

Simone de Beauvoir and the Value of Immanence

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ABSTRACT

Simone de Beauvoir systematically undervalues what she calls "immanence," which consists of the physical, the habitual, the repetitious. Not only does she believe that women have been relegated to the realm of immanence, she believes that immanence itself has little if any value. She sees what she called "transcendence" as having great value and, indeed, what makes a human life different and better from any other sort of life. I argue that her view, while embodying a tendency present throughout the tradition in which she works, severely distorts what is desirable for a human life and fails to properly value immanence.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir offers us a detailed analysis of the position of women as she saw it. Many aspects of this analysis are still meaningful in our contemporary context, many have been superseded by contemporary feminist scholarship. My focus in this paper will be the examination of a fundamental philosophical issue raised in both *The Second Sex* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, her book on moral philosophy—the difference between, difference in the roles of, and relative value of immanence and transcendence. The distinction between these categories is not unique to de Beauvoir. She follows Heidegger and Sartre and, perhaps, in some form all the philosophers in the tradition in which she works. I have chosen de Beauvoir's work because her particular ways of making, explicating and valuing this distinction enable us to see important implications of this way of viewing the world.

Before offering two important examples of her ways of valuing immanence and transcendence, I want to offer first a brief outline of her theory of freedom, as expressed in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, which is the key to the relative value of immanence and transcendence. Second, I want to offer a necessarily brief characterization of the categories of immanence and transcendence themselves.

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, freedom in the sense of choosing freely and responsibly among our possibilities is a capacity and desire that human beings both have and ought to value. Our freedom is grounded in our consciousness, in particular our ability to imagine things as being other than they are. However, unlike Sartre, with whose views hers are understandably often conflated, de Beauvoir is not completely a voluntarist, but a naturalist/voluntarist. For her, the desire for freedom is natural and

our choice of it as a value is both morally obligatory and psychologically necessary in that we do not feel we have done justice to our human nature unless we exercise it. For de Beauvoir, happiness, or at least the right kind of happiness, can only result from the recognition of an expression of our freedom and is a test for the absence of bad faith. If we attempt to avoid freedom and find ourselves in bad faith, we are miserable. If we embrace our freedom, if we choose our projects with an eye to creating situations for ourselves from which more possibilities will unfold rather than simply choosing options that result in dead ends, we will be happy. While she, like both Sartre and Heidegger, believes that we are always tempted to bad faith and the rejection of freedom, her notion of bad faith is more exclusively tied to the avoidance of freedom than either Heidegger's or Sartre's. For Heidegger and Sartre, the avoidance of any aspect of our being can result in inauthenticity or bad faith. In de Beauvoir's case, it is our seeing ourselves as free and responsible that is absolutely fundamental. She does not believe there are any desires that have the same status as the desire for freedom, especially desires connected with the bodily, stability, preservation of the past, or emotional entanglements. She does not see human beings as having deep, legitimate, non-negotiable needs for a stable environment, the love and support of others or a sense of continuity. Thus, if I should say that I want to marry because of my passionate love for and desire for a life of emotional security with my future partner, and go on to say that it is very important to me to live from the heart, to make decisions according to my deepest emotional intuitions as well as making decisions on the basis of the enhancement of freedom, de Beauvoir would be, at least, suspicious. She would point out that there are many opportunities for bad faith here, and urge me to ask myself whether all of these desires in some way embody a desire

for freedom and, if not, whether they do not embody a way of avoiding freedom. In short, one is seen to be either enhancing and/or acting on freedom or denying it.

Though immanence and transcendence are not precisely defined in either *The Ethics of Ambiguity* or *The Second Sex*, we can characterize the difference between them in some general ways. We can see immanence as the bodily/physical and the involuntary, and transcendence as consciousness and the voluntary. We can see immanence as material existence in general, its perpetuation, and the maintenance of the status quo, and transcendence as creativity, linear goal-pursuing change as opposed to cyclical, repetitious change, and achievement. In de Beauvoir's view, women have become symbols of immanence. They are seen by both men and themselves as biological beings, caretakers of biological being, sexual objects, guardians of the status quo who have no capacity for the achievement of goals, especially creative goals, whereas men see themselves and women also see them as symbols of transcendence. Though, of course, everyone is both immanence and transcendence, we are all made anxious by our ambiguity and wish to escape it by fleeing into one of its elements. Men see themselves as transcendence while projecting their immanence onto women; women see themselves as immanence while projecting their transcendence onto men. So far, this seems relatively straightforward. It becomes less so when we consider that, while women are nearly always in bad faith because they neglect their transcendence, men do not seem to be so clearly in bad faith for neglecting their immanence. Further, as one considers what she has to say about immanence and transcendence—in both *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and in *The Second Sex*—transcendence involves the exercise of freedom, and freedom is the only intrinsic value—we can see that, for de Beauvoir, transcendence is infinitely more important than immanence. Two examples help show how this is so: her picture of the happy life of what she calls “the modern married man”, and her analysis of childbearing and childrearing as activities.

De Beauvoir seems to believe that men can avoid bad faith even though their relationship with their own immanence is, in her analysis, extremely unclear. Not only do men get far more out of the traditional arrangement than do women, but they are also able to avoid bad faith and embrace both their immanence and transcendence even though the situation in which they do this involves little actual contact with the immanent aspects of life and depends upon robbing someone else of her freedom.¹ Let us examine this situation further.

In the case of the modern married man, there seems to be a basic asymmetry in the positions of men and women. It

is possible for a man and a woman, who are married and participating in the same relationship, not to be both in bad faith. The woman is inevitably in bad faith, since she is denying her transcendence, but the man can avoid it.

These two elements—maintenance and progression—are implied in any living activity, and for *man* marriage permits precisely a happy synthesis of the two. In his occupation and his political life, he encounters change and progress, he senses his extension through time and the universe; and when he is tired of such roaming, he gets himself a home, a fixed location, and an anchorage in the world.²

Man marries today to obtain an anchorage in immanence, but not to be himself confined therein; he wants to have hearth and home while being free to escape therefrom; he settles down but often remains a vagabond at heart; he is not contemptuous of domestic felicity, but he does not make of it an end in itself; repetition bores him; he seeks after novelty, risk, opposition to overcome, companions and friends who take him away from solitude a *deux*.³

The implication of these passages is clear. Men have their immanence just by participating in home life to the extent of living there. They need not do anything, though, of course, in a traditional relationship they pay for everything. They need do no work on the environment—they need not cook nor hang curtains in order to count as having taken care of their relationship to immanence. Admitting one's immanence seems here to involve only taking one's physical needs seriously and arranging that they be satisfied in a regular and pleasant way.

The second example indicates her distaste for immanence as well as her seeing it as, in some sense, a second-rate concern. It is this sort of discussion of immanence that anyone who is concerned with both the oppression of women and the undervaluing of areas which have been traditionally considered to be women's work will find disturbing.

De Beauvoir argues that childbearing and childrearing cannot count as a legitimate project, an exercise of both transcendence and immanence, since transcendence is not exercised in any way. She begins by citing the involuntariness of pregnancy.

[S]he does not really make the baby, it makes itself within her; her flesh engenders flesh only, and she is quite incapable of establishing an existence that will have to establish itself. Creative acts originating in

liberty establish the object as value and give it the quality of the essential; whereas the child in the maternal body is not thus justified.... A mother can have *her* reasons for wanting *a* child, but she cannot give to *this* independent person, who is to exist tomorrow, his own reasons, his justification for existence; she engenders him as a product of her generalized body, not of her individual existence.⁴

Thus, this particular child is not the mother's project because she cannot (either from the standpoint of what is possible or what is desirable) choose the child's values for her/him, and the purely physiological development of the child is involuntary.

One may consider this position simply an inadequate assessment of the many choices and projects involved in bringing to term a healthy baby until one takes into account her apparent distaste for both the feminine physical and for the kind of work women have traditionally done in connection with producing and maintaining aspects of the physical world.

Ensnared by nature, the pregnant woman is plant and animal, a stock-pile of colloids, an incubator, an egg; she scares children proud of their straight, young bodies and makes young people titter contemptuously because she is a human being, a conscious and free individual, who has become life's passive instrument.⁵

Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present. She never senses conquest of a positive Good, but rather indefinite struggle against negative Evil. A young pupil writes in her essay: "I shall never have house-cleaning day"; she thinks of the future as constant progress toward some unknown summit; but one day, as her mother washes the dishes, it comes over her that both of them will be bound to such rites until death. Eating, sleeping, cleaning—the years no longer rise up toward heaven, they lie spread out ahead, gray and identical. The battle against dust and dirt is never won.

Washing, ironing, sweeping, ferreting out rolls of lint from under wardrobes—all this halting of decay is also the denial of life; for time simultaneously creates and destroys, and only its negative aspects concerns the housekeeper.⁶

In both of these examples, de Beauvoir exhibits her undervaluing of and even disdain for immanence. The confusing thing about her discussion of immanence is that it contains both truth and distortion. While it may be true that many women in traditional relationships are, indeed, stuck in the house all day and concern themselves entirely with household matters while men go out into the public world and do not seem to value their homes as highly as women do, what should we conclude from this? Should we conclude that men are right to feel as they do, as she seems to imply, or should we perhaps wonder why she considers matters of the home, so fraught with emotional significance for both men and women, so relatively insignificant? By the same token, there is both truth and distortion in her descriptions of childbearing and housework. Many women hate being pregnant and despise housework, partially because, no doubt, they correctly feel they have been maneuvered into doing them without being able to make real choices. What should we conclude from the fact that men feel trapped in their homes and many women loathe things connected with domesticity and childrearing? It seems obvious that we should conclude, at least, that no one who hates housework ought to do it, no one should spend her life dealing exclusively with the negative side of immanence, pregnancy is difficult and uncomfortable and one needs to want a child very much to be willing to put up with its discomforts and inconveniences. However, one suspects that these conclusions would not be de Beauvoir's. She seems to have a fundamental aversion to the physical except as an instrument. To use one's body for one's own purposes is a pleasure. This involves the use of transcendence but to use one's body and one's time (which is, after all, connected to immanence—our mortality lies in our immanence) to do things which are not redeemed by transcendence, which have no transcendent purpose, which are not creative—is not a pleasure, and furthermore, seems to be morally suspect.

How did de Beauvoir come to believe it possible that one could simply accent one's immanence, have it dealt with by others, avoid involvement with the bodily except for sex, regard such significant human events as childbearing and childrearing as relatively unimportant in the larger scheme of things and still avoid bad faith? The answer to this question lies in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

De Beauvoir believes that people both want and ought to be free. Freedom is not our only desire; in my opening discussion, I mentioned her view that we also wish to avoid freedom. Our desire to do so takes the form of wanting simply to be, in the way a physical object exists. However, for de Beauvoir, this is not a legitimate desire

because it involves denying our freedom, and freedom is the defining characteristic of human beings. She does not want us to completely deny the physical and the repetitious, but she certainly does not see it as valuable in itself. Consider the following passages.

To wish for the disclosure of the world and to assert oneself as freedom are one and the same movement. Freedom is the source from which all significations and all values spring. It is the original condition of all justification of existence. The man who seeks to justify his life must want freedom itself absolutely and above everything else.... It is necessarily summoned up by the values which it sets up and through which it sets itself up. It cannot establish a denial of itself, for in denying itself, it would deny the possibility of any foundation. To will oneself moral and to will oneself free are one and the same decision.⁷

However, it must not be forgotten that there is a concrete bond between freedom and existence; to will man free is to will there to *be* being, it is to will the disclosure of being in the joy of existence: in order for the idea of liberation to have a concrete meaning, the joy of existence must be asserted in each one, at every instance: the movement toward freedom assumes its real, flesh and blood figure in the world by thickening into pleasure, into happiness.⁸

Thus, exercising one's transcendence is considerably more important than exercising one's immanence. It is the defining characteristic of human beings; it ought to be the value our choices are based on and maximize, and its exercise causes happiness. Immanence seems to be only a vehicle for transcendence. Of course, we must exist in order to exercise our transcendence (disclose being), but even our pleasure in existing has to do with "the movement toward freedom". De Beauvoir is very severe with those who are not occupied with transcendence.

If we were to try to establish a kind of hierarchy among men, we would put those who are denuded of this living warmth—the tepidity which the Gospel speaks of—on the lowest rung of the ladder. To exist is to *make oneself* as lack of being; it is to *cast oneself* into the world. Those who occupy themselves in restraining this original movement can be considered as sub-men. They have eyes and ears, but from their childhood on they make themselves blind and deaf, without love and without desire. This apathy manifests a fundamental fear in the face of

existence, in the face of the risks and tensions which it implies. The sub-men rejects this "passion" which is his human condition, the laceration and failure of that drive toward being which always misses its goal, but which thereby is the very existence which he rejects.⁹

For de Beauvoir, our humanity is in some sense defined by a spontaneous impulse towards creating the projects that ultimately create ourselves; she believes that human beings naturally want to exercise their freedom and bring new projects into being. She sees the opposite of this impulse as apathy, a kind of failure of life energy. The exercise of our transcendence just is that life energy; the failure to exercise it, our attempt to masquerade as immanence only, is a denial of our humanity. An interest in immanence, unless it is redeemed by transcendence, is an avoidance of the most important aspect of life. I suspect de Beauvoir would consider an interest in immanence and the notion that immanence is something in which one could even have an interest unless one were either avoiding one's transcendence or forced to, as women are, as essentially mysterious. What could there be to be interested in? By connecting our exercise of transcendence to our destiny as human beings, anyone who is not fundamentally interested in and committed to transcendence as a value is not quite human or, at the very least, in serious bad faith. Indeed, in *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir argues that the valuing of transcendence through the rise of patriarchy was an important advance in history (and a necessary one, from the standpoint of the development of the creative human being).

The peoples who have remained under the thumb of the goddess mother, those who have retained the matrilineal regime, are also those who are arrested at a primitive stage of civilization. Woman was venerated only to the degree that man made himself the slave of his own fears, a party to his own powerlessness: it was in terror and not in love that he worshipped her. He could achieve his destiny only as he began by dethroning her. From then on, it was to be the male principle of creative force, of light, of intelligence, of order, that he would recognize as sovereign.¹⁰

For de Beauvoir the valuing of transcendence over immanence is connected with power: the power to create, the power to achieve. She sees a regard for immanence as involving the belief either that one is powerless, as in the case of women, or that power lies outside human agency, as in the case of the belief of the power of the goddess. Either way, a failure to value transcendence more highly

than immanence deprives human beings (or, in de Beauvoir's account, males) of the power that should be theirs. Interestingly, she does not discuss the extent to which valuing transcendence without respecting and valuing immanence has its own dark side. In my discussion of immanence below, I will talk about positive reasons for taking immanence seriously; now I only want to mention an important negative aspect of overvaluing transcendence.

The currently fashionable belief, in both men and women, that somehow one can do anything, that causal factors—sex, class, age, health—are irrelevant, that the body has no limits and is a perfectly logical implication of seeing oneself in terms of one's transcendence. If our humanity resides in our ability and willingness to exercise our transcendence, then the more we exercise our transcendence, the more human we are. This leads to a very dangerous kind of hubris, a lack of respect and love for the bodily, a sense that anything can be controlled. The consequences of such a belief in personal relations, international relations and in our attitudes towards and actions towards nature, are everywhere to be seen. If we are to avoid the unpleasant present and future that this belief may well help bring about, we need to take immanence more seriously. But how? What is there, after all, to take seriously?

While there is a special joy in creation, in choosing goals, in bringing into existence things which never existed before and have come from one's own imagination, not to mention the pleasure of exercising a measure of power and control over one's own level of physical and psychological comfort, that these are the only worthwhile joys of life seems unlikely. De Beauvoir does not seem to consider the possibility that exercising one's immanence might be just as interesting, pleasurable and rewarding as exercising one's transcendence. Even a modest amount of reflection produces such examples as taking pleasure in one's existence as a physical being through physical activity and/or time spent in contemplation and connection with the rest of the physical world, *i.e.*, that contemplation of nature, pleasurable exercise, the deep pleasures of sexuality and affection. With respect to the repetitious aspects of immanence, especially immanence embodied in domesticity, consider the pleasures involved in certain ritualized and traditional pastimes—the sense of connection with the past involved in family or cultural traditions, the daily routines of family life; there is something uniquely moving in realizing that one is doing something—preparing a traditional meal, engaging in certain holiday rituals—that many generations of women/men/children have done before, or that one's own family has done before (only, of course, if one does not feel coerced into doing

them). However, de Beauvoir might be willing to agree to these sorts of examples as exceptional in some ways. Does this mean that the difficulty here is superficial rather than structural? Could her view be revised in fairly minor ways to accommodate valuing immanence without serious distortion? The answer is no.

To decide to embrace one's immanence thoroughly requires at least two things that, in de Beauvoir's view, would be extremely difficult to accept. First, one would have to believe that the exercise of the will, while important, is not primary and define not exercising the will in some way that does not involve seeing it as some sort of failure. For example, the opposite of willed activity is often thought to be passivity, or in de Beauvoir's case, apathy. Both of these suggest that one is doing absolutely nothing and has somehow fallen into a limp, will-less state. De Beauvoir imagines a failure to will oneself free as an attempt to avoid one's ambiguity by just being one's immanence and refusing to take up one's transcendence. Yet, there are other states—receptivity, deep experiences of being that involve the experiencing of a great deal of energy and pleasure, indeed, the experience of pleasure itself—which do not involve the exercise of the will, yet are not correctly described either as passivity or refusal to exercise the will. The fundamental difference between the aforementioned states and the exercise of the will is not that, in the case of the former, one is doing nothing while in the case of the latter one is doing something. The difference is that, in the case of the former, one is not attempting to accomplish anything, there is no goal in sight beyond the experiences and pleasures of the moment, while in the case of the latter there is nearly always some goal in sight, else why exercise the will at all.

The other view that would have to be accepted involves an evaluation; the bodily and the physical in general have value, not just as tools, but as forms of being. I do not know whether de Beauvoir holds that view, but my doubts are strong. One need only consult the passages, quoted above, on pregnancy to sense her distaste for the purely physical that is not redeemed by consciousness and/or purpose and choice.¹¹ Given that she sees identification with the bodily and the biological as the trap in which women have been caught, one cannot blame her for her apparently strong negative feelings about the feminine physical.¹² Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish carefully between fearing that one will be forced to live one's life as a being without freedom and the use of her own consciousness and believing that our experience of the bodily and the involuntary is not, in itself, worthwhile. To take the latter view is dangerous and can lead to the endorsement of the culture-nature opposition that by

now is so familiar to feminist thinkers and writers.¹³ We require more respect for and cherishing of the bodily and those processes not accessible to our wills, not less.

I want now to move to a deeper level of consideration of the value of immanence, and to do so, I want to direct attention to the extent to which immanence and the love for immanence would be antithetical to valuing transcendence more highly than any other way of being. It is, of course, true by definition that, when one value is paramount, others are excluded. Here we can see that there are ways of valuing immanence that are deeply at odds with even just a very strong prejudice in favour of transcendence.

Suppose we cultivated an attitude of love for and interest in immanence. Someone would still have to do housework and housework would still not be as interesting as reading philosophy to those who are interested in philosophy. Childbirth would still be painful and difficult. However, these would be considered the negative side of something which also has a positive side; as an example of the positive, let me offer an example many of us may find familiar. I have a garden. That garden demands from me a great deal of effort of the same dull sort as sweeping and dusting. In order to keep insects and weeds at bay, I must watch, pick, spray and cultivate. To allow the flowers to develop fully, I must fertilize and water. I do not particularly enjoy doing many of these things, or at least I do not enjoy them all the time. Nevertheless, the pleasure I get from contemplating the result, and the pleasure I get sometimes from engaging in the process, the sense of having contributed to the development of something and at the same time the feeling of respect and appreciation for the entity's independently developing nature, greatly outweighs the aggravation. Sometimes on the way out of the house, I simply stand and take pleasure in the flowers. Part of my pleasure has to do with my achievement (de Beauvoir would say, the exercise of my transcendence) and part has to do with something that is most emphatically not connected with the exercise of my transcendence, my respect for and appreciation of the independence and beauty of the natural world. I cannot control it, but I can nurture it and love it. This love itself in all its many forms seems to me to be a seriously neglected human capacity. It is, I suspect, what Sarah Ruddick has in mind in her essay, "Maternal Thinking"¹⁴. She borrows her notion of attentive love from Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch; she offers short passages from their works, and I will quote at greater length:

Beauty is the supreme mystery of this world. It is a gleam which attracts the attention and yet does nothing to sustain it. Beauty always promises, but

never gives anything; it stimulates hunger but has no nourishment for the part of the soul which looks in the world for sustenance. It feeds only the part of the soul that gazes. While exciting desire, it makes clear that there is nothing in it to be desired, because the one thing we want is the exquisite anguish it inflicts, then desire is gradually transformed into love; and one begins to acquire the faculty of pure disinterested attention.¹⁵

And from Iris Murdoch:

It is important too that great art teaches us how real things can be looked at and loved without being seized and used, without being appropriated into the greedy organism of the self. This exercise of *detachment* is difficult and valuable whether the thing contemplated is a human being or the root of a tree or the vibration of a colour or a sound. Unsentimental contemplation of nature exhibits the same quality of detachment: selfish concerns vanish, nothing exists except the things which are seen. Beauty is that which attracts this particular sort of unselfish attention. It is obvious here what is the role, for the artist or spectator, of exactness and good vision: unsentimental, detached, unselfish, objective attention.¹⁶

Both Weil and Murdoch regard aesthetic experiences of a certain kind and love, or at least this particular kind of love, as one thing: the attention to and love for the natural world gives us the opportunity to step outside goal-pursuing behavior, and especially the constant regarding of everything in terms of the satisfaction of our own desires, and to inhabit another realm of being. This is, of course, profoundly antithetical to the valuing of transcendence, at least in de Beauvoir's sense. Valuing one's transcendence involves using one's freedom to choose projects, presumably projects that one wants to achieve, and working towards them; it involves valuing achievement, and not valuing those activities that do not result in achievement. Attentive love for the natural world and our fellow human beings makes our seeing the world as instrument and others as partners in achievement or useful in some way much more difficult.

In addition to the Ruddick/Murdoch, Weil way of valuing immanence, another writer offers us a way of seeing the world and others that is not connected with the valuing of transcendence. In *Pornography and Silence*, Susan Griffin argues that pornography has to do with the nature/culture split, the rejection and hatred of the body as symbolized by women, the rejection of eros itself. For

Griffin, eros has to do with our sense of wholeness, both with nature and within ourselves. It is the connection of sexuality, sensuality, mind, expression and experience of feeling, and the sense that one need not reject and/or numb certain aspects of one's being—a kind of innocent responsiveness to the world and to others. In connection with child pornography:

In these acts, we attempt to destroy eros. For isn't it eros we rediscover in the child's world? The beauty of the child's body. The child's closeness to the natural world. The child's heart. Her love. Touch never divided from meaning. Her trust. Her ignorance of culture. The knowledge she has of her own body. That she eats when she is hungry. Sleeps when she is tired. Believes what she sees. That no part of her body has been forbidden to her. No part of this body is shamed, numbed, or denied. That anger, fear, love, and desire pass freely through this body, and for her, meaning is never separate from feeling.

But all this is erotic and erotic feeling brings one back to this state of innocence before culture teaches us to forget the knowledge of the body. To make love is to become like this infant again. We grope with our mouths toward the body of another being, whom we trust, who takes us in her arms. We rock together with this loved one. We move beyond speech. Our bodies move past all the controls we have learned. We cry out in ecstasy, in feeling. We are back in a natural world before culture tried to erase our experience of nature. In this world, to touch another is to express love; there is no idea apart from feeling, and no feeling which does not ring through our bodies and our souls at once.

This is eros. Our own wholeness. Not the sensation of pleasure alone, nor the idea of love alone, but the whole experience of human love. The whole range of human capacity exists in this love. Here is the capacity for speech and meaning, for culture, for memory, for imagination, the capacity for touch and expression, and sensation and joy.¹⁷

To value eros in this sense, to want to reconnect thought to feeling, sexuality to love, the mind to the body, to try to create a culture that allows eros to be expressed and not dismantled and divided, is also to value another way of being in addition to the setting of goals and the creation of projects. For here, as in attentive love, being is valued for its own sake, not to some other end. The indivisibility of being and the experience of beauty and pleasure in this form is its own point.

It seems clear that de Beauvoir fears immanence. She fears it because the negative side has been a trap for women and because a preoccupation with trying to control the immanent—keeping things from getting dirty, cleaning up when they do, *etc.*,—is frustrating and time-wasting as a life activity. No one could deny that any of these things are appropriately feared and hated as miserable and soul-destroying by someone who sees women all around her coerced into doing them. This is not the only aspect of immanence, nor does it offer a complete description of the experience of women. As she herself observes, we are *both* immanence and transcendence; my guess would be that many women experience aspects of family life as creative and interesting so long as they are not coerced. Further, women may have access to opportunities to exercise the positive forms of valuing immanence: attentive love, as Ruddick claims¹⁸ and less cut-off-ness than men from the bodily and eros. To do justice to our beings, to be in contact with reality, we must look carefully at all aspects of immanence and transcendence and how we value each.

A final word on the necessity of respect for immanence. Throughout both *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir clearly identifies creativity with transcendence. Anyone who has ever written a philosophy paper, painted a picture, or formulated any sort of theory, can attest to the fact that, though ideally creativity has to do with the will, the activity of the understanding and conscious imagining, in the sense that one has access to the areas of consciousness needed, very often one does not. Creativity often requires us to wait with patience at our desks and in our studios, to wait without the self-torture involved in constant inner urging and nagging. Ideas, especially original ideas, are not always voluntary, nor is our ability to understand the human condition entirely under conscious control. We must learn to respect our own inner processes along with other natural processes to maximize creativity. In the end, both creativity and understanding itself depends on a combination of active seeking, respectful waiting, and reflection on the results of both: doing philosophy, making art, loving one's friends, all depend as much on our capacities for receptivity to deep experience and attentive love as they do on our capacities for active thought and conscious construction.

1. In this connection, Mary Evans in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Mandarin* (p. 68) points out that de Beauvoir envisions no changes in the roles of men except those changes that are forced on them.
2. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 430.
3. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 456.
4. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 496.
5. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 495.
6. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 451.
7. De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 24.

8. De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 135.
9. De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, pp. 41-42.
10. De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, p. 76.
11. Since consciousness is the seat of freedom, and since freedom is exercised through the conscious choices of a will, these are connected.
12. For further discussion of de Beauvoir's disgust with the feminine physical, see Judith Okeley, *Simone de Beauvoir*, chapter 4, passim.
13. For example, see Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence*; or Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?," in M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, editors, *Women, Culture and Society*.
14. Sarah Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking," in Joyce Trebilcot, editor, *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*.
15. Simone Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader*, p. 333.
16. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, pp. 65-66.
17. Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence*, p. 254. For discussions which bear on these issues, particularly on the reclamation of the feminine in the sense of body and feeling, the work of two Jungian feminists has considerable interest. See Sylvia Brinton Perera, *Descent to the Goddess* and *The Scapegoat Complex*; and Marion Woodman, *The Addiction to Perfection* and *The Pregnant Virgin*; also E. Lauter and C.S. Rupprecht, editors, *Feminist Archetypal Theory*.
18. Also see Nel Noddings, *Caring*. A great many experiences seem possible through child rearing, not just moral but also epistemic. For example, in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, a significant number of women said they had begun to have a sense of themselves as responsible and competent, surely a matter of transcendence, through raising their children.

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Night and Fear in the Living Room

Night and fear clasp hands
and present themselves to my attention,
pause on the kitchen steps
to kick a piece of gravel
wispily aside.
Continuing
they shuffle faintly
through discarded newspapers
ting
on the water pipes
tap a brutal, grimy thumbnail
delicately on the sink's bare surface.
Outside my doorway they rest
breathing in
and out, shifting
from foot to foot so gently
the floor hardly creaks.
When I close my eyes they lean in
the doorway and I feel their cool breath
teasing the stray hair on my neck.
Hands still joined they soft foot it
into the living room, to sit
slowly on the old chairs, trail fingers
across the mantel, swing the hanging plant.
Just before it chimes they tap the clock
to see if it's working, then they look out the windows
and tease the neighbour's dog who whines
and snuffles in reply.

Enough, this ONCE I leap
bravely from bed, flashlight and reflex
at the ready, dash about the house
flicking on lights, radio, television,
drive them from the house
to crouch snickering among the bushes
below my window.

Rhona McAdam
Alberta