2-2021

Can There Be an Existentialist Virtue Ethics? [pre-print]

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This is a preprint of an article to be published in *The Journal of Value Inquiry*. Please cite the final version of the paper published there.

Abstract:

In this article, I argue that, contrary to appearances, Existentialism makes room for a distinctive form of virtue ethics. Working primarily from Simone de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*, I argue that while Existentialist ethics is centered around the will – whether it wills itself free, i.e., attains authenticity – it also encourages us to describe states of character in normative terms insofar as they confirm or contest this will. I outline an Existentialist virtue ethics over several sections. First, I provide an Existentialist account of states of character. Second, I consider authenticity as a sort of meta-virtue. Third, I examine the role of ambiguity in moral virtue, on this Existentialist account. Finally, I respond to a number of reasons for thinking that Existentialism cannot provide a virtue ethics.

Keywords:

Existentialism, Virtue Ethics, Simone de Beauvoir, Authenticity

It might seem that Existentialist ethics and virtue ethics have little to offer each other philosophically. And there are a number of reasons why matters appear thus. For example, Irene McMullin points out that contemporary virtue ethics often adopts a naturalism with which Existentialism would find itself at odds.[1] Or, as Steven Crowell argues, it seems that someone who does the right thing from a fixed and stable character might do so simply as part of a tendency to do *what one does* – but by Existentialist lights, such a supposedly virtuous tendency would be inauthentic.[2]

Yet, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, we find Beauvoir claiming, "One can choose not to will himself free [*on peut ne pas se vouloir libre*]. In laziness [*la paresse*], heedlessness [*l'étourderie*], capriciousness, cowardice, impatience, one contests the meaning of the project at the very moment that one defines it."[3] Here, Beauvoir names a set of character traits that obstruct willing one's own freedom. In other words, Beauvoir identifies a set of vices – and vices defined in specifically Existentialist terms. What I would like to do in this paper is to attempt to follow this suggestion by outlining an Existentialist virtue ethics. My purpose here is not so much to provide an exegesis of Beauvoir, as to take up this suggestion of hers, to see whether it works and how much we can do with it.[4] Nor will I attempt to justify either virtue or Existentialist ethics. Rather, my aim is simply to show that Existentialism can and should endorse a certain conception of virtues as normative.

To my mind, there are two key reasons to pursue this project. The first is that it allows us to explore Existentialism's moral dimension in new terms. Just as Kant's ethics is focused around the will, but his complete ethics includes an account of virtue, so Existentialist ethics is focused around willing

one's freedom (and the freedom of others), but can be seen to include an account of virtue. Developing this account provides a more complete understanding of Existentialism's ethical possibilities. Second, I think Existentialism can make interesting contributions to virtue ethics. Considerable work has been done in the past two decades on contributions Phenomenology can make to virtue ethics, and some work on Existentialism and virtue ethics, notably Irene McMullin's excellent *Existential Flourishing*. In this article, I offer a new account of the contributions Existentialism can make to our conception of virtue, starting from Beauvoir's description of what it takes to "will oneself free."[5] I will argue that Existentialism can provide us with more phenomenologically precise descriptions of virtue and vice than are otherwise available, and can ground virtue ethics in something more fundamental than contingent features of human psychology.

My plan will be to outline what an Existentialist virtue ethics might look like over five sections. First, I will provide a general sketch of the view. Second, I will explain what states of character amount to on such a view. Third, I discuss the role of authenticity in this account. Fourth, I explain why the Existentialist notion of ambiguity should be seen as fundamental to the moral virtues. Finally, I consider some major obstacles to offering an Existentialist virtue ethics.

1. An Existentialist Virtue Ethics

First, what defines a virtue ethics? Obviously, there is not a single account of virtue ethics, and so some reserve is required here. But we can provisionally say the following: A virtue ethics accounts for ethical normativity (at least in part) in terms of virtues. Virtues are good states of character, by which one usually understands something like stable dispositions to think, feel, act, etc. in certain ways. For example, as a first pass, Annas defines virtue as a particular kind of "state or disposition of a person".[6] Or, Swanton defines virtue as "a good quality of character, more specifically a disposition to respond to, or acknowledge, items within its field or fields in an excellent or good way."[7] Further, while there are different ways to understand what a disposition is, it's usual to say something along the lines of: one has a disposition to, e.g., act in a certain way if, when appropriately prompted under normal circumstances, one tends to act in that way. In brief, if Existentialism can allow for a virtue ethics, it must be able to account for ethical normativity in terms of states of character, where states of character are something like dispositions to think, feel, act, etc. in certain ways.

Second, what defines an Existentialist ethics? Unfortunately, given the diffuse character of the Existentialist movement, this question presents even greater difficulties. For the sake of simplicity, I'll adopt Webber's claim that what distinguishes an Existentialist ethics is the "view that all that is intrinsically valuable is the nature or structure of our existence."[8] On such a view, values do not exist independently of consciousness; instead, consciousness is itself the primary bearer of value, for which things and actions have value. That is, things and actions are not good or bad in themselves; they appear good or bad with respect to projects and goals that we have freely chosen.[9] To give a simple example: a new job offer that would pay well but require me to work long hours will appear good if I adopt the goal of procuring a large sum of money, bad if I adopt the goal of devoting time to friends and family. In this sense, Sartre claims, "freedom [is] the foundation of all values."[10] The Existentialist concludes that moral value cannot be defined in terms of universal rules of action (as the deontologist claims), nor in terms of the consequences of those actions (as the consequentialist would have it), since the moral value of an action and its consequences cannot be determined except with respect to the freely chosen projects of particular subjects. According to Webber, what matters then for the Existentialist, ethically speaking, is just that we "possess and express the single overarching virtue of authenticity: the disposition to recognize and promote what is most genuinely our own, the fundamental nature of our existence," namely, freedom.[11] Or, as Sartre puts it, while we cannot pronounce moral judgments on others' choices

of projects *per se*, we *can* in principle render moral judgment on the basis of whether they succeed or fail to "will freedom for freedom's sake."[12]

Beauvoir's view in *Ethics of Ambiguity* exemplifies these features of an Existentialist ethics, since it holds that freedom is the source of value and grounds morality on this fact. She writes that "freedom is the source from which all significations and all values spring."[13] In turn, our relation to this freedom, as the source of value, determines the moral quality of our actions: "To will oneself moral and to will oneself free are one and the same decision."[14]

According to Beauvoir, however, this claim poses a problem. The Existentialist claims both that we are free just in virtue of the kinds of things we are (i.e., consciousness), and that we ought to will ourselves free. But how can there be a moral demand to will ourselves to be something we already are? To formulate the problem in other words, it seems like freedom is not identical with value, since we are already free by our nature, but surely we are not always or already moral. Beauvoir's solution to this problem is to distinguish between two kinds of freedom, what she calls "natural freedom" and "moral" or "ethical freedom."[15]

According to Beauvoir, there is an important difference between the sort of freedom we have originally, just in virtue of the human condition – the freedom of "spontaneously casting ourselves into the world" or of being a "lack" – and the sort of freedom we have when we "will ourselves free," i.e., when we actively take up and realize our freedom through making committed choices.[16] The former sort of freedom – natural freedom – is simply a fact of our nature, not chosen or earned, and is essentially negative: it is the freedom of *not* having any pre-established ends or values. In contrast, the second sort of freedom – moral freedom – is an achievement, optional (in the sense that it may never be achieved), and positive: to attain moral freedom, I must positively value freedom. We can be, and in fact often are, free in the first sense without being free in the second, which explains why we are not, on this account, moral by nature. As Beauvoir puts it, "to will oneself free is to effect the transition from nature to morality by establishing a genuine freedom on the original upsurge of existence."[17]

But what exactly does it take to be morally free? Beauvoir describes various stages of this transition (in her Chapter 2, "Personal Freedom and Others"), but we can focus on two requirements. First, to be morally free requires that, in willing whatever projects one does, one recognizes the value of freedom (as, in Sartre's phrase, the "foundation of all values"). One could not be morally free while, for example, willing a project that undermined one's own freedom or the freedom of others. Further, one is not morally free in virtue of willing a project on the grounds that, e.g., it was required by one's biology or social expectation: such a project does not value freedom (but rather biology or society) in pursuing its end. Second, we shouldn't imagine moral freedom as some kind of self-contained revelry in the fact of one's own freedom. This would be a bit like a virtuosa valuing her talent with the violin by only ever contemplating the violin, or celebrating some prized coffee beans by putting them on a shelf, never to be ground. We value freedom precisely by taking up and using it to commit to some valued end. We are morally free, then, when we commit to some valued end in the recognition of freedom as the source of value. This is what it means to "will oneself free."[18] For Beauvoir, the fundamental moral quality is that of a will that wills itself free in this sense.

So, given these definitions, does Existentialism leave room for a virtue ethics?

We can start by following Beauvoir's suggestion in the above passage. There, she provides a list of vices, e.g., laziness, cowardice, impatience. We can think of these as vices, because they are states of character, and in particular, dispositions to think, feel, act in certain ways; e.g., laziness is a disposition to fail to follow through on chosen projects. Further, these are *normative* states of character, and are

distinguished from virtues in terms of the valence of normativity attributable to them (i.e., they are, so to speak, bad states of character).

One could reasonably suspect that I am putting too much weight on this short passage by Beauvoir. In particular, one might wonder whether these character traits really have moral import for Beauvoir, or if they are just a convenient way of making a point about the nature of freedom and existence. But Beauvoir does in fact want to make a moral point about these traits: she invokes them precisely as characteristic of the *failure* to transition from natural to moral freedom, as exemplary of how "one can choose not to will himself free."[19] In laziness, for example, one "contests the meaning of the project at the very moment that one defines it," insofar as one uses one's freedom to set a project, but fails to take responsibility for realizing that project. The project does not, then, have the meaning it would have if I approached it diligently. In other words, laziness is a way of failing to be morally free, in the sense that in laziness, we do not actively take responsibility for our freedom.

So, at the very least, such vices are *not moral* for Beauvoir. But couldn't they, for all that, simply be natural, i.e., amoral, and so not properly vices (i.e., immoral) at all in her eyes? The problem with this suggestion is that one could say the same thing about character types that Beauvoir clearly does consider immoral, e.g., the adventurer (e.g., Cortez) or the tyrant – since they too fail to recognize and take responsibility for freedom, in the sense of not recognizing the intersubjectivity inherent in freedom and so affirming the freedom of others.[20] Beauvoir does not, then, consider someone who fails to transition from the natural to the moral to be simply amoral. Failures to effect this transition are ways of being immoral. The amoral case, for Beauvoir, is not that of merely naturally free person, but that of the child (who is not yet properly free) or the oppressed (who has had their freedom forcibly removed). On this account, then, the immoral amounts to a failure fully to take responsibility for one's freedom – it is a failure to attain moral freedom. And, in this sense, laziness, impatience, etc. are immoral.

So, it is appropriate to read laziness, cowardice, etc. as vices, for Beauvoir, since they evidently are states of character, and they have normative import. Conversely, states of character can have a positive normative value for her. Thus, she writes, "The value of the chosen end is confirmed and, reciprocally, the genuineness of the choice is manifested concretely through patience, courage, and fidelity."[21] In other words, with traits such as courage and fidelity, we successfully make the transition from natural to moral freedom, and so such traits have moral value. Indeed, such virtues *manifest* moral freedom, since they are ways of willing genuinely.

On this account of virtue, normativity comes not from something like excellence at the human function, a tendency to achieve happiness, or consistency with natural law, etc. Rather, the normativity gets into states of character simply in virtue of whether they achieve moral freedom. The highest level normative demand, on Beauvoir's account, is that we take responsibility for our freedom through defining and realizing projects in a suitable manner (i.e., not in a manner that devalues freedom in our own case or the cases of others), whatever these may be. For her, as we have seen, our states of character can either confirm or contest these projects, and so can be moral or immoral in this secondary sense.

2. States of Character

So, we have a sketch of an Existentialist account of normative states of character. At this point, I would like to introduce an important refinement into the account. As we have seen, the prevailing discourse about states of character is that they are stable dispositions, to think, feel, act, etc. in certain ways. I doubt that this is a responsible way to talk about virtues on the Existentialist account, at least under certain definitions of "disposition." Part of the problem here is that virtue ethics sometimes adopts the

language of dispositions without analyzing it in depth. And while the literature on dispositions certainly presents us with more than one way to talk about dispositions, nevertheless at least some of these definitions would seem to disqualify dispositions from playing a role in an Existentialist virtue ethics. Take Ryle's definition: "To possess a dispositional property is not to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change; it is to be bound or liable to be in particular state, or to undergo a particular change, when a particular condition is realized."[22] But the language of being bound or liable to be in certain states under certain conditions is entirely absent from Beauvoir's discussion of patience, impatience, etc. For her, they appear to be more like qualities of the will, i.e., manners of willing. It's far from clear that this kind of "being bound or liable" is even compatible with Existentialist accounts of freedom. Objects can be bound or liable to be in certain states under certain conditions, but can subjects?

Fortunately, I don't think that anything about virtue ethics requires this kind of definition of virtue. Hursthouse, for example, argues that we think of "character traits as involving much more than tendencies or dispositions to act, even for reasons."[23] Nor does Aristotle define states of character in terms of being bound to act in certain ways. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, he simply defines a state as "what we have when we are well or badly off in relation to feelings."[24] Further, consider how he distinguishes between virtuous action and virtuous character. He does so not just in terms of a distinction between a chance action and a general disposition for acting, but in terms of a) knowledge, b) decision, c) a firm and unchanging state.[25] Aristotle already defines virtuous character, then, in terms of something like intentionality (knowledge and decision), and not simply in terms of boundedness or liability.

Quite aside from the language of dispositions, there is, I think, a very natural way for an Existentialist to think about states of character, supplied by Merleau-Ponty's notion of "styles of existence."[26] He writes that "I have a certain style of life."[27] Further, "along with existence, I received a way of existing, or a style. All of my actions and thoughts are related to this structure … ."[28] In brief, we can think of Merleau-Ponty's notion of a "style of existence" as a generalized manner of disclosing meaning in the world, or we might say, an *orientation* toward the world.[29] Merleau-Ponty's basic contention is that the way I perceive the world around me, what it means and what value it has, corresponds to my particular "hold upon the world" or way of "being in the world."[30] For example, in agreeing with Sartre that feelings like pain or fatigue don't force me to act in certain ways, Merleau-Ponty points out that this is because such feelings are experienced, or have their sense, through one's "attitude towards the world."[31] He writes, "Fatigue does not stop my companion because he likes the feel of his body damp with sweat, the scorching heat of the road and the sun and, in short, because he likes to feel himself at the center of things, to draw together their rays, or to turn himself into the gaze for this light and the sense of touch for these surfaces. My fatigue stops me because I do not enjoy this, because I have differently chosen my way of being in the world, and because, for example, I do not look to be out in nature, but rather to gain the recognition of others."[32] The way we experience these feelings, then, depends on our "way of being in the world."[33] Or, we might think of stinginess, for example, not merely as a propensity not to share my resources, but as a style of existence in which I experience the needs of others as an unwanted burden, harrying my own resources – which, let us suppose, are ample, but I experience as already stretched too thin – from all directions. In contrast, we might think of generosity as an orientation on which I experience the needs of others as a call to action. The general point is that the way the world reveals itself, and the way it motivates us, is correlative to a particular style of existence. If we thought of states of character in these terms, then they would not count as liabilities to act in certain ways, but as particular ways of disclosing meaning in the world, just as the adventurer's style of existence discloses the meaning of fatigue in a different way than does the writer's.

This, I take it, is pretty much how Sartre speaks of character: not as a quality of being, but as a way of projecting oneself in the world. He writes of Clovis' ambition that "to be ambitious is to project conquering a throne or honors; it is not a *given* which would incite one to conquest."[34] Or, in *Notebooks for an Ethics*, he claims that it is not technically correct to say "I *am* a coward," for example, since "this quality would imply some thesis about being."[35] Rather, we should say "I project being" in a manner that is decidedly not courageous.[36] Here too, Sartre seems to have in mind something like character not as a given quality or liability, but as a manner of disclosing meaning.[37]

Note that such styles of existence are relatively stable, albeit plastic. As with Aristotle's states of character, for Merleau-Ponty, such styles of existence are habitual. He continues, "we must recognize a sort of sedimentation of our life: when an attitude toward the world has been confirmed often enough, it becomes privileged for us," i.e., it becomes a "habitual being in the world."[38] At the same time, such habitual modes of being in the world can be learned, altered, or developed – in short, they are cultivatable, in the same way the virtues have traditionally been thought to be.

I don't see why an Existentialist couldn't, then, understand states of character as styles of existence or modes of being in the world, i.e., as something like general orientations toward or ways of disclosing the world. This would have the advantage of capturing the way Beauvoir talks about laziness, caprice, etc., not as tendencies for action, but as ways of defining the meaning of our projects: laziness, as a state of character, discloses our projects (determines their meaning) as lacking value at the very moment we define them; cowardice discloses the world as overwhelming our projects; etc.

3. Authenticity

It is not entirely unfamiliar to think of authenticity as a virtue.[39] In this section, I would like to consider authenticity as a sort of meta-virtue, i.e., as a virtue governing each of the other virtues.

Obviously, there are different ways of defining authenticity. In arguing that authenticity is a meta-virtue, I don't mean to be bound to any particular definition of authenticity (nor do I suppose that definitions of authenticity offered by various Existentialists' are necessarily compatible), so much as to the phenomenon these definitions are meant to capture. But Webber gives us a helpful starting point when he interprets the Existentialist idea of authenticity as "the disposition to recognize and promote what is most genuinely our own, the fundamental nature of existence."[40] Given the framing of this paper, then, we can understand authenticity in terms of Beauvoir's distinction between natural and moral freedom, where moral freedom, as "willing oneself free," is "recognizing and promoting what is most genuinely our own." For example, Beauvoir claims that to affect the transition from nature to morality is to found "a genuine freedom [*liberté authentique*] on the original upsurge of existence."[41] In the terms I have been developing here, authenticity would name the state of character that corresponds to taking up and realizing one's freedom actively, i.e., to achieving moral freedom; inauthenticity to the failure to achieve moral freedom.[42] Assuming this is an acceptable definition of authenticity, and that we can understand virtue in the manner outlined above – namely, as a state of character that achieves moral freedom – then, on this account authenticity is in fact identical with virtue, and inauthenticity with vice.

Here again one might have qualms about whether the definition of authenticity as a virtue is at all appropriate. One might object that nothing in Heidegger's account, for example, suggests we take authenticity to be a "state of character." Instead, Heidegger defines authenticity and inauthenticity as "existential modes of Being-in-the-world," where inauthenticity names a mode of Being-in-the-world that is "fascinated by the world," and authenticity names a mode of Being-in-the-world defined by Dasein's own self.[43] Certainly, in this light, the language of virtues as "dispositions" appears importantly

inadequate. Authenticity is not a liability to think, feel, and act in certain ways, so much as a mode of Being-in-the-world, i.e., something like a general orientation toward, or way of disclosing, oneself and the world; inauthenticity is not so much a liability to think, feel, and act in certain other ways, as a manner of disclosing oneself, namely, disclosing oneself in terms of the world. But once we adopt the refined definition of state of character provided above, as a style of existence or way of being in the world, authenticity evidently *can* count as a state of character (though Heidegger himself would, no doubt, resist this terminology), since Heidegger defines authenticity precisely as a mode of Being-in-the-world.[44]

I said above that authenticity is identical with virtue. More precisely, we might say that authenticity is a sort of meta-virtue, insofar as each virtue is a manifestation or a form of authenticity.[45] If authenticity is the state of character that corresponds to taking up and realizing one's freedom actively, and the virtues are just the states of character that correspond to taking up and realizing one's freedom, then the virtues are just so many different forms of authenticity. For example, patience, courage, and fidelity appear to be authentic states, whereas laziness, impatience, capriciousness, etc. are inauthentic ones. Thus, in contrast to the manner in which caprice, heedlessness, etc., contest the value of our choices, Beauvoir writes, "the value of the chosen end is confirmed and, reciprocally, the genuineness [*l'authenticité*] of the choice is manifested concretely through patience, courage, and fidelity."[46]

One might object that we can be virtuous without necessarily being authentic, and so virtues cannot be forms of authenticity. But this idea rings hollow. For example, one could not, I think, have courage, in any meaningful sense, if one were not (at least, in this respect) authentic. For what would "courage" be that is not a form of taking up and realizing one's freedom in projects one values? Intuitively, in my view, it amounts only to rashness or "adventurism." Indeed, I would suggest that something like this point is ultimately at stake in the strict conditions Aristotle puts on the situations in which bravery can be exercised, e.g., when facing death in war (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book III, Chapter 6).

To be virtuous in any meaningful sense, then, is to be (to the degree that one is virtuous) authentic, and in this sense, authenticity is a meta-virtue. As a meta-virtue, authenticity shows up in each of the various domains of human experience (i.e., the various spheres of activity and concern with which most every human life engages). How it shows up in each domain is what defines the virtue for that domain.[47] So, for example, we might take authenticity with respect to mortality to be courage; authenticity with respect to intersubjectivity to be friendship or justice; authenticity with respect to one's property to be generosity, etc. Of course, defining how authenticity shows up in each domain will be challenging – but the key point is that to determine the virtue proper to a domain, one has to figure out what moral freedom looks like in that domain. And my contention is that moral freedom does take a specific form in each domain.

This is *not* to say that authenticity requires the choice of some specific project or other, just that the *way* we hold these projects *is* defined by authenticity. In other words, my claim that moral freedom must take a specific form in each domain must not be confused with a claim that Existentialists advocate a specific set of virtuous actions. Of course, quite to the contrary, Existentialists hold that any such set of rules for action would prove inviable in the face of freedom and would be entirely compatible with inauthenticity (since any set of rules can be followed in an inauthentic manner). But my claim is not that authenticity requires that the will take on some particular *contents*, only that it take on some particular *forms*, since one cannot genuinely will oneself free without adopting the relevant forms (namely, the virtues).[48] Beauvoir argues, for example, that I cannot genuinely will myself free *in a way* that is capricious.

Further, I hope it is clear that I am not assimilating Existentialism to any particular cultural conception of virtue, e.g., to a bourgeois table of virtues. Rather, virtue is simply defined in terms of the requirements of authenticity, which may or may not agree with a particular culture's assessment of virtue. In fact, by these lights, dissent or revolt from prevailing norms that limit authenticity would I think count as a virtue.[49]

4. Ambiguity and Moral Virtue

I have said that moral freedom takes a certain form (though not a certain content) in each domain of experience. How exactly do we pick out what this form is? Evidently, we cannot identify virtue, on this account, simply in terms of an intermediate between extremes. But we can be more specific about how to identify virtues, and can do so in a way that captures something of the Aristotelian idea of virtue as an intermediate. The task for us is to identify what it would take to own up to the kind of freedom we have, and this, essentially, means successfully negotiating the ambiguity of the human condition. Let me explain what I mean.

Existentialism defines the human condition in terms of a fundamental ambiguity between the for-itself and the in-itself, self-consciousness and being.[50] Moral freedom consists in taking up and negotiating this ambiguity. In contrast, we could, following Merleau-Ponty, call "ambivalence" the attitude that rejects one side or the other of an ambiguity.[51] Ambivalence, since it rejects the ambiguous situation of human freedom, fails to own up to the kind of freedom we actually have. In this sense, ambivalence amounts to a failure to attain moral freedom. Given my definition of authenticity in terms of moral freedom, we could at this point further define authenticity as the disposition to negotiate the ambiguity of the human condition successfully. In contrast, inauthenticity amounts to ambivalence: the refusal of one or the other pole of ambiguity.

I will try to illustrate this approach by sketching (no doubt imperfectly) several examples.

First, consider generosity. Generosity avoids two vices: stinginess and prodigality. But what are stinginess and prodigality, when considered not as liabilities to act in certain ways, but as ways of disclosing meaning? I would suggest that both these attitudes amount to forms of ambivalence: the rejection of one side or the other of an ambiguous situation. The ambiguous situation at stake in generosity might be something like the relation between a subject and its material expression in property (more specifically, material expression as it stands in relation to others). The ambiguity here consists in the fact that a) we are subjects, and so not defined by material things, and b) we are also embodied agents in a spatio-temporal world, and so not indifferent to our expression through material things.[52] The prodigal person realizes a) at the price of rejecting b); the stingy person recognizes b) at the price of rejecting a). In contrast, generosity consists in a disposition to negotiate these conflicting demands: expressing one's agency in relation to others through one's material means.

Or take the example of courage. One way to think about courage is to take it as the virtue with respect to mortality.[53] The ambiguity to which it responds, then, is something like the ambiguity of being a finite reason: a subject related to its own death. And here too, there are two ways in which one can refuse this ambiguity in ambivalence: a) one could reject the importance of one's life, and so of one's death, in asserting one's subjectivity, or b) one could refuse one's subjectivity for the sake of one's life. These are something like what Aristotle called rashness and cowardice, or perhaps are something like what we find expressed in Hegel's description of the Master-Servant dialectic.[54]

Or, friendship, *philia*, is the disposition to negotiate the ambiguity of intersubjectivity, of being a for-others for-oneself. This situation is ambiguous, because in it we oscillate between being a subject for which there are others, and an object for other subjects. We can reject this ambiguity by a) taking

ourselves as objects for other subjects – something like what Aristotle called obsequiousness – or b) taking others as objects for our subjectivity – something like what Aristotle called cantankerousness. In contrast, friendship, or love, is the disposition to successfully negotiate this ambiguity.

To some extent, this is the way Merleau-Ponty has drawn the distinction between love and jealousy. Merleau-Ponty argues that both love and jealousy draw on a primitive experience of indisitinction between self and other, i.e., on the fundamental ambiguity of the distinction between self and other, but in different ways. So, he writes,

A) "One might say that the jealous person sees his existence invaded by the success of the other and feels himself dispossessed by him, and that in this sense jealousy is essentially a confusion between the self and the other. It is the attitude of the one who sees no life for himself other than that of achieving what the other has achieved, who does not define himself by himself but in relation to what others have."[55]

B) "To love is inevitably to enter into an undivided situation with another. … The perspectives remain separate – and yet they overlap. One can no longer say 'this is mine, this is yours;' the roles cannot be absolutely separated."[56]

And yet jealousy and love take up this ambiguity in different ways. Merleau-Ponty writes that jealousy is "ensnaring": "The ensnaring love of the child is the love that never has enough proofs, and ends by imprisoning and trapping the other in its immediacy."[57] In contrast, normal or non-pathological love consists in "having confidence above and beyond what can be proved," and thereby allows the other to be a separate (though not absolutely separate) perspective.[58] Thus, love succeeds in negotiating the ambiguity of self and other in a way that jealousy – since it cannot tolerate dispossession from the other – does not.

In each of these cases, there is not a fixed set of rules that count as criteria for successful negotiation of ambiguity; formally, we can only say that that failure consists in taking a one-sided, or ambivalent, approach to ambiguity. Indeed, it may be that ambiguity, per force, rules out any hard and fast resolutions to moral problems, and when approached in terms of hard and fast laws, ossifies into antinomy. Beauvoir writes that "it is impossible to determine this relationship between meaning and content abstractly and universally: there must be a trial and decision in each case."[59] The latter half of *Ethics of Ambiguity* is largely concerned to show that if we side universally with one side or another of an ambiguity we will be led into morally outrageous positions. If this is true, then the notion of virtue is particularly well suited to describe the right kind of stance towards ambiguity: resolving ethical situations in light of ambiguity will be a matter of prudence – practical deliberation or *phronesis* – that requires careful attunement to the case. As Beauvoir writes, "Contrary to the formal strictness of Kantianism for whom the more abstract the act is the more virtuous it is, generosity seems to us to be better grounded and therefore more valid the less distinction there is between the other and ourself and the more we fulfill ourself in taking the other as an end."[60] Beauvoir means that I am not more generous the more I act out of a formal duty to an abstract law, but rather to the extent that I experience this particular other's good as bound to my own. Conversely, I do not fail in generosity by failing to meet an abstract law, but by indifference or else by jealousy (by recognizing the "indistinction" between self and other, without tolerating any separation). That is, generosity requires us to negotiate a particular ambiguous situation, the ambiguity between my particular self and this particular other.[61] Perhaps we could say there is a formal demand to negotiate this ambiguity, and we can note features of what it means to do so: for example, to negotiate the ambiguity of self and other requires acknowledging indistinction while allowing for separation. But there is no hard and fast rule for how to

instantiate these features, or how to negotiate ambiguity generally: this must be discerned within each situation.

So, virtue would name a disposition to negotiate an ambiguous situation well, whereas vice would name a disposition to negotiate such a situation poorly, namely by taking a one-sided or extreme approach to a situation. If this last formulation is accurate, then I do not think this account of virtue so much rejects Aristotle's notion of virtue as an intermediate, as grounds it in the ambiguity of the human condition.[62] Virtue is a disposition to negotiate this ambiguity, whereas vices, the extremes, consist in its refusal. While Aristotle does not make this claim, certainly, I do think it finds expression in his argument that the gods lack the moral virtues.[63] In my view, this claim gets to the same phenomenon I am expressing in claiming that virtue consists in negotiating the ambiguity of the human condition – if we were gods, there would be no such ambiguity, and so no need for the virtues of the human condition. In this sense, virtue and vice are dispositional responses to the ambiguity of the human condition.

5. Objections and Responses

We now have a general formulation of an Existentialist virtue ethics: virtues are authentic modes of being in the world that successfully negotiate the ambiguity of the human condition, i.e., modes that realize moral freedom. At this point, I would like to consider several challenges to this Existentialist virtue ethics.

First, one might be concerned that virtue ethics has traditionally thought of the virtues as rooted in human nature. For Aristotle, for example, virtues are defined relative to the human function: virtue is just the disposition to perform the human function well in the various domains of human action.[64] In contrast, a core principle of at least certain kinds of Existentialism is that human nature has no normative import. By the lights of this kind of Existentialism, defining value in terms of human nature would amount to bad faith, i.e., an abdication of freedom under the pretense of being determined by one's nature.[65] As Sartre famously claims in "Existentialism is a Humanism," "There is no human nature."[66] According to this line of thinking, in light of freedom, human nature appears normatively inert. A related point, I take it, is at stake in Heidegger's distinction between anthropology, the study of the human being, and the analytic of Dasein, i.e., the study of the essential structures of existence.[67]

But nothing about Beauvoir's invocation of virtues and vices ties it to peculiarities of human nature.[68] Instead, she understands these vices and virtues strictly in terms of the difference between natural and moral freedom, i.e., in terms of "willing oneself free." And that distinction is not a contingent feature of human nature, but an essential structure of experience (i.e., the experience of any finite free being could be characterized in these same terms). If that's right, and if virtue can be defined in terms of moral freedom, then we can think of virtue and vice as existential modes, in Heidegger's sense (i.e., as pertaining to ontological structures of existence), just as Heidegger defines authenticity and inauthenticity as "existential modes of being-in-the-world."[69] We do not, for example, need to define capriciousness as a contingent feature of peculiarly human psychology: instead, we can define it in terms of the temporal character of moral freedom, i.e., as a disengagement of freedom from the time in which it would realize its projects.[70] In other words, if we define virtue and vice as existential modes, then there is no question of defining value in terms of contingent features of human nature. There is no question here of a natural law ethics, e.g., an obligation to continue in existence in virtue of a natural disposition to do so. This kind of ethics really would (by Existentialist lights) be rooted in peculiarities of human nature, and so amount to bad faith.[71]

Second, as Jack Reynolds has pointed out, one might have a more general worry about whether character traits can be a relevant consideration for Existentialism.[72] In virtue of the Existentialist

conception of freedom, appeals to character might seem like another form of bad faith. Sartre, for example, writes that "there is no such thing as a cowardly temperament."[73] Sartre does think some persons are cowards, but writes that, "a coward is defined by the deed he has done" – such that cowardice seems not so much a state as a collection of acts.[74] Once we get the idea of freedom into view, it's not clear that the idea of a character even makes sense. For what does it tell us that, e.g., I have a cowardly state of character? Either, it says that I am compelled to undertake cowardly actions, in which case I am not free; or, I am free, in which case a cowardly character is irrelevant to my action.[75]

But I'm unconvinced that this is a good Existentialist account of freedom. Merleau-Ponty criticizes such a view, basically on the ground that it fails to recognize that our freedom gears into a situation and general style of existence – the motives disclosed by our style of existence "do not annul freedom," but show that it "is not without supports within being."[76] Of course, one may not wish to admit the Merleau-Ponty of the *Phenomenology* as Existentialist. In this case, I'd just point out that not even Sartre or Beauvoir seem to propose any such incompatibility between character and freedom. What Sartre demands is that *character does not violate our freedom* – it does not force us to act in certain ways. For example, we saw him claim of ambition that it is "not a *given* which would incite one to conquest," but it is "to project conquering a throne or honors."[77] Or, he claims that the character of the one disposed to give into fatigue is "not a factual given and is only a name given to the way in which I suffer my fatigue."[78] This evidently does not rule out the significance of character for freedom – it just denies that a character like cowardice is a natural fact and defines it instead as a *way* of experiencing the world. This point is in perfect agreement with everything I have said about character. Just like Merleau-Ponty, Sartre writes that I can resist my fatigue "only by means of a radical transformation of my being-in-the-world."[79] Beauvoir evidently thinks of character in similar terms, writing that our ways of casting ourselves into the world "determine no behavior," and yet that one "draws the motivations of his moral attitude from within the character which he has given himself and from within the universe which is its correlative.[80]

Third, consider Crowell's point, mentioned in my Introduction, that Existentialism and virtue ethics seem to conflict, if one thinks of virtue as a stable disposition to do the right thing. But, Crowell, points out, one can do the right thing from a stable disposition simply because it is, so to speak, what one does, such that one can seemingly be virtuous without being authentic. But we should not think of virtue in these terms.[81] Take Aristotle's distinction between producing grammatical results and being a grammarian.[82] One can, he says, produce grammatical results by following instructions, but one can only be a grammarian by acting with grammatical knowledge: knowledge not of what one does (of how one has been instructed) but of the rules of grammar. Aristotle does go on to say that knowledge counts for less in the case of virtue than of crafts. Nevertheless, he seems to hold that to act virtuously one must know not merely what one does – i.e., what are the social expectations in a particular circumstance – but something like the rules of virtue (i.e., what virtue is and how to realize it). I do not think, for example, that we would call someone courageous if they risk their life simply because they are expected to. Such a person acts from something more like a fear of disapproval, of standing out, of taking responsibility for their freedom, etc., than from a positive recognition of the value of the project for which they are prepared to sacrifice. One could consistently ape virtue absent authenticity – that is, one could have a stable liability to act virtuously (to do what the virtuous person would do) under normal circumstances. But one could not, I think, *be* virtuous (have a virtuous style of existence) absent authenticity.

Fourth, there is a certain tension introduced into my account by the fact that virtue is supposed to be normative in a secondary sense. What is normative in the primary sense, on this account, is the will, namely, willing oneself free. On Beauvoir's account, virtues are normative insofar as they

participate in realizing this will. But these primary and secondary senses of normativity seem to conflict in certain ways. For example, one might think that one can will oneself free at any moment, but one cannot simply become virtuous at any moment: the former seems to be a decision one can make instantaneously, whereas the latter is a habit one cultivates over time. The problem with this objection is that, on the account of freedom I have been attributing to Existentialism, one cannot so neatly distinguish between will and character. In fact, we have seen Beauvoir suggest that one *cannot* genuinely will oneself free without virtues like patience. The idea is that willing oneself free is not a momentary decision, but a decision engaged in a temporal field, an ongoing effort of realizing itself. Of course, one can in a certain sense *decide* today to, e.g., become a novelist, even if tomorrow one will decide instead to take up fencing. But the question is whether this decision is really *willed* if it is not accompanied by the kind of character that supports this will in realizing itself through time. What must be said is that my character does not obviate free will – as Merleau-Ponty and Sartre point out, I am not determined by my character, e.g., capriciousness does not make it impossible for me to genuinely commit to writing a novel. But they also point out that I can act contrary to my character only *at the price of transforming my character*, in Sartre's terms, only by a "radical transformation of my being-in-the-world." Or as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "I am free in relation to my fatigue precisely to the extent that I am free in relation to my being in the world; [despite my fatigue] I am free to continue along my way on condition of transforming my being in the world."[83] For example, I only genuinely commit to writing my novel if I succeed in giving up my capriciousness. No doubt, such momentary transformations are never total, and there is no instantaneous transition from inauthenticity to authenticity. But my point is only that will is inseparable from character, and so willing is bound to a temporal extension: willing myself free is itself a project engaged in time, and not a momentary decision. As Beauvoir puts it, "the will is developed in the course of time," and this is why one needs character traits like patience to will in the full sense.[84] Thus, while the will is moral in a primary sense, and character moral in a derivative sense, nevertheless the former is inseparable from the latter. If this is a good phenomenology of the will, then Existentialist ethics (so focused around the will) actually requires something like a description of virtue.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that far from being incompatible with virtue ethics, Existentialism can allow for a distinctive virtue ethics of its own. No doubt, describing such an Existentialist virtue ethics puts both Existentialism and virtue ethics in something of a new light. But I have tried to show that there is no principled reason why Existentialism cannot include a virtue ethics. Moreover, I think this new light actually illuminates something helpful about both. On the one hand, this Existentialist virtue ethics opens up largely unexplored ethical possibilities for Existentialism. On the other hand, it provides a phenomenologically acute articulation of many features of conventional virtue ethics, while allowing us to ground virtue ethics on something more fundamental than arbitrary features of human psychology, namely, on essential structures of experience.

Notes

1. See Irene McMullin, *Existential Flourishing: A Phenomenology of the Virtues* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), Chapter 1.
2. See Steven Crowell, "Existentialism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2015).
3. See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 1948), p. 25.

4. In this paper, I understand Existentialism in a broad sense, as a historical philosophical movement centered around a certain set of ideas about existence and freedom, and including such figures as Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus, etc., and to some extent Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Certainly, there are formidable disagreements within this movement, and not all the figures I have just listed would adopt the moniker "Existentialist." For this reason, I will not attempt to develop a doctrine that would be entirely acceptable to all these thinkers. But neither will I attempt to explicate a single author in this tradition – I will not attempt to claim, for example, that Beauvoir takes herself to be a virtue ethicist. Instead, and while the impetus for this paper is drawn from Beauvoir, I will engage relatively freely with these different thinkers in an attempt to describe what we might, broadly speaking, call an Existentialist virtue ethics (rather than, say, a "Beauvoirian" or "Sartrean" virtue ethics).

5. I think my project is sympathetic to McMullin's – I am not attempting to offer a correction or conflicting account to hers. Rather, I think I develop a distinct way of articulating the role of virtue in Existentialist ethics here, one which I hope will complement her account, and to provide a concise response to some concerns about the possibility of an Existentialist virtue ethics. Briefly, whereas McMullin approaches virtue through human flourishing, conceived broadly in terms of responsiveness to practical reasons, my account starts from Beauvoir's idea of "willing oneself free" as the highest level normative demand. This starting point is not identical to McMullin's, but ultimately I think it comes quite close to hers, since in my view one could quite plausibly describe "willing oneself free," in Beauvoir's sense, in terms of something like McMullin's normative demands of self, other, and shared world.

6. Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics," in David Copp, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press 2007), 515-536, p. 516. Annas goes on to specify a "classical version" of virtue as, more specifically, "a disposition to act for reasons" (ibid., p. 516), embodying "a commitment to some ethical value" (ibid., p. 519), which she prefers to a weakened definition of virtue, accepted by other virtue theorists, simply as a "disposition to act" (ibid., p. 528).

7. Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 19.

8. Jonathan Webber, "Existentialism," in John Skorupski, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2010), 230-240, p. 232. For other accounts of Existentialist ethics, see William McBride, *Existentialist Ethics* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997); Mary Warnock, *Existentialist Ethics* (New York: MacMillan, 1967).

9. I have moved quickly here between the concepts of existence, consciousness, and freedom. Briefly, this is because on an Existentialist view, the fundamental fact about the "nature and structure" of our existence is consciousness. What distinguishes *existence*, in the way we have it, from the being of things like rocks or trees, is our consciousness. For reasons I won't explore here, Existentialists also hold that in virtue of consciousness, we are free. The key point I am considering at this point is that it is only virtue of this freedom that there can be values *for* consciousness.

10. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Basic Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 43.

11. Webber, op. cit., p. 233.

12. Sartre, op. cit., p. 43. There is not space, here, for an extended discussion of how Existentialism understands "freedom;" see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York:

Washington Square Press, 1984), Part IV, Chapter 1. Note, though, that in the present context, being free amounts to being fundamentally responsible for the meaning and value of one's own existence, this meaning or value not being guaranteed from the outside by a pre-existing nature, a God, or etc. Thus, Sartre writes that "if God does not exist" then we are not "provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behavior. … We are left alone, without excuse. This is what I meant when I say that man is condemned to be free." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Basic Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 32. Similarly, Beauvoir first discusses freedom, in the *Ethics of Ambiguity*, in the context of claiming there is no "foreign absolute" that could justify human existence. Beauvoir, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

13. Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 23.

14. Ibid., 24.

15. Ibid., op. cit., p. 24. For more on this distinction, in terms of "ontological freedom" and "moral freedom," see Kristina Arp, *The Bonds of Freedom* (Chicago, IL: Open Court), pp. 54-55.

16. Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 25.

17. Ibid., p. 25.

18. Why exactly we *should* will ourselves free, i.e., why moral freedom is actually *moral* in any recognizable sense, is of course a thorny problem for interpreters of Beauvoir – one which I leave aside since my project does not concern the foundations of Existentialism ethics, but the potential of this ethics to provide a virtue ethics. See Arp, op. cit., pp. 91-95, for one reading of Beauvoir on this point. See Jonathan Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), Chapter 10, for an exposition of Beauvoir's argument for this point in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*. Cf. Sartre, op. cit., pp. 42-43. Very briefly, the idea for both Beauvoir and Sartre is that freedom is the source of all values (insofar as nothing is valuable independently of a consciousness assigning it value). To will some valuable end, then, I ought to will the source of that value as itself valuable or an end. Of course, I can fail to recognize this requirement, namely in the attitude of bad faith, and so I can in one sense will without willing myself free. But this is to fail to recognize something essential about value or willing.

19. Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 25.

20. Beauvoir argues that willing one's own freedom entails willing the freedom of others, since freedom is inherently intersubjective. For example, she writes, "Every man needs the freedom of other men and, in a sense, always wants it, even though he may be a tyrant; the only thing he fails to do is to assume honestly the consequences of such a wish. Only the freedom of others keeps each one of us from hardening into the absurdity of facticity." Ibid., p. 77. Cf. Sartre, op. cit., p. 43. See Arp, op. cit., pp. 68-74, for an exposition of Beauvoir's argument. For Beauvoir's description of the adventurer and the tyrant, see *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Part II, "Personal Freedom and Others," and Arp, op. cit., pp. 60-4.

21. Beauvoir, op. cit., 27.

22. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 43.

23. Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 11. Or, Annas, who does define virtues as dispositions to act for reasons, is careful to explain that this disposition is exercised through an agent's practical reasoning, such that an exercise of virtue is "not the upshot of a causal buildup from previous actions but a *decision*." Annas, op. cit., 516.

24. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 1105b25-30.

25. Ibid., 1105a31-5. Cf. Kant's argument that virtue is not merely an "aptitude" or habit, but must result from "considered, firm, and continually purified principles." Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 515-516.

26. I'll leave aside here questions about whether Merleau-Ponty is properly termed an Existentialist. I take it that his account of freedom and existence are closely bound to those of Sartre and Beauvoir, though not identical, and so I see no harm in making use of his accounts, at least from the period of *The Phenomenology of Perception*, of "styles of existence," habit, and freedom.

27. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 469.

28. Ibid., 482.

29. For more on Merleau-Ponty's notion of style, applied in different ways, see Linda Singer, "Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style," *Man and World*, Vol. 14 (1981): 153-63; Samantha Mather, "Merleau-Ponty on Style as the Key to Perceptual Presence and Constancy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55 (2017): 693-727.

30. Merleau-Ponty, op. cit., p. 482.

31. Ibid., p. 466. Cf. Sartre (1984, 585).

32. Merleau-Ponty, op. cit., p. 466.

33. Merleau-Ponty makes a similar point about perception, that "every vision ultimately takes up, at the core of subjectivity, a total project of the world." Merleau-Ponty, op. cit., p. 427.

34. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), p. 586.

35. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 474.

36. He gives this manner the following flavor: "It is a question of a sort of original dispersion, a kind of waxlike flexibility depending on circumstances, a docile imitation of others … ." Ibid., p. 474.

37. This is also how I would respond to Crittenden's point that, for Sartre, the project of *being* virtuous or *being* authentic is itself abstract and inauthentic. Paul Crittenden, *Sartre in Search of an Ethics* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), p. 46. Sartre claims, for example, that authenticity "leads to renouncing every project of being courageous (cowardly), noble (vile), etc. Because they are not realizable and because they all lead in any case to alienation. Authenticity reveals that the only meaningful project is that of doing (not that of being) … ." Sartre, op. cit., 475. Attempting to *be* something is always a kind of bad faith, for Sartre. But I am not arguing that the Existentialist should pursue the project of *being* virtuous, just that to *will* authentically goes hand in hand with a certain style of disclosing meaning.

38. Merleau-Ponty, op. cit., 466.

39. Compare, for example, Marjorie Grene, "Authenticity: An Existentialist Virtue," *Ethics*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (1952): 266-274; Jonathan Webber, "Existentialism," in John Skorupski, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2010), 230-240, p. 233; and Jonathan Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 152. Note that, just as I am not suggesting that Existentialism exhorts us to adopt a project of *being* virtuous, neither do I mean that it exhorts us to *be* authentic. As Sartre puts it, "If you seek authenticity

for authenticity's sake, you are no longer authentic." Sartre, op. cit., p. 4. Rather, the Existentialist exhorts us to will our projects authentically.

40. Jonathan Webber, "Existentialism," in John Skorupski, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2010), 230-240, p. 233.

41. Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 25. Cf. Sartre's claim, "When I recognize, as entirely authentic, that man is a being whose existence precedes his essence, and that he is a free being who cannot, in any circumstances, but will his freedom, at the same time I realize that I cannot not will the freedom of others." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Basic Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 43. Note that, when Beauvoir speaks of *authenticité* in *Ethics of Ambiguity*, she usually speaks of "authentic freedom," as she does here, but she does also speak of existing authentically, "authentic man" [*l'homme authentique*], an "authentically moral attitude," etc. Beauvoir, op. cit., pp. 13, 63.

42. Note that authenticity and moral freedom are not thereby identical. Moral freedom is a property of the will – namely, its willing itself free – whereas authenticity is a state of character. My argument throughout is that moral freedom and authenticity (virtue) go together, or are conditions for each other. They require each other without being identical, much as enclosing three angles and having three sides go together as properties of a triangle, with the difference that here, moral freedom is supposed to be primary in the order of value.

43. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), pp. 220-221.

44. Admittedly, Heidegger uses these terms in an ontological, and not moral, sense. As he says of fallenness, authenticity, and inauthenticity, "In relation to these phenomena, … our own Interpretation is purely ontological in its aims, and is far removed from any moralizing critique of any everyday Dasein … ." Ibid., pp. 210-211. He says of inauthenticity that he does not ascribe it the sense of "a bad or deplorable ontical property." Ibid., p. 220. Heidegger's orientation is also apparent in his remark about his concept of "Being-guilty" that it is "the existential condition for the possibility of the 'morally' good and for that of the 'morally' evil – that is, for morality in general and for the possible forms which this may take factically. The primordial 'Being-guilty' cannot be defined by morality, since morality already presupposes it for itself." Ibid., 332. So, Heidegger argues that we should not take his terms in a moral sense, since they name the ontological conditions for morality. But nothing about this claim rules out a moral project – such a project is just not Heidegger's. I would suggest that Heidegger and Beauvoir are simply working at different levels of analysis, and so I don't see any principled problem with invoking "authenticity" in the present context. This is not to say there is no tension between the way in which I am using "authenticity" and the way Heidegger does. For example, nothing in Heidegger suggests that he would talk about authenticity or inauthenticity as habitual, as if one person could be more authentic than another. But, again, this discrepancy may be due to differences in the level of analysis, and even were it not, this may say no more than that I am discussing a different phenomenon than does Heidegger.

45. Cf. McMullin's definition of virtue as "modes of comportment in which the agent is attuned to these limitations [human finitude] and committed to addressing them in ways that are effective at realizing a condition of normative responsiveness despite the challenges they pose." McMullin, op. cit., p. 70. McMullin's also thinks of virtues as "problem-solving stances," understood as "tendencies that allow us to respond well to existential difficulties that afflict all human beings in virtue of the kind of existence we live." Ibid., 69-70. In my terms, McMullin is

here describing something like authenticity – a tendency to own up to and negotiate the demands of human finitude – in terms of virtue. Note that whereas McMullin thinks of the virtues as negotiating conflicting practical reasons in the face of human limitations, I suggest that Beauvoir conceives virtues as negotiating the various ambiguities of the human condition. While these accounts are not identical, I think they are quite close, since these practical demands (e.g., self and other) and limitations could I think also be described with Beauvoir's framework of ambiguity.

46. Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 27.

47. This claim is akin to John Russon's claim that agency is itself a virtue, which requires a set of "primary virtues," i.e., confidence, courage, and creativity. See John Russon, "The Virtues of Agency: A Phenomenology of Confidence, Courage, and Creativity," in Kevin Hermberg and Paul Gyllenhammer, eds., *Phenomenology and Virtue Ethics* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 165-179. Similarly, I am claiming that fully to be an agent – moral freedom or authenticity – entails adopting a set of character traits.

48. However, on this account, the form an authentic will takes (the way in which we will) does, I think, rule out certain contents of the will (certain projects). I cannot really, for example, generously steal from those in need.

49. See John Duncan, "Descent to the Things Themselves: The Virtue of Dissent," in Kevin Hermberg and Paul Gyllenhammer, eds., *Phenomenology and Virtue Ethics* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 191-211, for a deeper thematization of dissent as an existential virtue, albeit one with which my account does not necessarily agree on the whole.

50. See, e.g., the opening of Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*. Beauvoir, op. cit., pp. 5-8. Cf. Arp, op. cit., pp. 47-54.

51. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), p. 103.

52. Cf. Beauvoir's description of festivity, in which the free expenditure of goods realizes the negativity of the for-itself, but in an unsustainable manner. Beauvoir, op. cit., pp. 136-137.

53. Cf. McMullin, op. cit., Chapter 9. She writes, e.g., that "Courage is the virtue in which one chooses one's better self – i.e., one responds to the central normative claims at stake in a particular situation – despite the costs and risks associated with doing so." Ibid., p. 203.

54. According to Hegel, the master is the one who as the abstract for-itself "is not attached to any specific *existence*, … is not attached to life." G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 113. The one who becomes the servant represents an advance over the master, insofar as they learn "that life is essential to it as pure self-consciousness." Ibid., p. 115. We might see the character of the master here as a sort of rashness, understood as an inability to recognize life as essential to the for-itself. Departing somewhat from Hegel, we might contrast this with cowardice as a type that identifies itself with life as opposed to self-consciousness. Note that by invoking Hegel I don't mean to imply that, for Beauvoir, there is any kind of ultimate resolution of ambiguity in an *Aufhebung*. I just mean that Hegel can help illuminate the ambiguous situation I have in mind.

55. Merleau-Ponty, op. cit., p. 143.

56. Ibid., p. 154.

57. Ibid., p. 155.

58. Ibid., p. 155.

59. Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 145.

60. Ibid., pp. 155-156.

61. See Jack Reynolds, "Phenomenology and Virtue Ethics: Complementary Antitheoretical Methodological and Ethical Trajectories?" in Kevin Hermberg and Paul Gyllenhammer, eds., *Phenomenology and Virtue Ethics* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 113-131, for a more sophisticated discussion of this antitheoretical trajectory in phenomenology and virtue ethics.

62. Cf. John Russon, Personality as Equilibrium: fragility and plasticity in (inter-)personal identity," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2017): 623-635. Russon describes being governed by the mean as acting "toward one's situation with a supple mode of plastic responsiveness" and agency as achieved in an "interpretative equilibrium of self and world." Ibid., pp. 627, 629.

63. Aristotle, op. cit., Book X, Chapter 8. Cf. Augustine's point that complete happiness is impossible in this life, since our very virtues imply vices and imperfections. Augustine, *City of God* (New York: Penguin Classics), Book XIX, Chapter 4. Cf. also Kant's claim that "human morality in its highest stage can still be nothing more than virtue." Kant, op. cit., p. 515.

64. Aristotle, op. cit., pp. 1098a10-20.

65. One might wonder whether the concept of "bad faith" is equivalent to that of "ambivalence" developed earlier. I think Sartre compellingly makes the point that bad faith uses ambivalence, and that defining value simply in terms of human nature amounts to a kind of ambivalence. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), Part One, Chapter Two, section II, "Patterns of Bad Faith." But I am not prepared to argue that all ambivalence is bad faith, or that the two are conceptually identical. For this reason, I avoid assimilating them here.

66. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Basic Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 28.

67. Heidegger, op. cit., §10.

68. Nor is virtue ethics necessarily defined naturalistically. Cf. Annas, op. cit., pp. 525-528.

69. Ibid., p. 221.

70. Cf. McMullin's treatment of patience. McMullin, op. cit., Chapter 7.

71. Compare McMullin's helpful response to objectivist or naturalist accounts of virtue ethics. Ibid., pp. 25-30.

72. Reynolds, op. cit., p. 126.

73. Sartre, op. cit., p. 37.

74. Ibid., p. 37.

75. Cf. Kant's argument that we can't include habit in virtue, because habit would violate the freedom necessary for morality. Kant, op. cit., p. 537.

76. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 480.

77. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), p. 586.

78. Ibid., p. 586.

79. Ibid., p. 585.

80. Beauvoir, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

81. So, I think would many virtue ethicists. Cf. Annas' insistence on the role of personal reflection, and aiming at the ideal rather than the traditional, in classical virtue theories. Annas, op. cit., pp. 523-524.

82. Aristotle, op. cit., pp. 1105a21-26.
83. Merleau-Ponty, op. cit., p. 466.
84. Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 26.