contact with some vital absolute element. It may seem paradoxical that I, who was so much in love with life, should have continued to demand this inhuman purity from art. But there was a logic in my obstinacy: since art led me away from life, it could attain fulfilment only by denying life's claims. [318]

What she suggests here is that the facticity of a work of art, of a writing, in its utter independence from its author, produces a transcendent scene of meaning - transcendent in that it exists apart from its creator, independent and yet accessible. This transcendent quality in her creations fulfills the same function for Beauvoir's narrators as "god" did previously, providing a condition that "denied life's claims," such as finitude, while providing "contact with some vital absolute element." She later makes this connection more explicit, when describing her struggle to write *America Day by Day,* ". . . it did not give me what I had always demanded of writing up till then: the

[318] Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, p. 38.

feeling of risking and the same time transcending myself, an almost religious joy" [319] Here she unites risk and transcendence with the religious, suggesting that the joy afforded in such a transcendence is the thing to be indemnified and made holy. At the same time, it is clear that Beauvoir harbours no illusions that such a joy can be bound: she accepts the paradox of longing to repeat such joy, even though understanding its evanescence.

As she narrates how her relationship with Sartre matured, and required her to establish her own place within it more precisely, she admits

> the notion of salvation had lingered in my mind after belief in God had vanished, and my chief conviction was that each individual was responsible for securing his own. The difficulty nagging at me was not so much a social as a moral, almost a religious, contradiction in terms. [320]

Although her world was now entirely earthbound and human, she nevertheless continues to think in the language of her Catholic girlhood, translating its concepts, like "salvation" and "religious joy," into her existential context. Above all, she continues to long for Being:

> If I drank a little too much one evening I was liable to burst into floods of tears, and my hankering after the Absolute would be aroused again. Once more I became aware of the vanity of human endeavour and the

[319] Beauvoir, *After the War,* p. 127.
[320] Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life,* p. 54.

> imminence of death; I would reproach Sartre for allowing himself to be duped by the hateful mystification known as "life." [321]

As she puts it, up until the end of the Phony war,

> our life, like that of all petites bourgeois intellectuals, was in fact mainly characterized by its lack of reality. . . Nor could I break free from my universalist abstractions; I remained riddled with bourgeois idealism and aestheticism. Above all, my emotionally ambivalent obsession with happiness blinded me to political realities. [322]

This reflection, one of several similar, frankly acknowledges her ongoing attraction to "universalist abstractions" and "idealism," even as she was rationally rejecting such formulas in her philosophical texts.

Retaining the language of her former tradition, she also treasures the ritual of gathering friends and comrades for all night revelry, which she calls "*fêtes*." In one of several accounts she has given about the power of the *fête*, she observes:

> if hope is rekindled in the very midst of despair, if you regain your hold upon the world and the times - then the magic moment catches fire and you can plunge into it and be consumed with it: that is a "*fête*." The distant horizon is uncertain still, half threatening, half promising: that is why every *fête* has a quality of pathos about it. [323]

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[321] Ibid., p. 167.
[322] Ibid., p. 288.
[323] Ibid., p. 453.

This assessment of the quality of the authentic *fête* possesses the same qualities as her other mystic experiences: non-rational, intense, all-encompassing, and evanescent. As late as 1972, in her final volume of autobiography, *All Said and Done*, she reflects on the aim of her project:

> Like all individuals, I sought to overtake my being and merge with it; and in order to do so I based myself upon those experiences in which I had the illusion of having achieved this. Knowing meant directing my awareness toward the world, as did all the meditation of my childhood, withdrawing the world from the void of the past and from the darkness of absence: when I lost myself in the object upon which I gazed, or in moments of physical or emotional ecstasy, or in the delight of memory, or in the heart-raising anticipation of what was to come, it seemed to me I brought about the impossible junction between the in-itself and the for-itself. And I also wanted to realize myself in books that, like those I has loved, would be existing objects for others, but objects haunted by a presence, my presence[324]

The recurring themes: resisting absence, losing oneself in ecstasy, impossible paradoxical union of otherness, the quest for transcendence, usually identified as "happiness," it is all here at the end of this long life, as it was in the beginning. At the same time, with a fitting ambiguity, she became and remained an existential atheist, one who deemed the Catholic religion as a case of "merely reproducing a form of behaviour

[324] Beauvoir, *All Said and Done*, p. 29.

that was inculcated by their upbringing and that is observed in their circle," [325] and justified by psychologically self-serving "humbug." [326] In this prescient observation, she instantiates the scene of religion as the drive to gather and bind, in this case bourgeois society, into a self-perpetuating totality.

As the evidence presented suggests, a significant element in Beauvoir's Catholic and atheist reflections is her attraction to and engagement with what she calls mysticism. Beauvoir explicitly concerned herself with mystic tradition, as a reader of the mystic saints in her youth, and as a critic. She observes at the beginning of her chapter "The Mystic" in *The Second Sex*:

> Love has been assigned to woman as her supreme vocation, and when she addresses it to man, she is seeking God in him: if circumstances deny her human love, she will choose to worship the divinity in God himself. . . The Beloved is always more or less absent; he communicates with her, his worshipper, in ambiguous signs; she only knows his heart by an act of faith; and the more superior to her he seems, the more impenetrable his behaviour seems to her. [327]

This account of contemporary "woman" as a figure of "mysticism," opens this chapter in *The Second Sex,* followed by a phenomenological description of the mystic calling, in which she establishes the ambiguous play of desire for the Other that drives the mystic discourse. In this description, Beauvoir foreshadows observations by Certeau in *The*

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[325] Ibid., p. 460.
[326] Ibid., p. 462.
[327] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* p. 709.

Mystic Fable. Both are drawn to the post-medieval Christian mystics of the 16th and 17thcenturies; both observe the performance of the erotic and the gendered in the "lives of the saints." Both focus on the mystic performance as a resistance to the institutional hegemony of the time, although Beauvoir restricts her approbation to Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, disdaining others, like Madame Guyon as confusing "mysticism with erotomania." [328]

Reading Certeau's study as an iteration of the scene of religion, and in particular the scene of a determinate tradition, let us recall Certeau's observation that the mystics emerge from social conditions of decline: impoverished nobility, dispossessed gentry caught in the great upheavals driving these societies toward the "secular," a secular that engenders a new eroticism. A practical consequence of this is that it provides an opening for women - traditionally identified as carnal, material, and emotional - in the otherwise masculine ecclesia. Let us also recall that Certeau argues

> This was no mere coincidence. Both sprang from a "nostalgia" connected with the progressive decline of God as One, as object of love. Both are equally the effects of separation.[329]

Beauvoir understands the "effects of separation" and lives in circumstances, as a woman, as one disaffected from the tradition, that repeats the mystic scene. Like many of the mystic writers of the 16th and 17thcentury, Beauvoir is born into conditions of social decline: a dispossessed branch of an affluent French petit bourgeois family, a pious and obedient Roman Catholic mother, and a disaffected atheist father. Like many

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[328] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* p.711.
[329] Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, p. 4.

of her mystic antecedents, she experiences a longing for the transcendent absolute One that consumes her even as she becomes increasingly distrustful of the Church's requirements for the faithful. In this, born a woman, to an aristocratic family in declining circumstances, in a time of social, political and economic chaos, Beauvoir's material circumstances are remarkably close to Certeau's description of the late Renaissance mystics. Whether or not these circumstances are definitive, it is possible to see the ways in which they provide the circumstances for her rejection of her institutions and explorations of alternatives.

As Beauvoir begins to contest and resist the "serious" tradition she is presented with, she also suffers from a "nostalgia" that sees the site of the One change locations, from the divine to the human. And yet, she is careful to distinguish between what she calls "erotomania" and a worthy project for one's freedom. She notes, for the first time defining "mysticism," that the woman given over to the mystic is "groping for the supreme source of values. That is what every mystic is aiming for." [330] She rejects the argument that "the poverty of language makes it necessary for the mystic to borrow this erotic vocabulary" [331] because it truncates the unity of the existent individual: "she also has only one body, and she borrows from earthly love not only words but also physical attitudes; she has the same behavior when offering herself to God as offering herself to man. However, for Beauvoir this does not diminish the validity of her feelings," [332] nor does it compromise the integrity of the mystic experience. Beauvoir, consistent in her

[330] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* p. 711.
[331] Ibid., p. 712.
[332] Ibid.

view of the human being, insists that the subject IS the body, and can therefore only destine her actions through her body, in this case, the action of seeking union with the source of all values. Citing Teresa of Avila, she observes that "bodily gestures can be part of the expression of freedom" [333] when they act toward the object of desire, the object that arouses desire in the subject:

> Thus, in one movement, Saint Teresa seeks to unite with God and experience this union in her body; she is not slave to her nerves and hormones; rather, she should be admired for the intensity of a faith that penetrates to the most intimate regions of her flesh. In truth, as Saint Teresa understood, the value of a mystical experience is measured not by how it has been subjectively experienced but by its objective scope. [334]

Teresa is valorized by Beauvoir because in seeking the supreme source of values, she "situates the dramatic problem of the relationship between the individual and the transcendent Being in a highly intellectual way," [335] in which her experience far exceeded the boundaries of conventional sexuality. However, Teresa, like John of the Cross, is for Beauvoir "the striking exception:" others, like Mme Guyon and Angela de Foligno, are aiming for "the redemption of their femininity" [336] rather than transcendence. [337]

Published in 1949, these observations on mysticism in *The Second*

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[333] Ibid.
[334] Ibid., p.713.
[335] Ibid.
[336] Ibid.

Sex anticipate many of the recent critical approaches to mysticism that have developed during the past 30 years. This chapter observes a fluid understanding that the object of desire is ambivalent - human here, divine there, and is in either case, "more or less absent." A testament to her own engagement with the primary mystical texts, she critiques the Christian mystic writers of the 16th and 17thcentury from the point of view of psychology, sociology, and of course in terms of gender. Her astute interpretation of mystic practice anticipates the recent political, psychological, feminist, and historiographical critiques of mysticism. Her insights look forward to Grace Janzen in *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, Dyan Elliott in *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell,* and Amy Hollywood's *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference and the Demands of History,* each of which, for the various purposes already noted, investigates the tradition of associating "the female" with "body/ecstatic/erotic/mysticism"and the historic evidence which challenges these associations. Janzen and Eliot read the mystic discourse of women from the earliest evidence in the 5th century through the end of the 17th century as both a resistance to and a co-optation of the political and social boundaries prescribed for women from Tertullian through to Bernard of Clairvaux and the Inquisitors. In analyzing this discourse, they observe the ambiguity with which one can read the erotically charged language of many of the "saints," in some cases suggesting a thinly veiled substitution for carnal sexuality, in other cases indicating the only satisfactory metaphor to describe the transcendent, all-encompassing experience of divine love. Hollywood is more interested in the influence of medieval and early modern mystics on 20th century continental philosophy; but she also examines the

consequences of this for recent theories of gender, subject, and the body. She notes that for Beauvoir, mysticism has "been a site of female agency" that is nevertheless an "inadequate justification for women's existence." [338] She reads Beauvoir's approval of Teresa and Catherine of Sienna as "masculine" in contrast to the "feminine" antics of Mme Guyon and her ilk and argues that Beauvoir, rather than disrupt the hierarchies of the privileged male, seeks to reposition the female to occupy the side of privilege. At the same time, she recognizes a "counter-text" in Beauvoir which acknowledges the situatedness and, thus, limitations of every singularity, within which one can "disrupt" through an act of will to achieve a situated transcenedence.[339]

Beauvoir's distinction between "erotomania" and the quest for the supreme source of values anticipates Certeau's psychological history of the rise and persecution of the "mystics" that culminated in the trials at Loudon. Certeau examines the psychological affects of the decline of central institutional authority and rise of discrete "movements." In his examination of Jeanne des Anges, one of the "possessed" at Loudon who later toured France exhibiting "divine" tattoos on her hands, he observes that it becomes apparent in reading her own testimony that she authored a troubling relationship of manipulation and abuse in the name of propping up a divine mystery.[340] However, like Beauvoir, Certeau does not insist on reducing all mystic discourse to its sometimes troubling provenance, but seeks to understand that for some, it is an endless quest for One who is absent.

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[338] Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, p. 118.
[339] Ibid., p. 134 – 135.
[340] Certeau, *The Possession at Loudun* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) p.162.

As we have seen, Beauvoir describes herself as having a "mystical aptitude." She attests several times to having passed through a "mystical" experience in communing with the natural world, and does not forsake the exhortations of those mystics she admired. She rarely defines "mysticism," but we may infer that she understands it as the fulfillment of the desire for union with the transcendent, a union that engages the whole individual and which exceeds rational expression. She puts this most bluntly when she says "I had rejected the notion of divinity but not all aspects of the supernatural," [341] a sentiment also echoed by her character Marcelle, who says ruefully, "she wishes she still believed in God so that she could go and cry in a church as she had done when she was a child: human things left her deeply unsatisfied." [342] Rejecting divinity but "not the supernatural" confirms her persistent openness to experiences that transcend quotidian expectation. However, this "openness" is also a void, an absence that she longs to fill, impossibly, with "being." In *After the War*, she recalls "God had died when I was fourteen; nothing had replaced him: the absolute only existed in the negative, like a horizon forever lost to view." [343] This is the heart of her understanding of ambiguity – a longing to be, a seeking to be one with another "being," at the same time acknowledging that "Being" is an illusion, and so an impossible object of desire. This also draws near to Certeau's scene of the mystic, a scene he infers we still inhabit, a "region we cannot identify, as if we had been stricken by the separation long before realizing it. When this situation finds expression, it may still borrow the

[341] Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, p. 38.
[342] Beauvoir. *When Things of the Spirit Come First,* p. 24.
[343] Beauvoir, *After the War*, p 46.

words of the ancient Christian prayer: 'May I not be separated from Thee.'" [344] The persistent longing for the absent remains a powerful trope in her texts, an acknowledgement of the "negative" that had once lit up the horizon of her desire, but is now "forever lost to view." And yet, it still hovers on the other side of her imagination, a work of mourning that is always in progress.

It is Beauvoir's suspicion toward and rejection of presence, of a static, eternal Being, and all the implications of such stasis, that led her to Existentialism, and to her "Ethics of Ambiguity." Her argument for rejecting traditional metaphysics - the metaphysics of an absolute eternal unchanging "heaven of Ideas" (à la Plato), or god - is both experiential and logical. The experience of realizing god was no longer relevant to her life is witnessed in her *Memoirs*; the logical implications of belief in an all-encompassing totality are taken up in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, where she argues that the very concept of an eternal absolute to unite with and be encompassed by leaves no room for movement, a space where "all figures disappear," and "presence cannot be distinguished from absolute absence." [345] The last observation establishes a logically incompatible paradox that she addresses with her program in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, where she affirms the human ontological truth that we are free: that there is no external source of value or meaning except that which we make; that the meaning we create requires our relationship to others; and that, paradoxically, transcendence is found in the movement of our projects, projects "that concern others, [as] they concern me."

[344] Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable,* p.1.
[345] Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cineas,* p.101.

Beauvoir's autobiographies also detail how her rejection of Roman Catholic piety emerges in step with her descriptions of a bewildering erotic maturation, echoing Certeau's account of the trajectory of the mystic tradition wherein, as we have noted, the demythified divine is displaced by the mythification of love. While this movement is true in Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, her philosophical texts and novels reveal a nuanced understanding of the longing for that which is absent, for an absolute in an utterly secular world. She explicitly acknowledges this contradiction as one iteration of the heart of the human condition, which she defines as "ambiguity," a contradiction that she argues it is necessary to embrace, if one is to live an authentic human life.

So where does this discussion take us? As we have seen, Beauvoir testifies to an experience of joining the "in-itself to the for-itself," [346] or, in other words, her "being" with an "other," an experience she longs to repeat. She treasures this longing for union with the absolute other, even as she admits its impossibility. This is her "holy," the experience of which she wishes to preserve, indemnify, and repeat, even as she acknowledges that the logic of contingency and finitude make this impossible. This is one of Derrida's two sources of religion, and it persists for her, even after her "conversion" to existentialism. This may be explained in terms of Beauvoir's acceptance of the existential ambiguity of our lives, which provides the conditions for the persistence of certain tropes of practice and existential understanding retained from her Roman Catholic rearing. She still seeks salvation, but now salvation means to be

[346] Beauvoir, *All Said and Done,* p. 29.

saved from the darkness of mortality. She still yearns for union with Being, knowing there is only becoming. She aims at union with a transcendence that contradicts the contingency of existence. What of the second source of religion, the originary faith that founds all promises, all hope? Her faith, once directed at the absent deity of the Catholic tradition, the absolute Other named there "God", is now aimed at the human I-Other binary, the binary which she claims is the foundation of meaning. The next chapter will examine the role of the Other in her *Ethics of Ambiguity,* and the originary faith it entails*,* providing the view necessary to understanding how the mystic sojourn is manifest in Beauvoir's philosophy and fiction, and how this opens the question of religion and mysticism.

CHAPTER Five

The Other Shore

As we have seen, Beauvoir rejects the Roman Catholic rite and faith in God, metaphysics or any external powers and instead reassigns faith to the appeal of human relationships, and the promise that these relationships offer for justifying our lives. I want to show how the faith that is implicit in Beauvoir's ethics functions in the same way as the "originary faith" we have examined in Derrida's analysis of religion, one of his two sources of religion at the limit of reason. This faith is implicated in that longing for an absolute other, a longing which seems to contradict Beauvoir's insistence on the human source of any meaning, in the course of which she affirms that the only viable "absolute" is the "other."

Beauvoir's ethic is situated squarely in the inescapable and necessary fact of human relationships. Deutscher, O'Brien, and Tidd, [347] among others, have examined the theme of the "other" as it reflects Beauvoir's engagement with the philosophical tradition, especially Hegel. In her study of this theme, O'Brien reads Beauvoir's oeuvre

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[347] Deutscher, P. "Enemies and Reciprocities," MLN vol. 119, issue 4 (September 2004): pp. 656 - 671. A putative deconstruction of the inflections of the "other" in *The Second Sex, Pyrrhus and Cineas,* and less so, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Deutscher's careful reading reveasl the scope and limits of how the other is constructed - interestingly, gender is not one of its categories.

Tidd, Ursula. "The Self-Other Relation in Beauvoir's Ethics and Autobiography," *Hypatia* vol.14, issue 4 (Autumn 1999): pp.183 - 174. Tidd argues that the ethics constituted by the relation to the other enjoined in Beauvoir's philosophy in the 40s is performed throughout her many autobiographical texts.

O'Brien, Wendy. *Simone de Beauvoir and The Problem of The Other's Consciousness: Risk, Responsibility and Recognition,* unpublished dissertation (University of Waterloo, 2013). O'Brien argues for a sustained preoccupation with the "problem of the other," mediated through her enagagement with Hegel, throughout Beauvoir's works.

as "as a sustained meditation on the problem of the other's consciousness," [348] following Beauvoir's self-assessment that the problem she engaged with throughout her career was that of "the problem of the "the consciousness of the other." [349] O'Brien locates this meditation in Beauvoir's lifelong engagement with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Reviewing the mutlivalent possibilities for interpreting Hegel's dialectic of consciousness, O'Brien suggests that

> Hegel is not imposing his account of the dialectic upon the history of consciousness in his writings, as is often considered to be the case, but rather he is bearing witness to its workings. It is not used in order to make evident the movement of consciousness toward recognition but rather the dialectic is evidenced or revealed through his description of this history. This is a phenomenology. That is, the dialectic was not his methodological presupposition but rather was his philosophical discovery. This is a subtle yet significant difference . . . [350]

O'Brien agues that while Beauvoir finds an inspired template for thinking about the problem of the Other in Hegel's text, "what Beauvoir seeks to do in and through her readings of the *Phenomenology* is to extract the history of consciousness from its metaphysical groundings and replant it within the framework of her version of existentialism." [351] Following O'Brien, for Beauvoir, the crux of Hegel's dialectic of self-consciousness - "recognition" - not only provides the conditions for the self but also

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[348] O'Brien, *Simone de Beauvoir and The Problem of The Other's Consciousness,* p. 2.
[349] Ibid., p. 1.
[350] Ibid., p. 6.
[351] Ibid., p.21.

provides the conditions for the relationship with the Other - the other who only, in her freedom, can confer meaning on our existence, by giving a future to our projects through the content of the appeal to which the other responds. Where Hegel fails for Beauvoir is in his insistence on the totalizing essence that is the appearances. She overcomes this by relocating the human being in the existential context.

For Beauvoir, we can read the response of the other to my project as a pledge - a pledge to honour the other's project and, out of one's freedom, adopt it. Drawing near to Derrida's presentation of "originary faith," this response, this pledge, gives meaning to our existence by transforming our end into a new departure for the other who honours our project. The faith at issue is located in this possibility - a contingent possibility as not every project of an other will be honoured, nor will every other honour ours. She insists we must be faced with free men: each individual must freely choose those others who are imicable - in love and friendship, or in necessity - sometimes in antinomonies of ethical dilemmas. Every project involves risk - the risk of failure - but the will to pursue it also exhibits this faith, the same faith that finds its justification in the response to the appeal of the project. This implicit faith, this *rapport* that is established between those individuals who "tie" themselves to each other's projects, performs as the originary faith which Derrida proposes is one of the two sources of religion at the limit of reason alone.[352]

As O'Brien suggests, Beauvoir is engaged in a "sustained meditation on the other's consciousness," but it is her engagement with Hegel, which began in the

[352] See Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," pp 64 – 66 for his explicit description of the "two sources of religion at the limit of reason alone," and his assertion of originary faith as the basis of all human relationships.

summer of 1940, that allows her to define the problem and its implications with philosophical clarity. A review of her writing during the 1940s allows me to present a genealogy of the Other in her thought, in which the Other, conceived first as "detached, absolute, unalterable, an alien conscience," [353] is gradually understood to be the location of meaning and justification for one's existence. We can see this development in the three major texts of this period: *She Came to Stay, Pyrrhus and Cineas,* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity.* Although some recent scholarship has reviewed the development of Beauvoir's thought in both her fiction and philosophy during this period, for example Sally Scholz, Shannon Mussett, and Wendy O'Brien, [354] no one has reviewed it for the purpose of explicating the role of the other as it functions in the scene of religion, which I propose here.

Beauvoir's first attempt at fiction, the long unpublished *When Things of the Spirit Come First*, reflect her preoccupation at that time with critiquing the "serious" pose of bourgeois society. In five loosely connected stories, she describes the effects of bad faith propositions upon individuals, and the existential consequences of rejecting it. By contrast, her next novel, *She Came to Stay*, written between 1938 and 1941, begins with a character who is ostensibly free from the shackles of bourgeois seriousness, who nevertheless must discover the Other, and the existential ramifications of this.

Françoise, the protagonist, is acutely aware of herself as a conscious being, freely engaging with a world that, in her estimation, requires her own eyes and mind to

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[353] Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay* (London: Flamingo, 1995), p. 292.
[354] Specifically, O'Brien's unpublished thesis, *Simone de Beauvoir and The Problem of The Other's Consciousness*; and Scholz and Mussettt, editors, *The Contradictions of Freedom.*

exist. She lives a full and well organized life in a contingent relationship with Pierre, the love of her life, until Xavière enters their world. In the course of mutely watching Pierre become emotionally entangled with Xavière, Françoise discovers the other who cannot be sublated to her own consciousness, and who persistently challenges and disrupts Françoise's understanding and desires.

This text follows the trajectory of Hegel's description of self-discovery in *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Françoise is first presented as one totally oblivious to the possibilities of consciousness outside her own. Indeed, she embodies a breathtaking solipsism:

> When she was not there, the smell of dust, the half-light and their forlorn solitude did not exist for anyone; they did not exist at all. And now she was not there. The red of the carpet gleamed through the darkness like a timid nightlight. He exercised that power: her presence snatched things from their unconsciousness; she gave them their colour, their smell. . . She alone evoked the significance of these abandoned places, of these slumbering things. She was there and they belonged to her. The world belonged to her. [355]

Soon, however, with the arrival of Xavière, and the growing intimacy between Xavière and Pierre, Françoise's lover, she begins to perceive herself as indistinct and empty: "I am no one. . . She did know with reasonable certainty what she was not: it was agonizing to know herself only as a series of negations." [356] This corresponds to the

[355] Ibid., p. 1-2.
[356] Ibid., p.146.

movement in Hegel's dialectic of the self coming to awareness of herself, of her own *ipseity*, as an object of thought, as something to be recognized. In Hegel,

> Self-consciousness is, first of all, simple *being-for-itself,* self-identical through the exclusion *from itself* of everything *other; its essence and absolute object is,* for it, *the I;* and it is an individual in this immediacy, that is, in this *being* of its *being-for-itself.* Whatever is Other for it is an object characterized as unessential, with the character of the negative. But the *Other* is also self-consciousness; it emerges as an individual over against an individual. [357]

As Hegel cautions us, his dialectic of self-consciousness "has many sides and many meanings," [358] but here we can read Françoise's experience as both one of self-recognition as well as one of Other-recognition. Françoise's self-perception is driven by her encounter with Xavière, so that Beauvoir offers us both her changing self-perception - as the *I,* as the *being-for-herself* - and at the same time, her perception of Xavière and her relationship with her as an other *being-for-herself.* Françoise sees Xavière mutilating her own flesh one night, and understands "behind that maniacal grin, was the threat of a danger more positive than any she had ever imagined. Something was there that hungrily hugged itself, that unquestionably existed on its own account." [359]

This threat echoes Hegel's claim that the activity of the other is a threat that must be negated:

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[357] Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in *Classics of Western Philosophy,* Eighth Edition, edited by Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2012), p.1163.
[358] Ibid., p. 1162.
[359] Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay,* p. 285.

> The relationship of both self-consciousnesses, therefore, is determined in such a way that they test themselves and each other in a life and death struggle. They must enter into this struggle because they must elevate their certainty of themselves, of *being-for-themselves,* into a truth with regard to themselves. And it is only through the risking of life that there is freedom. . . [360]

However, following from his insistence on the double-movements inherent in this psychological process, at the same time that the self asserts itself against the Other, it simultaneously knows itself as an object to that Other, itself *as an other* to be negated. In this moment, wherein the self is aware of its dual positions, "it must be concerned with lifting the other independent essence, in order thereby to be certain of its own independent essence; secondly, this matter of lifting its [own] self because this other is itself." [361] In Hegel's next iteration of this dialectic, that of the Master and the Slave, the Master - the *being-for-itself,* and the Slave - the *being-for-another* - eventually recognize their mutual necessity: the Master as master requires the Slave to master; the Slave as slave, necessary to the master's identity, thus constitutes the Master, "lifting" the Slave to the level of the Master. In this "play of forces that constitutes self-consciousness, Hegel explains that

> each is the middle for the other, through which each mediates itself with itself and merges with itself, and each is to itself and to the other an

[360] Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit,* p.1163.
[360] Ibid., p.1162.

> immediate Essence *being-for-itself,* which simultaneously is only *for itself* by virtue of this mediation. They recognize one another as mutually recognizing one another.[362]

Echoing Hegel's "play," Françoise's discovery of the total otherness of Xavière leads her to determine that the only solution to the threat she poses is to kill her, literally. Speaking with Pierre, Françoise protests the meaninglessness of abstractions (one of Beauvoir's persistent criticisms of Hegel) and explains that ideas have no value unless they "pass the test" of lived experience. Pierre offers:

> "The moment you acknowledge my conscience, you know that I acknowledge one in you too. That makes all the difference."
>
> "Perhaps, " said Françoise. She stared in momentary perplexity at the bottom of her glass.
>
> "In short, that is friendship. Each renounces individual self-importance. But what if either refuses to renounce it?"
>
> "The friendship is impossible," said Pierre. [363]

Here is the crux of the problem that concerns Beauvoir with respect to Hegel's dialectic, the problem of the other as free to resist: to resist the implications of mediation, to resist friendship, to resist the particular relationship in its situation. Observing that "Xavière never renounced any part of herself," Françoise realizes, "One would have to kill Xavière." [364]

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[362] Ibid., p. 1163.
[363] Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay,* p.303.
[364] Ibid.

Beauvoir later reflects that this ending was not a satisfying or authentic solution to Françoise's problem, [365] inferring she is aware that the dialectic is left incomplete in her novel. She continues to explore this question of the Other, reframing it as the question of what is "our true relationship with other people." [366] During this period, she writes *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* both of which take up the problem of the other and develop Hegel's notion of recognition into the foundation for an ethics and for ontological justification. Both of these texts will be examined here as they constitute the fullest articulation of Beauvoir's philosophy and the are the evidence for her performance in the scene of religion.

In developing her theory of the "I-Other" binary as a locus for ethics, Beauvoir stages a subtle structure in her first published philosophical work, *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, and considers the question, why act? It anticipates, in a different context, the ethic that Beauvoir later develops more explicitly in *The Ethics of Ambiguity.* As Bergoffen has noted, "she will not take up the ethical question, how ought I to act? until she answers the existential question, Why act?" [367] In answering this question, Beauvoir argues that the defining quality of human existence is action, action that benefits from reflection when one's finite ends are accomplished. The title reflects this necessary ambiguity, as Pyrrhus argues for acting while Cineas evokes the power of reflection. Beauvoir's human being must act, because only in action do we live our constitutional transcendence, which is to ever succeed our given existence through the projects we

[365] Beauvoir, *ThePrime of Life,* p. 479.
[366] Ibid.
[367] Bergoffen's "Introduction" to *Pyrrhus and Cineas,* p.82.

imagine and manifest. To not act is to not live, but one's actions need to be toward something: they need to be destined.

The second theme in *Pyrrhus and Cineas* is, then, to what do I destine my actions so that they acquire meaning? The answer according, to Beauvoir, is other people - not God, not "humanity," not "infinity," but other specific situated individuals. She argues that we act out our desired projects, and in this, appeal to other individuals who, when they respond to our project, take it up as their own, thereby validating the meaning of our project even as they freely appropriate it as their own. To act out our "projects," literally those projections of will into an unknown future out of an unstable present, involves risk: the risk of failure, the threat of opposition. However, Beauvoir also argues that it involves hope and promise, the promise of success, the hope of having our singular undertaking - irrevocably singular - taken up by an other. Implicit in her schema is the idea of faith: to act implies a faith that, despite the risk and the threat, an "other" will respond to the appeal of our project and so give it meaning beyond a solipsistic willing. In making this argument, Beauvoir transforms Hegel's figure of "recognition" as a kind of perpetual truce between hostile forces into a structure of mutually supporting and beneficial human relations. Whereas in Hegel's scheme, consciousness of the other provokes a defensive response and a desire to sublate the perceived threat, at first by annihilation and, only secondly, as a necessary component of identity, Beauvoir moves directly from the second position – of recognizing the other as necessary to identity – and analyses the implications of this recognition. She acknowledges the threat posed by the other but only as a threat of indifference toward

or rejection of the appeal of one's project, and therefore the meaning afforded by the other's recognition. On the other hand, she also holds up the promise of response, of an other promising to take up one's project, one's appeal, as their own.

Beauvoir structures this essay strategically in order to make a compelling case for *ambiguity*, at first supporting the position of Pyrrhus who emphasizes that human beings are existents who *act*; then later, after anticipating and addressing the traditional and metaphysical objections to her argument, she will also affirm the stance of Cineas, that rest and reflection are also necessary. Interrogating Candide's exhortation to "cultivate your own garden," Beauvoir argues that we can only ever cultivate our own garden, as situated individuals who are nevertheless ontologically free. As individuals who are both subject and object, we found our relationship with the world in the choices we make. She claims "there exists no ready-made attachment between the world and me."[368] Rather,

> only that in which I recognize my being is mine, and I can only recognize it where it is engaged. In order for an object to belong to me, it must have been founded by me. It is totally mine only if I have founded it in its totality. The only reality that belongs entirely to me is, therefore, my act.[369]

It follows then that action is the locus of human identity: to be human is to act, and moreover, to be human is to act towards, to destine one's action. As a consequence, one is in a state of constant transcendence, through this action. "I am

[368] Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cineas,* p.92.
[369] Ibid., p.93.

not a thing, but a project of self toward the other, a transcendence." [370] Citing the Gospels, Beauvoir explains by analogy her claim that she becomes a transcendence, someone who exceeds her own facticity, as a "spontaneity that desires, that loves, that wants, that acts" and, in so doing, she creates her singular relationship to the world:

> When the disciples asked Christ: who is my neighbour? Christ didn't respond by an enumeration. He told the parable of the Good Samaritan. The latter was a man abandoned on the road: he covered him with his cloak and came to his aid. One is not the neighbour of anyone; one makes the other a neighbour by making oneself his neighbour through an act. [371]

However, she observes that although my garden is mine by virtue of my cultivation of it, she is aware of those who do not act in sincere engagement, but rather "contents himself with pretenses," [372] living a cautious and limited existence, focussing on fleeting pleasures of the moment. Beauvoir considers the pleasures of the Instant, of "Rest," and argues that this is not a worthy destiny for our action, because to be perpetually at rest is to tear oneself away from the world, to dwell in a meaningless ennui. This corresponds to her interpretation of Heidegger's claim that "Man is a being of faraway places," where humans are "constitutively oriented toward something other than himself [sic]. He is himself only through relationships with something other than himself," [373] even in the apparent stillness of rest, where one's imagination and thought is also

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[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Ibid.
[373] Ibid., p.98.

elsewhere at the same time. More than once, she argues that "rest," like "Paradise," is a closed and airless space. One only seeks rest momentarily, when one "lacks imagination," [374] after which one will, if Pyrrhus, "hunt, he will legislate, he will go to war again" [375] because

> One cannot fulfill a man; he is not a vessel that docilely allows himself to be filled up. His condition is to surpass everything given. Once attained, his plenitude falls into the past, leaving that "constant emptiness of the future [*creux toujours futur*] of which Valéry speaks gaping open. [376]

As she will argue elsewhere,[377] the particulars of a human being's existence are "made," not born, out of their ontological freedom. There is no predetermined "nature" by which we are determined beyond the bare facticity of our animality. She asserts that what each human being makes herself into is an open question, and is, logically, one that can only ever be ascribed to the individual in question. In this way, she is not a "being" to be "filled" by outside actions or exhortations. This infers that as there is no ordering "form" for the human being, there is no presence, no teleological resting place: she is always in motion. Thus, the "instant" of pleasure, illusory and insubstantial, is not a satisfactory destination.

From her observation that once attained, "plenitude falls into the past," it follows that ends are beginnings: the justification for the project: "The notion of end is

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[374] Ibid.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid.
[377] See *The Second Sex,* wherein her main philosophical argument is the interrogation of identity – in this case, gender roles.

ambiguous, since every end is a point of departure at the same time. But this does not prevent it from being seen as an end. Man's freedom resides in this power.[378] The dialogue between Pyrrhus and Cineas hinges on Cineas' objection that Pyrrhus only goes forth to conquer that he may return, so why bother in the first place? Man "cannot find rest, and yet what is this movement that leads him nowhere?" [379] Beauvoir argues that the finite condition of our projects does not disqualify them:

> Pyrrhus is not leaving in order to return: he is leaving in order to conquer. That undertaking is not contradictory. A project is exactly what it decides to be. It has the meaning that it gives itself . . . Each man decides the place he occupies in the world, but he must occupy one. [380]

One cannot destine oneself toward infinity because Infinity denies "those who unite me to this singular minute, to this singular corner of the earth." [381] Similarly, one cannot destine oneself towards a "universal truth, "since "my own self is abolished within the universal." [382] This is where Beauvoir first departs from Hegel's dialectic, rejecting his metaphysical premise, in which appearance is merely the given historically situated "clothing" for the universal "*geis*t": "Hegel declares in vain that individuality is only a moment of the universal becoming. If this moment, as unsurpassed, had no reality, then it should not even exist in appearance; it should not even be named." [383] For Beauvoir, the only truth that the human being can know is found in the moments of

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[378] Ibid., p. 99.
[379] Ibid., p.102.
[380] Ibid., p.100.
[381] Ibid., p.101.
[382] Ibid.
[383] Ibid.

her singular and contingent existence. The idea of the universal leaves no room for the particular and contingent.

Her critique of the category of the "universal" also applies to the concept of God. To those who suggest God is a worthy end for one's actions, she observes that, according to the theological claim that God is infinity and plenitude, "The perfection of his being leaves no place for man," [384] neither logically, in time or space, or ontologically. Man's freedom and transcendence is cancelled by such a conception. Or, if God wills that we destine ourselves to him, that we are a project not yet realized in the project of himself, Beauvoir concludes with Angelus Silesius, that "God needs me as I need him." [385] Here, Beauvoir is arguing the logical impossibility of human volition having any meaning if the account of theological metaphysics, that God is the totality, is tested against the experience of a specific living person. Following this inference, against those who would argue that "humanity" is a worthy end for our acting, she argues that "humanity" is a myth: there are only individuals. "Humanity is a discontinuous succession of free men who are irretrievably isolated by their subjectivity." [386] Against an apparent "Hegelian Optimism," she reasons that "it must be established that the synthesis effectively conserves the thesis and the antithesis that it surpasses; each man must be able to recognize himself in the universal that envelops him." [387] She counters that all that is preserved of the singular individual in Hegel is

[384] Ibid., p.102.
[385] Ibid., p.104.
[386] Ibid., p.109.
[387] Ibid., p.111.

> precisely his facticity. The truth of a choice is the living subjectivity that makes it a choice in the end, and not the fixed fact of having chosen. Hegel retains only this dead aspect. As long as he falls into the world as a thing passed by and surpassed, man cannot find himself there. On the contrary, he is alienated there. One cannot save a man by showing him that the dimension of his being by which he is a stranger to himself and an object for others is conserved. [388]

So too, for those "floating in Hegelian ether, neither the life nor the death of these particular men seems important to us." [389] Consequently, there is no "Universal point of view," as no one individual is universal and "one cannot have a point of view other than his own. [390]

Having shown the deficiencies of infinity, God, pleasure and humanity as destinations for human action, Part II begins by affirming the appeal of the other: "But the other is there, before me, closed upon himself, open onto infinity. If I destined my actions to him, wouldn't they also take on an infinite dimension?"[391] The governing question becomes "what then do we expect from others?"[392] and, by implication, what do they expect of us?

Not devotion, which often takes on "an aggressive and tyrannical shape," without and against the other. [393] Devotion cannot be *for* the other because as argued earlier,

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[388] Ibid., p.112.
[389] Ibid.
[390] Ibid.
[391] Ibid., p.116.
[392] Ibid., p.117.
[393] Ibid., p.118.

"one cannot fulfill a man:" [394] "I am not the one who founds the other; I am only the instrument upon which the other founds himself. He alone makes himself be by transcending my gifts." [395] Here Beauvoir navigates the difficulty of ambiguity, insisting on the singular, particular existence of each individual and on her necessary and incontrovertible ontological freedom, an individual who alone can "found" or justify herself, who at the same time serves as an instrument for the other who finds her "gifts" - her projects - suitable for taking up as his or her own. If one accepts this paradox, she argues, then one accepts that we can do nothing for others: they can only do things for themselves. We can provide the occasion, but only each individual in this conception can act out the movement of her own human existence. She concludes that "the fundamental error of devotion is that it considers the other as an object carrying emptiness in its heart that would be possible to fill." [396] The same applies to an ethics of self-interest, which assumes "an emptiness was there the first, in me or in another, and that I would not have been able to act if the place for my action had not been already carved out." [397]

Instead, Beauvoir exhorts us to accept the ambiguity of our human condition and our human relationships:

> In enlightened, consenting gratitude, one must be capable of maintaining face to face these two freedoms that seem to exclude each other: the

[394] Ibid., p.121.
[395] Ibid.
[396] Ibid., p.122.
[397] Ibid., p.123.

> other's freedom and mine. I must simultaneously grasp myself as object AND as freedom and recognize my situation as founded by the other, while asserting my being beyond the situation. [398]

Instead of Hegel's "play of forces" which have emerged from struggle to recognition of their mutual dependence, Beauvoir affirms "enlightened, consenting gratitude:" enlightened in the recognition of the ambiguity of every human being, "these two freedoms that seem to exclude each other: the other's freedom and mine" who are both always "object AND freedom," and by whom each is situated in her own specific context. "Consenting gratitude" implies acceptance of the ambiguity of each individual's condition as well as the ambiguity of their relationship: "We must know that we never create anything for the other except points of departure, and yet we must want them for ourselves as ends." [399] The gratitude flows from the fact of being faced by another human freedom, one who may justify my actions by founding her own actions out of mine. A reciprocal respect supports the one by the other. The gratitude also flows, by inference, from the fact that "a man would be nothing if nothing happened to him, and it is always through others that something happens to him, starting with his birth." [400] However, it must be selflessly given, without any thought of return. "It is not a matter of paying off a debt here. . . A lucid generosity should guide our actions," [401] or else they become selfish and self-defeating, like devotion. This is similar to Derrida's argument in *The Gift of Death,* that unless one gives unconditionally, one is still enclosed in a

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[398] Ibid.
[399] Ibid.
[400] Ibid., p.125.
[401] Ibid., p.124.

restrictive economy, which undermines the gift from within as soon as calculability enters. Recognizing opposition and violence in the world, she notes "And if I can do nothing for a man, I can do nothing against him either," [402] that violence does not touch the ontological freedom of the person. This is not an endorsement of violence, but rather an illustration of the location of freedom - in the consciousness and will of the individual. In this sense, "we are therefore never anything but an instrument for the other, even when we are an obstacle, like the air that supports Kant's dove while resisting it." [403] Concluding this section with a very Pauline question, "Must we, then, conclude that our conduct towards others does not matter?" [404] she observes "it is indifferent for him . . . But it concerns me, it is my conduct, and I am responsible for it," [405] because "I am the facticity of his situation."[406] Thus, one is always implicated in the situation of the other, a play that resonates with Derrida's Abrahamic trope in *The Gift of Death*, that response always involves the sacrifice of an other, which both condemns us and lifts us into our humanity.

As a human freedom, we are able to choose among the situations that face us. However, how does one choose? "What is my true relationship with the other?"[407] Turning to the "errors of false objectivity," [408] she observes another plane of ambiguity, that "working for some often means working against others,"[409] a dilemma not resolved

[402] Ibid., p.124.
[403] Ibid., p.125.
[404] Ibid.
[405] Ibid.
[406] Ibid., p.126.
[407] Ibid.
[408] Ibid.
[409] Ibid., p.127.

by working for the good of all, since this is a meaningless category. Arguing against the fallacy of an "objective point of view," she affirms the fact of our perceiving others as "objects" and perceiving ourselves alone "in our intimacy and our freedom as a subject." [410] To try to imagine the point of view of the other is impossible, as it would require me to "cease being me," [411] and so cease to have any point of view worthy of the name.

Moving from this premise, of the irrefutable fact of our singular point of view, she then argues that "the other's freedom alone is capable of necessitating by being. My essential need is to be faced with free men."[412] Critiquing Hegel again, she claims that "it is not a matter of making recognized in us the pure abstract form of the self [*moi*], as Hegel intends,"[413] arguing that we are only realized as beings in the world through "my actions, my works, my life," through the projects we make exist in the world, projects through which we communicate with others. If we do nothing, there is no possibility for communication - because there is nothing by which we can appeal to the other. Some people delude themselves or misrepresent themselves as founding things that they have not: "the jay adorns himself in peacock feathers and the handsome Christian borrows Cyrano's voice under Roxanne's balcony." [414] In the end, it is Cyrano that Roxanne truly loves, and Christian, having "founded" nothing in this relationship gains nothing. "I take on shape and existence only if I first throw myself into the world by loving, by doing."[415] The "objects" that proceed from this loving and doing are the

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[410] Ibid., p.128.
[411] Ibid.
[412] Ibid., p.129.
[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid.
[415] Ibid., p.130.

occasion for communication with the other. These objects are, however, contingent: "there are endeavours that extend over an entire life; others are limited to an instant, but none express the totality of my being since this totality *is not,"*[416] with the result that "we exist for others only insofar as we are present in our actions, and therefore in our separation."[417] With whom does one want to communicate these separate endeavours, and what does one expect? Ideally, one wants one's projects to be taken up by an other who will appropriate it and thereby provide the conditions for this project to transcend me. "Truly, in order for the other to possess this power of making the objects that I founded necessary, I must not be able to transcend him in turn."[418] The other who takes up my project must herself, in "enlightened, consenting gratitude," turn every finite end of her own willing into a new point of departure, lest the other "appears to me as limited or finite, [and] the place he creates for me on earth is as contingent and useless [*vaine]* as himself."[419] In other words, the other must not only respond to the appeal of my project: the other must acknowledge and accept her ontological freedom and the moral freedom that it enjoins, an observation that will become the focus of *The Ethics of Ambiguity:*

> For I must have freedom facing me. Freedom is the only reality that I cannot transcend. How can one surpass what is constantly surpassing itself? If a being appears to me as pure freedom, if he is capable of

[416] Ibid., p.130.
[417] Ibid.
[418] Ibid.
[419] Ibid.

> founding himself entirely by himself, he can also justify what I have founded by taking it on as his own.[420]

The ambiguity of this argument is piquant. On the one hand, Beauvoir's human being is the being who is always becoming, always loving and acting in freedom, and so passing - temporally, materially, emotionally, intellectually - beyond the instant into the unfixed future. At the same time, one can, if lucid, appeal to another free human whose own becoming, "constantly surpassing itself," becomes the only logical absolute available.

Because we are faced with several freedoms, freedoms which "do not agree among themselves," [421]we are faced with the necessity of choosing to whom we will respond, and by extension, appeal. The point of this observation is to insist that the justification offered to us by others who take up our projects is only valid while it is taken up - while it is lived and living. Nothing is "justified simply because they are written down in history."[422] The objects we create and throw into the world "will be saved only if others found a future that envelops it by surpassing it, and only if new objects choose it in the past for a future,"[423] a sentiment that resonates with Derrida's figure of inheritance and the obligations it enjoins us to, by responding - pledging again - to that which we inherit, to that which lives in the inheritance.[424] Thus, we want to be recognized by those who will project our projects toward a future we can still recognize as our own: "the project by which others confer necessity upon me must also be my project,"[425]

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[420] Ibid., p.131.
[421] Ibid.
[422] Ibid.
[423] Ibid., p.132.
[424] See Derrida, *Spectres of Marx,* "Exordium," pp xvi f.
[425] Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cineas,* p. 133.

again evoking an ambiguity at the heart of this schema, in which "I" am a free and willing subject whose project is taken up by an other to whom I am an object, and will appropriate my project into their own. We can respect those whose projects do not appeal to us, but we can only appeal "to the men who exist for me, and they exist for me only if I have created ties with them or if I have made them into my neighbours."[426]

> So here is my situation facing others: men are free and I am thrown into the world among these foreign freedoms. I need them because once I have surpassed my own goals, my actions will fall back upon themselves, inert and useless, if they have not been carried off toward a new future by new projects. [427]

She acknowledges that the hope that her projects will always be extended and so achieve absolute transcendence is vain, but she will continue the struggle nevertheless, because she wants to achieve *being.* In this text, the condition of *being* seems to be a condition of being recognized and justified by an other free consciousness. To the extent that one's project is adopted by the other, one enjoys *being.*

> To seek to be is to seek *being* because *there is no* being except through the presence of a subjectivity that discloses it, and it is necessarily from the heart of my subjectivity that I rush towards it.[428]

She will continue to struggle, again, in "enlightened, consenting gratitude" in order that "free men," who must "love it, want it, and prolong it" can "give my actions and my works

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[426] Ibid., p.135.
[427] Ibid.
[428] Ibid., p.136.

their necessary place."[429] The key here is that the other does so *freely,* and this requires respect: "Respect for the other's freedom is not an abstract rule. It is the first condition of my successful effort. I can only appeal to the other's freedom, not constrain it."[430] This necessary respect is necessarily reciprocal and so enjoins *rapport:* "But in order for this rapport to be established, two conditions must be met. First, I must be allowed to appeal."[431]

Rapport is a precise term for this relationship between human beings, etymologically derived from *rapporter* - to bring back: we reach out, give and receive, each brings back from the other. Beauvoir observes that some others may try to silence or stifle or suppress an individual voice, and with that, their being, against which one is justified in struggling. Secondly, "I must have before me men who are free *for me*, who can respond to my appeal,"[432] acknowledging the reciprocity necessary to this human foundation for meaning. Not only must these others be free to respond to my appeal, they must also be peers. Here, she argues that while violence is a fact of our world, and violence cannot touch the ontological freedom of the other, the man to whom one does violence "is not my peer, and I need men to be my peers."[433] If we can grant this premise, that in a world of free individuals, they may appeal to one another and so see their projects transcend themselves, one must also grant that there is no final goal or success possible, since "our goals are never anything but new points of departure," and

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[429] Ibid., p.136.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Ibid.
[432] Ibid., p.137.
[433] Ibid., p.138.

even then, not all finite goals are achieved. Therefore, "we must assume our actions in uncertainty and risk, and that is precisely the essence of freedom."[434] It is also precisely the essence of faith. "Freedom is not decided with a view to a salvation that would be granted in advance. It signs no pact with the future."[435] And yet, in another register of ambiguity, "I act only by assuming the risks of that future. They are the reverse of my finitude, and I am free in assuming my finitude."[436] By implication, one can only assume one's freedom by action: "man can act; he must act. He is only in transcending himself. He acts in risk and failure. he must assume the risk. By throwing himself toward the uncertain future, he founds his present, with certainty."[437]

Returning to her opening dialogue, Cineas is given leave to ask, "And after that?" reminding us of his initial critique of Pyrrhus. Rather than conclude that all is vanity, Beauvoir affirms that Cineas' question has merit, in that it performs reflection. Reflection is valuable in that it reveals that "every project leaves room for a new question. . . . It releases me from the illusion of false objectivity."[438] Reflection allows one the "enlightened, consenting" attitude required to assume one's freedom, and a clear view of the absolute singularity and separateness of others at the same time that we face each other as the conditions for each other's meaning: "In order to be recognized by them, I must first recognize them. Our freedoms support each other like the stones in an arch, but an arch that no pillars support. Humanity is entirely

[434] Ibid., p.139.
[435] Ibid.
[436] Ibid.
[437] Ibid.
[438] Ibid.

suspended in a void that it creates itself by its reflection on its plenitude."[439] Thus, the essay concludes that both action and reflection are necessary, as reflection, which can only ever spring from a particular point of view denies nothingness and affirms plenitude in its very existence; and action throws us towards others, others who are the condition and promise for existential meaning: "Man knows nothing other than himself and cannot even dream of anything that is not human. To what can he therefore be compared? What man could judge man? In whose name would he speak?" [440]

This lengthy review of Beauvoir's *Pyrrhus and Cineas* gives insight into some of the more abbreviated claims of *The Ethics of Ambiguity.* Most of the themes of the former are present in the latter, as both texts gravitate toward an articulation of ethics within an existential context. For example, the definition of the human being - as a "freedom" who "acts," and for whom meaning is only found when others take up our acts - so carefully developed in *Pyrrhus and Cineas* is only briefly stated in *the Ethics of Ambiguity.* So too is her argument for the necessity of acknowledging the human realm as the only possible realm for human meaning, and the relationship between humans as the necessary condition for this. However, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is more explicitly focused on the question of "how one ought to act," implicitly addressing the critics of "existentialism" and, more particularly, the [unnamed] critics of Sartre who claim that existentialism is a moral relativism devoid of ethics.[441] In meeting this criticism, Beauvoir

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[439] Ibid., p.140.
[440] Ibid., p.141.
[441] Beauvoir assumes her reader is aware of the public discourse on "existentialism" in the initial post-war period, and so does not name names. However, from her autobiography, and Edward Baring's recent study of the young Derrida, it seems likely she refers to Henri Lefevbre, Jacques Maritain, and to a lesser extent, Gabriel Marcel as those who accuse existentialism of being morally relativist, and ethically bankrupt. See Baring, Ch 1, "Humanist

spends considerable space describing the existential consciousness in the context of the European philosophical tradition before analyzing its moral implications.

She appeals immediately to this tradition in Part I, "Ambiguity and Freedom," invoking Montaigne in order to describe the ambiguity of the human condition: " 'The continuous work of our life,' says Montaigne,' is to build death.' " [442] She launches her thesis of ambiguity from this quotation, that the human condition is that of living only to die; conscious yet "crushed by the dark weight of things"; subject and object, singular and a member of a collective, "useless passion." The history of philosophy according to Beauvoir, following Nietzsche, is a history of eluding the truth of this ambiguity and devising ethics on the basis of falsification of our true condition: "They have striven to reduce mind to matter, or to reabsorb matter into mind, or to merge them within a single substance."[443] Those "consoling ethics" emanating from these metaphysics either exhort the denial of the body in favour of a later spiritual reward, or recommend a yielding to the moment by engulfing oneself in it, only highlighting "the disorder from which we suffer."[444] Beauvoir dismisses the evasions and misrepresentations of metaphysics, and instead advises: "Let us assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the genuine condition of our life that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting."[445]

Pretensions," for a historical analysis of the political and intellectual context for Sartre's 1946 lecture, "Existentialism is a Humanism."

[442] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 7.

[443] Ibid., p. 8.

[444] Ibid.

[445] Ibid., p. 9.

Asserting that existentialism has always been a philosophy of ambiguity, from Kierkegaard through Sartre, Beauvoir takes on the main criticism of existentialism, that it is "a philosophy of the absurd and of despair."[446] Beauvoir uses this observation and Sartre's declaration that man is a "useless passion" to argue for the necessity of an existential ethics. Here, assuming a familiarity with her existential claim that human beings possess neither a determined nature nor are destined to a pre-determined end, she argues that the "failure" implicit in the human as a "useless passion," the failure to ever achieve any absolute satisfaction in a world now emptied of metaphysics, is the necessary condition for *any* ethics: "without failure, no ethics." Citing Hegel, she observes his argument that "moral consciousness can exist only to the extent that there is a disagreement between nature and morality. It would disappear if the ethical law became the moral law."[447] Thus, not only does the existential acknowledgement of ambiguity and, ultimately, failure provide the conditions for the development of an ethic: at the same time, such an acknowledgement is also the acknowledgement of the undetermined freedom of the human being.

Turning specifically to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness,* she admits that it insists "above all on the abortive aspects of the human adventures."[448] However, she finds in its last pages an opening "for the perspective of ethics" which she intends to pursue here, in Sartre's claim that "man is a being who *makes himself* a lack of being *in order that there might be* being."

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[446] Ibid., p.10.
[447] Ibid.
[448] Ibid., p.11.

Arp has taken up Sartre's quotation in some detail, partly to argue for Beauvoir's intellectual independence from his philosophy. According to Arp, this quotation from Sartre should be understood in his text and in Beauvoir's as an inflection of Husserl, of Husserl's thesis about human intentionality. "In Husserl's terms, consciousness constitutes the meaning of objects in the world, and the meaning of the world itself."[449] However, while Sartre draws an absolute distinction between "*en-soi"* and "*pour-soi,*" that is - between consciousness and non-consciousness - between which, he argues, there is no communication, Beauvoir's ontology is closer to Merleau-Ponty's, in that she "stresses the dark, submerged links between the non-conscious and the conscious more than he does."[450] Arp emphasizes that the "being" which Sartre observes we lack is being as constructed by consciousness - and reads Sartre's ontology as proceeding from the position of consciousness imposing itself on the world. Beauvoir, by contrast, sees the world as impinging on consciousness, as something that exists apart from our consciousness, and as something in which we have a powerful desire to merge ourselves rather than dominate.[451] Arp argues that this nuance is an important premise in Beauvoir's ethic, that the "failure to realize this basic desire is not a loss but rather a gain. For by making ourselves a lack of being we remain at a distance from nature. Due to this distance the sky and water exist before us."[452] The Husserlian influence as presented by Arp is helpful, but where I part company with her is both in her reading of

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[449] Kristana Arp, *The Bonds of Freedom: Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Ethic (*Chicago: Open Court Press, 2001), p. 51.
[449] Ibid., p.52.
[449] Ibid., p.53.
[450] Ibid., p.55.

what "being" connotes in the quotation in question, as well as the rather limited and binary interpretation of the "*en-soi*" or realm of being-to-be-disclosed. Certainly, both Beauvoir and Sartre engaged with Husserl and phenomenology. But as Arp herself and, more recently, Weiss have observed, her phenomenology allies her more closely to Merleau-Ponty than Sartre. [453] Moreover, to regard the "*en-soi"* as an undefined "nature" may exclude the fact of the specific humanity whose being one is driven to disclose. Arp does herself admit that both Sartre and Beauvoir use the term "being" in more than one way, and often without precision. [454] That said, I will suggest a reading here that acknowledges both Beauvoir's knowledge of the European metaphysical canon and her rejection of its teleology, if not its methods.

Beauvoir, seizing on Sartre's claim that "man is a being who *makes himself* a lack of being *in order that there might be* being," finds in this thought an affirmation of not only Husserlian intentionality, but also human autonomy: "his passion is not inflicted on him from without. He chooses it."[455] This is further corroborated by her italicizing of the words "*makes himself,"* which we can infer should be read as self-determination. The "failure" of man's passion is not a cause for unhappiness, but rather a recognition that such passion can find "no external justification."[456] Man [sic] lacks *being,* which here suggests the soul or *geist* of the metaphysical tradition, and all of its consolations. However, in acknowledging the absence of "*being,"* in acknowledging the existential ambiguity of the human condition, the human being can disclose "being" - those

[453] Gail Weiss, "Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty."
[454] Arp, p.52.
[455] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p.11.
[456] Ibid., p.12.

situated, finite, singular individuals and the actions which, as we have seen in *Pyrrhus and Cineas,* define them. Such "uprooting" of the human being from the world grants a distance for perspective, and allows all things to be disclosed. "Man makes himself a lack, but he can deny the lack as a lack and affirm himself as a positive existence,"[457] effectively trading the false consolations of metaphysics for the vital and ambiguous truth of existing. Invoking Hegel, "it might be said that we have here a negation of the negation by which the positive can be re-established", but "rather than being a Hegelian act of surpassing, it is a matter of conversion."[458] By this she means to eliminate the problem in Hegel of surpassed terms "preserved only as abstract moments, whereas we consider that existence still remains a negative in the positive affirmation of itself," in that "the failure is not surpassed, it is assumed."[459] The negation of the negation can be read here as the acknowledgement that there is no "being," and as there is no "being" to be lacking in, there is no lack at all. Instead, there is existence, the state of living temporally, situatedly, singularly, and the acknowledgement of the lack of "being" emanates from the recognition of this condition. Conversely, to acknowledge the "lack" of metaphysical "being" is to affirm existence. Hence the "positive affirmation of itself." At the same time, such an acknowledgement in no way mitigates the uselessness of the passion that Sartre claims defines us. In this way then, "the failure is not surpassed; it is assumed." By parsing Sartre's definition of the human being, Beauvoir situates the conditions for the ethic she is going to propose and at the same time explicitly informs

[457] Ibid., p.13.
[458] Ibid.
[459] Ibid.

us that she is using Hegel's dialectic as a point of departure rather than an end, a strategy we have seen at work in *Pyrrhus and Cineas.*

On the basis of this existential perspective, in which the genuine person "will not agree to recognize any foreign absolute," Beauvoir argues, again following Nietzsche,[460] that since we cannot evaluate the meaning of existence, the only question worth asking is is "whether he wants to live and under what conditions."[461] Each person bears responsibility for the actions she undertakes in her freedom. In this, Beauvoir identifies another existential conversion, in "the tradition of Kant, Hegel and Fichte, who, in the words of Hegel himself, 'have taken for their point of departure the principle according to which the essence of right and duty and the essence of the thinking and willing subject are absolutely identical',"[462] although for existentialism that identification resides in the freedom of human beings and not in some abstract essence. The question existentialist ethics face is: how can the plurality of particular, singular separate persons, each acting out her on reality, "get together"? [463]

After an excursus in which she considers how Marxism can, like Christianity, disallow the responsibility of the individual, Beauvoir reassigns the meaning of "being," lifting it out of its static, all-encompassing metaphysical construction and transforming it into the consciousness of *beings* in the world, beings that have meaning to the extent that a conscious subject perceives and engages with them. One may accuse her of

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[460] See Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, "*The Problem of Socrates: 2," *Classics of Western Philosophy,* edited by Steven M. Cahn (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 1229. "One absolutely must reach out and try to grasp this astounding *finesse*, that the *value of life cannot be assessed.* Not by the living, since they are parties to the dispute, - in fact, thy are the objects of contention, and not the judges; not by the dead, for another reason."
[461] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 15.
[462] Ibid., p. 17.
[463] Ibid., p. 16.

equivocation, but it is a reading consistent with her rejection of essentialism and embracing of phenomenology. Here, Beauvoir argues that "the original scheme of man is ambiguous: he wants to be, and to the extent that he coincides with this wish, he fails. All the plans in which this will to be is actualized are condemned; and the ends circumscribed by these plans remain mirages."[464] Here we find a different register for "being" than the ones suggested by Arp. Here we have a suggestion of desiring something that is now "condemned" as "mirage," likely the old *ontos* of the Greek and Christian metaphysical tradition. If this understanding of "being" is accepted, then her claim - that we want to "be" in some absolute sense, yet fail - is a precise expression of ambiguity: the human being desires (for a variety of reasons, most situational) to be united to a transcendent absolute other, and at the same time, realizes the impossibility of this and so fails. However, she continues, "man also wills himself to be a disclosure of being, and if he coincides with this wish, he wins, for the fact is the world becomes present by his presence in it."[465]

Disclosure implies and requires a certain "perpetual tension to keep being at a distance, to tear oneself from the world and to assert oneself as a freedom."[466] On the one hand, as there is no transcendent absolute "*being"* in which to submerge oneself, only "beings," the existential position requires acknowledgement of this, tearing oneself from the mirage of totality; on the other hand, such a recognition is also a recognition of freedom, because "freedom is the source from which all significations and all values

[464] Ibid., p.23.
[465] Ibid.
[466] Ibid., p.24.

spring. It is the original condition of all justifications of existence."[467] Addressing the apparent contradiction of granting people an original freedom while admonishing them to act out of this freedom, which Arp[468] designates in three registers as ontological, moral and concrete freedom, Beauvoir argues that "to will oneself free is to effect the transition from nature to morality by establishing a genuine freedom on the upsurge of our existence."[469] Following Hegel's observation that there is no ethics without failure, she asserts that it is only in recognizing and embracing the ambiguities of existence - and its inherent failures - that one can become authentically moral. One is born free, but one can "evade this choice,"[470] and so remain stuck in unrealized ontological freedom. It is only by consciously thrusting one's freedom toward something, towards a project, that one is justified or "founded." "But this justification requires a constant tension. My project is never founded: it founds itself,"[471] to the extent of its limited ends. Here is where the need for the other enters, in that one's projects, "the movement of my transcendence requires that I never let it uselessly fall back upon itself, that I prolong it indefinitely," [472] a feat that can only concretely happen through the grace of others.

Beauvoir does not develop this theme until the end of Part II and the beginning of Part III. Her concern at the End of Part I is to address the question of why ontologically free persons do not necessarily embrace their freedom as the locus of their moral

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[467] Ibid.
[468] See Arp, *The Bonds of Freedom*, p 86f.
[469] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p.25.
[470] Ibid., p. 25.
[471] Ibid., p. 26.
[472] Ibid., p. 27.

agency, sometimes caught in a situation which "preserves existence in its pure facticity but forbids it all legitimation,"[473] sometimes choosing, at what Beauvoir terms the "moment of justification,"[474] the options of bad faith and self deception. In the latter case, Beauvoir locates moral evil, placing it squarely in the choices realized by free persons who are necessarily responsible for their actions. She argues that existentialism is the only philosophy "in which an ethics has a place," observing that

> it is because there are real dangers, real failures and real earthly damnation that words like victory, wisdom, or joy have meaning. Nothing is decided in advance, and it is because man has something to lose that he can also win. [475]

In making this claim, she again evokes the concept that ethics is only possible where an alternative - the unethical option - exists. It also evokes Derrida's claim in "Faith and Knowledge," regarding the logic of auto-immunity:

> But the auto-immunitary haunts the community and its systems of immunitary survival like the hyperbole of its own possibility. Nothing in *common*, nothing immune, safe and sound, *heilig* and holy, nothing unscathed in the most autonomous living present without a risk of autoimmunity. As always, the risk charges itself twice, the same finite risk. Two times, rather than one: with a menace and with a chance. In two

[473] Ibid., p. 31.
[474] Ibid., p. 41.
[475] Ibid., p. 34.

> words, it must take charge of – one could also say: take trust in – the *possibility* of that **radical evil** without which good would be for nothing.[476]

This passage in Derrida, which reiterates the logic of the autoimmunity of "religion" also offers a similar logic to that expressed by Beauvoir regarding existential responsibility: both agree that it produces meaning precisely because there is risk: of failure, of rejection, that is at the same time a possibility, "a menace and a chance." By the same logic, the good requires the possibility of evil for its identity as good.

When we relate this axiom to her anthropology of freedom, our freedom is the condition of ethics in that it allows for the possibility of retreat from responsibility as well as the deliberate abrogation of it. Part II, "Personal freedom and Others," is her sustained critique of those who "slide incoherently from attitude to another."[477]

Evoking Descartes, Beauvoir observes that one is not "free" as a child. Instead, the child is "cast into a universe which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit."[478] Eventually, however, each person arrives on the path to maturity at a moment of doubt, a moment of questioning: this is the moment of justification, where the "serious world" she has received from her caregivers collapses and the young person "is cast into a world which is no longer ready-made, which has to be made; he is abandoned, unjustified, the prey of a freedom that is no longer chained up by anything."[479]

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[476] Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," p.82.
[477] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 34.
[478] Ibid., p. 35.
[479] Ibid., p. 39.

Faced with this confusing and dizzying situation, Beauvoir details five types of "bad faith" responses to this "moment of justification," in ascending order: the sub-man; the serious man; the nihilist; the adventurer; and the passionate man. Each of these "types" is guilty of varying degrees of bad faith, and its consequences: fear, abdication, withdrawal, cruelty, nihilism, narcissism; each is unjustified due to an inability to fully and transparently assume his or her responsibility. The last type, who is also the most redeemable, the "passionate man," may come to the vital choice of coming to accept his distance from the "object" he desires, rather than eliminating it through various kinds of domination.

In this discussion, Beauvoir begins to lay out conditions of our relationships to each other. First, she insists that it "is only as something strange, forbidden, as something free, that the other is revealed as an other. And to love him genuinely is to love him in his otherness and in that freedom by which he escapes."[480] Such an acknowledgement evokes Françoise in *She Came to Stay,* her terror at the discovery of the facticity and freedom embodied by Xavière. But here, Beauvoir moves beyond the initial shock, and reasons that this otherness is constituted by this liberating freedom, a freedom each one possesses and which each can inhabit. The distance of "otherness" is produced by this ontological freedom, the same freedom which "I" as subject enjoys, the same freedom by which "I" can ultimately escape the impositions of an other, as well as accept their free generosity. Moreover, the being one seeks to disclose by understanding oneself as a lack of being must be *an other being,* if we are to avoid

[480] Ibid., p. 67.

solipsism. Of course, in keeping with her consistent understanding of the ambiguity of our condition, we may acknowledge the utter otherness of the other, at the same time that we acknowledge that the other founds the meaning of our lives. "Thus we see that no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself," since, as she had already argued at length in *Pyrrhus and Cineas,*

> To will oneself free and to will that there be *beings* is one and the same choice, the choice that man makes of himself as a presence in the world. We can neither say that the free man wants freedom in order to desire being, nor that he wants the disclosure of being by freedom. These are two aspects of a single reality. And whichever be the one under consideration, they both imply the bond of each man with all others. [481]

This bond, this *religatio* - to invoke the etymology of "religion" - is the bond that creates the condition for meaning. If our projects are to be more than solipsistic vanities, there must be other consciousnesses that can respond to their appeal. Against both Bataille, who argues that each man, desiring to be All, sees others as "a limit, a condensation of himself," and against Hegel, who argues "each consciousness . . . seeks the death of the other,[482] she observes that to hate the other, to struggle against the other is naive and self-defeating, because "if I were really everything, there would be nothing beside me; the world would be empty. There would be nothing to possess and I would be nothing."[483] If we accept this logic, in which the fallacy of "identity logic" - the drive to

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[481] Ibid., p. 70.
[482] Ibid.
[483] Ibid.

sublate the other into a unity - is laid bare, then it follows that "Man can find a justification for his existence only in the existence of other men."[484] Beauvoir makes a similar argument for human relationships as the locus of meaning when she observes that *nothing happens to a person* without the involvement of an other, starting with our birth, and that this "happening" is the promise and locus of meaning. "I concern others and others concern me: there we have an irreducible truth."[485]

For Beauvoir, the question that arises, if one accepts this claim, is this: among the many appeals that face you, which ones do you choose?

> To will oneself free is to will others free. This will is not an abstract formula. It points out to each person concrete action to be achieved. But the others are separate, even opposed, and the man of good will sees concrete and difficult problems arising in his relations with them. [486]

The necessity of choosing which *others* to respond to is treated at length in *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and is treated again here, but within a different context. Part III is at once a reiteration of the argument that human meaning can only arise as an appeal and response between free agents who are utterly separate to one another, *and* at the same time a polemic against various criticisms against existentialism. The latter changes the emphasis of Beauvoir's apologetics, and leads to a lengthy consideration of the antinomies of ambiguity regarding oppression and the violence that may accompany it. Nevertheless, she begins Part III - "The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity" - by asserting

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[484] Ibid., p. 72.
[485] Ibid.
[486] Ibid., p. 73.

again the inextricable engagement of each person with other persons in "a speaking world from which solicitations and appeals rise up. This means that, through this world, each individual can give his freedom a concrete content,"[487] a pre-emptive volley against the charge that existentialism can provide no concrete ethic. One is always only situated in a particular time and space, and can only play out one's good will, or lack thereof, among situated and situating individuals.

Above all, Part III allows Beauvoir to argue coherently for what she calls several times "salvation." Redeploying her Roman Catholic lexicon, Beauvoir asserts that if we accept the description of the existential human condition given here - that there is no given meaning or aim for one's existence - then the only response to this fact that can grant meaning to one's existence is the ethical response: to respond to the appeal of the other, which is also a promise to the other. In this way only can we be "saved" from a meaningless or solipsistic existence, from "mere facticity."

This response is a double movement: on the one hand, it is a positive affirmation of one's freedom and the responsibility this entails, in order to disclose being in our response to the other, which she tries to show in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*; on the other hand, it is the negative movement of rejecting oppression as it inevitably curtails one's own freedom. The oppressor is inevitably one of the failed "types," whose motive and operations she details in Part II. The oppressor is trapped in the solipsism of her fear or cruelty - another expression of fear. Beauvoir's ethic explicitly and logically excludes such solipsism since the entire value of the ethic - to be validated by the other- requires

[487] Ibid., p. 74.

the freedom of the other. Speaking to the claim that existentialism is an "individualistic ethics," she responds

> This individualism does not lead to the anarchy of personal whim. Man is free; but he finds his law in his very freedom. First, he must assume his freedom and not flee it; he assumes it by a constructive movement: one does not exist without doing something; and also by a negative movement which rejects oppression for oneself and others.[488]

As time-beings, the reality our experience of time-conception is powerfully engaged in this theory. This response to the appeal of the other and of their projects validates past lives and promises to those living today. She says of the child, even those in impoverished and dispossessed circumstances, "he is the living affirmation of human transcendence: he is on the watch, he is an eager hand held out to the world, he is a hope, a project."[489] The future is infinite; the present is the moment of decision and action. But the past, although complete and non-negotiable, speaks to us, carries forward those promises which we can still embrace. "One does not love the past in its living truth if he insists on preserving its hardened and mummified forms. The past is an appeal; it is an appeal toward the future which sometimes can save it only by destroying it."[490] This appeal from the past, from the spectral, an appeal which Derrida figures as an injunction,[491] demands response, but not idolatry. To respond is to pledge again - but not blindly or uncritically.

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[488] Ibid., p. 156.
[489] Ibid., p. 102.
[490] Ibid., p. 95.
[491] For one such discussion of this figure, see Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p. 8 f.

Let us recall that Derrida describes the site of faith as the promise between us - to tell the truth, to believe the other, even though they may be lying - which is also the risk.[492] This faith, in Beauvoir, is located in the promise I carry for the other, by responding to the appeal of her project, by appropriating her project, in order that it and, by extension she herself, has meaning beyond her own existence, a meaning that enlivens my existence : "let them accord value to one another in love and friendship, and the objects, the events, and the men immediately *have* this value; they have it absolutely."[493] Above all, the promise of the response includes an affirmation of solidarity, that we are not merely and utterly separate, but that we can appeal to one another for affirmation, for meaning, and perhaps receive. This appeal is not abstract, as Beauvoir tried to show in her novels. Witness Anne returning from the edge of suicide, forced downstairs into her living house by the sounds of her family in the garden, *appealing* to her.[494] The other is neither always the enemy, nor always of the same nature, but he or she is a force and the condition of one's situation. Invoking Kant's dove again, she observes

> The resistance of the thing sustains the action of man as air sustains the flight of the dove; and by projecting himself through it he accepts its being an obstacle; he assumes the risk of a setback in which he does not see a denial of his freedom . . . These withdrawals and errors are another way of disclosing the world.[495]

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[492] This summarizes the discussion of faith and response given in *The Gift of Death,* and "Faith and Knowledge," more fully explicated in Chapter Three of this dissertation.
[493] Ibid., p. 158.
[494] Beauvoir, *The Mandarins,* translated by Leonard M. Friedman (London: Fontana Books, 1957), p. 761.
[495] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* p. 81.

Across the straits separating individuals, there sounds an appeal and a promise to which one can respond in risk, with faith. This is the only consolation available to us:

> ‘ Do what you will, come what may.’ That amounts to saying in a different way that the result is not external to the good will which fulfills itself in aiming at it. If it came to be that each man did what he must, existence would be saved in each one without there being any need of dreaming of a paradise where all would be reconciled in death. [496]

Beauvoir locates faith between individuals, radically separated from and “other” to each other, who appeal to one another and who, in their freedom, may respond to each other, each response bearing a promise of a kind of salvation - from the void, from solipsism, from meaninglessness and faciticty. This faith is one of the two sources of religion in Derrida’s reading. Where does the other “source,” that of “knowledge”, feature in Beauvoir’s thought? Knowledge, “always tempting,” is the affect of the drive to gather and bind, of the desire for stasis and stillness. “Knowledge” is the sign of those conditions that one seeks to indemnify and preserve unscathed, *heilig,* holy: the desire for “knowledge” is inaugurated by that same desire that aims at union with the other, and which in this function is the source of faith. Philosophically, Beauvoir accepts the impossibility of such conditions. As we have seen, for Beauvoir, the human condition is paradoxical, ambiguous and contingent, a fact that must be embraced and accommodated. The condition that she repeatedly admits she longs for – that of an absolute union with an other – is also repeatedly denounced as impossible. This

[496] Ibid., p. 159.

longing, as she describes it in “The Mystic” and in which she draws close to Certeau’s figure, is toward a Beloved who is largely absent. In her ethics, she has clearly reassigned this longing to the custody of “others“ and finds in this situation a possible site for the production of meaning, through the chain of appeal and response already detailed. To the extent that one’s projects are ultimately finite, however, the satisfaction of one’s desire in the response of the other is limited, “ordering a sequel of wanderings and pursuit,” as Certeau so eloquenty puts it.

Knowledge then, in Beauvoir, is impossible amid the contingencies and finitude of human life. Her ethic is structurally a repudiation of the drive to homogeneity and hegemony, even as she admits, like Derrida, to the temptation of “knowing.” Keenly sensitive to the implications of ambiguity, Beauvoir exhorts her readers to accept that the “facticity” of life is meaningless apart from the human beings who bear the weight of the things of this world. On the other hand, the meaning that people create between them is itself contingent, borne aloft like the air beneath Kant’s dove – in resistance and tension. In Beauvoir’s philosophy, which is a radical departure from the dominant metaphysical tradition embedded in the scene of religion, “knowledge” has been iterated as a *sign* of that which is ultimately contingent and ambiguous. As such, “knowledge” cannot be preserved, rendered *heilig,* holy, unscathed, and thus does not constitute the occasion for a phantasm or spectre to rule the castle. However, if Beauvoir has undermined the possibility of “knowledge” as such by her insistence on the logic of ambiguity, what of the machinery of autoimmunity? In Beauvoir’s thought, in her resistance to metaphysics and to all totalizing doctrines, out of her disciplined

commitment to the acceptance of ambiguity, autoimmunity can be seen to function in the movement of the scene of religion. The scene of religion, where she rejects and moves away from in its manifestations in the Roman Catholic institution and doctrine and in the bourgeois economic and social matrix the Church supported, is redeployed again: the site of the One – here, an existential iteration of the "Other" every "I" appeals to - changes, from a divine absence to a human subject. This change does undermine the authority which underwrites the bourgeois capitalist Catholic tradition which Beauvoir abandons, but it does not abrogate the structure of *faith* per se, and so we may read this as a case of the mechanism of resistance – in this case, the 20th century scene of religion and the forces attempting to gather and bind its citizens – producing the very threat it seeks to prevent – here, Beauvoir's critical interrogation and wholesale replacement of its tropes with existential philosophy and ethics.

Chapter Six

A Moving Scene

This dissertation has sought to think together the work of Simone de Beauvoir with a figure I am calling the scene of religion. It is inspired by a thread of concern in her work that enjoins a response: after the fall of "metaphysics," after disenchantment with progress and reason, what is the basis of meaning in a godless universe? What is our relationship to the others in this existentially conceived world? Beauvoir's own avowal of atheism and her existential ethic may suggest a rejection of "religion" as it is commonly formulated, and this may account for the slender scholarly interest in this topic. However, according to the reading offered here, Beauvoir is firmly situated within the scene of religion, and is engaged in its movement even as she resists its drive to gather and bind. The logic of the binary orders it so: at the risk of being redundant, "No *weg* without *unweg;"* no rejection of "religion" that does not always already imply "religion." Certeau and Derrida have been enlisted in the investigation of this reading, a happy circumstance that has produced an unexpected benefit: bringing these three French philosophers together, perhaps for the first time, in a revealing serendipity of thought.

I suggested in Chapter Three that reading Beauvoir's existential ethic within the scene of religion poses a new aporia: given the logic of *différance,* can one who has rejected the tropes of "religion" by redeploying its sources be said to inhabit another scene? Is there an "outside" of the scene of religion, a site which is also the scene of globalatinized capitalism? Does Beauvoir show us the play toward an opening in this

binary? The answer is ambiguous: on the one hand, Beauvoir's performance in the scene of religion resists the hegemony of the dominant culture and it does so by enabling heterogeneity. In this, she provides a structure for an ongoing play of resistance within the dynamic between the forces of hegemony and those of heterogeneity. At the same time, to be faithful to the different logic articulated by Derrida, the movement of "autoimmunity" is non-negotiable. The question is, when a structure for resistance to hegemony is instituted, will this very structure of resistance not also be subject to a play of resistance? Is there an alternative to the dialectic of the binary, as such? Is such an alternative desirable? Before moving on to the implications of the enabling of heterogeneity in Beauvoir's ethic, an unspoken ethical assumption at play in the contemporary practice of critical theory needs acknowledging.

An unspoken assumption in much of the discourse of contemporary philosophy, and particularly in that indebted to French "post-modern" philosophy, is that heterogeneity is preferable to homogeneity. One might assume that this is self-evident as a political proposition, when the consequences of extreme movements of homogeneity, like political and social fascisms, are considered. It is easy to condemn irrational intolerance and the persecution of other human beings for being different in ways that do not obviously interfere with others. On the other hand, when societies and their subsets act according to implicit and desirable agreements about social discourse and behavior, this is, at the mild end of the spectrum, a movement of homogeneity that most societies wish to retain. This raises the question about the necessary role of homogeneity as a social force in the binary of "same" and "different," which is also the

binary of "self" and "other." While the critique of uncritically held normative homogeneities is necessary and reasonable, it is interesting that neither Derrida nor Certeau argue against them definitively or at all. Their focus is on enabling the *hetero* rather than simply dismissing the *homo*. In this they have a sister in Beauvoir.

Returning to the question of the implications of Beauvoir's ethic for enabling heteogeneity, I have argued that Beauvoir performs a movement of autoimmune resistance within the scene of religion she inherits. When she rejects the authority of the bourgeois Roman Catholic tradition to which she was subject, she at the same time affirms faith between free subjects as a foundation for meaning. I want to attend closely to her exact phrase describing her adolescent rejection of the tradition. She says she realized that "god was no longer relevant to me."[497] There are several registers of meaning for this declaration. Within the context of this specific passage in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, "god" is no longer relevant to Beauvoir as a divine accountant, who promises rewards in an afterlife for conforming to specific behaviours now because, she concluded, "his name would have to be a cover for nothing more than a mirage,"[498] whereas the earth was manifestly alive and beautiful to her. The other obvious register of meaning here is the inference that if there is no "god," then the source of meaning for someone, driven by a desire for union with another, must be that very "other." As we have seen, Beauvoir develops a logic of reciprocity, in which individuals provide a reciprocal context for the founding of the meaning of each other's projects and, ultimately, lives. "God" no longer justifies existence; only "I," in my appeal to and

[497] Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter,* p. 137.
[498] Ibid.

response from “thee,” can found my life, and only if every “I” assumes the mantle of freedom and responsibility that Beauvoir argues is afforded to each person. Heir to the "self” that we have seen inaugurated in the scene of religion, refined and valorized in the various European “Enlightenments,” Beauvoir meticulously affirms the implication of “self-authorization,” while insisting that such “self-hood” is woven into the self-hood of others. Thus, within this particular intellectual thread of the 20th century scene of religion, the authority of the tradition, the authority of “god,” is replaced by the self-authorizing autonomous subject, one who accepts the ambiguity of the human condition, and the contingent and fragile conditions for meaning.

If one accepts this reading of Beauvoir, that she necessarily inhabits the scene of religion, a scene of a self, driven by desire, played out in the tension between faith and knowledge, it is necessary to examine the trope of the autonomous subject that occupies the site of faith in her thought. If we follow Derrida and Certeau faithfully, the “machine” for the making of gods does not quit because of meta-critical insight, and the figure of auto-immunity is always already at play. Several implications emerge. First, there is the contestable concept of the autonomous subject: is an individual definitively free to assume responsibility for one’s choices and actions? According to Beauvoir’s own logic, echoed in Derrida[499] and Certeau, she would answer “no,” since we are “the facticity” and the “situation” of each other’s lives, and can never be said to possess

[499] Derrida in particular has written extensively on “self” and its “authorization” – *selbstdarstellung* – in his reading of Freud, in which his deconstructions inevitably undo the conceits of Freud’s self-conception. See “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” *Diacritics* volume 25, number 2 (Summer, 1995): pp. 9-63; “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” and “To Speculate: On Freud.” Certeau responds more obliquely to this problem, but nevertheless engages in a psychological profile of “mystic” mentors in *Possession at Loudun* that suggest the play of the self as social construct.

autonomy in an absolute way. Other critiques of this construct, from the social sciences and psychological studies, suggest, for example, that the group mind is ubiquitous, and difficult to resist; that our animal drives both trump and constitute all *ratios*.[500] According to the logic of autoimmunity at play in the scene of religion, the valorized autonomous subject, if indemnified, is already automatically being resisted and contested, sometimes for good, other times for evil. Which is to say, that we who inherit this possible human being – the possibility of the responsible subject – must accept that it is not "pure," nor absolute, nor "unscathed" as a location for meaning.

This entailment of her thought, that of the contingency of all projects, and thus all meaning, is the great merit of Beauvoir's logic of ambiguity. In this, she foresees and accommodates the necessarily contingent and unstable nature of our projects, yet enjoins us to undertake them despite their unavoidable contingency, to appeal to the other who is the only possible foundation for meaning, in risk and love. There is an opening here for a more rigorous analysis of the role of her free and responsible subject in her discourse, for an interrogation of this figure. Nevertheless, I propose that because Beauvoir frames her philosophy within the basic premise of ambiguity, her "subject" is a viable site for faith, the faith that seeks to satisfy desire, at least temporarily, in the custody of our relationships.

As for knowledge – the figure of that which can be known in some static sense – this too is subject to her logic of ambiguity, to the play of call and response, between specific situated contingent persons. To be clear, with respect to the "serious" tradition

[500] For example, see Doris Lessing's reflection on the Milgram experiments called "Group Minds;" or Derrida's reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in "To Speculate: On Freud."

she rejects, she nevertheless does not reject those figures in that tradition who still speak with a human wisdom and tenderness, only those absurdities that exhibit "force of law" without a corresponding justice for the fact of our singular freedoms.

At stake in this study of Beauvoir's philosophy of ambiguity is the figure of religion. The "scene" offered in my reading of Derrida and Certeau may have its roots in the quotation from Bergson, that "the universe is a machine for the making of gods."[501] Interrogating religion as a scene – that is, as a play of forces enacted by human beings, subject to repetition and change, subject to autoimmune disruption – demonstrates the working of the "machine" that gathers and binds even while undoing that which it seeks to hold indemnified. This scene, as we have seen, is specifically situated, in the world, in its economy and politics and social structures, and is driven by two sources which exceed this scene. The theory that this scene affords the scholar of religion perhaps embaces other methods and theory: the work of Caroline Walker Bynam, Russell McCutcheon, Tomoko Masuzawa, to name a very few, can easily be read within the scene of religion, attending as they do the historically situated sociological, political, and textual location of that thing religion in their various discourses, and supporting the assumption in their discourses, that "religion" is a trope of intellectual, social and political forces, and not a *sui generis* category of human endeavour. Thus, the scene of religion undermines uncritical approaches to religion - those that approach it as something discrete, private, often deemed precious, and beyond rational analysis – and complements critically aware approaches by situating them in a meta-theoretical

[501] Bergson, as quoted in Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," p. 77.

context. The figure of the scene of religion provides a site for understanding through the very mechanisms which constitute it – faith and knowledge – and contributes to the difficult and necessary task of disentangling an inadequate concept of religion from its implications in our complex and troubled contemporary situation. Locating the existential philosopher Beauvoir within this scene, as an agent of its mechanisms at the same time that she reisists its unjust constraints, reveals a reinscription of faith as a category of human action, beyond the scene of religion: as the promised fulfillment of the ancient prayer – "may I not be separated from thee;" as an opening for what may come: *l'avenir.*

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