Masters, Slaves and Others

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In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir utilised some of the basic concepts of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* - concepts such as 'immanence' and 'transcendence', 'being-for-self' and 'being-for-others', 'bad faith' and 'authenticity' - in a profound diagnosis of the condition of women. That she could thus use the framework of Sartrean existentialism is, as Michele Le Doeuff has pointed out [1], both surprising and impressive. The existentialist emphasis on radical freedom seems to leave little scope for the idea of oppression; and Sartre's notorious descriptions of the horrifying 'immanence' of the female body may well seem to make his book unpromising material for appropriation to the expression of feminist ideals. It cannot be denied that the apparently unpromising Sartrean framework, as used by de Beauvoir, has proved very fruitful for understanding the peculiarities of the situation of women, and the strange tensions they continue to experience between their gender and prevailing cultural ideals of what it is to be human. This philosophical framework, however, also underlies some of the limitations which can now be seen in de Beauvoir's diagnosis of the situation of women and some tensions in her articulation of feminist objectives.

The problems centre on the central notion of 'otherness' which de Beauvoir presents as the basic trait of woman - the peculiar way in which a free autonomous being finds herself compelled to assume the status of the Other, stabilised as an object, doomed to 'immanence'. Woman's 'transcendence' is overshadowed and itself transcended by another ego which is 'essential and sovereign'. In *Force of Circumstance* (1963) de Beauvoir expressed some second thoughts about her formulation of this central theme of female 'otherness'. She did not however express any reservations about her articulation of feminism in terms of the existentialist ideal that women should come to present themselves as 'the eye that looks, as subject, consciousness, freedom' [2]. The goal is a female attainment of Sartrean 'transcendence'. In this paper I want to explore some of the philosophical tensions in this ideal. De Beauvoir's concept of 'otherness' and the co-relative ideal of 'transcendence' have their origins in Hegel's version of the struggle of consciousnesses in the section on Lordship and Bondage in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. To see the problems in de Beauvoir's application of them, we must take them back to their Hegelian origins and follow them through their adaptation by Sartre.

Hegel on Masters, Slaves and Women

Hegel's famous master-slave dialectic occurs in the context of his treatment of the emergence of sustained self-consciousness out of less advanced stages of consciousness - sense-certainty, perception, understanding [3]. Two points are crucial for our purposes: Hegel's understanding of the relationship between self-consciousness and Life, and his claim that sustained self-consciousness involves a struggle between consciousnesses. For Hegel, self-consciousness is one stage along the grand unfolding of Spirit from Nature and its eventual return to Nature. It is a moment in the series of negations and transformations through which Substance becomes determinate, a stage in the unfolding of Spirit in which consciousness 'presses forward to its true existence' What is distinctive about the stage of self-consciousness is that it defines itself against Life as its opposite; its peculiar richness derives from what it has as its opposite pole. The stage of simple immediacy of consciousness - 'sense-certainty' - gives way to the stage of 'perception', in which determinate but static objects are set over against consciousness. This is in turn transformed into Understanding, the stage where objects of consciousness are construed as having inner natures operating in accordance with Forces. This is associated with a tenuous form of self-consciousness: in thus understanding the world, consciousness understands itself. However Understanding, if it is to become full self-consciousness, must be transformed so that its objects are not enduring, static things following external laws, but rather organic, living things - the proper objects of desire. Consciousness now apprehends itself as confronted with Life - an 'infinite unity of differences' - and this emerging self-consciousness takes the form not of a bare awareness of an object, but rather desire for a living thing.

The transition to Desire sets the scene for Hegel's claim that self-consciousness involves an inevitable struggle between consciousnesses. There can, he insists, be no self-consciousness without inter-subjective awareness; an isolated consciousness cannot sustain self-consciousness. A consciousness can be aware of itself only by having consciousness presented to it as an outer object; but because this stage of developing consciousness takes the form of desire, a contradiction arises. The emerging self realises that the object of its desire is independent

of itself. The object is an 'other' and its otherness must be overcome if the truth of self-certainty - the sustained grasp of self as there in the world - is to be achieved. Even the lower forms of life, Hegel quaintly observes, act in conformity with this need to supersede the other by making it a part of themselves - they devour what they need from the world. However for fully self-conscious beings the necessary incorporation of the other is a more complex matter than mere eating. Self-consciousness is certain of itself only by overcoming the other, cancelling its otherness. The satisfaction of desire overcomes this independent otherness. In destroying the independence of the other, a self objectifies its own self-consciousness as in the world. But this can now be seen as a self-defeating enterprise, for the very being of self-consciousness demands that there be an independent other to thus overcome. With the incorporation of the other, self-consciousness itself disintegrates for want of an external consciousness in which its own being will be mirrored back to it. Hegel's conclusion is that, if self-consciousness is to be sustained, the object set over against it must allow itself to be incorporated without thereby ceasing to exist: and the only way this can be achieved is through the recognition of one consciousness by another. 'Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness'. Consciousness here 'first finds its turning point, where it leaves behind it the colourful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present' (pp.110-11).

It is the necessity of recognition which makes sustained self-consciousness, for Hegel, inherently conflict-ridden. If self-consciousness is to be sustained it must be, as it were, confronted by itself in another; there can be no self-consciousness without consciousness of the Other. But this mutual need of the other's recognition - demanding, as it does, that each engage in its own negation in order to sustain the other's self-certainty - means that the two consciousnesses must 'prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle' (p.114). The struggle may end in the actual death of one of the antagonists. The more interesting outcome, however, which makes possible a transition to richer forms of consciousness, is that whereby both survive but with one in a state of subjection to the other. Both have staked their lives, and by living through the fear of death they have attained to a kind of consciousness which transcends mere absorption in the immediacy of Life. They are now conscious of Life as something not exhausted by any of the particular determinate forms it takes. Hegelian self-certainty is grounded in this detached awareness; it stands above Life, rather than being absorbed in it as are the lesser forms of consciousness. The two consciousnesses in Hegel's story, however, are transformed in different ways by this fear of death they have each lived through. They survive as different kinds of self-consciousness: Lord and Bondsman.

It now turns out that, from the point of view of the Lord, the existence of the subjected consciousness no longer serves the purpose for which it was needed. Self-consciousness was to be sustained through the satisfied desire for recognition; but the outcome of the struggle is a recognition that is 'one-sided and unequal'. The object in which the Lord has achieved his mastery is not an independent consciousness but a servile one in which he cannot recognise himself; the required reflection of independent consciousness is distorted by the subjection which has been the condition of its attainment. Despite his 'victory', the Lord has found no external object in which his free, independent consciousness can be mirrored back to him and hence sustained. The kind of recognition he receives from the Bondsman is in fact detrimental to the project of sustaining awareness of self as free, independent consciousness; the self-certainty of the victor is once again under threat. Nor is this all there is to the souring of the Lord's victory. His relation to non-conscious things is now mediated through the bondsman's labour on them. He is thus deprived of what, for the bondsman, will prove the ultimately successful externalisation of self - the capacity to labour on things and thus make them over in one's own form.

A correspondingly advantageous reversal is the lot of the 'dependent' consciousness of the bondsman. Whereas the externalised truth of the Lord's self-consciousness is the servile consciousness of the bondsman, that of the bondsman is the free consciousness of the Lord - at any rate, for as long as that free consciousness can be sustained. The bondsman, moreover, is able through his enforced labour on things to transform his immediate relationship to the world into self-conscious awareness of it. Mere labouring on things, without having been through the life and death struggle, would leave consciousness immersed in the immediacy of lower forms of consciousness. But the consciousness of the bondsman has been through the fear of death, which has shaken everything stable in his world to its foundations; he is now aware of Life as something not exhausted by the immediate and particular vanishing moments of

experience. Work, for this transformed consciousness, can now become a way of actually bringing about the 'dissolution of the stable', a reworking of natural existence in the worker's own form. It becomes 'desire held in check, fleetingness staved off'. Through forming and shaping things, the bondsman's consciousness acquires what eludes the Lord - an 'element of permanence'; he discovers himself in the forms his work imposes on objects (p.118).

To see how all this bears on the question of women, we must see the master-slave dialectic in relation to the later sections of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* where Hegel explicitly discusses male-female relations [4]. His treatment of the theme arises in the context of a discussion of the ethical life and the contrasts between its self-conscious and its unreflective forms. In many ways, this reproduces the structure of Hegel's treatment of the relations between individual self-consciousness and the more immediate, unreflective forms of consciousness. The ethical life is an early stage in the unfolding of Spirit into social, cultural and political life - a relatively primitive stage which must go under in response to inner strains, passing over into the more advanced stages in Spirit's self-realisation: law, culture and philosophy. The ethical life, in a

typical Hegelian fission, splits into two forms: two 'ethical substances', identified with the 'human' and the 'divine' law. These are respectively associated with Society and the Family and also explicitly with the male-female distinction. Each side of the division is construed as a genuine 'moment' of the spiritual, ethical life. The Family, however, represents the 'unconscious' notion of the ethical order, as opposed to its self-conscious existence, embodied in the wider life of Society, where the ethical 'shapes and maintains itself by working for the universal' (p.268).

We have seen that individual self-consciousness, for Hegel, demands an externalisation of the self, so that it comes to find self, as it were, in the outer world. Without such objectification of selfhood, self-consciousness remains tenuous, liable to slip back into immersion in mere Life. The externalisation of self makes possible a sustained self-consciousness; mere immersion in Life, in contrast, cannot sustain a stable self-consciousness. This contrast is echoed in Hegel's treatment of human and divine law. Self-conscious ethical life demands an externalisation into an outer realm beyond the particularities of Family Life; it is sustained through access to the wider life of Society, beyond the confines of the Family. And for Hegel, the crucial 'working for the universal' which goes on out there is explicitly the prerogative of the male individual. In the wider public arena, the male, on behalf of the Family, pursues the 'acquisition and maintenance of power and wealth' - a pursuit which for Hegel transcends its significance for the private gain of the individual and his family. The enterprise takes on a 'higher determination', which 'does not fall within the Family itself, but bears on what is truly universal, the community'. In relation to the Family, in fact, this external activity of the male has a negative role 'expelling the individual from the Family, subduing the natural aspect and separateness of his existence, and training him to be virtuous, to a life in and for the universal' (p.269).

The Hegelian individual is 'actual and substantial' only through this richer dimension of universality, associated with life as a citizen, external to the Family. In so far as he is not a citizen but belongs to the Family, the individual is only an 'unreal, impotent shadow' (p.270). The realm of the Family is the realm of 'divine law' - the realm of duties and affections towards blood relatives. All this Hegel sums up as the 'nether world'; and since women are not citizens it is also the realm of women. For them, there is no actual participation in the unfolding of Spirit into the advanced forms which go beyond family life. It should be stressed, again, that this is not for Hegel a matter of excluding women from the ethical order. Ethical life does occur within the Family; and despite their confinement to it women can be concerned with the 'universal' rather than with the particularity of 'natural' feelings. But because they lack access to that wider domain of fully self-conscious 'working for the universal', their ethical life involves a predicament which does not arise for men.

> In the ethical household, it is not a question of *this* particular husband, *this* particular child, but simply of husband and children generally; the relationships of the woman are based, not on feeling, but on the universal. The difference between the ethical life of the woman and that of the man consist just in this, that in her vocation as an individual and in her pleasure, her interest is centred on the universal and remains alien to the particularity of desire; whereas in the husband these two sides are separated; and since he possesses as a citizen the self-conscious power of universality, he thereby acquires the right of desire and, at the same time, preserves his freedom in regard to it. Since, then, in this relationship of the wife there is an admixture of particularity, her ethical life is not pure; but in so far as it *is* ethical, the particularity is a matter of indifference, and the wife is without the moment of knowing herself as *this* particular self in the other partner. (pp.274-75)

The point is that in so far as relations within the Family are 'particular' - focused on this particular husband or child - they are not also 'ethical'. Men, in contrast to women, have an additional, external sphere of activity, where they 'work for the universal'. A man can thus treat his family relationships as entirely 'particular', without sacrificing his ethical life. But a woman can have the ethical life only to the extent that she can transform the particularity of family relationships into ethical, 'universal' concerns - for husband and children as such, rather than for these particular people. So what for the male is 'particular' is for the woman 'universal' and ethical. And this gives rise, Hegel goes on to point out, to inevitable conflicts between male and female. From the male perspective, there are conflicts between the ethical and the merely particular. Family Life drags him back to the particular from the outer realm of universality. But for the female, as Hegel sees, the conflicts take the form of external encroachments on the ethical demands of the Family. The conflicts between the two spheres thus takes the form of conflict between *male* and *female* as different embodiments of the ethical stage of Spirit. Not just Family concerns but *womankind* itself becomes the enemy of the wider community.

> Since the community only gets an existence through its interference with the happiness of the Family, and by dissolving (individual) self-consciousness into the universal, it creates for itself in what it suppresses and what is at the same time essential to it an internal enemy - womankind in general. Womankind - the everlasting irony (in the life) of the community - changes by intrigue the universal end of the government into a private end, transforms its universal activity into a work of some particular individual, and perverts the universal property of the state into a possession and ornament for the Family. (p.288)

Under these strains, the ethical stage of Spirit goes under and Spirit advances on into its next stages - legal status and personality, which need not concern us. What is important is how, in the light of Hegel's treatment of male-female relations, we are to understand the implications of the earlier master-slave dialectic. The two struggles - master-slave and male-female - I want to suggest, should be taken in conjunction. They are, of course, not meant to be chronologically related. Rather they represent similar 'moments' in different versions of the story of Spirit's unfolding from Nature, told once as the story of the emergence of individual self-consciousness as a stage in human knowledge, and again as the emergence of fully self-conscious forms of social life. Each story illuminates the other, and what connects them is the theme of the conditions of sustained self-consciousness. Individual self-consciousness is associated with a breaking away - achieved through surviving the fear of death - from immersion

in mere Life and its particular transient attachments. And self-conscious ethical life is likewise associated with a breaking away from the Family, which - at any rate from the male perspective - is also associated with particularity. In either case, it is by breaking away from the merely particular that true individuality is attained. The wider public domain outside the Family is the realm where the ethical life attains self-consciousness and is hence able to maintain itself in stable being without lapsing back into the particularity of merely natural feeling. From the male perspective, the Family serves as a realm of containment of the particular: he must transcend it to reach self-conscious ethical life through 'working for the universal'. In thus breaking away from the realm of mere particularity the male is breaking away from the domain and concerns of women. Women, if they are to be ethical beings, must do the best they can with the personal relationships that belong within Family Life. The brother-sister relation, Hegel thinks, has more potential for sustaining ethical self-consciousness than either husband-wife or parent-child relationships, holding some prospect of a free mutual recognition between selves, unmixed with struggles for independence or the sway of merely natural feeling (pp.274-75). But the proper sphere of sustained selfhood is out there beyond the Family. Women are relegated to a different, private sphere, which is not primarily associated with sustained self-consciousness.

The point here is not that what awaits the male beyond the confines of Family Life is engagement in life-and-death struggles for recognition, issuing in relations of Lordship and Bondage. The two stories do not intersect in that way. The male, when he leaves the constraints of Family Life, engages in civilised activities associated with the acquisition and maintenance of power and wealth. The stories do nonetheless map one another. The master-slave story describes a struggle for dominance between consciousnesses intent on obtaining recognition of a kind which will sustain self-certainty. And women, for Hegel, are outside the whole drama of the achievement of sustained self-consciousness. This is not to say that Hegel thinks that women do not actually have self-consciousness, or that they have no share in the more advanced stages of the unfolding of Spirit in human culture. The position is more complex. Spirit 'in its entirety' is supposed to be present at each of the advancing stages; but it is always a later stage that gives this presence of Spirit to a former. It is through its relation to human law that divine law can be seen as containing ethical Spirit, and this dependence is reflected in Hegel's corresponding remarks about the male/female relation. It is through their relation to men that women are part of the 'upward movement of the law of the nether world to the actuality of the light of day and to conscious existence': and it is through their relation to the Family and the feminine that men are involved in the corresponding 'downward movement' from actuality to unreality (p.278). Women do have self-conscious existence and activity but only by virtue of their relation to men.

Hegel's master-slave dialectic is of course not formulated in ways that explicitly exclude women from engagement in life-and-death struggles for recognition. However, if we read these passages in the light of Hegel's subsequent explicit discussion of the male-female distinction it can be seen that the struggle which dramatises Hegel's understanding of the preconditions of sustained self-consciousness is fundamentally a struggle between male consciousnesses. Women are outside the drama, although they are given a share in the spoils of victory. Hegel's struggle for self-consciousness is really a struggle between male selves and others. Women do not - at any rate, in their own right - fit into this dialectic as either masters or slaves. We should then expect some oddities in any attempt to apply the relations of recognition between Hegelian selves and others to understanding the condition of women. And some of the puzzling features of de Beauvoir's analysis of the condition of women, as we shall see later, do seem to derive from the underlying maleness of the original Hegelian confrontation of consciousnesses. However, de Beauvoir's application of the master-slave story is in fact taken not from the original Hegelian version but from Sartre's retelling of the story, which differs from Hegel's in some important and relevant respects.

The Sartrean Other

In the opening chapter of Part Three of *Being and Nothingness* [5], Sartre hails Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic as a break-through in the philosophical understanding of self-consciousness. As Hegel sees, the appearance of the Other is indispensable to the very existence of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness cannot be attained simply by looking into oneself, as if one could perform some impossible intellectual contortion in which the subject becomes the object of its own gaze. Rather than trying to somehow derive our awareness of others out of our self-awareness, we must go the other way round. Sartre is deeply impressed, too, by Hegel's stress on negation and the element of conflict it introduces into the nature of self-consciousness. The Other is both the same as me, in being self, and not the same, in being another self. To be conscious of the Other is to be conscious of what is not me; and to be conscious of myself is to be conscious of what is not the Other. 'The Other is the one who excludes me by being himself, the one whom I exclude by being myself' (p.236). Sartre elaborates Hegel's idea that there is an unavoidable power-struggle at the heart of self-consciousness into the claim that it is only in so far as each is opposed to the Other that they grasp themselves as selves, as having 'being-for-self'. Confronting the Other, each asserts his right of being an individual self.

Sartre's version of Hegel's master-slave story highlights this aspect of reciprocal recognition. The final stage of Hegel's story - the externalisation of self through labour - drops out altogether in Sartre's version. Sartre, moreover, gives his own

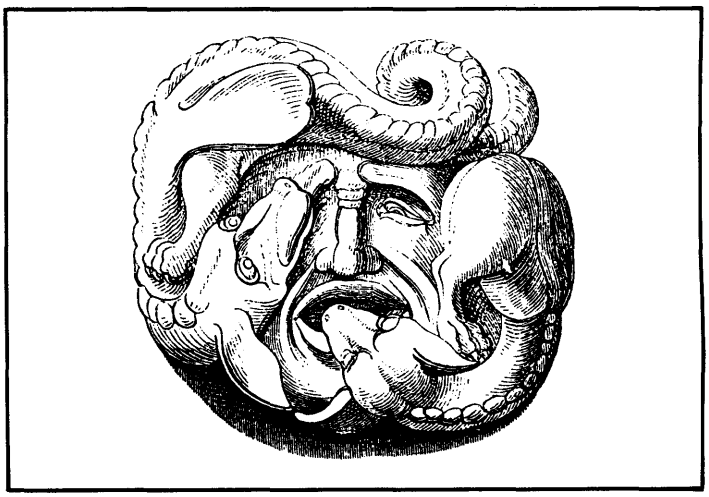
twist to Hegel's description of the struggle for recognition. The power-struggle becomes a struggle between competing 'Looks'. My very existence as a self-conscious being depends not just on the fact of the Other's recognition but on what kind of self the Other recognises me as being. This creates a crucial dependence on the Other. 'As I appear to the Other, so I am' (p.237). This mutual dependence on the content of the Other's perception gives a rather different role, in Sartre's version, to the contrast between the consciousness of the Master and that of the Slave. In Hegel's version, both consciousnesses live through the fear of death, and it is the freedom this brings that later enables the slave to externalise self in the world through labour. In Sartre's version, the benefits of having staked one's life and lived through the fear of death accrue entirely to the Master.

> The value of the Other's recognition of me depends on the value of my recognition of the Other. In this sense, to the extent that the Other apprehends me as bound to a body and immersed in *life*, I am myself only *an Other*. In order to make myself recognised by the Other, I must risk my own life. To risk one's life, in fact, is to reveal oneself as not-bound to the objective form or to any determined existence - as not-bound to life. (p.237)

Sartrean slave consciousness remains immersed in life as something too dear to lose; the consciousness of the Master, in contrast, through risking life breaks free to stand above it. Being prepared to die, he is no longer confined by the determinacies of his situation; he transcends all determination to any particular mode of existence. We can see emerging here Sartre's own existentialist preoccupation with absolute freedom as the achievement of a transcendence of all determinate situations. The Sartrean Master exults in having risked his life. On the other hand, 'the Other remains bound to external things in general; he appears to me and he appears to himself as *non-essential*. He is the *Slave* I am the *Master*; for him it is I who am essence' (p.237).

Sartre himself makes explicit some other relevant aspects in which he departs from the Hegelian treatment of the role of the Other in self-consciousness. For Hegel, he complains, the problem of self-conscious ness remains formulated in terms of knowledge, and this is falsely optimistic in two ways. Firstly, it is 'epistemologically optimistic'. Hegel thinks that selfhood, through the mediation of the Other, can be adequately presented to perception as an outer object. But, Sartre argues, this is impossible. Consciousness cannot be an object to consciousness without this fact modifying what it really is. To appear as an object to consciousness is no longer to be consciousness. I cannot be an object to myself, for the object is precisely 'what I make myself not-be' (p. 242). According to Hegel, the Other is an object and I apprehend my own selfhood in recognising this external self. But the one of these affirmations, Sartre argues, must destroy the other. To be an object is precisely not-to-be-me. If the Other is to me an object, for that very reason it cannot reflect back to me my own selfhood. Between the 'Other-as-object' and 'Me-as-subject' there is no common measure (p.243). Secondly, Hegel's position is 'ontologically optimistic'. In considering the problem of the Other, he places himself at the standpoint of the whole; and from this standpoint there is no real problem of particular consciousnesses. They can be considered as in genuine relations of recognition to one another; each is located in the unfolding, all-embracing Spirit. But from the standpoint of each consciousness this all-embracing perspective in which conflicts can be reconciled is not available. And this makes the struggles between consciousnesses of more consequence to each of them. 'No logical or epistemological optimism can cover the scandal of the plurality of consciousnesses' (p.244). 'So long as consciousnesses exist, the separation and conflict of consciousnesses will remain...' (p.244).

For Sartre, an adequate treatment of the relationship between self and other must start 'at the only possible standpoint' - that of a particular consciousness. It must nonetheless retain Hegel's 'brilliant intuition' that the self is dependent on the other in its very being. What this yields is the idea that we attain to self-consciousness not through an intellectual awareness of the Other as an outer object, but rather through emotion. Self-consciousness does not arise from intellectual awareness of objects but rather from the experience of such emotions as shame and pride; and at the heart of such emotions is the experience of finding within my own consciousness 'the Other himself as not being me'. The experience, and its bearing on self-consciousness and freedom, are described in the section on 'The Look' (pp.252-302). As the points Sartre makes here are essential to understanding de Beauvoir's application of the Sartrean notion of the Other, I will focus on the section in some detail.



The experience of being looked at is the source of our apprehension in our own 'inmost depths' of the Sartrean Other. But the apprehension of another's look - a look directed at me - cannot, Sartre argues, be the apprehension of an object. The experience of being looked at is quite different from the apprehension of an object and excludes it. The point becomes clearer in Sartre's contrast between the experience of looking at someone who is not looking at me, and our experience of a look directed at ourselves. I am in a public park. Not far away there is a lawn and along the edge of that lawn there are benches. A man passes by those benches. Instead of a grouping towards me of the objects, there is now an orietation which 'flees' from me. I experience a 'reorganisation of space'. This man, we suppose, sees the lawn. He may walk on the grass, and so on. I am aware of a spatiality that is not my spatiality. Among the objects of my universe, an element of disintegration has appeared. '... an object has appeared which has stolen the world from me'. There is a decentralisation of the world which 'undermines the centralisation which I, as perceiver, am simultaneously effecting'. '... it appears that the world has a kind of drain hole in the middle of its being and that it is perpetually flowing off through this hole' (p.256). But all of this, so far, is contained within my

centralisation of the scene. This man who is effecting the 'internal hemorrhage' (p.257) of my world is himself an object in my spatialisation. The bleeding away of my world is controlled, localised. His look directed at other objects is itself contained in my world. The situation becomes quite different if he now looks at me; his look can no longer be contained as an object in a world centred around my own look.

The point Sartre extracts from all this is that we cannot at the same time perceive a look as an object and apprehend a look fastened on ourselves as object; it must be either one or the other. To apprehend a look directed at us is not to apprehend an object; it is consciousness of being *looked at*. It is this experience which yields the Other to us. The Other is in principle the One that looks at me' (p.257). This Look need not be 'the convergence of two ocular globes in my direction'; it can be a rustling of branches, the sound of a footstep followed by silence, the opening of a shutter, the movement of a curtain. It is this sense of the Other's Look that is involved in shame. Listening behind a door out of jealousy, I hear footsteps behind me and experience shame, which involves awareness of myself as object to the Other (p.259). The immediate effect of this awareness is a denial of my 'transcendence', so that I become fixed with a determinate nature. The Look of the Other fixes my possibilities. By thus denying my transcendence it denies my freedom. I am placed in danger - a danger which is no accident, but the permanent structure of my 'being-for-others' (p.268). This is the state of the Sartrean 'slave consciousness'. Whereas the consciousness of the Master retains transcendence of all determinate situations, that of the Slave is immersed in determinacy.

The self that is given me through awareness of being looked at, then, is never the self as transcendent. What I am aware of through being looked at is not my self as a free subjective being, but rather an objectified self - the 'self-for-others'. For Sartre there is no possibility of reciprocal recognition between transcendent selves. The Look transforms its object from a transcendent being into a degraded consciousness. This objectification is a 'radical metamorphosis'. My being-for-others is a fall through absolute emptiness towards objectivity. There is, however, something intrinsically false, Sartre suggests, about this objectification. I cannot ultimately be deprived of my transcendence, for this would involve an alienation of my selfhood. The Other does not constitute me as an object for myself, but only for him. I take on, as it were, his alienating gaze; but I cannot really be alienated from myself. The objectifying force of the Other's Look can in principle always be resisted. My absolute freedom as a subject cannot be denied. The resistance of the Other's objectifying Look is central to Sartre's version of Hegel's life-and-death struggle between rival consciousnesses. Each strives to be the one that retains freedom, turning the other into a mere object. It is impossible for both lookers to be reciprocally free, recognising one another's 'being-for-self'. Thus the Sartrean antagonists struggle for the role of Looker. Each consciousness rejects the Other's objectifying Look, refusing to be limited to what it is perceived as being. Sartrean selfhood essentially involves this constant wrenching away from the Other's attempt to fix my possibilities by perceiving me as object; it involves a constant surpassing of fixed or 'dead' possibilities. The true Sartrean self is in this way a 'perpetual centre of infinite possibilities', which refuses to be known as an object. And it is this ideal of transcendence which de Beauvoir takes over in *The Second Sex* [6].

De Beauvoir on Woman as Other

De Beauvoir's idea of woman as 'other' is articulated in terms drawn from the Sartrean struggle for dominance between Lookers and Looked-at. There can at any one time be only one Sartrean Looker; the other must be looked-at. In appropriating this point to the analysis of the female condition, de Beauvoir introduces two variations to the Sartrean theme. The first is that, with respect to relations between the sexes, one sex is, as it were, permanently in the privileged role of Looker; the other is always the Looked-at. The second is that in her version of the struggle between hostile consciousnesses, one side connives in its defeat. Women are engaged in the struggle, but they are somehow not serious antagonists. Unlike the original master-slave struggle from which it all derives, the outcome here is not really a 'subjugation'. Women have themselves submitted to constitute a permanent Other. In the Sartrean struggle, two consciousnesses are locked in a combat of fierce, uncompromising Looks. The outcome is uncertain, although one must go under. In de Beauvoir's application of this model to the sexual division, woman connives at being the objectified Other. Women accept their own objectification, being well-pleased with the arrangement.

> To decline to be the Other, to refuse to be a party to the deal - this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred on them by their alliance with the superior caste. Man-the-sovereign will provide woman-the-liege with material protection and will undertake the moral justification of her existence ...
> (p.21)

What makes this extraordinary arrangement appealing to women is elaborated in terms drawn from Sartre's treatment of the demands of freedom. The condition of being female comes out as, as it were, a permanent state of Sartrean 'bad faith', in which women connive at being turned into objects, denying their transcendence. The condition and its ideal alternative are expressed in terms of 'immanence' and 'transcendence'.

> Every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out towards other liberties. There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the *en-soi* - the brutish life of subjection to given conditions - and of liberty into constraint and contingence. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted on him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil. Every individual concerned to justify his existence feels that his existence involves an undefined need to transcend himself, to engage in freely chosen projects.
> (pp.28-29)

Many contemporary readers of *The Second Sex* will have reservations about Sartrean transcendence as a human ideal, even apart from what limitations it may have as a feminist one. Can any will really be as free as Sartre would have it? And should we really want to be transcendent selves, leaping about in triumphant assertions of will in defiance of all the apparent determinacies in our situations? The ideal of radical freedom and the associated idea of bad faith can be seen, too, as in some ways just adding an extra burden of self-recrimination on those - male

or female - who find themselves caught in oppressive situations. However, the queries I want to raise here concern rather more specifically what becomes of the Hegelian and Sartrean treatments of self-consciousness in de Beauvoir's analysis of the predicament of women.

First, let me stress what I regard as a positive feature of de Beauvoir's use of the original Hegelian framework, as mediated by Sartre. De Beauvoir is of course not explicitly addressing herself to Hegel's treatment of the condition of women. But her own account of the female predicament can nonetheless be seen as illuminating an inner tension in Hegel's position. Hegel did not regard women as lacking the status of spiritual subjects. It is true that he saw them as, in a sense, closer to Nature than men: the form of ethical life with which they are associated is a less advanced form of Spirit than that associated with men. It is nonetheless supposed to be genuinely ethical. Woman does share in the more advanced stages of Spirit; but, as we have seen, she does so in a curiously vicarious way, through her relations to man. For de Beauvoir, as for Sartre, the conditions of selfhood are in contrast quite uncompromising. Nothing short of actual engagement in 'projects' and 'exploits' will do. In the lack of that, human subjects are forced back into mere 'immanence'. There can be no vicarious selfhood; and it can be only through bad faith that women regard their relations to men as giving them a share in transcendence. The middle zone which Hegel sets aside for women - located between the merely 'natural' and the full participation in the outer world of projects and exploits - must be seen as a delusion. If women are not out there engaging in their own projects and exploits, they are reduced to mere immanence or immersion in Life. There is no middle zone between transcendence and immanence, between 'being-for-self' and 'being-in-itself'.

In this way, we can see de Beauvoir's treatment of the Otherness of women as drawing out the inner inconsistencies in Hegel's treatment of woman's status as a spiritual subject. This repudiation of the Hegelian 'nether world' as nothing but the zone of bad faith, however, has some more negative consequences for de Beauvoir's account of the condition of being female. They come out especially in some of her remarks about female biology. In some passages, the female predicament is presented as a conflict between being an inalienable free subject, reaching out to transcendence, and being a body which drags this subject back to a merely 'natural' existence. It is as if the female body is an intrinsic obstacle to transcendence, making woman a 'prey of the species' During menstruation, says de Beauvoir, a woman 'feels her body most painfully as an obscure, alien thing; it is, indeed, the prey of a stubborn and foreign life.... Woman, like man, *is* her body; but her body is something other than herself' (p.61). This apparently stark dualism between transcendence through the will and confinement to bodily 'immanence' is a disconcerting picture of the condition of being female. At this point the notion of woman as 'other' may well seem to have over-reached itself. How can objectification of consciousness make one's very body other to oneself? Why should a woman's direct experience of her own body be an experience of lack of transcendence, of 'immersion' in mere Life? Why, at any rate, should this be so in any way that would not apply equally to the direct experience of a male body? Here it may well seem that de Beauvoir has appropriated, along with Sartrean ideas of transcendence, his notorious treatment of the female body as the epitome of immanence [7]. One need not endorse the more exultant celebrations of the personal and political potential of female biology and motherood to think there is something unduly negative about de Beauvoir's depiction of female biology.

In partial defence of de Beauvoir here it can of course be said that the experience - however direct - of a female body which she is describing is the experience of a body which has been culturally objectified by centuries of exposure to the male Look. De Beauvoir warns in the Introduction to Book Two of *The Second Sex* that her use of the words *woman* or *feminine* are not intended to refer to any changeless essence; that the reader must understand the phrase 'in the present state of education and custom' after most of her statements. And there is certainly something correct about the suggestion that women experience even their own bodies in ways that reflect the conditioning effects of a male objectifying Look. It is not female biology itself, we may say, that poses the obstacle to a feminine 'transcendence', but rather what men, with the connivance of women, have made of female biology. And de Beauvoir does seem to have this distinction clearly in mind in the following passage:

> Men have presumed to create a feminine domain - the kingdom of life, or immanence - only in order to lock up women therein. But it is regardless of sex that the existent seeks self-justification through transcendence - the very submission of women is proof of that statement. What they demand today is to be recognised as existents by the same right as men and not to subordinate existence to life, the human being and its animality.
> (pp.96-97)

But perhaps there is more to it than this. What makes the female body such a threat to Sartrean transcendence seems to be not just the result of its having been objectified by the male Look. Underlying de Beauvoir's descriptions of female biology is the original Hegelian opposition between the individuality of self-consciousness and the inchoate generality of mere Life. It is not just for straightforward practical reasons that woman's greater biological involvement in 'species life' poses obstacles to her attaining 'transcendence'. It is not just that, given the prevailing modes of social organisation, woman's primary responsibility for child care or domestic labour sets limits to her involvement in 'projects and exploits'. There seem to be conceptual reasons, too, for her greater proneness to Sartrean 'immanence'. Sartrean transcendence, like its Hegelian predecessor, is precisely a transcendence of mere 'Life'. Man transcends species life; he 'creates values'. Thus the existentialist perspective, de Beauvoir claims, enables us

> to understand how the biological and economic condition of the primitive horde must have led to male supremacy. The female, to a greater extent than the male, is the prey of the species; and the human race has always sought to escape its specific destiny. The support of life became for man an activity and a project through the invention of the tool; but in maternity woman remained closely bound to her body, like an animal. It is because humanity, calls itself in question in the matter of living - that is to say, values the reasons for living above mere life - that, confronting woman, man assumes mastery. Man's design is not to repeat himself in time: it is to take control of the instant and mould the future. It is male activity that in creating values has made of existence itself a value; this activity has prevailed over the

confused forces of life; it has subdued Nature and Woman.
(p.97)

'Transcendence', in its origins, is a transcendence *of* the feminine. In its Hegelian version this is a matter of breaking away from the 'nether world' of women. In its Sartrean version it is associated with a repudiation of what is supposedly signified by the female body, the 'holes' and 'slime' which theaten to engulf free subjecthood [8]. It is as if, in the lack of a Hegelian 'nether world', all that is left for male subjecthood to 'transcend' is the female body itself. In both cases, of course, it is only from a male perspective that the feminine can be seen as what must be 'transcended'. But the male perspective has left its marks on the very concepts of 'transcendence' and 'immanence'. Perhaps it is not, after all, surprising that de Beauvoir should slip into those disconcerting passages where it seems that women must struggle not only with their own bad faith and male power but with their own bodies, if they are to achieve true selfhood and freedom; as if they can achieve 'transcendence' only at the expense of alienation from their bodily being.

What I am suggesting here is that the ideal of 'transcendence' is - in a more fundamental way than de Beauvoir allows - a male ideal; that it feeds on the exclusion of the feminine. This is what makes the ideal of a feminine attainment of 'transcendence' puzzling. In Hegel's original version of the transcendence of mere Life, women were outside the drama, relegated to a 'nether world'. In de Beauvoir's application of the model, mediated through Sartre, women are slotted into the conflict of hostile consciousnesses; and her ideal is that they struggle to become Lookers rather than always the Looked-at. But can 'transcendence' be taken over in this way as if it were in principle a gender-neutral ideal? And what remains of it in the lack of that Hegelian middle zone which Sartre and de Beauvoir would have us repudiate as the zone of bad faith? Male transcendence, as Hegel himself partly saw, is something quite different from what female transcendence would have to be. It is a breaking away from a zone which for the male remains intact - from what is for him the realm of particularity and merely 'natural' feelings. There is for the female, in contrast, no such realm which she can both leave and leave intact. What would the distinction between 'transcendence' and 'immanence' amount to in a framework that entirely lacked that other more central and basically male-oriented distinction, between the 'private' realm of the Family and that 'outer' public domain into which free consciousnesses leap for the exhilarating pursuit of projects and exploits?

Footnotes

1 Michele le Doeuff, 'Operative Philosophy: Simone de Beauvoir and Existentialism', I & C, No.6, Autumn 1979
2 *Force of Circumstance*, trans. R. Howard (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968), pp.202-03.
3 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford, OUP, 1977), pp.104-119. All quotations and page references are from this edition.
4 *Op.cit.*, pp.267-290.
5 *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H.E. Barnes (London, Methuen, 1958). All quotations and page references are from this edition.
6 *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972). All quotations and page references are from this edition.
7 *Being and Nothingness*, Part IV, Chapter 2, Section 3.
8 *Op.cit.*, pp.609-14.

Further Reading

Below is a selective list of books and articles on feminism and philosophy:

S. Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*, Virago, London, 1980
J.B. Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought*, Martin Robertson, London, 1981
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S. Harding and M. Hintikka (eds.), *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, Synthese Library No.161, D. Reidel, Holland, 1983
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C. Gould and M. Wartofsky (eds.), *Women and Philosophy*, Perigree Books (G.P. Putnam), New York, 1980
M. Mahowald (ed.), *Philosophy of Women: Classical to Current Concepts*, Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis, 1978