

## 4. Why Xavière is a Threat to Françoise

Beauvoir's first publication, *She Came To Stay*, set the agenda for much of the rest of her philosophical career, both in its form and in its content. The use of literary fiction remained central to her articulation of her own brand of existentialism. The use of autobiographical material to provide much of the narrative of the novel is echoed not only in her subsequent works of fiction, but also in her use of autobiography itself as a medium of existential thought. The themes of gender and age in relation to human freedom and fulfilment are central to the novel, just as they are central to her work as a whole and are the subjects of her two major theoretical treatises. Published in 1943, the same year as Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, this novel constitutes the first major statement of Beauvoir's form of existentialism.

Merleau-Ponty recognised the novel's significance early on, describing it as heralding a new kind of literature in his 1945 article 'Metaphysics and the Novel'. Existential philosophy, he argues, shifts the focus of metaphysics from the abstract categories of thought onto our experience of the world, which precedes and underpins that thought. It thus aligns the central task of philosophy with that of literary fiction, to explicate our experience and explore its implications, and Beauvoir's novel is a paradigm of this new 'metaphysical literature' (MN: 27-8). Beauvoir confirmed this in 'Literature and Metaphysics', a lecture delivered during the 'existentialist offensive' later in 1945 and published in *Les Temps Modernes* the following year. Metaphysics, she argues, is the attempt to elucidate one's own existence. Philosophy does this in abstract concepts, but literature allows us 'to describe the metaphysical experience in its singular and temporal form' (LM: 274). Existentialist thought uses both forms because it aims 'to reconcile the objective and the subjective, the absolute and the relative, the timeless and the historical' (LM: 274).

We should not accept, therefore, any reading of the novel that aims to capture it fully in a few abstract themes or ideas. Beauvoir points out that a metaphysical novel would fail if it

merely attempted to provide 'a fictional, more or less shimmering garment' for 'a preconstructed ideological framework' (LM: 272). Rather, such a novel is an 'adventure of the mind' in which the novelist tries to present a rich metaphysical vision of the human condition through language and the reader aims to participate in this vision (LM: 275-6). To try to decode the novel for its abstract philosophical meaning is to take up the wrong attitude as a reader. But having read the novel properly, the reader can express aspects of that vision in the abstract terms of philosophy, however inherently limited those terms may be. This simply requires the reader to respect the richness and sophistication of the vision in which it is embedded. One aspect of the novel that can be isolated in this way is an image of freedom over time that is central to Beauvoir's distinctive form of existentialism.

### 1. A Metaphysical Novel

The novel centres on the threat that Xavière poses to the relationship between Françoise and Pierre. This is indicated by the novel's original title, *L'Invitée*, an indication preserved by the title of the English translation, *She Came To Stay*. Françoise and Pierre have a relationship that allows them to have affairs with other people. But the threat Xavière poses is not simply that Françoise finds the reality of this openness more difficult than she had imagined. Xavière is not the first person Pierre has had an affair with during their relationship, but his previous affairs have not caused Françoise any anguish. What is more, he repeatedly offers to break off this affair. One aspect of the problem is certainly that Françoise is herself attracted to Xavière. But we should not agree that the problem Françoise faces is simply that Xavière brings out in her something taboo in her society (Heath 1998: 177-80). For we should understand the fundamental problem posed by Xavière as metaphysical. Otherwise we would not have succeeded in participating in the metaphysical vision that Beauvoir attempts to capture in the novel that centres on this problem. We should agree with Merleau-Ponty that the psychological aspects of the novel are merely superficial and look deeper (MN: 32).

What is the aspect of the human condition exemplified, then, in the problem that Xavière poses for Françoise? 'What the characters in this book discover', argues Merleau-Ponty, 'is inherent individuality' (MN: 32). The relationship between Françoise and Pierre was premised on a common project, a common set of values, which they pursued together, even where this meant them each having affairs with other people. Xavière is brought into the relationship as part of this project, but then undermines it. She does this not only

through her rejection of their common values, but more importantly through Pierre's increasing sympathy with that rejection. She thus ruptures the mythical status that Françoise and Pierre have assigned themselves as a couple in harmony (Heath 1998: 176-7). But this is not merely a psychological point: through Pierre's complicity in bringing about this rupture, Françoise is forced to confront the metaphysical fact of her individuality, her irrevocable existential isolation. As her illusion of being part of a metaphysical 'we' is shattered, Merleau-Ponty points out, the artificial world she has built on this foundation collapses (MN: 32-3)

Xavière's challenge to the projects at the heart of the relationship between Françoise and Pierre is not simply that she presents an alternative set of values. It is rather that she directly attacks those values, objecting to their endless conversations about how best to live as a kind of narcissistic pedantry and portraying their creative endeavours as no different to the tediously regimented lives that they think they have escaped. This aspect of the rupture that she effects in their relationship reveals to Françoise that her own image of her life is no more significant than the ways in which it might be seen by other people. It is not merely a psychological fact, according to Merleau-Ponty, that 'it is our inevitable fate to be seen differently from the way we see ourselves' (MN: 38). It is a metaphysical fact. 'As long as Xavière exists, Françoise cannot help being what Xavière thinks she is' (MN: 37). Indeed, much of the novel explores the various ways it is possible to respond to the images of oneself presented by another person, and the ways in which these strategies can be infused with sexual desire (Barnes 1998).

The confrontation with Xavière, therefore, destroys Françoise's confident image of herself as part of a deeply connected couple engaged in a noble project of experimental living. Although this does capture an essential aspect of the problem that Xavière poses for Françoise, however, it does not seem to capture the whole of it. For it leaves some important aspects of the novel unexplained. On a psychological level, we can ask why Xavière's behaviour has this effect on Françoise but not on Pierre. This suggests that their collective project played a more significant role in her life than in his. Pierre's more sympathetic reactions to Xavière's challenges to their values, moreover, seem essential to the problem that Françoise faces. This suggests that the problem is as much to do with Pierre's commitment to their shared values as it is with Xavière's criticisms of them. And if we see the metaphysical story only as Françoise's realisation of her individuality and her dependence on the ways other people see her, then her finding Xavière sexually attractive plays no metaphysical role.

Merleau-Ponty's interpretation has therefore left some psychological aspects of the drama unexplained and others metaphysically redundant. An account of the problem Xavière poses for Françoise that does not have these shortcomings would better fit Beauvoir's idea of a metaphysical novel. Furthermore, in her essay on the metaphysical novel Beauvoir is clear that the temporal dimension of literary narrative is a feature of this way of articulating a metaphysical vision that sets it apart from mere description in the abstract language of philosophy (LM: 274). Merleau-Ponty's interpretation casts time merely as the arena in which the metaphysical vision is articulated, itself playing no essential role in that vision itself. Beauvoir's emphasis on the role of time in metaphysical literature, however, suggests that the metaphysical vision that Beauvoir is presenting through this novel is itself inherently temporal.

## 2. The Sedimentation of Projects

At the heart of Beauvoir's existentialism is the idea of a project. Human existence just is 'engagement in the world', a 'surpassing of the present toward a future' (EPW: 212; see also SS: 17). Projects are, as their name suggests, inherently temporal: not only are they oriented towards goals, but these goals are pursued only on the basis of what one has already become in the past (PC: 94). These projects are not determined by innate natures as they develop through our circumstances, but rather are freely chosen. 'I am free, and my projects are not defined by pre-existing interests; they posit their own ends' (EPW: 212). Since these freely undertaken projects are the whole basic structure of my existence, I have no innate nature. 'I am not a thing, but a project' (PC: 93). Beauvoir therefore agrees with Sartre and disagrees with Merleau-Ponty on the origins of projects.

But there is one crucial respect in which the metaphysical vision that Beauvoir presents through the threat Xavière poses to Françoise agrees with Merleau-Ponty's theory of freedom and disagrees with Sartre's initial form of existentialism. Merleau-Ponty argues that 'we must recognize a sort of sedimentation in our life', such that 'when an attitude toward the world has been confirmed often enough, it becomes privileged for us' (PP: 466). If I have been committed to a particular project, then 'this past, if not a destiny, has a specific weight' that makes it not merely a past decision and set of actions but 'the atmosphere of my present' (PP: 467). This is why one cannot easily abandon a project that one has pursuing for a significant amount of time, he claims. But what exactly does he

mean by an attitude becoming 'privileged' or carrying 'weight' or being 'the atmosphere of my present' due to 'a sort of sedimentation'?

Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'sedimentation' is central to the account of human existence articulated in *Phenomenology of Perception*, with the result that it has accrued a complicated meaning before it is employed in the chapter on freedom. He first uses the term to refer to the persistence of the conclusion of some reasoning as an acquired concept or judgment that can be drawn on without the need to work through that reasoning again (PP: 131). In part, this account of concept formation and its influence over thought is intended as a critique of rationalist epistemology. Explicit reasoning to a conclusion or the immediate judgment that something seems evidently true each deploy such sedimented ideas, so that the structure and meaning of such rational thought could not be fully spelled out without articulating all of the prior experience that formed the content and degree of influence of these sedimented ideas (PP: 416).

But the role of sedimentation is not limited to forming a stock of ideas that can be recalled and deployed in explicit reasoning. Rather, the knowledge that I gain about my environment becomes sedimented in my ability to navigate the world intelligently and even adeptly without the need for explicit thought about what I am doing (PP: 132). Perception 'is a reconstitution' of a meaningful environment, argues Merleau-Ponty, and therefore 'presupposes in me the sedimentations of a previous constitution' (PP: 222-3). The world that I live in, my milieu, is not simply a realm of physical objects, but is replete with my sedimented knowledge of their spatial arrangement and the meanings that they have for me. Indeed, it is also replete with meanings that have become 'sedimented on the outside': meanings encoded in language (PP: 195-6, 202) and those conferred on objects by people who have designed or used them for a specific purpose (PP: 363).

It is the role of one's own sedimented knowledge in constituting the world of one's experience to which Merleau-Ponty is referring when he talks of a 'sort of sedimentation' of motives (PP: 466). This kind of sedimentation has two aspects. One is that it structures the world of one's experience, just as sedimented knowledge of one's environment is manifest in the way that objects in the environment are experienced. This idea is central to the existentialism of Beauvoir and Sartre. Merleau-Ponty does not analyse the sedimentation of motives in any way that would distinguish this aspect of it from the sedimentation of knowledge, whereas Sartre does distinguish the reasons for action that we find in the environment as a result of our projects from the experienced meanings that

have their sources in our knowledge, physical abilities, and social context, as we saw in the previous chapter.

The second aspect of this sedimentation, however, is that it is a gradual strengthening: each time a motive is acted upon, it increases in 'weight', becomes a little more 'privileged', becomes more firmly embedded in the agent's outlook, with the effects that its influence over behaviour is increased and that it is more difficult to reject it. Merleau-Ponty argues for the sedimentation of motives through his critique of Sartre's idea that a project can be revised or abandoned at any point without any reason to do so. However, this argument fails to establish its conclusion. This idea of sedimentation is indeed inconsistent with the claim that one can revise or abandon a project for no reason, but we can reject that claim without thereby accepting that motives are gradually strengthened each time they are acted upon. Beauvoir endorses Merleau-Ponty's idea of sedimentation in her review of his *Phenomenology of Perception*, where she contrasts it with Sartre's theory of 'the absolute freedom of the mind' (RPP: 163). Although she does not specifically mention motives or projects in that review, we can derive from her novel published a couple of years earlier a reason to believe in this sort of sedimentation.

### 3. Why Xavière is a Threat to Françoise

For the sedimentation of projects is an inherently temporal aspect of the metaphysical vision of human existence that Beauvoir articulates in *She Came To Stay*. Françoise has pursued her shared project with Pierre for many years, has built her life around the values enshrined in that project, with the result that those values have gradually become deeply sedimented for her. They now exert a strong influence over her outlook in general and it would be very difficult for her to give them up. Indeed, this project and these values are now at the core of her sense of her own identity. Because this is a joint project with Pierre, moreover, his commitment to these same values is essential to her understanding of what is worthwhile, her sense of purpose in life, and indeed to her sense of who she herself is. Because of the sedimentation of the project over a substantial tract of time, a threat to this project is a threat to Françoise herself and her whole world.

The threat Xavière poses is not simply that she might replace Françoise in Pierre's affections. If that were the problem, then Françoise would encourage Pierre to break off the affair with Xavière when he offers to do so. She does not want this because she is committed to the joint project that allows them each to have affairs with other people.

Neither is the threat Xavière poses simply that she criticises the values around which Françoise has built her life. Living an unconventional life means facing such criticisms regularly from many people, so Françoise must be used to this. Xavière does not criticise from an alternative set of values, moreover, but simply as a flippant rejection of organising one's life around any values at all. It is difficult to see how this could be taken as serious criticism by someone living according to values that have been and continue to be carefully thought through.

Rather, it is precisely Xavière's own lack of commitment to any values that is at the heart of the threat she poses to Françoise. More precisely, the problem is Pierre's admiration for Xavière's rejection of such commitment. For in taking seriously her claims that the values he shares with Françoise are worthless, or at least are no more important than any other set of values that they could have adopted instead, Pierre betrays his own lack of commitment to the shared project. Xavière is much younger than Françoise and Pierre. She is only just starting out in adult life. Her playful and sceptical view of their values is perfectly appropriate for someone beginning to find her own way in the world. 'Her life had not yet begun; for her everything was possible', as Françoise herself puts it (SCS: 23). But having pursued his joint project with Françoise for many years, Pierre by contrast ought to have developed an attachment to the values enshrined in that project that would preclude his admiration for Xavière's rejection of that project.

Or this, at least, is how Françoise sees the situation. What she has learned from Pierre's admiration for Xavière is that he simply has not been committed to their shared values in the same way that she has been, the way that she had thought he had been. For if he had, then those values would now be as sedimented in his outlook as in hers. 'These thirty years were not only a past that she dragged along behind her; they had settled all about her, within her', Beauvoir tells us. 'That was her present, her future, that was the substance of which she was made' (SCS: 143). Had he really been committed to their shared project, he would not be able to mistake Xavière's frippery for profundity. This is what brings Françoise to realise her individuality. She discovers that even what she was most sure of in another person, Pierre's commitment to their project, has turned out not to be true. The problem is not that she has discovered the inevitable mismatch between her image of herself and the ways in which other people see her. It is rather that Pierre's sympathy for the way Xavière sees the two of them brings Françoise to realise that her entire adult life has not been what she thought it was and that her very identity as someone engaged in this joint commitment is undermined.

In this light, her attraction to Xavière takes on a metaphysical aspect. So long as she could subordinate this to the aim of incorporating Xavière into her life with Pierre, it posed no problem for her. But once she realised the implications of Pierre's admiration for Xavière's outlook, her continuing attraction to Xavière threatened to erode her sense of her own commitment to the values of the shared project, her sense that she ever took them seriously. The final scene of the novel is not motivated simply by Françoise's jealousy or by her inability to live with her taboo attraction (Heath 1998: 177-80). Read in such psychological terms, this scene seems excessive and melodramatic, as Toril Moi has pointed out (2008: 117). Given that Beauvoir intended the novel as a work of metaphysical literature, however, we should not be satisfied with Moi's psychoanalytic reading of it (2008: 139-143). Rather, we should agree with Mary Sirridge that the shortcoming of the psychological narrative in the final scene is essential to the novel's design: it forces the reader into the metaphysical perspective (2003: 147). In one act, Françoise departs from the shared project with Pierre while removing the threat to her commitment to the values that she had believed herself to share with Pierre, thereby establishing her individual life project on the ruins of their shared one.

#### 4. Beauvoir's Critique of Sartre's Theory of Freedom

We should therefore understand this metaphysical drama to be the fundamental structure of the novel. It is not that 'the metaphysical narrative is constantly destabilised by the presence of a second, commonplace level of narrative' (Sirridge 2003: 146). Rather, this more commonplace psychological intrigue of attractions and jealousies is the vehicle for the metaphysical narrative. Although the novel might contain valuable psychological insights, it is the metaphysical vision that drives the entire story. In this respect, *She Came To Stay* is the most accomplished of Beauvoir's works of metaphysical literature, perhaps the most accomplished existentialist novel of all. For it is the unfolding of the drama itself that embodies the metaphysical vision, rather than the lessons learned by the characters, the ideas they discuss, or their analyses of their experiences. By accomplishing this through a plot which is psychologically plausible until the end, Beauvoir has allowed the metaphysical content to structure the novel without disrupting the literary artifice that allows the reader to enter fully into the world it portrays. Her novel therefore meets the stringent literary standard that Camus outlines for philosophical novels in his review of Sartre's *Nausea*, a novel he praises highly despite thinking that it fails to meet that standard (SN: 199-202).

The novel's metaphysical purpose also drives its deployment of autobiographical material. It is clear from their shared project in life that Françoise and Pierre are modelled, however loosely, on Beauvoir and Sartre. The unstable ambivalence towards their shared project that Françoise sees in Pierre's admiration for Xavière dramatises the philosophical instability that Beauvoir sees in Sartre's theory of projects. Just as Pierre claims to be committed to their shared project while also open to the idea that it is no more valuable than any other possible project, so Sartre's theory of freedom in *Being and Nothingness*, published in the same year as *She Came To Stay*, holds that human existence is fundamentally both a commitment to projects and an ability to revise or reject any project at any time. Just as Françoise sees Pierre's admiration for Xavière's frippery as incompatible with his professed commitment to their shared project, so Beauvoir sees Sartre's idea of the freedom to revise or reject a project without difficulty as incompatible with the sedimentation involved in the genuine pursuit of a project.

Beauvoir's critique of Sartre's theory of freedom embedded in this novel goes further than the one offered by Merleau-Ponty a couple of years later. For, as we saw in chapter 3, all that is required to protect Sartre's theory from Merleau-Ponty's argument is to excise the claim that a project can be revised or rejected for no reason. We can reject that claim without thereby accepting that projects, or the values they enshrine, are gradually strengthened over time as the individual's commitment to them is repeatedly affirmed in thought and action. The existential threat that Xavière poses to Françoise dramatises Beauvoir's view that such sedimentation is an inherent aspect of commitment to a project or value. It is because the values of their shared project are not deeply sedimented in Pierre's outlook that Françoise comes to realise that he has never really been committed to them.

Sartre, by contrast, does not offer a clear positive account of what he means by commitment to a project. He does hold that it requires one to orient oneself toward the value enshrined in the project, as we saw in chapter 3, and that an explicit decision to do so is neither necessary nor sufficient for doing so, just as it is neither necessary nor sufficient for physically turning to face in a new direction. But since orienting oneself towards a value is not a bodily action, it is not clear what this imagery really indicates. Why does the gambler find the casino tempting despite his recent resolution not to gamble? How can he establish that resolution in place of his old project of gambling? Why does Daniel find it so difficult to drown his cats? Beauvoir's vision of the metaphysics of

commitment in *She Came To Stay* provides clear answers to these questions: the gambler has become deeply committed to gambling by regularly affirming in action the value it has for him; Daniel has become deeply attached to his cats by looking after them.

The metaphysical drama of *She Came To Stay*, therefore, is driven by an inherently temporal view of what it is to become committed to a project and its values. Sartre's theory of freedom lacks any account. Françoise's view that Pierre has not really been committed to their shared project because they have not become sedimented dramatises Beauvoir's view that Sartre cannot provide an account of commitment unless he accepts the sedimentation of projects. But to accept sedimentation would require him, as Beauvoir points out in her review of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, to revise his belief in 'the absolute freedom of the mind' (RPP: 163). For the influence of a sedimented project over one's thought and behaviour can be overcome only by the sedimentation of a countervailing value through thought and action, a process that Françoise is concerned might result from her own attraction to Xavière. This is the 'temporal thickness' of projects that Beauvoir mentions in her response to Merleau-Ponty's attack on Sartre's theory of freedom more than a decade later (MPPS: 242). But by that time, Beauvoir ascribed this idea of sedimentation to Sartre.

## 5. The Weight of Situation

In some of the most influential work in anglophone Beauvoir scholarship, Sonia Kruks has argued that Beauvoir and Sartre disagreed about the metaphysics of freedom as early as 1940, that Beauvoir developed her own account of freedom across her theoretical publications of the 1940s, and that she eventually persuaded Sartre to adopt her position (Kruks 1995; Kruks 1998). This disagreement and development, according to Kruks, concerns the impact of the individual's situation on their freedom. Sartre holds in *Being and Nothingness* that the social and physical structure of a situation limits the range of possibilities open to the individual, so limiting their freedom of action, but the significance of these limits is provided by the projects sustained by the individual's metaphysical freedom, since it is these projects that transform a pre-existing situation into a field of reasons. Beauvoir, according to Kruks, develops the contrary idea that situations weigh down metaphysical freedom itself, such that social oppression severely atrophies that freedom, and eventually persuades Sartre to agree.

This analysis has been claimed to misrepresent Sartre's theory of freedom. 'Sartre abandons his initially exaggerated view of absolute freedom', argues Matthew Eshleman, when he 'recognises social limitations to freedom' in the latter half of *Being and Nothingness* (2009: 69; see also Eshleman 2011: 43). Sartre begins with an abstract characterisation of metaphysical freedom, but then revises this to form his considered view, which includes the claim that 'the Other's existence brings a factual limit to my freedom' (B&N: 544). However, we should distinguish freedom of the mind from freedom of the person. Sartre argues in the first part of *Being and Nothingness* for absolute freedom over the projects that structure the world of our experience as a field of reasons. Later in the book, he argues that our freedom over our public image, or being-for-others, is limited by the freedom of other people: they have freedom over the projects that shape the way things in their world, including myself, appear to them. But this does not limit my freedom over the projects and values that shape my experience, because my being-for-others is a distinct aspect of my existence (B&N: 545-6; Webber 2011: 188-9). Beauvoir is right to ascribe to *Being and Nothingness* a theory of 'the absolute freedom of the mind' (RPP: 163).

Eshleman further argues that in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, published the year after *Being and Nothingness*, Beauvoir agrees with Sartre's initial abstract characterisation of freedom rather than endorsing his considered view. Beauvoir here clearly draws a distinction between 'freedom', which is a metaphysical property of the mind, and 'power', which is the ability to influence the world. While 'power is finite and one can increase it or restrict it from the outside', she argues, 'freedom remains infinite in all cases' (PC: 124). Kruks does cite this passage, but concludes only that Beauvoir's idea that metaphysical freedom can be modified by restrictions on the agent's power remains 'still undeveloped' in this work (1998: 50-1). Moreover, as Eshleman points out, Kruks provides only one quotation from all of Beauvoir's theoretical works of the 1940s that directly describes metaphysical freedom as reduced by oppressive situations, a sentence from the Introduction to *The Second Sex*: when 'transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation of existence into "in-itself", of freedom into facticity' (SS: 17). The significance of this sentence is questionable. The use of quotation marks around 'in-itself' suggests that it is not to be taken literally as a metaphysical change, as Eshleman points out (2009: 85 n15). Taking it in this way does not fit well with the preceding sentence, which identifies transcendence as essential to 'every subject' (SS: 17). But perhaps more importantly, Eshleman points out that *The Second Sex* was first published in 1949, by which time Sartre seems to have been changing his mind about ontological freedom anyway (2009: 67).

Should we conclude from this that Kruks is mistaken to claim that Beauvoir and Sartre disagreed about freedom at the time *Being and Nothingness* was published? As we have seen, the metaphysical vision that Beauvoir articulates in her novel published at that time does disagree with Sartre's theory of freedom, even drawing attention to this in the characters that she uses to dramatise her metaphysics of commitment. Kruks and Eshleman have both restricted themselves to Beauvoir's theoretical writings, even though Beauvoir herself argued that literary fiction is more appropriate than abstract philosophical thought for articulating metaphysics (LM: 274-5). What we find in *She Came To Stay*, however, is not the view that Kruks ascribes to Beauvoir, that situations can directly reduce metaphysical freedom. It is rather the view that the longer one has been genuinely pursuing a project, committing oneself to the value it enshrines, the more sedimented that project and value become. Given that projects are undertaken and pursued in socially constructed contexts, projects that become sedimented incorporate aspects of the individual's social situation. It is through the sedimentation of one's projects, therefore, that the influence of social situation on one's own mind can become steadily stronger and more difficult to overcome.

This is consistent with the contrast that Beauvoir draws between freedom and power in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*. Power can be restricted from the outside, by imprisonment for example, but freedom itself cannot. The increasing influence of social situation on the mind occurs only through the sedimentation of projects that are themselves freely formulated and undertaken by the individual. Although actions can be effectively forced from the outside, the attitude with which they are done cannot. The sedimentation of projects itself, moreover, does not set external limits on freedom. For, on Beauvoir's account, sedimentation is itself inherent in the freedom to commit oneself to projects and the values they enshrine. Without sedimentation, there could not be any such commitment. Sedimentation is therefore intrinsic to metaphysical freedom, as Beauvoir sees it, not something external to it. In this sense, metaphysical freedom remains 'infinite' (PC: 124) even though overcoming a sedimented project would be a difficult temporally extended task: it is infinite because it has no external boundaries, no limitations set by anything other than the operation of freedom itself.

## 6. Why Beauvoir is an Existentialist

We should agree with Kruks, therefore, that even when *Being and Nothingness* was being written, Beauvoir was developing an alternative theory of freedom which recognised that metaphysical freedom can become weighed down by the social structures that constrain the individual's life. But this effect of situations is mediated, on Beauvoir's view, through the sedimentation of freely chosen projects. Although she has this idea of sedimentation in common with Merleau-Ponty, we should not conclude that her theory of freedom is closer to his than it is to Sartre's. For as we saw in chapter 3, Merleau-Ponty holds freedom to be the degree to which the material and social structure of the individual's situations permits the pursuit of their preferred projects. The projects themselves, on Merleau-Ponty's view, are the result of an innate nature as it has developed through the individual's experience. Beauvoir, by contrast, agrees with Sartre that there is a prior metaphysical freedom over the pursuit of projects: we freely choose the projects we pursue and the values they enshrine, according to Beauvoir, even though abandoning a project becomes more difficult the longer it is pursued.

This contrast with Merleau-Ponty can be found in Beauvoir's view of the relation between the sedimentation of motives and the sedimentation of knowledge. In her review of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Beauvoir praises Merleau-Ponty's detailed theories of the sedimentation of knowledge in thought and action (RPP: 160-3). She does not mention his point towards the end of the book that we should also recognise 'a sort of sedimentation' of motives (PP: 466). Merleau-Ponty describes this sedimentation as something merely additional to the sedimentation of knowledge, operating in an analogous way. Beauvoir, however, sees the sedimentation of knowledge as an aspect of the sedimentation of projects. She agrees with Sartre, that is to say, that the classifications and techniques that make up the social world cannot impinge on metaphysical freedom directly, but become incorporated into the individual's outlook and behaviour only through forming the detail of the projects that the individual pursues. Sartre calls this subsumption of social meanings into projects 'interiorisation' (B&N: 544). Beauvoir differs from Sartre only in her further view that these meanings become sedimented in one's thought and behaviour through the sedimentation of the projects within which they are subsumed.

Beauvoir's position is a form of existentialism precisely because it accords this priority to the individual's projects. But her form of existentialism differs from Sartre's on a fundamental matter. For her, the slogan 'existence precedes essence' captures a temporal

relation as well as a logical one: as time goes on, for Beauvoir, the values and meanings that comprise the individual's projects become sedimented, thereby developing something like an individual Aristotelian essence that explains why that person thinks and behaves in the particular ways that they do. This is not quite an Aristotelian essence, since the idea of sedimentation entails that this character continues to develop and that, in principle, any sedimented project could be weakened and removed over time. But it is closer to an Aristotelian essence than is permitted in Sartre's initial theory of freedom. In his meaning of the slogan, the term 'essence' refers only to the set of projects that the individual is pursuing and can revise or reject at any moment. These projects carry no weight, for Sartre, beyond the individual continuing to affirm them. Beauvoir's meaning of the slogan recognises that the values and social meanings enshrined in these projects can become very firmly embedded in the individual's outlook and behaviour, so that the individual can find it difficult to overcome them and is even unlikely to want to do so.

This form of existentialism has a political aspect that Sartre's cannot have. Beauvoir's theory allows that social structures can make the exercise of metaphysical freedom over one's own projects increasingly difficult as a result of the sedimentation of social meanings and of values formulated against the backdrop of these meanings. Sedimented meanings can influence the individual's thought and outlook to such a degree that alternatives to their current situation become very hard to imagine and sedimented values built on those social meanings can make such alternatives seem very unattractive, even if the individual is strongly dissatisfied with their current situation and projects. Such internalised oppression cannot be explained without a theory of sedimentation, so cannot be explained by Sartre's existentialism. It can be characterised as a repression of freedom only if we accept that the ability to imagine and adopt new projects is central to human freedom, which is not accepted by Merleau-Ponty's theory of freedom as the degree to which one's situation tolerates the pursuit of one's projects. This way of understanding the internalisation of oppression is central to Beauvoir's analysis of gender in *The Second Sex*, as we will see in chapter 5. It rests on a theory of freedom and projects that is neither Sartre's nor Merleau-Ponty's, though it has aspects in common with each of these.

What, then, should we make of Beauvoir repeatedly claiming that she had simply adopted Sartre's philosophical system? These claims have been taken to justify reading her work as simply providing literary illustrations and ethical applications of Sartre's philosophy. But they have also been dismissed as disingenuous, since the evidence shows that her philosophical thought departs substantially from his (Kruks 1995: 80-2; Kruks 1998: 46).

One way to reconcile Beauvoir's distinctive form of existentialism with her claim that she followed Sartre in philosophical matters, however, is to apply the distinction she herself drew between metaphysics and philosophy. 'Metaphysics is, first of all, not a system', she writes; 'one does not "do" metaphysics as one "does" mathematics or physics' (LM: 273). One rather adopts an attitude towards existence that enables 'an original grasping of metaphysical reality' (LM: 273). Philosophy makes this vision explicit by forging a conceptual apparatus to capture abstract structures of it. Literature, by contrast, can present it in full. In her theoretical works, Beauvoir presents her original metaphysical vision through her appropriation of the conceptual apparatus found in *Being and Nothingness*.

## 7. The Ambiguity of Influence

This is not to deny that Beauvoir influenced that conceptual apparatus. Sartre's sophisticated and detailed philosophical terminology undoubtedly developed through his continual discussions of philosophy with Beauvoir throughout his adult life, just as it undoubtedly developed through discussion with other philosophers, including Merleau-Ponty, and through his readings and perhaps misreadings of many works across the years of its formation. Neither is it to deny that these discussions substantially shaped the metaphysical views that Beauvoir, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty each went on to articulate. But it is to accept Beauvoir's distancing herself from the precise meanings of these terms that can be found in *Being and Nothingness* and elsewhere in Sartre's work, even though she deploys those same terms. For on this reading of the development of existentialism, Sartre's primary concern was with the articulation of his metaphysical view in an abstract philosophical framework, whereas Beauvoir was sceptical of the power of such conceptual work to capture the rich nuance of her metaphysical vision. That she nevertheless tried to capture her vision in the terminology of a closely similar metaphysics has some strategic advantages over developing an entirely new terminology, but comes with inevitable limitations.

When some detail of her philosophical fiction or her theoretical works is incompatible with those of Sartre's concepts she deploys, we should read this as a manifestation of these limitations, rather than as mere inconsistency in Beauvoir's thought itself. We should prefer, so far as is plausible, to revise our understanding of her use of the relevant concept rather than to dismiss the apparently troublesome detail. Given the role of the sedimentation of projects in structuring the narrative of *She Came To Stay*, we should read

her use of Sartre's language of metaphysical freedom in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, for example, not as an endorsement of his concept of freedom in its entirety, but only as much as is consistent with this sedimentation. Given the development of existentialism through their continual discussion and given her views of the relation between metaphysical thought and philosophical vocabulary, we are not justified in drawing the stronger conclusion, which some Beauvoir scholars have put forward, that she employs his terminology only out of personal loyalty at the cost of significantly distorting her own thought (Le Doeuff 1995: 62-5; Tidd 1999: 48; Langer 2003: 88-9). We should rather accept the view that Beauvoir transforms the terms she appropriates from Sartre, just as she does with the terms borrowed from other thinkers (Deutscher 2008: 14-18).

These transformations are often subtle. Her alterations to Sartre's concepts are obscured if we read her work through the lens of his philosophy. There have been two forms of reading *She Came To Stay* in this way. One has been to read it as an illustration of the philosophical analyses found in *Being and Nothingness* (Barnes 1998). The other has been to analyse the biographical record with the aim of establishing which of the ideas in common between these two books were originally Beauvoir's and which were originally Sartre's (Fullbrook and Fullbrook 1995; Fullbrook 2004). Both of these ways of reading Beauvoir risk occluding philosophical contributions unique to her works of the relevant period. Drawing attention to the parallels between her thought and Merleau-Ponty's, on the other hand, risks simply recasting Beauvoir as his intellectual disciple rather than Sartre's, or at best characterising her work as a synthesis of theirs (Bergoffen 2009: 17).

These kinds of analysis of Beauvoir's work are tempting if we start with her theoretical works of the 1940s, since they were all published after *Being and Nothingness* and all but *Pyrrhus and Cineas* were published after *Phenomenology of Perception*. We might then read our conclusions about her theoretical works back into her earlier novel. But if we start by trying to make sense of the novel in its own terms, then we are led to a metaphysical vision that can in part be explicated in terms of the philosophies of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, but since it was published at the same time as *Being and Nothingness* and two years before *Phenomenology of Perception* it is less tempting to take her work to be derivative of theirs. We could then attempt to disentangle the lines influence through analysing the biographical material, but since this material is patchy and mostly limited to correspondence between two of the three it is not at all clear why we should expect such an endeavour to be successful.

One of Merleau-Ponty's observations on *She Came To Stay* is instructive here. 'It is impossible to calculate each one's role in the drama, impossible to evaluate the responsibilities, to give a true version of the story', he writes, because it is part of the novel's metaphysical vision that each person 'is inextricably and confusedly bound up with the world and with others' (MN: 36). Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre had been discussing their ideas with one another for fifteen years by the time *She Came To Stay* was published (Bakewell 2016: ch. 5). We can identify Beauvoir's philosophy, just as we can identify Françoise's view that Pierre had never really been committed to their project. What we cannot hope to do is to break the thought of any one of these philosophers down into distinct units and determine its provenance, just as we cannot break Beauvoir's novel down into discrete events and assign responsibility for each to a particular character. But this ambiguity of influence does not matter. For what is interesting about Beauvoir is not whether this or that particular idea crossed her mind before it crossed either Sartre's or Merleau-Ponty's. What is interesting is the metaphysical and ethical outlook, the form of existentialism, that she developed through her extended conversations with them both.

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