



Comparative and Competing Frameworks of Oppression in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*

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1. Introduction

There has been a concerted effort to recover Simone de Beauvoir as a legitimate philosophical figure despite her protestations to the label of philosopher and her preference for self-identifying as an author or writer. This recovery of Beauvoir, which celebrates her foundational contributions to feminism, as well as her insights on other forms of oppression such as anti-Black racism, antisemitism, and colonialism, stands in stark contrast to sharp criticism of Beauvoir for her exclusions of women of color and her appropriations of the suffering of others as a rhetorical strategy to advance her arguments about the oppression of white women.¹ Focusing on Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, I argue that a major problem in that seminal and controversial text is the way she deploys comparative and competing frameworks of oppression. At times, Beauvoir describes the woman, the Black, the Jew, the colonized, and the proletariat in ways that suggest that sexism on the one hand, and racism, antisemitism, colonialism, and classism on the other hand, are comparative systems of oppression. But when pointing to key differences between women and other groups, she sets up competing frameworks of oppression, privileging gender difference in ways that suggest that woman's subordination is a more significant or constitutive form of oppression than racism, antisemitism, colonialism and/or class oppression.

In many cases the "woman" that Beauvoir describes is not a Black woman, a Jewish woman, a colonized woman, or proletariat woman, but rather a white woman. In this way—using the term "woman" without qualifiers such as "white" or "French"—Beauvoir conceals the whiteness of the woman/women she is most often describing as Other

while also dismissing the gendered aspects of anti-Black racism, anti-semitism, colonialism, and class oppression to which she compares white women's oppression. Furthermore, her figurative description of free white women as slaves or as enslaved displaces the existence and oppression of women and men that are subjugated to ancient and modern forms of institutional slavery. Looking closely at these comparative and competing frameworks of oppression in *The Second Sex*—alongside select divergent secondary literature on Beauvoir's analogical analyses of oppression in that text—I have observed that Beauvoir's critics are keenly aware of the arguments in support of Beauvoir. However, some of her supporters maintain an epistemological standpoint of ignorance concerning certain limitations of her feminist philosophy.² Consequently, in their zealous attempts to enshrine Beauvoir in the gilded halls of philosophy, some of her supporters not only duplicate her exclusions of women of color but they also perpetuate the very silencing of women's voices that they decry in the discipline of philosophy.

This article seeks to offer a corrective to some of the exclusive tendencies in Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy and the replications of these exclusions in existing scholarship on Beauvoir (and perhaps by extension in white feminist philosophy more generally). The article unfolds in three parts. In the first, "From Recovery to Rebuke," I begin with a few examples of what I am calling recovery literature on Beauvoir, which I juxtapose with a rebuke of Beauvoir and her sympathetic white feminist readers by Sabine Broeck. In the second part, "Comparative and Competing Frameworks of Oppression," I detail Beauvoir's analyses of antifeminism, anti-Black racism, antisemitism, and classism as well as critiques of her comparative and competing frameworks of oppression. In the third part, "Woman as Slave," I examine the various ways that Beauvoir describes women as slaves or enslaved, and also criticisms—again by Broeck—of this familiar trope used by white feminists to advance their own cause. Here I also take into consideration the ways in which both institutionalized slavery and Hegel's master-slave dialectic are significant for Beauvoir's analogical analysis of women as slaves.

2. From Recovery to Rebuke

Secondary feminist literature on Beauvoir in the United States often begins from a defensive position, building a case that she was in fact a philosopher and offering justifications for her philosophical significance. Some earlier attempts to recover Beauvoir as an original philosophical thinker emphasize that she is not a mere follower of Jean-Paul Sartre and that in fact it is Sartre who took up Beauvoir's innovative philo-

sophical insights for his own intellectual development. For example, in *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre: The Remaking of a Twentieth-Century Legend*, Kate and Edward Fullbrook assert: "It is now utterly clear to us that de Beauvoir was the driving intellectual power in the joint development of the couple's most influential ideas."³ Analyzing Sartre's *War Diaries*⁴ and Beauvoir's *Letters to Sartre*,⁵ Fullbrook and Fullbrook argue that "the story of their partnership has been told backwards."⁶

Margaret Simons has also debunked the commonly held view of Beauvoir as a mere follower (and companion) of Sartre in *Beauvoir and The Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism*. Citing sexism in many representations of their relationship, Simons argues: "From the standpoint of feminist theory, a most serious aspect of this sexist view of Beauvoir's relationship to Sartre is the discounting of Beauvoir as an original thinker and the refusal to acknowledge, analyze, and critically study her work as social theory and social philosophy."⁷ Also highlighting the backward telling of the story of influence between Sartre and Beauvoir, she continues, "This view fails to recognize the originality of Beauvoir's insights and is thus unable to appreciate her considerable influence on Sartre's development of a social philosophy of existentialism, and on contemporary feminist theorists as well."⁸ Simons revisits this issue in her introduction to *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, where she names Sartre's overshadowing of Beauvoir as a persistent problem. Simons reminds readers that "from the beginning, she was assumed to be Sartre's philosophical follower and her work merely an application of his philosophy."⁹ According to Simons, additional reasons why Beauvoir's philosophy is unanalyzed and misunderstood have to do with her highly original philosophical methodology, her rejection of systems building, and her position that philosophy should reflect the ambiguities of life, while focusing on concrete problems.

There have been other more recent efforts to recover Beauvoir by insisting that she is not only heavily influenced by canonized white western male philosophers but she also originated her own significant philosophical insights, and on this basis, Beauvoir too has earned a place in the canon of western philosophy. For example, Nancy Bauer has underscored various influences on Beauvoir's work, from Descartes and Husserl to Hegel, Heidegger and, of course, Sartre, while also insisting, "Beauvoir's aspirations to write about being a woman are inextricably intertwined with her discovery of what I argue is both her own philosophical voice and a model for doing philosophical work that lies waiting to be appropriated by both feminists and philosophers."¹⁰

Bauer problematizes the ways in which Beauvoir has been neglected as a philosophical figure and states:

I can't imagine anyone doubting that part of the reason for this neglect is the simple fact of her having been a woman. (Can we name a woman philosopher whose work has been sufficiently acknowledged? Can we specify the significance of being a woman philosopher?—which is to ask, Do we know what it means to be a woman philosophizing? That we find resources in *The Second Sex* to begin thinking about these issues is, to my mind, only one of its great—neglected—achievements.)¹¹

Following Toril Moi, Bauer offers a compelling analysis of patriarchal ideology to explain the condescension toward Beauvoir, even by her supporters. “On Moi’s view, condescension to Beauvoir is a product of ‘patriarchal ideology,’ which she sees as fundamentally hostile to the idea of the intellectual woman (and, *a fortiori*, a woman *philosopher*).”¹² For Bauer, we must acknowledge the simple fact that “Beauvoir has repeatedly been a victim of flat-out sexism.”¹³

Although offering an overall divergent view of Beauvoir from those already mentioned, Sabine Broeck does affirm the philosophical significance of Simone de Beauvoir and *The Second Sex* in “Re-Reading de Beauvoir ‘after Race’: Woman-as-Slave Revisited.” Broeck argues, “The signifying and repertoire-building power of de Beauvoir’s texts has, by way of their continuous dissemination and reception, pre-ordained feminist epistemology until today.”¹⁴ According to Broeck, the goal of *The Second Sex* is in part “to establish a philosophical positioning of woman in the most universalizing and general sense, to counter the white patriarchal mythology of woman as lack, as absence, and at best an ornamental and empirical object” (RB 177). But this is also an important point of contention for Broeck insofar as Beauvoir’s text (and its critical reception) problematically puts white women in the epistemic default position while simultaneously ignoring the racialization of white women.¹⁵ And despite Beauvoir’s use of history and accounts of her own lived experience, Broeck asserts that she also turns away from these details “in order to create a counter-space for woman as a generalization, as occupying a universal subject position that philosophy can recognize” (ibid.). Simply put, Broeck claims that Beauvoir’s ultimate goal is to insert white women into philosophy.¹⁶

Far from denying Beauvoir’s philosophical significance, Broeck makes her philosophical import the starting point for situating the gravity of Beauvoir’s (and her readers’) problematic analogies between different systems of oppression and appropriations of the suffering of others. I would like to support Broeck’s insights with some elaborations and nuances in the next section where I examine various comparative

and competing frameworks of oppression in *The Second Sex* before focusing specifically on the woman as slave analogy in the final section.¹⁷

3. Comparative and Competing Frameworks of Oppression

There are several comparative and competing frameworks of oppression in *The Second Sex*. While Beauvoir's primary focus is on woman's situation, she thinks about gender along with other identity categories from the very beginning of the text where she compares the woman, the Black, the Jew, the colonized, and the proletariat. In some instances Beauvoir suggests that sexism, racism, antisemitism, colonialism, and classism are all comparative systems of oppression. In other instances she underscores key differences between what she calls antifeminism on the one hand and racism, antisemitism, colonialism, and/or class oppression on the other hand. It is on these points of difference that Beauvoir establishes competing frameworks of oppression and privileges woman's oppression as a more unique and constitutive form of oppression.

Let us first look at examples of comparative frameworks of oppression before turning to the competing frameworks of oppression. Identifying woman as "Other" early on in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir describes *Otherness* as an "original category" and *alterity* as a "fundamental category" of human thought.¹⁸ She then offers several examples of Others: "For the native of a country inhabitants of other countries are viewed as 'foreigners'; Jews are the 'others' for anti-Semites, blacks for racist Americans, indigenous people for colonists, proletarians for the propertied classes" (TSS 6; LDS 1 16). In this way, Beauvoir presents women, foreigners, Blacks, Jews, indigenous (colonized) people, and proletarians *comparatively* as Others. For her, the stereotype of "the eternal feminine" (TSS 4; LDS 1 13) corresponds to stereotypes about "the Black soul" and "the Jewish character" (TSS 12; LDS 1 24). The justifications for creating inferior conditions for race, caste, class, or sex are not only comparable; these justifications are actually the same.¹⁹ The comparison emerges again when Beauvoir inverts the typical formation of *the woman problem*, emphasizing instead what she identifies as *the man problem*: "Just as in America there is no black problem but a white one, just as 'anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem, it's our problem,' so *the problem of woman has always been a problem of men*" (TSS 148; LDS 1 221, emphasis added).²⁰ In examining these comparative frameworks of oppression in *The Second Sex* more closely, my initial focus will be on the parallels of experience Beauvoir outlines between women and Blacks, followed by

women and Jews, and then the differential responses to oppression by women, Blacks, Jews, and proletarians.

Comparing antifeminism to anti-Black racism, Beauvoir notes that antifeminists seek to offer separate but equal status to women ("the other sex") in the same way that Jim Crow laws subject Black Americans to extreme forms of discrimination (TSS 12; LDS 1 24). She asserts that there are "deep analogies" between the situations of women and Blacks: both are liberated today from the same paternalism and the former master caste wants to keep them in their place (TSS 12; LDS 1 25). Blacks are praised for being "carefree, childlike, [with] merry souls," while "true" women are described as "frivolous, infantile, [and] irresponsible" (ibid.). The competition of women threatens men in a similar way that the competition of Blacks threatens whites.²¹ Beauvoir also underscores the comparative ways in which oppression creates a sense of superiority in the oppressor.²² She revisits this comparison between women and American Blacks later in the text when describing the experience of being revealed to oneself as alterity. She posits:

It is a strange experience for an individual recognizing himself as subject, autonomy, and transcendence, as an absolute, to discover inferiority—as a given essence—in his self: it is a strange experience for one who posits himself for himself as One to be revealed to himself as alterity. That is what happens to the little girl when, learning about the world, she grasps herself as a woman in it This is not a unique situation. American Blacks, partially integrated into a civilization that nevertheless considers them an inferior caste, live it; what Bigger Thomas experiences with so much bitterness at the dawn of his life is this definitive inferiority, this accursed alterity inscribed in the color of his skin: he watches planes pass and knows that because he is black the sky is out of bounds for him. Because she is woman, the girl knows that the sea and the poles, a thousand adventures, a thousand joys are forbidden to her: she is born on the wrong side. (TSS 311; LDS 2 52–3)²³

In each of these comparisons women seem to be white (or at least not Black) and Blacks are assumed to be both American and male.

In addition to comparing women to Blacks, Beauvoir also makes controversial comparisons between women (or more specifically, prostitutes) and Jews. She unhesitatingly claims, "[The prostitutes'] situation and the Jews' were often rightly compared" (TSS 113; LDS 1 170).²⁴ Concerning the perception of Jews and prostitutes by the church Beauvoir asserts, "usury and money lending were forbidden by the church exactly as extra-conjugal sex was; but society can no more do without financial speculators than free love, so these functions fell to the damned castes" (TSS 113; LDS 1 170). There is an implicit description of Jews as financial speculators and of prostitution as free love here. She also compares the ways in

which prostitutes, like Jews, experienced residential restrictions and limitations placed on their movement:

They were relegated to ghettos or reserved neighborhoods. In Paris, loose women worked in pens where they arrived in the morning and left after the curfew had tolled; they lived on special streets and did not have the right to stray, and in most other cities brothels were outside town walls. (Ibid.)

She then adds, “Like Jews, [prostitutes] had to wear distinctive signs on their clothes,” and furthermore, “[Prostitutes] were *by law* taxed with infamy, had no recourse whatsoever to the police and the courts, and could be thrown out of their lodgings on a neighbor’s simple claim. For most of them, life was difficult and wretched” (ibid.). Additional problematic comparisons between women and Jews include Beauvoir’s description of unmarried women as “pariahs” and her depiction of the destruction of women’s housework as “small holocausts.”²⁵ As with the comparison between women and Blacks, the women/prostitutes here seem to be white (or at least not Jewish) and the Jews are presumably male.

In making these various comparisons, Beauvoir does underscore key differences, particularly the different responses to oppression by women versus other groups (i.e. Blacks, Jews, and proletarians). Women are complicit, women do not resist or revolt against their oppressors, and women do not posit themselves as subjects (thereby turning their oppressors into objects). She offers several examples. Concerning complicity Beauvoir explains, “The great difference [between women and blacks] is that the blacks endure their lot in revolt—no privilege compensates for its severity—while for the woman her complicity is invited” (TSS 311–2; LDS 2 53).²⁶ Pointing to resistance and revolt, she states that while fanatic Jews or Blacks may seek to eliminate their oppressors in order to make all of humanity Jewish or Black, “a woman could not even dream of exterminating males” insofar as a “cleavage of society by sex is not possible” (TSS 9; LDS 1 19–20). Also, unlike the proletariat which “has always experienced its condition in revolt” with the goal “to cease to exist as a class,” the woman has “no desire for revolution” and “would not think of eliminating herself as a sex” (TSS 66; LDS 1 102–3).²⁷ And when considering subjectivity, Beauvoir notes that women do not generally say “we” like proletarians and Blacks—positing themselves as subjects and transforming the bourgeois or whites as objects (TSS 8; LDS 1 19). So having compared the oppression of women to Blacks, Jews, and the proletariat, Beauvoir also contrasts the differential responses to oppression by women and these other groups (while simultaneously not naming the whiteness of the women

and ignoring the existence and experiences of women within these other groups).

Moving away from comparative frameworks and the differing responses to oppression by women and other Others, we find that competing frameworks of oppression emerge. This becomes clear when Beauvoir contrasts antifeminism with racism, antisemitism, colonialism, and class oppression based on reciprocity, numerical minority status, and historical events of oppression. Beauvoir differentiates the significance of gender subordination from other oppressions by asserting that reciprocity is absent in gender difference, suggesting that other categories of difference and corresponding forms of oppression do allow for reciprocity in a way that gender does not.²⁸ According to Beauvoir, “whether one likes it or not, individuals and groups have no choice but to recognize the reciprocity of their relation” (TSS 7; LDS 1 17). But she goes on to pose the question, “How is it, then, that between the sexes this reciprocity has not been put forward, that one of the terms has been asserted as the only essential one, denying any relativity in regard to its correlative, defining the latter as pure alterity?” (ibid.). Likewise, when exploring the relationship between oppression and minority status, Beauvoir observes that absolute domination of one group by another for shorter or longer periods of time often resulted from numerical inequality or a majority dominating a minority. But women are not minorities like other groups, “women are not a minority like American blacks, or like Jews: there are as many women as men on earth” (ibid.).

When looking at historical events of oppression, Beauvoir insists that there is not a specific event in history to which women can trace their oppression. She singles out women’s subordination as a constitutive form of oppression when arguing that unlike other oppressions, which are traceable to an historical event, there have always been women and they have always been subordinate to men. She presents the following examples of events in history that resulted in subordination:

Often, the two opposing groups concerned were once independent of each other; either they were not aware of each other in the past, or accepted each other’s autonomy; and some historical event subordinated the weaker to the stronger: the Jewish Diaspora, slavery in America, and colonial conquests are facts with dates. In these cases, for the oppressed there was a *before*: they share a past, a tradition, sometimes a religion, or a culture. (TSS 7–8; LDS 1 18)

Again, her point is that women cannot pinpoint a historical event that decisively resulted in their being subordinated by men.

It is in this context, considering the ongoing oppression of women with no specific historical event to which they can point, that Beauvoir contrasts the situation of women with the proletariat along the same lines. Initially she does see a possible comparison between women and the proletariat: both are oppressed despite the fact that they are not a numerical minority.²⁹ But she immediately pushes back on this comparison when thinking about offering a historical account of oppression. She explains, “However, not *one* event but a whole historical development explains their [proletarians] existence as a class and accounts for the distribution of *these* individuals in this class” (TSS 8; LDS 1 18). Continuing to contrast the situation of women to proletarians, Beauvoir asserts, “There have not always been proletarians: there have always been women; they are women by their physiological structure; as far back as history can be traced, they have always been subordinate to men; their dependence is not the consequence of an event or a becoming, it did not *happen*” (ibid.).

Thus, Beauvoir is clear, the dependence and subordination of women—unlike Jews, the enslaved, the colonized, or the proletariat—is not the result of a particular event or fact in history. For her, “Alterity here [in the case of women, but not the other groups] appears to be an absolute, partly because it falls outside the accidental nature of historical fact” (ibid.).³⁰ Women have no past, history, religion, solidarity, or even space of their own to make communities.³¹ Beauvoir again highlights what she sees as the uniqueness of woman’s oppression toward the end of the introduction:

But what singularly defines the situation of woman is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other: an attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence, since her transcendence will be forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness. (TSS 17; LDS 1 31)

Beauvoir’s use of comparative and competing frameworks of oppression in *The Second Sex* is troubling. Most often the woman that Beauvoir refers to as the Other is a white woman whose subordination is being compared to or juxtaposed with the subjugations of men through different forms of oppression—e.g., anti-Black racism, antisemitism, classism. According to Beauvoir, white women’s oppression is similar to anti-Black racism, antisemitism, and classism for men because in all cases they are stereotyped, offered similar justifications for their inferior treatment, segregated, or singled out in certain ways. But Beauvoir also insists that white women’s oppression is fundamentally different from these other oppressions experienced by men because

women have no reciprocity, there is not a historical event to account for their oppression, and women are complicit with rather than resistant to their oppression. The subjugation of non-white women is obscured, not only in the form of what Beauvoir calls antifeminism, but also as a salient aspect of anti-Black racism, antisemitism, and/or classism that women within these groups simultaneously experience.

These claims are not altogether new. Elizabeth Spelman is among the earlier critics of Beauvoir (and white feminists more generally) for comparative and competing analogies of oppression in *The Second Sex*. In *Inessential Woman*, Spelman notes that when Beauvoir contrasts “women” with other groups while simultaneously ignoring women within those other groups, “she expresses her determination to use ‘woman’ only in reference to those females not subject to racism, anti-Semitism, classism, imperialism.”³² Spelman argues that this is not so much ignorance on the part of Beauvoir, who is obviously aware of the multiple positions of women. Rather, “Beauvoir sabotages her insights about the political consequences of the multiple locations of women” in her very comparison of women to other groups.³³ Spelman elaborates:

As we have seen, on the one hand she refers to what she herself takes to be significant differences among women; but on the other, she dismisses those differences as irrelevant to understanding the condition of ‘woman’, insofar as she takes the story of ‘woman’ to be that provided by examination of the lives of women not subject to racism, classism, anti-Semitism, imperialism, and so forth.³⁴

Although Margaret Simons is among Beauvoir’s ardent defenders, she too problematizes Beauvoir’s analogical accounts of oppressions as well as her Eurocentrism. In *Beauvoir and The Second Sex*, Simons is clear about the shortcomings of the race-gender analogy and explains that “separating racism and sexism as distinct, though analogous, analytical categories can be problematic, denying the experience of African American women, for instance, for whom the effects of racism and sexism are often inseparable.”³⁵ Furthermore, as Simons explains in “Beauvoir and the Problem of Racism”:

Beauvoir’s understanding of racism is central to her philosophical project in *The Second Sex*; but racism and ethnocentrism are also problems for her In her study of women in history, Beauvoir elects to focus solely on the West, and more specifically France, dispensing with the rest of women’s history in a footnote.³⁶

These critiques and challenges are also applicable to Beauvoir’s comparison between women and slaves, which is taken up in the next section.

4. Woman as Slave

Another comparison that Beauvoir weaves throughout *The Second Sex* is between the situation of woman and that of slave. Beauvoir's discussion of slavery includes, but is not limited to, analogy and metaphor. Early in the text there are points at which she seems to be describing institutional slavery or forced slave labor even as she is considering the implications of slavery for the status of (non-slave) women. For example, creating a narrative about the history of slavery and the changing perception and status of woman Beauvoir explains:

Man wanted to exhaust the new possibilities opened up by new technology: he called upon a servile workforce, and he reduced his fellow man to slavery. Slave labor being far more efficient than work that women could supply, she lost the economic role she played within the tribe. And in his relationship with the slave, the master found a far more radical confirmation of his sovereignty than the tempered authority he exercised on woman. Venerated and revered for her fertility, being *other* than man and sharing the disquieting character of the *other*, woman, in a certain way, kept man dependent on her even while she was dependent on him; the reciprocity of the master-slave relationship existed *in the present* for her, and it was how she escaped slavery. (TSS 86; LDS 1 131)³⁷

Beauvoir suggests that the circumstances faced by the slave are worse than those of woman, though both suffer. She explains,

As for the slave, he had no taboo to protect him, being nothing but a servile man, not just different, but inferior: the dialectic of the slave-master relationship will take centuries to be actualized; within the organized patriarchal society, the slave is only a beast of burden with a human face: the master exercises tyrannical authority over him; this exalts his [master's] pride: and he turns it against the woman. (TSS 86–7; LDS 1 131–2)³⁸

Thus, for Beauvoir, the tyranny and pride exerted by man over the slave gets turned against woman.

As with the earlier examples of comparative and competing frameworks of oppression in *The Second Sex*, we see both a comparison and a contradistinction drawn between the subjugation of slaves and of women. Comparatively, Beauvoir notes that like all oppressed people dependent on a master's whims (from slave to servant to indigent), women too "have learned to present [the master] with an immutable smile or an enigmatic impassivity; they carefully hide their real feelings and behavior" (TSS 271; LDS 1 402). This facade of the oppressed gets framed as the "Mystery" of the Other—whether feminine mystery or mystery of the Black or the Yellow.³⁹ However, Beauvoir is sure to underscore an especially significant distinction between the woman

and slave. She asserts that woman does not become conscious of herself against the man, unlike the slave who “becomes conscious of himself against the master” (TSS 66; LDS 1 102).

In addition to this comparison and contradistinction between woman and slave, Beauvoir also presents woman as slave or as enslaved. In the introduction, Beauvoir initially stops short of describing woman as slave and opts instead to use the term vassal.⁴⁰ But throughout *The Second Sex* we find multiple references to woman as enslaved, including not only her portrayal of woman as enslaved by man and enslaved by the body’s reproductive functions for the species, but also her analysis and appropriation of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic as a theoretical framework for examining the subjugation of woman. I will present a few examples of Beauvoir’s presentations of woman as enslaved by man and species before turning to her use of Hegel.

Woman’s enslavement to man is sometimes conceptualized by Beauvoir in terms of property; for example, woman is bought like a head of cattle or a slave, woman is property like the slave, beast of burden, or thing.⁴¹ Beauvoir contends that man clearly wants to enslave woman, particularly as he imagines himself to be her benefactor, liberator, or redeemer.⁴² But the irony of man’s success in enslaving woman is that “in doing so, he robbed her of what made possession desirable” (TSS 204; LDS 1 305). In addition to being enslaved by man, Beauvoir underscores the ways in which woman’s reproductive function enslaves her to the species with significant limitations imposed upon her. She insists, “Woman’s enslavement to the species and the limits of her individual abilities are facts of extreme importance; the woman’s body is one of the essential elements of the situation she occupies in this world” (TSS 48; LDS 1 77). She also contends, “The fundamental reason that woman, since the beginning of history, has been consigned to domestic labor and prohibited from taking part in shaping the world is her enslavement to the generative function” (TSS 136; LDS 1 114). Beauvoir is pointing to both the bodily impositions of pregnancy and birth as well as the existential implications of maternity and its impact on being in the world and shaping the world.

Another place that the comparison of woman’s conditions gets linked with slavery is through Beauvoir’s allusions to and appropriations of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic. More specifically, I am interested in her explicit discussion of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic as it relates to the male-female dynamic she is analyzing. On the one hand Beauvoir asserts, “Certain passages where Hegel’s dialectic describes the relationship of master to slave would apply far better to the relationship of man to woman” (TSS 74; LDS 1 114). On the other hand, she acknowledges that the woman is not the same as the slave. Beauvoir states:

Assimilating woman to the slave is a mistake; among slaves there were women, but free women have always existed, that is, women invested with religious and social dignity: they accepted man's sovereignty, and he did not feel threatened by a revolt that could transform him in turn into an object. Woman thus emerged as the inessential who never returned to the essential, as the absolute Other, without reciprocity. (TSS 160; LDS 1 239)

Beauvoir is cognizant of important differences between Hegel's slave and the situation of woman. For Hegel, she explains, "the Master's privilege . . . arises from the affirmation of Spirit over Life in the fact of risking his life: but in fact the vanquished slave has experienced this same risk [of his own life]" (TSS 74; LDS 1 114). In contrast to Hegel's slave, Beauvoir states: "the woman is originally an existent who gives *Life* and does not risk *her* life; there has never been combat between the male and her" (ibid.). Also, unlike Hegel's slave and master, woman aspires to and recognizes man's values rather than pitting her values against his.⁴³ In the dialectic, "Each one [master and slave] tries to accomplish itself by reducing the other to slavery. But in work and fear the slave experiences himself as essential, and by a dialectical reversal the master appears the inessential one" (TSS 159; LDS 1 238). This reversal between the master and slave has not occurred between man and woman. Man has remained essential and woman has remained inessential. Beauvoir presents the possibility for an outcome between man and woman that differs from the dialectic between master and slave. Rather than reversing the position of essential and inessential or subject and object, Beauvoir posits, "The conflict can be overcome by the free recognition of each individual in the other, each one positing both itself and the other as object and as subject in a reciprocal movement" (ibid.). Highlighting the challenge that this possibility entails, she adds, "But friendship and generosity, which accomplish this recognition of freedoms concretely, are not easy virtues" (ibid.).

As with the previous comparisons of woman's oppression to other forms of oppression (anti-Black racism, antisemitism, colonialism, classism), Beauvoir's comparison of woman to slave along with her presentation of woman as enslaved is problematic. Again, Beauvoir sabotages her own insights. She herself notes that it is a mistake to assimilate woman to the slave. She understands that among slaves there were women and that free women (invested with religious and social dignity) have always existed. And yet, women slaves or enslaved women are largely disregarded in Beauvoir's analysis. It is also noteworthy that the issue of slavery as presented in *The Second Sex* has not been a central point of emphasis in much of the secondary literature. When slavery in *The Second Sex* is examined in the literature, it is often taken up

in the context of Beauvoir's engagement with Hegel's master-slave dialectic. But the issue of slavery as explicitly connected to institutional slavery and the history of colonial enslavement is under-engaged in the literature. I will briefly explore examples of both the connection of slaves to Hegel's master-slave dialectic and the connection of slaves to institutional slavery in specific secondary literature.

When analyzing Beauvoir's relationship to the master-slave dialectic, some readers critique her use of Hegel and suppose that she takes up his position uncritically, while others assume that she simply adopts Sartre's reading of Hegel.⁴⁴ In *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism*, Nancy Bauer rejects these approaches, examining Beauvoir's use of Hegel and seeking to distinguish Beauvoir's analysis from Hegel's and Sartre's in terms of appropriation and transformation, rather than application.⁴⁵ Put another way, Bauer insists that Beauvoir appropriates and transforms Hegel's master-slave dialectic rather than simply applying it to the dynamic between man and woman. Like Bauer, Fredrika Scarth insists that Beauvoir's analysis of the master-slave dialectic offers alternatives to both Hegel and Sartre.⁴⁶ For Scarth, rather than simply apply the dialectic to man and woman or use it as an analogy, Beauvoir appropriates it and transforms it by changing the meaning of risk that drives the dialectic.⁴⁷ But neither of these readings of Beauvoir's use of Hegel mention or account for actual enslaved persons as a reference point for Hegel's or Beauvoir's analyses of slavery.⁴⁸

Returning to Elisabeth Spelman's critique in *Inessential Woman*, she notes that Beauvoir "sometimes contrasts 'women' to 'slaves' . . . , but she never really talks about those women who according to her own categories belonged to slave populations—for example, Black female slaves in the United States."⁴⁹ We might add here that the secondary literature on Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* sometimes talks about women and slaves in relationship to Hegel's master-slave dialectic, but does not really talk about women belonging to slave populations, or the implications of the master-slave dialectic for analyzing institutional slavery. These are central issues raised by Sabine Broeck who makes significant interventions in this discussion. Concerning the master-slave dialectic, Broeck notes that "Among white philosophers in France in the late 1940s and 1950s, 'slavery' if anything, had an entirely Hegelian/Kojevean horizon. There was no slave trade historiography that had made its way into a wider discourse" (RDB 171). But Broeck insists that such "white epistemic isolation" must be called into question in the cases of Beauvoir and Sartre given their intellectual exchanges and personal relationships with figures like Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Richard Wright. For Broeck, despite these transnational, multi-ethnic, anti-racist intellectual friendships, Beauvoir's writ-

ing, “in its insistence on a creative re-employment of Hegelian allegory, has obscured rather than illuminated a positioning of the subject of gender vis-à-vis its colonial and enslavist implications in the history of modern Europe” (RDB 172).⁵⁰ So we might read Beauvoir as successfully deploying (or appropriating or transforming) Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, but Broeck warns that we must also take into consideration the problematics of that dialectic as it relates to the histories of enslaved people of African descent.

Broeck argues that the woman-as-slave analogy, the logic of which has deeply racist effects, is one that has been used from early modern feminism (Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges) through second wave feminism (Millet and French feminists).⁵¹ She asserts:

What appeared as a new philosophical pre-figuration was actually a re-configuration of an allegorical trope with a long history: the rhetorical construction that casts woman as slave in opposition to man as master has long allowed white western women to enter critical negotiations of subjectivity in western (post)-Enlightenment thought. (RDB 171)

She describes this geometrically as a triangle in which white Man figures as *Subject*, white Woman figures as *Object* and Black Slave, a seemingly gender-neutral and invisible third position, figures as *Abject*. According to Broeck:

Hegelian allegory and western modern philosophy in its wake knows the subject only as masterful opponent to the object. There is no subject model in western thought that would not require a subject that is one precisely because it masters its object other, which in turn may dialectically strive to become a subject of mastery. This binary opposition, however, can only work because of its unspoken third term: the position of being abjected from this struggle, namely the early modern position of factually enslaved people of African origin. This triangle, however invisible, enables the notorious Hegelian opposition: the position of the abjected is the one that any given object may differentiate itself against, thus aspiring to, or actually becoming, a subject (however ‘lesser’). (RDB 178)

The significance of the triangle presented by Broeck cannot be overstated. She describes it as the driving dynamic of transatlantic modernity.

Taking seriously this triangle, it seems that feminist interventions by Beauvoir and others have not destroyed the subject-object binary and the universal Man as subject has not capitulated. Rather, woman has sought to gain more recognition from man and tried to move closer to subjectivity by appropriating the suffering of the abject (enslaved Blacks) while also avoiding being seen as abject. Not only does Beauvoir engage in an appropriation of Black suffering in the form of slavery to advance her philosophical discussion of woman’s situation,

but Broeck posits that Beauvoir's readers also seem to readily accept this appropriation.⁵² In the end, "Beauvoir's analysis remained anchored in that binary philosophy, which does not have any critical interest in the 'thingification' of the enslaved in modern, enlightened history" (RDB 179). Consequently, white women seeking subjectivity by appropriating and yet differentiating from Black abjectivity ultimately miss opportunities for coalitions and solidarity with Black women and men.⁵³ Thus, the implications of the woman-as-slave analogy, like the other comparative and competing frameworks operating throughout *The Second Sex*, warrant more critical attention.

5. Conclusion

My aim in writing this article has been to explore comparative and competing frameworks of oppression in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* alongside divergent secondary literature on this figure and text. In some cases scholars have argued that Beauvoir is a legitimate philosophical figure by celebrating her foundational contributions to feminism and the study of other forms of oppression. In other cases, scholars have conceded Beauvoir's philosophical legitimacy and yet insisted on holding her accountable for exclusions of women of color in her analysis of the situation of woman and for her appropriations of the suffering of enslaved Blacks as a rhetorical strategy to advance her arguments concerning white women's subjugation. I have argued that comparative and competing frameworks of oppression pose major problems throughout *The Second Sex*: on the one hand, by collapsing diverse systems of oppression as the same, and on the other hand, by distinguishing between these systems of oppression in a way that privileges gender difference and oppression above other forms of oppression.

When Beauvoir says that there are deep analogies between the situations of women and Blacks, what is not stated is that she is presenting the situations of white women and Black men, while also erasing Black women. When she talks about American Blacks and American racists, she is not mentioning French Blacks and anti-Black racism among the French. When she compares the situations of prostitutes to Jews, she does not mention that prostitutes were not systematically targeted for actual obliteration through a literal holocaust which is quite different from her figurative description of the destruction of women's housework as "small holocausts." When she asserts that Blacks, Jews, and proletarians (assumed to be all males) resist and revolt while women (assumed to be white) are complicit, she erases the experiences of oppression for women who are Black, Jewish, and/or proletariat as well as the agency among these women for resistance or revolt. When she

insists that there have always been women and women have always been subordinate to men she imposes a western narrative of gender formation that is challenged by women of color feminists. When Beauvoir presents woman as slave and/or as enslaved to the species she perpetuates a white feminist strategy of exploiting the suffering of those actually enslaved to garner support for the cause of white women.

My point is not that we should stop reading *The Second Sex*. Like any philosophical text, it has its insights and shortcomings that need to be examined. My hope is that in raising some of these issues, we stop pretending that these shortcomings do not exist. By acknowledging and analyzing rather than apologizing for such shortcomings in the text, we are able to consider the serious implications they have for the insights offered.

NOTES

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1. I prefer to keep "Black" and "Blackness" and "anti-Black" racism capitalized in the same way as "African-American" is capitalized, though I use Black rather than African-American throughout because it is a more inclusive term. Also, I prefer to keep "white" in lowercase as an intended disruption of the norm (i.e., using either capitals or lowercase letters for both terms). This preference is applied to the text in my own voice, but not to quotes of other texts.
2. This observation has also been made while attending recent philosophy conferences where Beauvoir has been prominently featured. When pointing to certain exclusions, some scholars attempt to defend Beauvoir based on her lack of access to resources on Black women in the 1940s and 1950s. Other responses include claims that *The Second Sex* has had more impact on women's lives around the world than any other text because it resonates with so many women—suggesting that if the text was so exclusive it could not resonate with other women.
3. Kate Fullbrook and Edward Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre: The Remaking of a Twentieth-Century Legend* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p. 3.

4. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Carnets de la drôle de guerre: Septembre 1939–Mars 1940* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983); *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phony War 1939-40*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1984).
5. Simone de Beauvoir, *Lettres à Sartre: 1940–1963*, ed. Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir (Paris: Gallimard, 1990); *Letters to Sartre*, trans. Quintin Hoare (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).
6. Kate Fullbrook and Edward Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 3.
7. Margaret Simons, *Beauvoir and The Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), pp. 1–2.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
9. Margaret Simons, introduction to *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Margaret Simons (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 2.
10. Nancy Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 10.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
13. *Ibid.* Bauer also identifies five gestures of condescension toward Beauvoir: “(1) a conception of Beauvoir as the mother of modern feminism . . . [whose] insights . . . have been surpassed by others’ later acts of writing; (2) a view of *The Second Sex* as a book that is eye-opening but not radical . . . ; (3) an identification of the philosophical dimension of *The Second Sex* as consisting in nothing other than warmed-over Sartrean existentialism; (4) a linking of what are taken to be the shortcomings of *The Second Sex* with biographical facts about Beauvoir, particularly her relationship with Sartre; and (5) an understanding of numerous features of Beauvoir’s book, sometimes her shortcomings and quite often her achievements, as products of the writing of which she is *unconscious*” (*ibid.*, p. 13; see also p. 17).
14. Sabine Broeck, “Re-Reading de Beauvoir ‘after Race’: Woman-as-Slave Revisited,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 14:1–2 (2011), p. 171; hereafter RDB, followed by page number.
15. See RDB 169.
16. “De Beauvoir’s ultimate goal, therefore, is not to create a counter-ethnography of certain groups of women in certain historical, cultural, social and political situations, but to insert *woman* into philosophy” (RDB 177).
17. For Broeck, another negative impact of the legacy of *The Second Sex* is tied to the woman as slave analogy: “Because of the text’s far-reaching and ongoing active legacy, the impact of white feminist appropriation of modern enslavement cannot be considered trivial” (RDB 182).

18. Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), vol. 1, p. 16; hereafter LDS, followed by volume and page number; *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Chevallier (New York: Knopf, 2010), p. 6; hereafter TSS, followed by page number.
19. See TSS 12; LDS 1 25.
20. Beauvoir is referring here to Richard Wright's and Gunnar Myrdal's assertions that there is not a Black problem but rather a white problem, along with Sartre's claims about antisemitism. At the end of *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre states: "Richard Wright, the Negro writer, said recently: 'There is no Negro problem in the United States, there is only a White Problem.' In the same way we must say that anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem; it is our problem" (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, trans. George J. Becker [New York: Schocken Books, 1995], p. 152). In *An American Dilemma*, Myrdal asserts, "The Negro problem is primarily a white man's problem" (Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* [New York: Harper, 1944], p. 669).
21. See TSS 13; LDS 1 25–6.
22. Beauvoir states: "in the United States a 'poor white' from the South can console himself for not being a 'dirty nigger' Likewise, the most mediocre of males believes himself a demigod next to women" (TSS 13; LDS 1 25–6). This language of superiority and the specific phrase "dirty nigger," is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's analysis in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952); *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967). Beauvoir, in her discussion of inferiority complexes in men notes that "no one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or more disdainful, than a man anxious about his own virility" (TSS 13; LDS 1 25–6).
23. The notion that the girl is born on the "wrong side" ("of the line" in the first English translation) echoes Du Bois' analysis of the color line. See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Howard Madison Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953), p. 298.
24. The French edition reads: "On à rapproché justement leur situation et celle des Juifs auxquels elles étaient souvent assimilées."
25. For example: "There are still many social strata where she is offered no other perspective; for peasants, an unmarried woman is a pariah; she remains the servant of her father, her brothers, and her brother-in-law; moving to the city is virtually impossible for her; marriage chains her to a man and makes her mistress of a home" (TSS 443; LDS 2 227). Housework "does not even result in a lasting creation" (TSS 483; LDS 2 278). Woman must consider "her work as an end in itself" (*ibid.*). The product of housework "has to be consumed. . . . [It is] finished only with its destruction. For her to consent to it without regret, these small holocausts must spark some joy or pleasure somewhere" (*ibid.*).

26. Again emphasizing woman's complicity, Beauvoir states elsewhere: "The man who sets the woman up as *Other* will thus find in her a deep complicity" (TSS 10; LDS 1 21).
27. Additional examples of resistance that she mentions include the proletarian revolution in Russia, Blacks in Haiti, and the Indo-Chinese fighting in Indochina. See TSS 8; LDS 1 19.
28. For more on reciprocity in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, see Penelope Deutscher, "Conversions of Reciprocity," chap. 5 of *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 159–83. Deutscher identifies several uses of the term 'reciprocity' in Beauvoir's work. One is that "my perception of the other as (racially, or via some collectivity or identity) marginal or not the norm should ideally be equalized and thus inflected by my sense that I, too, must sometimes take up a position as potentially suspect and conspicuous" (ibid., p. 162). Additional meanings of reciprocity in *The Second Sex* include: "mutual need or dependency; legal and economic equality, particularly the kind that allows one to enter into a contractual relationship on a fair footing; mutual obligation; exchanging the role of the 'other'; exchanging the role as other in the more specific sense of that which is foreign, importantly different, and elusive to one's grasp; subjects serving as both subject and object for each other, occupying positions as simultaneously subject and object; the idea of a constant tension produced by the mutual attempt to subordinate, without this necessarily producing the entrenched subordination of any individual or group, a tension that can be seen in both friend and enemy relations; and the mutuality of generosity and friendship between subjects, which can be seen as a supreme human accomplishment" (ibid., pp. 163–4).
29. "Proletarians are not a numerical minority either, and yet they have never formed a separate group" (TSS 8; LDS 1 18).
30. The French edition reads: "C'est en partie parce qu'elle échappé au caractère accidentel du fait historique que l'alterité apparaît ici comme un absolu."
31. See TSS 8; LDS 1 19.
32. Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 65.
33. Ibid., p. 64.
34. Ibid., p. 71. She further states: "According to [Beauvoir], the situation of 'woman' must be contrasted to that of Blacks, Jews, the working class" (ibid.).
35. Simons, *Beauvoir and The Second Sex*, pp. 169–70.
36. Margaret Simons, "Beauvoir and the Problem of Racism," chap. 14 of *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays*, ed. Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Lott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 260. See also Kathryn T. Gines, "Sartre, Beauvoir, and the Race/Gender Analogy: A Case for Black Feminist Philosophy," chap. 2 of *Convergences: Black Feminism and Continental Philosophy*, ed. Maria del Guadalupe Davidson, Kathryn T.

Gines, and Donna-Dale L. Marcano (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010), pp. 35–51, where it is argued that the analogizing of racial oppression with gender oppression problematically codes race as Black male and gender as white female, erasing the ways in which Black women (and women of color more generally) experience racism and sexism—or racialized sexism and sexualized racism—simultaneously.

37. Early on (TSS 70–87; LDS 1 109–32), Beauvoir suggests that she is describing labor, woman, and slavery during what she calls the “primitive period” (TSS 87; LDS 1 132). Here she seems to have in mind more ancient forms of slavery than the transatlantic slave trade. She makes further references to Apollo in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, as well as seventeenth-century cosmologies of Assyro-Babylonians, in discussing the shift away from matrilineal to paternal rights. She also mentions Sparta, describing it as the only city-state where women were treated almost equally to men, not jealously enslaved by a master (TSS 96–7; LDS 1 146–7); free women, slaves, and prostitutes in Greece; and Asian slaves prostituted near Athens (TSS 97; LDS 1 147).
38. Beauvoir elaborates, “Everything he wins, he wins against her; the more powerful he becomes, the more she declines. In particular, when he acquires ownership of land, he also claims woman as property” (TSS 87; LDS 1 132).
39. See TSS 271; LDS 1 403. Beauvoir continues, “the fact is that rich America and the male are on the side of the Master, and Mystery belongs to the slave” (ibid.).
40. Beauvoir states: “Now, woman has always been, if not man’s slave, at least his vassal; the two sexes have never divided the world up equally; and still today, even though her condition is changing, woman is heavily handicapped” (TSS 9; LDS 1 20). For other references to woman as vassal throughout the text, see TSS 9, 149; 189; 243; 264; 270; 341; 423; 440; 656–7; 691; 726; 733; LDS 1 23; 1 224; 1 285; 1 362; 1 393; 1 401; 2 89; 2 199; 2 221; 2 504; 2 551; 2 595; 2 605).
41. “He buys her like a head of cattle or a slave, he imposes his domestic divinities on her: and the children she conceives belong to her spouse’s family” (TSS 90; LDS 1 137). “Since she is property like the slave, the beast of burden, or the thing, it is natural for a man to have as many wives as he wishes . . . polygamy” (TSS 91; LDS 1 138).
42. “Clearly man wants woman’s enslavement when fantasizing himself as a benefactor, liberator, or redeemer” (TSS 201; LDS 1 300).
43. See TSS 74–5; LDS 1 115.
44. For example, Kathy Ferguson states: “De Beauvoir’s self is very like Hegel’s, an empty ego traveling on a journey filled with conflict and danger from others. She sees human subjectivity as characterized by ‘the imperialism of the human consciousness,’ always needing to conquer” (Kathy E. Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], p. 58). Ferguson also discusses essentialism (see “Essentialism?” in “Praxis Feminism,”

- chap. 3 of *The Man Question*, pp. 81–91) and mentions Black women and Black feminism, but not Black slaves (in relation to Hegel or other contexts). See also Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London: Routledge, 1983).
45. Bauer argues, “Beauvoir, on my view, is not simply gesturing at the master-slave dialectic as a source of inspiration for and illumination of her own view. Rather, she wants what she has to say about women to *contest*, on philosophically internal ground, the generic picture of human relations we get in the dialectic . . . between Hegel and Sartre” (Nancy Bauer, *Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism*, p. 182).
46. For Scarth, “[Beauvoir] suggests that hostility is only one possible reaction to the presence of free others; there will always remain the possibility of conversion and reciprocal recognition” (Fredrika Scarth, *The Other Within: Ethics, Politics, and the Body in Simone de Beauvoir* [Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004], p. 104).
47. Scarth asserts, “But Beauvoir doesn’t precisely apply the dialectic to the relation between men and women. It would be more accurate to say that she appropriates it. By this I mean that Beauvoir doesn’t simply use the master-slave dialectic as an analogy of the relations between men and women, in which masters are to slaves as men are to women. Rather, she transforms the dialectic by changing the meaning of risk that drives it” (ibid.). Scarth notes the following two differences: “One difference is that the risk that men take, for Beauvoir, is not simply the risk of life in the struggle with another, but more generally the risk of asserting themselves as free, the risk of creating something new in the world” (ibid., p. 108). The second difference is this: “The salient fact about woman as Other is that she allows man to escape ‘that implacable dialectic of master and slave which has its source in the reciprocity between free beings’” (ibid.).
48. Bauer does note the issue of slavery in Beauvoir’s *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (see Simone de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l’ambiguïté* [Paris: Gallimard, 1947]; *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman [New York: Citadel Press, 1976]). She observes, “In the *Ethics*, for example, Beauvoir briefly discusses the predicament of African American slaves in the antebellum American South” (Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism*, p. 175). However, this is not taken into consideration in Bauer’s analysis of the master-slave dialectic in *The Second Sex*.
49. Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, p. 65.
50. She later elaborates, “For de Beauvoir, as for post-Enlightenment thinkers in the Hegelian tradition, the subject is thought of as such because it masters the other who is thus structurally always already in the submissive ‘slave’ position. Consequently, (and despite her knowledge of history) if de Beauvoir wants to install woman as the primary antagonist to man, she has to signify her as the Hegelian type ‘slave’; she narrates the figure of woman as emblematic of the species ‘slave’ by giving woman a consciousness of the slavish who is in need of being put next to freedom, thereby to become a resistant object to a subject, and eventually, a subject

herself" (RDB 178).

51. See RDB 171, 178.

52. See RDB 169, 171, 178. "Bolstered by this evasion, the engagement of feminism with post-Enlightenment rhetorical structures of modern subjectivity, which has consistently positioned woman as 'slave' in a subject-object antinomy, must be considered a productive and generative rhetorical move to maneuver white western women into a position of claimant to the subject. This is true for Wollstonecraft and de Gouges as for de Beauvoir: the threat of being 'slave' became the horizon of degradation from which the object-subject negotiations about rights and freedom could be differentiated successfully" (RDB 179).

53. See RDB 181.