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Gender and the History of Philosophy: An Analysis of Essentialism and Gender Disempowerment

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GENDER AND THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY:
AN ANALYSIS OF ESSENTIALISM AND GENDER DISEMPOWERMENT

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

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ABSTRACT

In this project, I examine the philosophical theories of truth, gender, and power, and the parallels between each theory. I argue that both Friedrich Nietzsche and William James advanced theories that deconstructed the idea that human beings, or "man" and "woman," were bound by an essential nature or innate characteristics that determined their social role. Though this critique was robust, I argue that it enforces gender disempowerment on a number of platforms since the theories did not analyze gender, but rather truth and value. Simone de Beauvoir, I argue, expanded Nietzsche's and James' thought, but included a critical analysis of gender and disempowerment. De Beauvoir's idea that gender identities are imposed and created by power defines gender as a social-construct, and something that individuals, though only privileged "man," have autonomy over. Though this analysis is extensive and emancipatory, I argue that de Beauvoir, by defining "woman" as something that it, e.g. the "other" gender related to "man," de Beauvoir establishes as unified category of gender which entails exclusion of individuals who do not fall under these rigid categories. I argue that Judith Butler's conception of gender as an imposed mechanism by power to define, classify, and separate individuals is the most exhaustive and inclusive conception of gender among the authors that I examine, and actively subverts the oppressive practices of sociopolitical power.

Keywords: Anti-essentialism, gender binary, philosophy of gender, feminist theory.

Dedicated to:

My friends and family

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-F.T.D.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Philosophers William James and Friedrich Nietzsche, writing respectively within the late-19th, and James into the early-20th, century developed extensive philosophical analyses devoted to critiquing essentialist and metaphysical theories that had influenced Western thought within the discipline of philosophy since Plato. James' approach grounded truth through a subjective means of practice, thus defining truth and value in terms of its practical import and its ability to make sense of the external world.[1] James' understanding of truth on a large, social scale was a repeated practice of some types of subjective maxims. Truth is related to its practical, real-world usage, and this practical usage determines its value within a society. Mathematical concepts, James argued, are not platonic entities that exist beyond human experience within some metaphysical realm, but rather subjective concepts that were created and practiced for their practical usage within the physical world, e.g. their ability to help human beings make sense of the world within scientific discourse. The repeated practice of these fictional concepts ground them as socially-constructed truths. Truth and empirical objects, anything existing in the physical world, have no essential properties or natures. Rather, truth is created by subjects.

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[1] William James, "What Pragmatism Means," *Pragmatism,* in *William James: Writings 1902-1910,* ed. Bruce Kuklick and the Library of America (New York, New York: Penguin Publishing, 1987): 508-509.

Nietzsche expressed a similar anti-essentialist understanding of truth and

metaphysical concepts, claiming that truth is an individualistic construction. Through

Nietzsche's thought experiment of "the Death of God," metaphysics and objective truth

lose all bearing upon the physical world—in fact, the physical or experiential world is the

only world that exists.[2] Metaphysical realities are fictitious concepts conjured in order to

give individuals meaning and power over their existence, and to allow truth, in an

objectively binding sense, to have significance and import. The gods Nietzsche criticizes

are represented in both rationalistic thought that emerged from the Enlightenment, that

established truth within a large metaphysical system of reality, as well as Christian

doctrine, thin addition to the god of Judeo-Christian traditions who established truth

within doctrine and laws. Nietzsche understands both Christian and rationalistic

systematization as the manipulation of truth into a metaphysical or supernatural

"beyond," which enables individual beings to find meaning and structure under the threat

of chaos and meaninglessness.

This understanding of truth, Nietzsche claims, forces the individual being away

from themselves and places emphasis on a reality that does not exist. Reality, as

Nietzsche describes it, is purely empirical sensibility; anything beyond sensible objects is

nonexistent.[3] Thus, metaphysical reality is nonexistent, and truth and value are purely

subjectively-created concepts. Nietzsche denies the existence of truth in-itself, existing

as an objective entity that determines the nature of the physical world, and describes truth

as an individual creation, based upon their own desires and drives. Truth, individuals,

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[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Madman," *The Gay Science,* Trans. Walter Kauffmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1974): 181-182.
[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Reasons," *Twilight of the Idols*, Trans. Richard Polt (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997): 19-20.

and physical reality are not essential in nature. Rather, truth is synthetic. Truth is created by individuals based upon their desires, instead of truth determining reality and individual desires. Nietzsche philosophy was highly influential in 19th century social theory and psychology, often influencing social and political movements that he was situated amongst within his historical context. These particular sociopolitical movements criticized notions of sexuality and gender relations as being understood as essentially different, but still operated within essentialism. Feminist movements simply claimed that there was no essential difference between masculinity and femininity, rather than transcending essentialism altogether.

It is clear to see that both James and Nietzsche are both describing a version of truth and reality that is anti-metaphysical and anti-essentialist. Rather than truth existing within the objective realm of metaphysics, it is created and practiced by individuals in order to determine their own version of reality and nature. Reality, objects, and existence have no essential properties that exist beyond their practice or interpretation and determine their existence within the world. This understanding of truth shows a paradigm shift from essentialist notions of reality to anti-essentialism within philosophical analysis.

One may think that gender essentialism, the view that gender, masculine and feminine, is produced by essentialized sexual difference, now has no place within anti-essentialist thought. Anti-essentialism refutes the idea of anything existing as essential, therefore essential natures of sex and gender, determined by metaphysical concepts, cannot exist under this paradigm of thought. One would assume that this conception of truth and reality would undermine all forms of essentialism, including gender

essentialism; however, as I will argue in the forthcoming chapter, they do not. Both Nietzsche and James tend to enforce binaried understandings of gender within social structures. Gender essentialism and its resultant disempowerment can become an individualist or social practice, where gender binaries and gender oppression can be argued to improve social relations to efficiently function. James' conception of truth makes no effort to analyze gender or its relation within the paradigm of truth and social practice. Though it deflates the idea that sex and gender are essentially determined, and arguments that rest upon the idea that the gender binary is essentially derived are now challenged and deconstructed, it still allows for a paradigm of gender disempowerment. No argument can be given to satisfy this flaw, which operates under James' understanding. James also justifies a notion of a sex and gender binary, thus entailing oppression and exclusion of any individual who operates outside of this binary.

Nietzsche's thought succumbs to the same fault. As I will demonstrate, Nietzsche's conception of truth and value does criticize and disprove arguments for gender oppression and binaried social relations based on essential characteristics.[4] However, disempowerment and binaried social relations can be enforced by being supported as subjective creations based on willful desire and drives. Social relations can easily adopt a binaried structure of gender and justify this relation through action upon subjective desire and maxims. Also, Nietzsche's anti-essentialist philosophy does nothing to dismantle a binary of sex or gender, or challenge the notion that sex or gender may have more than two rigid and unmixable categories. Thus, Nietzsche's thought also entails oppression and exclusion, and is not a critique of binaried social understandings. Neither James nor Nietzsche analyzed gender disempowerment under their conception of

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[4] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 182.

truth and value. Anti-essentialism, though providing useful arguments to undermine gender essentialism and disempowerment based on essentially different sexual natures, does not critically analyze gender and gendered social relations. It is not until, I will argue, the mid-to-late-20th century that gender is critically analyzed under a philosophical paradigm.

Philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, I will argue, synthesized anti-essentialist thought into a working critique of gender disempowerment and binaried social relations. De Beauvoir reworked and reanalyzed the shortcomings of anti-essentialist thought, but used anti-essentialism and notions of subjectively or socially-imposed truth within her own framework, which sought to critically engage gender disempowerment and the various social and intellectual theories that were analyzing gender. De Beauvoir held the belief that gender and sexuality were distinct entities, and neither of which were essentially determined to behave and operate in any certain way. This belief is justified through anti-essentialist arguments, reinforced through James and Nietzsche. However, de Beauvoir critically analyzes gender and claims that notions and relations of gender are contingent upon the values and truths of a socio-historical situation. Simply put, social norms and understandings regarding gender are adopted and applied to society as objective facts about the nature of gender and reality.

De Beauvoir understands these norms as being synthetically imposed by structures of power and privilege, rather than being objectively true and essential. Norms are created and reinforced through social relations and institutions, and these norms are merely synthetically created by systems of power in order to maintain their power. Though de Beauvoir goes much further in criticizing gender disempowerment and its

relation to essentialism, she operates within the framework of anti-essentialism, primarily the framework of James and Nietzsche. Anti-essentialist understandings of truth and reality are utilized by de Beauvoir, but synthesized in order to create a critical understanding of gender and power within the discipline of academic philosophy. I will argue in the following work that James' and Nietzsche's anti-essentialist thought was influential yet harmful to a philosophical understanding and of gender and a critique of gender disempowerment, and was later modified to serve as a critical analysis of gender and unjust social relations by de Beauvoir.

Though de Beauvoir establishes a philosophical critique of essentialism and gender disempowerment, she still operates under a gender binary, and in attempting to define "woman" and the context of "woman" as unified, de Beauvoir consequently defines "woman's" situation as essential. For de Beauvoir, "woman" is defined as "Other," in relation to" man," no matter the socio-historical context that defines either gender identity. Thus, de Beauvoir's critique consequently establishes a unified definition of "woman" and operates under the understanding of a two-gender-two-sex model, which enforces a gender binary and essentializes "woman" through an idea of a unified definition. De Beauvoir's critique of gender disempowerment within the context of anti-essentialism in compelling and liberating, since disempowerment based on an essential nature has no grounding; however, that understanding fails also to be exhaustive, since it operates within a gender binary and unifies "woman" and the oppression of "woman" under an essential definition.

Judith Butler, writing respectively within third-wave feminist movement of the 1990s, recognizes the problematic consequences of de Beauvoir's theory. As Butler

understands the history of feminist theory, feminism has consistently attempted to unify

"woman" in order to create a subject for sociopolitical recognition and emancipation.

Though this methodology is tempting, it is problematic. First, as Butler claims, by

assuming a unified definition of "woman," feminism operates under the same

exclusionary and oppressive model that subordinates "woman" in the first place.[5] A

unified definition of "woman" fails to account for other facets of one's identity, such as

race, class, and sexual orientation. It also assumes that there is a unified and essentially

binding criterion of identity that all of "woman" shares, which fails to account for

cultural or social differences in subjects.[6]

Butler also claims that the idea of sociopolitical emancipation, which is the goal

of feminist theory, is itself a paradox. In order to gain sociopolitical emancipation,

"woman" has to appeal to a political power structure which has the ability to recognize

and equalize subjects. When feminist theory appeals to this structure, however, it appeals

to the structure of power that is responsible for its subjugation in the first place.[7] The

paradox of feminist theory is that it seeks emancipation through oppressive means and

appeals to the source of its subjugation for emancipation. Feminist theory is in need of a

new critique of gender, power, and sexed categories that transcend the normal restrictions

of a binary and essential identity. Butler offers a new method critique for feminist

theory. In the work that follows, I will maintain the idea that anti-essentialist thought

fails to critique gender disempowerment outside of an essentialist understanding, while

de Beauvoir fails to transcend a gender binary and offer a fully anti-essentialist

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[5] Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," *Gender Trouble* (New York, New York: Routledge Classics, 2007): 4.
[6] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 6.
[7] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 2-3.

conception of gender identity, and that de Beauvoir entails a form of gender

disempowerment because of this. I will conclude that Butler's conception of gender and

identity is the most exhaustive theory to critique subversive power, essentialist notions,

and gender disempowerment within the paradigm of philosophical analyses of gender or

truth presented by Nietzsche, James, or Beauvoir. I will also conclude that Butler offers a

challenge to rigid and exclusionary tropes of masculinity and femininity.

CHAPTER 2

NIETZSCHE, JAMES, AND SUBJECTIVITY

Friedrich Nietzsche and William James were both situated within a particular

tradition of Western philosophical thought. Metaphysics, since Plato, had formulated

truth to be objectively binding, existing beyond all human experience and interpretation.

Plato, through his idea of metaphysical Forms, defined truth and reality in this way.

Nietzsche and James were both responding to this interpretation of truth, and critically

engaging its validity. In the section that follows, I will examine Plato's theory of the

Forms, particularly his idea of the "divided line," and the essential and metaphysical

effects that stem from this theory. Then, I will examine, in some detail, Nietzsche's

response to this interpretation, and his anti-essentialist understanding of truth and value.

I will briefly highlight various social and intellectual movements that use Nietzsche

arguments—that also influence Nietzsche's work—to give context to Nietzsche's anti-

essentialist thought, and detail a concrete example of its practice. I will then examine

James' pragmatic understanding of truth, as a second anti-essentialist response to Plato.

Last, I will highlight the success and failures of these anti-essentialist approaches to truth

and essentialism, and their correlation to gender and binaried social relations.

To best grasp Nietzsche's and James' anti-essentialist thought, it will be most

helpful to examine Plato's account of metaphysics and the essentialist understanding of

objective reality that it entails. This will also shed important light on how Nietzsche's

and James' ideology helped shape and structure de Beauvoir's account of gender

a social-construct. Plato claims, in his work *The Republic*, that reality is divided into two

realms: the physical-or-sensory realm, and the metaphysical-or-intelligible realm.[8] For

Plato, any object belonging in the sensory realm is a mere copy of its corresponding Form

in the metaphysical realm. So, for example, when some entity in the sensory realm is

deemed as beautiful, this entity is appealing to the Form of beauty, and thus has the

specific characteristics of beauty that the Form entails. Form-object relation is essential

and objective and the metaphysical Forms give structure to the physical objects. Plato

uses another example to demonstrate the physical-metaphysical nature of reality. Plato

uses the thought experiment of an individual comparing two sticks, both located in the

sensory realm, that are equal in size. Plato claims that the sticks are appealing to the

Form of equality, which is located in the metaphysical realm. For the sticks to be equal,

and for an individual to know what the function of equality is, there must be an

established, perfect Form of equality that an individual recognizes when making this

comparison; or that entities mimic when they are sensibly equal. The Form of equality is

the essence of physical equality, and thus defines its ontological standing in the sensible

realm.[9] The Forms give things their essences, and all things have an essence. Forms

structure nature, and Forms are objective and perfect. So, for Plato, every entity in the

sensory realm has a specific and essential purpose and set of traits that is located in the

metaphysical realm. Metaphysical Forms are real and true, for Plato, and appearances are

merely appealing to their essential Forms. Platonic metaphysics, then, gives

essentialism—of any kind—its grounding. Essential natures must exist since the Forms

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[8] Plato, "Book VI," *The Republic,* trans. Tom Griffith, ed. G.R.F.F Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 509d-511e, 216-220.
[9] Plato, *The Republic,* 511a-e.

are the essential part of any physical object, and no object can exist without its corresponding Form. Forms and their objectively true status are privileged over sensory objects and their contingently relational status, since the Forms are the nature of anything that exists within the sensory world.

Essentialism is clearly entailed from this objective understanding of Form-object relations. Forms are true, and thus structure all things that appeal to them, namely everything within the sensory realm of existence. The Forms are the true structure of reality. Gender is essentialized through this understanding, since it human beings, or males and females, have essential natures. Maleness corresponds to its established Form, as does femaleness. It is not a far-reaching step to justifiably claim that males are privileged over females because of their essential natures. The masculine nature obtains its certain properties from its Form, as does the feminine nature. It can be justifiably argued that males and females are not only different, but that one is better than the other because of innate concepts stemming from its nature or essence. Social and intellectual disempowerment is entailed since social norms can arbitrarily pick-and-chose which "natural" properties are to be privileged over the other, and that these properties are essentially true and necessary. The only way out of this argumentation is to challenge the paradigm of truth and essentialism itself, which Nietzsche and James both did. Now that Platonic essentialism has been discussed, it will be simple to see the intent and arguments that anti-essentialism challenges.

Nietzsche rejects the idea that there is a world that is beyond the sensible, human world—he denies all existence of objective, intrinsic value and worth. For Nietzsche, the world has no objective truth or purpose. God's death marks the historical and intellectual

moment that reality, truth, and value ceased to have essential characteristics and

justifications. Platonism claimed that there existed a world in-itself where all objective,

essential entities existed; Nietzscheanism, on the other hand, asserts that there is no

existing world that is in-itself, rather all truth and purpose is grounded within the sensible

world or human being. All value and truth, then, is contingent upon individual or social

creation and justification. Reality is not fixed within an objective, essential framework.

Reality, as Nietzsche defines it, is an interpretation of the experiential world, rather than

something that is-in-itself.[10] Reality is perception and conjecture on the account of

individual or social creativity.

   With this assertion, Nietzschean thought is anti-essentialist. Nietzsche's

expression that "God has died" has more implications than just the void of objectivity in

reality; this claim has another facet. Since objective justification and purpose has ceased

to exist within individual conscience, individual human beings are responsible for the

creation of value, meaning, and purpose.[11] The Death of God, then, has two implications:

the dismissal of objectivity and the existential responsibility for individuals to create

themselves and their own "truths" based on individual desire. Individuals are allotted

radical freedom over their lives and values once binding objectivity has ceased to become

a method for defining truth and existence. This freedom leaves the future open for

individuals to create themselves according to their own desired purposes. Nietzsche

claims that, in the aftermath of God or objectivity, individuals "shall become the masters

over [themselves], masters also over [their] virtues…" and are, thus, responsible for

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[10] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 19-20.
[11] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 181-182.

themselves and their desires.[12] An individual's purpose and character is discovered within that individual, rather than outside them. Nietzsche thus disposes of essential entities and metaphysical, objective truths. Through the thought-experiment of the Death of God, Nietzsche has rejected Platonic metaphysics and essentialism as a whole, and has defined truth and value as a social or individualistic creation; meaning, value, purpose, and reality are assigned, not essentially derived at from objective entities. Nietzsche's anti-essentialism marked a new paradigm shift in academic philosophy, and a move towards an existentialist account of philosophy and intellectualism.

Nietzsche's "Death of God" is only one example of his anti-essentialist philosophy. Nietzsche establishes an idea of an *Intellectual Conscience* in a number of his works—especially his novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. For Nietzsche, this "conscience" is the only way individuals can create their own meaning and value in the wake of the death of God. What Nietzsche is describing through this idea is the drive and desires within an individual—their *Will to Power*—that forces them to introspectively examine and reexamine their value and choices, in accordance to their own preferences.[13] Nietzsche claimed that nihilism, or the state of apathy and despair in the face of the meaningless of existence, was simply a failure in individual desire.[14] An individual, for Nietzsche, is made up of various forces of drives and desires (i.e. their *Will to Power*) which stems from their *Intellectual Conscience*.[15] Nietzsche is claiming that, since there is no objective purpose in the world, individual beings must create their purpose from

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[12] Friedrich Nietzsche, from "The Death of God, *Existentialist Philosophy: An Introduction,* ed. Nathan Oaklnader (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Publishing, 1996): 77.
[13] Robert Pippin, "Introduction," in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* by Friedrich Nietzsche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 161.
[14] Pippin, "Introduction," from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* 161-162.
[15] Pippin, "Introduction," from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* 163.

their own desires and preferences, which is found through a constant "checking-in" with oneself and one's desires—or their *Intellectual Conscience.* One's *Intellectual Conscience* is defined, then, as the constant examination and revaluation of their desires and values. Nietzsche has rejected all definition of values and truths from an objective understanding to a social and individual construction based upon desire and preference. Platonic and Enlightenment thought are rejected, the current approach by social intellectualism has been defined as fallacious, and individual creativity has been posited as a means to truth and value. Nietzsche's anti-essentialism was groundbreaking in academic philosophy, for it shifted significance from an objective, essential understanding of truth and value, to a socio-individualistic understanding. However, within the discussion of gender and gender-essentialism, Nietzsche's anti-essentialist philosophy is problematic and caused problems for 19th and 20th century feminist theory.[16]

In order to best understand Nietzsche and the contributions that he made to philosophy and to the later analysis of gender, it is imperative to understand Nietzsche's historical context—in particular, to draw parallels from the ongoing debates of gender, sexuality, and intellectual discourse to Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche anti-essentialism was influencing and being influenced by specific movements of late-19th century Germany, and these movements are a concrete example of Nietzsche's influence on notions of gender. Nietzsche was writing at the latter part of the 19th century, after the

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[16] I am familiar with the work of Kelly Oliver and Maudemarie Clark, which analyzes Nietzsche's use of "woman" and misogyny and the parallels each have with truth and life-affirmation within Nietzsche's philosophy. I am concerned with Nietzsche's anti-essentialism and its success and failures regarding critical analyses of gender, especially relating to later gender theorists such as de Beauvoir and Butler, which is not analyzed under contemporary scholarship. For a further discussion of this Nietzsche use of truth and life-affirmation and its gendered parallels, see *Feminist Interpretations of Nietzsche.*

Enlightenment had undermined the power of Christianity to be the most compelling answer and justification to a variety of philosophical and intellectual quandaries. The world was now structured by a metaphysical, rationalist system of thought, and truth was independent of the physical world. Germany, in this post-Enlightenment world, was operating under this scientific understanding of phenomenological examinations. Sexuality, at the turn of the 19th century, was also under strict scientific analysis—specifically the sexual sphere of individual behavior and the innate drives that this sexuality implied. A wealth of intellectual rhetoric concerning sexuality appeared in Germany at the beginning of the 19th century, which then had a tremendously significant effect on social and political discourse. Sexuality determined one's existence in society, since, according to the social sciences that were prominent in this period, sexuality was correlated with an individual behavior. Gender, sexuality, and social "place" were viewed under one specific paradigm: the biological analysis.[17] Through medical studies, sexuality and sexually-driven social roles were established by, and for, working systems of power.

Sexuality, social order, and identity were combined into a theory of biological essentialism. e.g. that males and females had essential sexual, and thus character, traits that were tied to their biological makeup, that shaped the political, social, and intellectual sphere of Germany from the early 19th century until the 20th century. According to contemporary historiographical studies on sexuality in modern Germany, sexuality and its correlation to individual social existence was defined by "a set of concepts, institutions, and practices developed by the bourgeoisie" and thus enforced by these

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[17] Edward Dickinson and Richard Wetzell, "The Historiography of Modern Sexuality in Modern Germany," *The German History Society* vol. 52, 3 (2005): 294-295.

social relations of power.[18] Notions of sexuality and sexual practices were constructed by various social structures and then normalized through biological studies and the social and political acceptance of these constructs. Sexuality and society were related interdependently, since sexuality had been conjured to determine the order of society, and one's status in society was thus determined by one's "innate" sexual drives and corresponding character traits—one's sexual drives, under the interpretation of 19th century German intellectuals, was directly related to one's cognitive and social capacities.[19] Social intellectualism viewed the male sex drive as strong and forceful, thus entailing their assertiveness and independence within their given social relations. Female sex drives, on the other hand, were deemed as weak and submissive, thus entailing a social existence of celibacy and interdependence.[20] Sex drives were a determining factor of how one would behave, and what one's situation in society ought to be, under the current understanding of 19th century sexology. Sexuality was a facet of individual identity, since it determined one's character qualities which was said to be solely related to one's biological makeup. This led power-systems to define individuals and their place in the social order based upon their innate sexual drives, and based upon the definition of sexuality that biology conjured for specific groups of individuals. Since sexuality was "elaborated by medical experts—doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, [and] sexologists," as Edward Dickinson and Robert Wetzell claim, social power systems had justification and credible "proof" that sexuality produced innate character traits, and biological essentialism could then manage society in a specific manner.[21] Thus, as a number of

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[18] Dickinson and Wetzell, "The Historiography of Modern Sexuality in Modern Germany," 296.
[19] Dickinson and Wetzell, "The Historiography of Modern Sexuality in Modern Germany," 296-297.
[20] Dickinson and Wetzell, "The Historiography of Modern Sexuality in Modern Germany," 295-297.
[21] Dickinson and Wetzell, "The Historiography of Modern Sexuality in Modern Germany," 296.

scholars claim, power-structures adopted and enforced notions of sexuality and social

identity and determined how individuals were situated within this construction.

Though gender was not specifically analyzed, *per se*, under this biological

construction of identity and social structure that defined one through their innate

biological sexuality, constructions of gender certainly derived from it. Notions of power

constructed sexual drives and concepts of biology to be essential to an individual's

character, thus essential to an individual's social place. Gender and sexuality, in the late-

19th century, were combined into a unified definition of identity. Sexuality and its innate,

biological concepts defined masculinity and femininity, and their corresponding place in

society. Politics, economics, and social relations were determined by one's constructed

gender role. Femininity became known to be passive, submissive, and "pure," in tandem

with "woman's" innately weak and passive sexual drive. If a "woman" escaped her rigid

social or sexual classification, then she was seen as degenerate by social German society

throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. An individual's place was defined for them,

and this place was contingent upon relations of biology, power, and sexual drives. The

previously established gendered binary of social order, where masculinity is privileged

over femininity, was being reinforced by new scientific discourse and manipulated by

systems of sociopolitical power.

Various feminist movements in early 20th century Germany began to challenge

this notion of gender classification and oppression, and "woman's" place inside of this

oppressively constructed system. Biological, innate sexual drives were the focus of

feminist scrutiny in late 19th century German intellectualism. Feminist and social theorist

Henriette Furth directly challenged the "unscientific" consensus of "woman's" sexual

character, and challenged "woman's" corresponding place in society. Furth produced a study, with the help of various 19th century biologists, that compared the sexual drives of male and female plants and animals, and concluded that there was no essential difference between them; she then related this finding to human sexuality, and exclaimed that there was no difference in male and female drives and sexual capacities, and, thus, no difference in male and female characteristics. The place of "woman" in German society—the place of submissive, maternal passiveness— Furth concluded, was unjust.[22] Prior to Furth's study, it was constructed that "woman" was tied to her sexual drive, which was established as lax or weak—as compared to the relentlessly strong masculine drive. Furth reversed this ideology, and advocated that the sexual drive in females was no different than that of males, and that "woman" ought to act upon this sexual drive in hopes of gaining sexual and political equality, since the politics of social society were strongly tied to one's social-sexual perception. This feminist movement marked a shift in intellectual discourse on sexuality and social structure in Germany at the turn of the 20th century.

In the 1870s, social-psychology produced a number of studies on the sexuality of "woman," that determined, just as men, women had strong, innate desires, drives, traits, and women were capable of being autonomous beings in relation to these desires—but, were still inferior to men's drives and traits. The ideology that "woman" ought to be celibate ceased prominence with this new scientific "discovery," and more social space opened for women to morally and socially act upon their sexual desires.[23] Though this

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[22] Kristen Leng, "An Elusive Phenomenon: Feminism, Sexology, and the Female Sex Drive in German at the Turn of the 20th Century," *Centaurus* vol. 55 (2013): 131-132.
[23] Leng, "An Elusive Phenomenon: Feminism, Sexology, and the Female Sex Drive in German at the Turn of the 20th Century," 136.

study and newly established ideology helped "woman" politically and socially, it still maintained a fixed notion of essentialism—"woman" and "man" had essential, innate characteristics that were tied to their gender. Though Furth claimed that there was no difference between the sexual and character qualities of masculinity and femininity, she maintained that there were still essential defining traits of individuals—these traits just were not different between men and women. Nonetheless, there were still defining, essential traits within men and women, these traits were now just viewed as the same. Prior to Furth's and the social-psychologists analysis, sexuality was essential to an individual innate character, and this version privileged men; Furth's and social-psychology's analysis claimed that men and women were essentially *the same*, using biology to back their claims. Though Furth's analysis, along with the new analysis of scientific sexology of the 1870s, binaried essentialism—the idea that male sex drive, and thus males in general, is privileged over female sex drive—essentialism still existed in academic thought. Furth failed to deny, as did the social scientists of her context, that any essential characteristics existed within individuals and their characters.

Though Nietzsche details an extensive account of anti-essentialism, and establishes a thorough philosophical analysis regarding truth, meaning, and individual value and freedom, Nietzsche does not give a working analysis of gender or gender disempowerment. Gender is not analyzed under Nietzsche's anti-essentialist philosophy, and this philosophy is not utilized to scrutinize gender disempowerment or a gender binary. Under Nietzsche's anti-essentialism, gender disempowerment can actually be enforced. Since all truth and value is based upon individual desire and preference, gender disempowerment—or a privileging of masculinity over femininity, as social history has

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shown is a popular paradigm of social structure—can be argued and justified as an expression of an individual or social preference. A truth of gendered-disempowerment can be related to the desires and wants of a given individual or group of individuals, and this desire can be carried out and acted upon with no condemnation or flaw within this individualistic understanding of truth and creation. Since very little-to-no critical analysis of gender is given in Nietzsche's work, and Nietzsche's philosophy claims that the future of an individual's existence is open for self-creation and preference, a gender binary and gender-disempowerment can be easily rationalized and established under Nietzschean anti-essentialist thought. Though Nietzsche's thought established a working counter-example to essentialism and objectivity, it did not provide gender a place in academic philosophy or with a method to condemn disempowerment based upon one's facet of identity. Later philosophers recognized this problem of Nietzschean anti-essentialism, and established a new method of gender examination under anti-essentialist and existential frameworks.

Philosopher William James was actively centered, as was Nietzsche, within a critical analysis of Platonic metaphysics, which shifted the paradigm of truth from an objective, metaphysical understanding to yet another subjective understanding. James' pragmatism sought to alter the conception of truth from a world beyond the physical sensory world, to the sensory world itself. James was writing and criticizing two dogmatic forms of truth that plagued philosophy during this context, rationalism and empiricism. James is primarily concerned with refuting the metaphysical structure of rationalism, however, he claims that under both interpretations nature is understood as being essentially determined by something, be it metaphysical forms that individuals can

understand, or some other type of objective structure that is unknowable. Truth is understood in objective concepts that are discoverable by individuals, but not determined by them. Nature is essentially structured in a particular way, and human beings "absorb" this truthful structure.[24] According to James, understanding truth to be metaphysically determined is simply to "escape" the concreteness of reality. Physical sensibility is reality, for James, and attempts to escape it lose all ability to engage with the physical reality. Abstraction and metaphysical concepts are not an "an explanation of our universe, it is….a way of escape."[25] Essential and metaphysical conceptions of truth and nature are not, in fact, that determinate force shaping reality and sensory objects; rather, concepts of metaphysics and essential natures are nonexistent, and are only means of escaping the plurality and chaos of the physical world. James furthers this critique by claiming that "the actual universe is a thing wide open, but rationalism makes systems, and systems must be closed…for [individuals] in the practical life, perfection is something far off…" which strengthens his understanding of reality as the perception of sensory objects.[26] Metaphysical essentialism has no meaningful relations with concrete reality, as James defines it, and is thus an escape and an attempt to systematize this pluralistic reality.

Truth, for James, is not determined by an existing metaphysical form; nor is reality determined by an essential nature that is perfect and absolute. This is a direct contention with Platonism, and is thus an anti-essentialist conception of reality and truth. For James, truth is determined by its "practical consequences," and not some essence existing beyond human experience. Human experience is a requirement for pragmatic

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[24] James, *Pragmatism,* 493.
[25] James, *Pragmatism,* 495-496.
[26] James, *Pragmatism,* 498.

truth, in the sense that a belief's practical consequences and usage determines its meaning

and status as a truth.[27] James furthers this thought by claiming that a belief becomes a

meaningful truth by determining "what conduct it is fitted to produce," meaning that a

belief's significance is only related solely to its import and result.[28] If the result is

favored and continually practiced, then that belief becomes a synthetic truth. Truth does

not derive its nature from an essential, metaphysical beyond; rather, truth is subjectively

created and practiced, and its significance is contingent upon the practical impact that

would resolve from adopting the belief as a truth. Metaphysical disputes, according to

James, are meaningless—there are no practical consequences and imports that can be

derived by holding a particular metaphysical concept, thus the concepts have no practical

meaning. Abstractions and things in-themselves, or essential essences, are "unlawful

magic" which have no practical or distinguishable significance.[29] Platonic essentialism is

deconstructed, and a new, practical paradigm of truth is conceptualized under subjective

and practical terms. Essential properties are meaningless, and concepts and objects

derived their significance from their practical meaning and prolonged practice.

James further defines his conception of truth and reality, and claims that truth is

an instrument. James claims that mathematical and scientific "truths" are not grounded in

metaphysical objectivity, but are simply the best human-constructions that allow

individuals to engage and make-sense of the physical world. Truth is instrumentally true,

as are mathematical and scientific truths, in the fact that it allows individuals to "get into

satisfactory relation" with the physical world, or serve as "conceptual short-cuts" that

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[27] James, *Pragmatism,* 505-506.
[28] James, *Pragmatism,* 506.
[29] James, *Pragmatism,* 508.

enable individuals to engage their reality.[30] Truth, again, is a synthetic practice that only

becomes significant in its relation to its practice and the outcomes of that practice.

Objective nature, as James argues, "is nowhere to be found" and is nonexistent under this

anti-essentialist paradigm.[31] Reality consists of sensory experience, and individual

conception of these sensory experiences. There exists no binding, objective essence that

determines how things are. Things are sense and understood in a plurality of way, and

individuals adopt specific beliefs based on these experiences. The beliefs gain

significance when their practical consequences are significant enough to allow

individuals to make sense of the physical world in a cohesive and efficient manner. Truth

and beliefs changes as new experiences emerge, thus altering the practical consequences

of these existing truths and beliefs. The structure of reality is simply human

interpretation and practice, which is in constant flux as new interpretation and practice

emerge. Truth is contingent upon its practical and useful relation to experience and the

ability to engage with the physical world in a consistent manner; thus it is a synthetic and

individual practice. Social meaning and values are contingent upon wide-scale practice of

given beliefs that have particularly helpful practical effects. Reality and meaning are

"made true," rather than being structurally determined that way.[32]

　　　This conception of practiced truth certainly dismantles the idea of metaphysical

essentialism. Essential properties are meaningless and have no practical, concrete import,

and are only an escape from reality. Since truth is framed a useful practice and

interpretation of experiences, there cannot be said to exist any type of essential nature

that binds reality or individuals. Gender essentialism, as in the case of Nietzsche's anti-

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[30] James, *Pragmatism,* 512.
[31] James, *Pragmatism,* 515.
[32] James, *Pragmatism,* 574-578.

essentialist thought, is dismissed on grounds of abstraction and meaninglessness. Essential, objective entities do not exist. However, this conception of truth also fails to analyze gender and binaried social relations, and therefore enforces gender disempowerment. It can easily be conceived that gender disempowerment can be a practiced truth with consequences that are justifiably argued to efficiently arrange social reactions and individual understandings of sensory reality. Pragmatic conceptions of truth establish a working critique of essential natures and realities, thus any argument grounding disempowerment or a binary within a framework essential nature cannot hold to be true. Masculinity and femininity have no natures that differentiate them or serve to privilege one over the other, but social reactions can discriminate against masculinity or femininity based on adopted and continued social practices; one gender can be provided over the other, not based on nature, but upon synthetic practice. Pragmatism makes advances in analyzing gender, since is deconstructs essentialism, though it fails in the fact that it justifies disempowerment and binaries based on subjectively imposed and practiced truths.

Nietzsche and James both made significant strides in an analysis of gender, by attacking essentialism on two different methods; however, both failed to critically engage gender disempowerment, and developed theories that enforced different forms of disempowerments based on gender and binaried social relations. Neither challenges the notion of sex and gender binaries, either. Both conceptions of anti-essentialist philosophy assume that there are two sexes and two genders. Thus, those who fall outside of the normative functions of masculinity and femininity, or male and female, are automatically oppressed for failure to conform to established binary of sex and gender.

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Thus, oppression outside of essentialism is justified and oppression based on binaried sex and gender is entailed. Later theorists will recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the anti-essentialist conception of truth and meaning, and will work to synthesize its failings in extensively analyzing gender and disempowerment, but also use its core arguments as the foundation to their theories.

CHAPTER 3

DE BEAUVOIR AND THE HISTORICAL SITUATION

Working nearly half a century later, French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir
utilized the framework of Nietzsche's and James' anti-essentialism as well as 19th and
early-20th century social theory. De Beauvoir's groundbreaking work, *The Second Sex,*
published in 1949, sought to formulate a new analysis on gender and power, taking the
shortcomings of the social feminists, intellectuals, and philosophers of 19th and mid-20th
century and creating a new synthesis to analyze gender and "woman's" "Otherness" in
modern French society. Feminist theory, prior to de Beauvoir, was still immersed within
the Nietzschean inspired scientific and psychological discourse of the 19th and 20th
century social theory, coming out of Germany. Nominalism was the prominent feminist
theory of 20th century France, which concluded, as did German social theory, that "man"
and "woman" were essentially the same. The socio-political situation of "woman" was
bettered by such theories, but no more progress was made from the feminist movement of
early-20th century Germany, which primarily equalized the sexual drives of "man" and
"woman", and gave "woman" more opportunity and choice to act upon those sex drives.
De Beauvoir claimed that this understanding of sexuality and gender—two terms that
prior feminism would have treated synonymously—was flawed, and did nothing to

critically analyze gender or the gendered structure of social politics and individual choice and freedom.[33]

De Beauvoir's analysis focused on the socio-historical *situation* of femininity, rather than assigning "woman" specific characteristics and arguing for the political and social equality of those individuals, as prior feminists had done. De Beauvoir shifted the paradigm of gender analysis in a new direction, one that analyzed notions of power and identity from a phenomenological and social-constructivist standpoint. This new theory of gender focused more on deconstructing the phenomenon of gender and gender roles within a certain historical situation, while separating gender and sex as two distinct phenomena, as opposed to examining sex and gender within the framework of socio-political advancement. De Beauvoir's theory was a robust paradigm shift to a philosophical analysis of gender within a specific individual and social situation, and this challenged all preconceived notions of gender, power, essentialism, and conceptions of identity. Feminist theory now had an entirely new and distinct paradigm, which was based upon the work that prior anti-essentialists and feminist had established.

De Beauvoir wrote in a particular context that enabled her to make various claims and arguments on gender, individual situations, and sexuality. France—coming out of the Second World War, and being immersed in the intellectual rhetoric of existentialism, pluralism, liberalism, anti-essentialism, as well as other radical theories—was conveniently situated for groundbreaking analytical work on the social-sciences, individualism, human psychology, and responsibility.[34] These new intellectual

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[33] Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction, *The Second Sex,* Trans Constance Borde (New York, New York: Vintage Books, Inc., 2010): 3.

[34] Judith Coffin, *"*Historicizing the Second Sex," *French Politics, Society and Culture,* 52, no.2 (2007): 124-125.

movements in French society, and the state of France after the moral and physical destruction of Second World War, allowed for new debates and angles on a variety of topics, and established a foundation for various thinkers to establish new ideas and analyses in a variety of fields. A critical and philosophical analysis of gendered society emerged.

De Beauvoir's socio-historical context, just as her work focuses on, served as a helpful context and source of inspiration for her work and radical ideas. In this section, I seek to contextualize de Beauvoir in a given historical and intellectual situation. First, I will examine de Beauvoir's feminist theory in light of mid-20th century French social, intellectual, and political society, in order to give context to de Beauvoir's thought, and to display the progression of feminist and social theory that emerged in Europe from Nietzschean anti-essentialism. Second, I will analyze de Beauvoir through a transmission of intellectual ideas such as Platonism, anti-essentialism, and existentialism to detail de Beauvoir's theory, and how this theory was a synthesis of these branches of thought. Last, I will conclude that de Beauvoir's analysis on individual situations was a new and unique angle on prior feminist and philosophical theory, thus sparking a new wave of gender analysis and field of academic philosophy; a critical analysis of conceptions of gender and gender disempowerment.

I complicate recent scholarship that explores de Beauvoir's work within its intellectual community, regarding Freudian psychoanalysis or American radical feminism, and I situate de Beauvoir more deeply within French postwar intellectualism.[35] The situation of France after the Second World War is essential to contextualizing de

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[35] Here, I am specifically referring to Coffin's work on *Historicizing The Second Sex* and *Beauvoir, Kinsey, and Mid-Century Sex*. Other scholarship has grounded de Beauvoir in her philosophical context within French and American philosophy, as well as French existentialism.

Beauvoir through a philosophical and historical understanding. Historian Judith Coffin

undertook this task in her work "Historicizing the Second Sex;" my work enriches this

insightful and extensive analysis, by relating de Beauvoir's ideas within a larger

transmission of ideas regarding gender and academic philosophy.

De Beauvoir, in her introduction to *The Second Sex,* expresses her impatience

with the existing feminist and social theories of modern France. According to de

Beauvoir, "enough ink has flooded over the quarrel about feminism...and the volumes of

idiocies churned out over this past century do not seem to have clarified the problem."[36]

Nominalism, which asserted that men and women were, in most senses, *the same*, was the

most prominent feminist theory of mid-century France. Social-science had moved from

the 19th century understanding of essential differences within "man" and "woman," to a

more liberal theory of gendered existence: that there were no properties that differentiated

the two, and that each were essentially the same. "Man" and "woman" were both labeled

"human being." De Beauvoir criticizes this view, claiming that it was too trivial and

abstract: "Nominalism is a doctrine that falls a bit short...clearly, no 'woman' can claim

without bad faith to be situated beyond her sex."[37] The theory was trivial because,

according to de Beauvoir, every individual is a human being; the theory added nothing to

the analysis of gender disempowerment.[38]

Nominalism is too abstract to have any political or intellectual import for de

Beauvoir, because though both men and women may be human beings, there are specific

social distinctions and inequalities that separate them, e.g. the binaried society that

privileges men over women. De Beauvoir's claim is that feminist theory fails to

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[36] De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex, 3.*
[37] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 4.
[38] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 4.

examine gender in the correct way. For de Beauvoir, an individual's gender identity is a facet of their existence, and that this facet is inescapable. To identify both "man" and "woman" as a human being and nothing more would be to separate an individual from their sex and gender identity. In order to properly analyze gender, then, one must examine what grounds gender identity, and, for de Beauvoir, this is an individual's socio-historical situation.[39] With this new analysis, de Beauvoir articulated a new direction within feminist theory, and moved gender into the scope of academic philosophy, surpassing existing feminist theories and their platforms of analysis.

De Beauvoir did not stop at critiquing French feminist theory of the mid-20th century. Rather, de Beauvoir's work criticized, analyzed, and synthesized a variety of aspects of French intellectual culture. In the aftermath of the Second World War, intellectual and public discourse published a number of works on ethics, humanism, liberalism, Marxism, and a variety of others. However, the French intellectual and public spheres were not particularly interested in analyzing "woman's" liberation movements, or gender as a whole. Feminism, as de Beauvoir's intellectual colleagues would have claimed, had already been given a sufficient analysis; the issue of feminism was over.[40] After the Second World War, the French public sphere was focused on establishing a unifying morality and enforcing normative ethical codes. Literature, philosophy, social-psychology, and other academic disciples were expected to produce work that matched up with this established moral code.[41] This meant that French society had repressed—or, at least, confined—sexuality, and the discussion of it, to the private sphere.

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[39] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 4-11.
[40] Coffin, "Historicizing the Second Sex," 124.
[41] Coffin, "Historicizing the Second Sex," 131.

Unlike Germany in the 19th century, amid anxiety and social reformation after the

Second World War, talk of sexuality was eliminated within intellectual and social

discourse, and lost significance in the social and political order, as well as its prominence

in intellectual studies. According to Coffin, "simply to speak of the 'sexual'--and to

insist that it was important or necessary to do so—was to reduce and debase the human; it

represented the surrender of civilization of the individual to the dark forces of

sexuality…"[42] French culture was attempting to recover from the atrocities of the Second

World War by alienating immoral discussion in public and academic settings, which

included any discussion of sexuality and gender. Feminist theories in mid-century

France, primarily, focused on pacifism and political advancement; de Beauvoir's analysis

shifted this paradigm and created feminist theory anew.

In *The Second Sex,* de Beauvoir asserts that "one is not born, but rather becomes,

'woman'. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human

female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this..." which serves

as the underlying claim to her intellectual analysis of gender: tropes of gender are socially

defined for by structures of power and privilege, and adopted and personified by specific

individuals.[43] De Beauvoir's analysis, then, claims that an individual's socio-historical

situation defines their identity and existence. Gender, for de Beauvoir, is an entity that is

placed on a sexed body. Gender is a socially-created trope, and conceptions of gender

are particularly binaried; the masculine nature is far more socially privileged than the

feminine nature, and this phenomenon is contingent upon sociopolitical understandings

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[42] Coffin, Historicizing the Second Sex," 131.
[43] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 283.

of gender and value, relative to a particular context.[44] "Woman" in mid-century France, according to de Beauvoir, is posited as the "Other;" something systematically different than the dominant, privileged masculine gender. For de Beauvoir, French society privileges masculinity as "right by virtue of being a man."[45] She also claims that "humanity is male, and man defines "woman", not in herself, but in relation to himself. She is not considered an autonomous being."[46] Conceptions of gender and identity are defined in relation to the values and ideologies of a particular society; those with social privilege and power, however, possess the ability to create and enforce conception of gender. Thus, "woman's" situation is created by power and privilege, relative to a particular social context.

Gender, for de Beauvoir, is not a Platonic ideal that *is*. Rather, gender is a social-construction, based upon the ideologies and privileges of a given socio-historical situation.[47] In mid-century French society, as de Beauvoir claims, "woman" is the "Other," the inferior, or the submissive. Men "have better jobs, higher wages, and greater chances to succeed than their female competitors; they occupy many more places in industry, in politics, and so forth…"[48] French society is dominated by male privilege, and this privilege creates the social-situation of "woman". Throughout historical discourse, "woman's" subordination has been normalized by a society dominated by male privilege. "Lawmakers, priests, philosophers, writers, and scholars," de Beauvoir claims, "have gone to great lengths to prove that women's subordinate condition was willed in

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[44] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 272.
[45] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 5.
[46] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 5.
[47] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 273.
[48] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 9.

heaven and profitable on Earth."[49] De Beauvoir's claim reiterates her idea that gender is

created and assigned through social and political discourse. Gender is a social

phenomenon, and individual identity is contingent upon a set of circumstances pertaining

to their situation. Identity, choice, and freedom are limited. Only those that are

privileged are able to seek any sort of transcendent freedom from their gendered

situation, while, also, creating and enforcing situations for those less privileged.

Social and political relations are separated into two categories, and two classes of

individuals are defined through the current sociopolitical context of France. According to

de Beauvoir, "the division of humanity into two categories of individuals…is a static

myth."[50] Through this division of classes, one set of individuals, "man," is defined

through reality and has power over ones conception of identity. The other class,

"woman," is defined through a "transcendent ideal," or a fixed stereotype, where no

control over identity is possible because it is defined as an absolute entity that escapes

beyond all physical interpretation.[51] Thus, "woman" is fixed, defined, and limited while

"man" is free to create and define; the *Eternal Feminine* is formed from this social

division, which defines "woman" as a trope based on a specific set of pejorative

characteristics. De Beauvoir complicates this division and trope by claiming that "it is

obviously not reality that dictates to society or individuals their choices between the two

opposing principles of unification; in ever period, in every case, society and individuals

decide according to their needs."[52] Here, de Beauvoir is claiming that the idea of

"woman" is merely a series of characteristics and definitions that binds identity, and that

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[49] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 11.
[50] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 266
[51] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 266-267.
[52] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 267.

this trope is created by a given society or set of individuals in order to enforce power and advance interest. Social relations solidify this trope through a widely accepted practice, which individuals and institutions accept, enforce, and center operations on. This conjured ideal is widely adopted and practiced by a particular context, through relations of power and privilege who create and enforce it, and is also personified and adopted by individuals whom are defined by the trope itself.[53] Or, the idea of "woman" is "effected by patriarchal society for the end of self-justification…this society imposed its laws and customs on individuals in an imagistic and sensible way."[54] This trope, then, is falsely justified through an absolute, metaphysical concept that does not exists, and is thus falsely imposed by structures of power and privilege which define concrete reality and social norms.

According to de Beauvoir, "when [an individual] is offered no goal, or is prevented from reaching any goal, or denied victory of it, [their] transcendence, falls uselessly into the past…this is the lot assigned to women in patriarchy."[55] The trope of "woman" takes away any type of freedom "woman" has to create and define itself, and thus traps "woman" within the definition that is defined for it. Rather than allowing "woman" to create itself through choices and values, "woman" is forced to comply with a rigid stereotype that is justified by a platonic nature, which is defined by power systems of privilege based on the self-interest of a given socio-historical context.

De Beauvoir is concerned with dismantling Platonism and essentialist tropes of identity and truth, just as Nietzsche and James were; thus, de Beauvoir is operating under an anti-essentialist paradigm of thought. However, de Beauvoir's new paradigm

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[53] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 269.
[54] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 272.
[55] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 267

incorporates anti-essentialist arguments to analyze conceptions of gender and power. Since gender, for de Beauvoir, is a synthetic identity that is created by a given society and placed onto individuals, de Beauvoir is using an anti-essentialist idea in a way that includes gender. Since, under this paradigm, truth has no objective grounding, but is created and practiced by individual beings, gender is analyzed in the same method. Gender has no essential traits; rather, it is constructed by and contingent upon a given socio-historical situation. Gender and sexuality, then, have no specific or essential essence and definition, thus both phenomena are constructed. This new synthesis takes claims from Nietzschean and Jamesean anti-essentialism, and analyzes gender while scrutinizing power systems and privilege for creating the imminent situation of particular individuals. Gender as an essential definition of one's existence is dissected to become a social construct the time, relative to an individual's situation.

De Beauvoir's examination of gender also took place within, and extended, the newly established intellectual movement of existentialism. For de Beauvoir, one's gender identity is a part of their being; or, as existentialists would call it, their *facticity*. Existentialists separate being into two categories: being as facticity—which is defined as uncontrollable factors of one's existence such as one's sex, race, or family genealogy— and being as transcendence—which is defined as the ability to shape one's existence, actively, in accordance to their own self-interest and value. These two entities are intricately intertwined, and one must be both of them at the same time to escape being in *bad faith*, or a faulty, deceptive existence.[56] An individual, to the existentialist, is not pure facticity nor pure transcendence. Nietzsche's and James' philosophy clearly established a

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[56] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Deception and Falsehood," from *Existentialist Philosophy: An Introduction*, ed. Nathan Oaklander (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Publishing, 1996): 299.

groundwork for the existentialists since subjective value and truth are the foundation of the theory, and the future for individuals, under anti-essentialist thought, is open to create. French existentialists were concerned with examining individual responsibility, value, and freedom—a focus fitting for postwar France—but neither were concerned with the analysis of gender. As part of the existentialist movement, though, de Beauvoir extended the debates of existentialism to include a consideration of gender within its framework.

De Beauvoir's work incorporates existentialism and anti-essentialism to evaluate gender situations. De Beauvoir claims that, "every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is a degradation of existence into 'in-itself,' of freedom into facticity…" which grounds her thought in existentialist ideology.[57] De Beauvoir adds to the prior claim by stating "[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…"[58] According to de Beauvoir's claim, the situation of "woman" in this given socio-historical situation, is not chosen by individuals, it is assigned. Being of transcendence succumbs to being of facticity: choice is limited, and even thwarted, by the situation. In this sense, de Beauvoir utilizes and restructures the philosophies of anti-essentialism and existentialism to examine gender and individual situations, and utilizes each theory to critically analyze gender and social structures of power within a given historical context.

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[57] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 17.
[58] de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 17.

Utilizing a philosophical paradigm, de Beauvoir synthesizes arguments and ideas from feminist theory, anti-essentialism, and existentialism to develop a critical philosophical analysis of gender and gender-disempowerment; something that feminist theory, philosophy, and French intellectualism prior to de Beauvoir had failed to do. De Beauvoir is, as many scholars claim, the shift into *Second Wave* feminism, challenging various other theories to examine the social, economic, and historical situation of individuals to determine their status in society. Rather than existing under a moralized framework, or premise that there was no difference in "man" and "woman"—while, simultaneously denying the blatant difference between the sexes in the social-sphere— and situating individuals beyond their sex, de Beauvoir framed her analysis differently, examining the correlation of gender identity, choice, and social power structures. Not only did de Beauvoir falsify traditional and social theories of French intellectual and feminist thought, breaking ground in a new method of feminist and social theory, she also expanded the philosophical discipline to include the critical analysis of the relations of gender and power.

De Beauvoir is situated within a paradigm of anti-essentialist thought that is attempting to restructure the focus or truth and nature from platonic metaphysics to a socially imposed understating. De Beauvoir's conception of the trope of "woman" is justified by appealing to a metaphysical form, just as platonic metaphysics is. This form then defines social relations and concrete reality. However, de Beauvoir understands of this trope as being a socially imposed reality, which is contingent upon values and ideologies of a particular context, and thus presents an anti-essentialist argument. "Woman," nor "man," is essentially anything other than the values defined by a given

social power structure and the choice of the agent to define themselves according to values. However, only allowing those whom are socially privileged are able to actively define and create themselves and the privileged values of a social context, while limiting those not privileged by the social system to an imposed and inescapable definition of character. De Beauvoir's conception of power as a subversive social operation further defines anti-essentialism, and this usage analyzes and critiques notions of gender and disempowerment and defines gender as a socially-imposed value that is widely practiced and enforced.

Though de Beauvoir offers a critically engaging critique of the situation of "woman," her arguments fails to be exhaustive. De Beauvoir understands individuals defined in relation to the privileged and practiced values of a given social context. Social power allows individuals the autonomy to actively choose the values and identity tropes for themselves, which thus defines the values of a given context. However, those not recognized by social power are defied in relation to those who are, and are thus prohibited autonomy and individuality, and are inescapably defined as "Other." Historically, "woman" has been defined in relation to "man" and thus as a social otherness. Masculinity exists as a socially privileged and socially mobile identify trope, where femininity is defined only in its difference to masculinity. Though individuals have a sense of autonomy to choose to become feminine or masculine, social power prohibits the feminine from this choice, and devalues the identify trope altogether. De Beauvoir seems to be advocating for the autonomy of the feminine, and a feminist critique of the social power that defines and privileges to become more egalitarian and accessible.

This, at first, seems emancipating. However, de Beauvoir fails to excuse her analysis of all types of oppression. De Beauvoir, by only understanding sex as being defined in terms of male or female and gender as being defied in terms of masculinity and femininity, is operating within a gender binary, and excludes those who do not conform to either sex or gender; it fails to allow any type of freedom or autonomy outside of the traditional binaried understanding of sex and gender. De Beauvoir also defines "woman" as essentially related to "man" or the privileged social values and identity trope of a context, and thus offers a universalized understanding of "woman." De Beauvoir defines "woman" as unified which shares a common conception of being defined as "Other" in relation to "man" and is offered no autonomy and individuality by the existing social power system. This is problematic because it fails to exhaust the term of "woman," and creates a false universal trope that ignores differences in class, race, sexual orientation, and so on and the different types of oppression that are associated with these differences in identity, which are all included within the term "woman." Thus, de Beauvoir's analysis fails to be exhaustive in understanding "woman", and actually entails various forms of oppression, essentialism, and binaried social relations.

CHAPTER 4

BUTLER AND ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM

"The Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."[59]

Judith Butler recognized, in de Beauvoir's and the prior anti-essentialists work,

the potential to entail various forms of oppression while advocating for equity. Butler

rejects the conception of gender and feminist ideology of "second wave" feminism,

particularly that of understanding "woman" as a universalized identify concept that all

who identify as "woman" share in, and operating under a binaried understanding of sex

and gender.[60] In this section, I will examine Butler's claims against feminist theory

particularly that of "second wave" and Beauvoir's theory of gender theory, and how this

framework of feminist theory entails oppression in its effort to dismantle oppression.

Primarily, how prior feminist theory and de Beauvoir's anti-essentialist theory of gender

defined "woman" in universal and binding terms for purposes of recognition and

emancipation. However, Butler claims this foundational approach, using "woman" as the

foundation of feminist politics, essentializes "woman" into a unified definition of value,

class, sexuality, and oppression. More specifically, this approach assumes that "woman"

is defined under a white, straight, middle-class definition, since this trope of "woman"

has been privileged in most socio-historical contexts. Feminism, therefore, excludes

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[59] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007): 2
[60] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 4-6.

various individuals who cannot be defined under this privileged and limited definition. In the following work, I first examine the paradox of emancipation that Butler charges feminist theory with. Second, I examine the pejorative implications that Butler details regarding universal identity, and how this conception entails oppression. Third, I will examine Butler's refutation of a gender binary and her understanding of the relationship of gender, sex, and power production. Finally, I will conclude that Butler offers an alternate critique of gender disempowerment and power, which highlights elements of anti-essentialism through its anti-foundational approach. Since Butler rejects foundational definitions of gender, I conclude, her work is anti-essentialist. Under this approach, gender has no essential characteristics that define it. Since gender has no essential characteristics or foundations and cannot be defined in one specific way with specific traits, Butler's project challenges traditional tropes of masculinity and femininity that have unreachable criterion, while allowing gender theory to be more inclusive in its approach.

Butler claims, in her work *Gender Trouble,* that "feminist theory has assumed that there is some existing identity understood through the category of woman."[61] For emancipatory purposes, a unified identity of "woman" seems necessary and essential. One must present a common identity or group to be recognized within a political structure. In order to make appeals for political advancement, a group or individual must define some sort of identity that is publically recognizable. "Woman," as Butler claims, has historically not be recognized as autonomous or even recognized as an existing identity at all, and thus feminist theory has formed a type of unity and definition in order to create a subject of "woman," a subject for feminism, and a subject for political

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[61] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 2.

recognition and advancement.[62] De Beauvoir advanced this type of understanding, by defining "woman" as something that universally is. Representation and unification defines "woman" as essentially something, and creates a subject that can be socio-politically recognized as deserving of various rights and mobility. However, Butler rightly recognizes that this form of unification is flawed for a number of reasons. "If one is a 'woman,'" Butler claims, "that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive…"[63]

Gender and gendered categories of identity, such as "woman," fail to account for cross-cultural and historical contexts where gender is defined and practiced in different way than others. Also, assuming there is one subject of "woman" assumes that there is only one voice of "woman," one common mode of oppression, and one common set of values and lifestyle.[64] Emancipation, if received from a sociopolitical power structure, would only allow for emancipation from one specific gender classification. Though there are a number of different desires that are not determined by binaried categories, cultural and historical contexts, and value systems that gender categories can take on, e.g. differences in race, class, sexual orientation, and the like, a universal "voice" of feminism fails to account for these differences, and simply combines difference into a unified, superficial definition of "womanhood" in order to benefit and emancipate a select few members of the inflated subject. Feminism operates under a paradoxical system of emancipation, since it attempts to liberate "woman's" oppression by oppressing various differences of "woman."[65] Feminism therefore becomes a power structure that

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[62] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 2.
[63] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 4.
[64] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 4-5.
[65] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 7-8.

subjugates and oppresses various individuals and lifestyles within socio-historical and sociocultural contexts. Representation and systems of oppression for a woman of color or a lesbian woman will be much different than representation and systems of oppression for, say, a straight, middle-class white woman. In order to avoid acting as a regulatory and oppressive system of power, the language and "objective" of feminism must cease creating universalized claims for common representation.

With this understanding of power and representation, Butler's project problematizes the very idea of emancipation within feminist theory. According to Butler and French poststructuralists like Michel Foucault, political and regulatory power systems are, in fact, the reasons for forms of subjugation in the first place.[66] According to Butler, subjects under the control of a sociopolitical structure of power, which is defined as legal, institutional, and linguistic operations, are "regulated by such structures, by virtue of being subjected to them, [and] formed, defines, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures."[67] Thus, political operations, legal operations, and linguistic limitations, e.g. how discourse defines and communicates concepts and identities, produce and define subjects and their situations according to the limits and methods established by the structure of power itself. Feminist theory that appeals to this structure will be self-defeating, Butler claims, because this structure is the reason for their situation and subjugation. Production and representational politics conceals its structural and production power by law and institutions which claim to represent individuals while but simultaneously produce them and their situations.[68] The ideology and methods that support the political structure and regulate individual identities and situations are justified

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[66] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 2-3.
[67] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 3.
[68] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 3.

through "naturalized" laws which constitute individuals as subjects under the power of that law. Thus, when feminist theory appeals to a political power structure, it is operating under a self-defeating methodology; it uses the exact same oppressive and exclusionary tools as the power structure that oppresses it. With universalizing and essentialist foundations, feminism becomes an oppressive and coercive power structure that defines "woman" only by a privileged monolith.

In short, when feminism defines "woman" through linguistic means as a unified category, it is acting as a regulatory power structure that oppressively produces subjects and situations; the category is itself oppressive, and thus the failure to understand differences in the subjects that it is claiming to represent, feminism actually creates an oppressive and faux situation for various members under the subject definition. Foundational feminist politics, which attempts to focus on a foundation of "woman" and the subject of "woman," becomes the source of oppressive power that it is attempting to deconstruct.[69] An anti-foundationalist account of feminism, therefore, can achieve critical emancipation from subjected oppression. De Beauvoir and prior feminist theory failed to recognize this flaw.

Butler's work exposes how essentialist notions of identity serve to subjugate various individuals to the established system of oppressive power. However, in order to be fully inclusive, this understanding must actively challenge the notion of the sex/gender binary, lest it continue to oppress various "subjects" who fail to conform to the mode of operation that the structure of power has established. Butler understands structures of power to create and naturalize conceptions of sex and gender, and the legal and social

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[69] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 10.

means in which is upholds these rigid conceptions.[70] However, Butler understands

structures of power as operations that create two rigid categories of sex based on the

created two categories of gender; thus, the sex/gender binary.[71] Structures of power

intend to situate social relations upon a "heterosexual matrix" where specific modes of

behavior are regulated and prohibited, and situations are created through this regulation

and prohibition. Sociopolitical power, therefore, intends to situate society under the

paradigm of normative heterosexuality, where two specific genders are needed to form a

contrast.[72] Gender categories are established and imposed by various structures of

political and social power. Two categories are established with corresponding behavioral

characteristics, with each gender category opposing the other. This strategic creation by

sociopolitical power yields rigid classification of individuals, and regulates behavior,

identity, and desire. Gender is a socially constructed classification that made to seem

normal and natural behaviors structures of power, in order to maintain the "heterosexual

matrix." A gender binary is constructed in order to enforce and normalize desire, sex, and

social relations under a specific intent; that is, to regulate social heterosexuality and

structure social relations, sex, and gender within heteronormative standards. This

understanding deflates the rigid and binding nature of masculinity and femininity, making

each out to be created and enforced tropes. Gender becomes less structured or abstract,

and is understood within the context of normative and coercive power.

Gender, as Butler defines it, controls and regulates biological discourse of sex,

and conceptions of sex. If only two rigid genders exist, then two corresponding rigid

sexes exist. Butler claims that the "'truth of sex'…is produced princely through the

[70] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10-11.
[71] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 13.
[72] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 22-23.

regulatory practices that generate coherent through the major coherent gender norms. The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete asymmetrical opposition…"[73] Operating under the power of the heterosexual matrix as defined and enforced though the regulative practices of a power structure, a gender binary is formed to produce and regulate normative functions. Gender, then, defines sex, and produces specific situations that advance a particular social end. Gender, sexual desire, and sex categories are produced by various structures of power that regulate all social relations. Thus, any individual who fails to adhere to these superficially created tropes of identity and orientation fails to be accepted, or even recognized, by social relations. Rigid forms of masculinity and femininity, with the corresponding behavior and character traits that oppose one another which have been established by the sociopolitical power source, are forced upon individual to conform to their corresponding identity. This ordering of gender and sex defines discourse, language, and social operations. If a sexed body fails to conform to define itself to its corresponding gender-related identity, that body is unrecognizable and thus excluded within the structure of social relations.[74]

According to Butler, "identity is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality…the person is called into question by the cultural emergence of those 'incoherent…' who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are formed."[75] In short, those who fail to conform to the regulative understanding of sex, gender, or orientation will be unintelligible under the paradigm established by the current sociopolitical structure. Tropes of masculinity and femininity, then, have absolute power of individual identities through structured and rigid standards.

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[73] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 24.
[74] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 22.
[75] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 22-25.

Thus, the sex/gender binary is superficially created in order to produce a specific end, which is the regulation of society under the heterosexual and heteronormative standards as produced by systems of political and social power. These conceptions dominate social ideology and discourse, and any paradigm outside of this specific order is deviant and socially and/or linguistically incomprehensible. The gender binary is thus a regulatory tool of a dominant power structure. Gender is used as a regulatory means of control in which power structures situate sex and desire in order to define a particular paradigm of social and individual operations. Gender controls notions of sex, discourse, and intelligibility. Thus, the gender binary proves to be a false category established by oppressive power sources, and essentialist understandings of "woman" not only oppress "woman," but enforce the binary and heteronormativity that the system of oppressive power has established. In order for feminist theory to avoid utilizing oppressive functions that are implied in the foundation of "woman," it should abstain from foundational and essentialist definitions of gender and instead deflate gender and heterosexual norms as mere tactics of control imposed by oppressive politics. According to Butler, "juridical structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power; hence there is no position outside this field;" therefore, for feminist theory to avoid becoming an, or at the very least utilizing the means of, the contemporary field of power, it's goal should work towards an understanding "genealogy of its own legitimating practice" in order to authentically critique and undermine the field of power.[76] This geology will yield subversive results within the framework established by contemporary power. Gender and sexed categories can be deflated and defined as superficial concepts used to regulate social relations to suit a heterosexual privileged

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[76] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 7.

ideal. Feminism can also avoid utilizing the same tactics that coercive power utilizes,

e.g. essentializing a unified but white and privileged voice of feminism and excluding

others who fail to meet this definition while giving power to the conception of gender it is

trying to dismantle, and subsequently becoming a linguistic and political power structure

that defines subjects through coercive means.

This conception of gender and sex escapes the oppressive paradoxical nature of

feminist politics prior to "third wave" feminism and queer theory. Butler's conception of

gender and critique of identity avoids operating under essentialist notions of unity, which

includes differences in the identity of "woman" to account for race, class, sexuality, and

so on. Sex and gender are not limited by two rigid categories; these categories are

defined and concealed by structures of power in order to regulate individuals and

individual desires, and are defined as binaried to form sexual and gendered opposition.

Thus, Butler offers the most inclusive and critical conception of gender and identity

among the anti-essentialists and de Beauvoir, though the critique is limited to operate

within the inescapable oppressive and ubiquitous nature of power. Rigid definitions of

masculinity and femininity are challenged and deconstructed as means of situating and

classifying individuals towards the end of heteronormative sexual standards.

Heteronormative standards are therefore defined as the coercive and regulative means

implored by oppressive power, and gender categories and binaries are the means to

achieve these standards. Individuals are now able to have some, though limited,

autonomy and choice of gender or desire since standards of gender, sex, and desire are no

longer understood as totalizing and solidified.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Plato's essentialist understanding of truth, nature, and value dominated

philosophical discourse and justified gender disempowerment and social gender binaries.

Since, according to Plato, all physical objects, including the values or identities that

individuals hold, are defined by a metaphysical and overarching Form, all physical

objects are said to have essentially defining natures. Thus, any form of truth and value

will be defined by a definite Form that is supported by a metaphysical concept. Entities

within the physical realm are simply mere copies that derive meaning and essence from

the corresponding Form that defines. It is clear, then, that gender essentialism and a

gender binary is entailed and supported by this conception of reality and objective truth.

Essential natures, maleness and femaleness, are Forms that exist metaphysically, and are

thus discovered by individuals. The Form of maleness thus establishes a rigid form of

behavior, value, and character traits that are supported through the Form of male. Thus,

any individual possessing these qualities is defined as a male by the corresponding Form

of male. The same holds for femaleness. A given historical context can justify gender

disempowerment from this ideology by simply privileging the "truth" of masculinity over

femininity, or vice versa—though, historically, the former precedes the latter in almost

every case.

Any such arguments that wish to argue against gender oppression or a binary that privileges one or the other conceptions of gender and sex must operate under an anti-essentialist argument. The conception of truth, meaning, and value being essentially part of an object or individual must cease to have any grounding. Simply stating that, in terms of a binaried social-structure, that "woman" ought to be, or actually is, more privileged that "man" is still using essentialist notions to ground claims. Under this paradigm, the privileging of one sex or gender over the other is meaningless, and can be argued for the same justifications on either side. Both sexes and genders are grounded within essentialized natures that derive truth and meaning from a metaphysical Form. Thus, in order to escape such a conception of gender and sex, and to dismantle social binaries and stereotyped oppression, essentialist arguments must be show to be false, or operating under false assumptions and justifications. Only then will a feminist critique of oppression, binaries, and power be able to be successfully and inclusively achieved.

Nietzsche and James, I argued, successfully altered the paradigm of truth and value from essentialist to anti-essentialist framework. Nietzsche's understanding of truth is exemplified in his provocative thought experiment "the death of God," where God symbolizes objectively and universally established "truth" and objective value. Rather than existing outside of human interpretation and control, truth and value are human constructs, established by individuals or groups of individuals, in the case of social truths, to assign meaning and significance to existence, based on individual desires and the desire to achieve power and control over one's life and life-choices. Nietzsche understands individuals as possessing a strong and constant flux of desire, and having an internal conscience that wants to act upon these desires. Since God and objectivity have

ceased to ground truth, value, and choice, the individual and individual desires are the only authentic meaning-and-value-makers. One is constantly driven by an internal "will to power," that forces individual to create meaning and adopt values, only to create more meaning and adopt more values in order to satisfy their internal driving forces.

James' conception of truth and value, as I have presented it, operates under the same framework as Nietzsche's. For James, as with Nietzsche, truth and value are not essentially defied objective concepts that exist beyond individual interpretation and creation. Rather, individuals or a collection of individuals form conceptions of truth based upon practical consequences; or, simply, what is accomplished by establishing a particular idea, or what would be the consequences of not adopting an idea. If, as an individual or a social consensus, an idea or concept is adopted and continually practiced because of its practical consequences, then that idea or concept is solidified as an adopted or imposed truth based on continual and wide-spread practice and acceptance. Truth is not given significance because of its corresponding Form, as with Plato, nor is it solely based upon individual or collective desires and the means to achieve these desires, but truth is adopted because of its import with individuals engaging and conceptualizing the world. If a concept does not aid individuals in understanding the world, fails to be continually practiced, or another idea would have better practical consequences if it were practiced, then that concept is not practical and is thus not imposed as truth. Mathematics, therefore, is not grounded in objective mathematical concepts that are continually discovered by individuals, but are rather created and practiced by individuals because the concepts practical import in engaging and understanding the world. The same is true for value. Values are accepted and established for the practical consequence

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of accepting that said value, and the values continued practice. Meaning and truth are imposed on society and individual life rather than defined by it.

Intuitively, this seems to be emancipatory and groundbreaking for feminist theory within the context of critiquing oppression and disempowerment. The anti-essentialism from James and Nietzsche is, in fact, successful in offering a critique of power that oppresses conceptions of gender or creates oppression for specific gender conceptions based on essentialist understandings. Justifications for oppression, binaries, and forms of disempowerment based on natural or essential characteristics have no grounding. Since truth, values, and individual characteristics are now based solely on individual or social creation, nothing can be said to be essentially one way or another. No sex or gender can be essentially defined, and no conception of sex or gender can be essential privileged over the other. Gender characteristics and "truth" about gender is a social or individual construction and practice, rather than something essential or objective. From the anti-essentialist conception of truth, gender traits are contingent upon social constructions and individual practice.

However, as I have shown, this paradigm is not as emancipatory as it may intuitively seem. Though oppression from essentialism is successfully deflated as based on false justifications, oppression and disempowerment can still be enforced. Anti-essentialism though, as presented by Nietzsche and James, actually entails oppression and a gender binary. Nothing about anti-essentialist ideology changes the conceptual understanding of sex and gender, or that either category fails to be as rigid and exclusive as it is defines. Any particular individual who identifies as or personifies the characteristics of a mixture of masculinity or femininity is automatically excluded and

oppressed under anti-essentialist frameworks, because gender and sex binaries are not analyzed or challenged. Moreover, since anti-essentialism frames truth within individual or social creativity and practice, it enforces arguments for oppression and disempowerment. Gender-based oppression could be a practical and acceptable consequence to engage social relations and politics, and thus wide-practiced and accepted. James' pragmatic approach to truth fails to exhaust its critique to include gender or sexual oppression. Nietzsche's framework fails in the same regard; oppression and disempowerment can be desired and adopted as values by individuals or social-structures, and enforced by Nietzsche's thought. Though both are emancipatory in engaging oppression based on essential natures, they fail in a number of other regards to be feminist valuable for a feminist critique.

De Beauvoir understood the powerful significance of anti-essentialist thought, but also recognized the potential danger of the framework left on its own with no expansion or synthesis. Though de Beauvoir utilizes particular aspects of anti-essentialist thought, she expands the framework to actively include a critique of subversive power relations and gender oppression. De Beauvoir understands individuals as the French existentialists do, claiming that individuals have no binding natures or characteristics other than uncontrollable facets of identity such as race or ancestry. Thus, no essential gender tropes exist that can truthfully define individuals, and all individuals possess the autonomy to choose how they wish to identify. A sense of agency is involved where individuals choose what values and identity categories that they conform to.

However, as de Beauvoir rightfully concludes, this sense of freedom and transcendent choice that individuals possess is only socially accessible to those whom are

privileged and have mobility awarded by a social power system. De Beauvoir is critical of prior feminist theory, since it, as she claims, fails to analyze gender and the situation of "woman" in correct terms, and simply advocates for equal political advancement. This advancement will not be possible, though, because only masculinity is allowed to freely choose and practice individual autonomy, where femininity is defined by the context, in opposition to masculinity, and thus unable to choose or transcend the situation of "Other." Whatever "man" is defined as being, though its own values which shape the value structure of a context, "woman" is defines as its opposite and "woman's" autonomy is elusive. Gender is defined in purely anti-essential terms, conceptualized and understood relative to a particular context. De Beauvoir is advocating for political and social power to equalize autonomy and conceptualize gender categories as less rigid. Since agents can choose what values and identities they take on, masculine values or feminine values are not so rigidly defined; "man" can take on feminine values and vice-versa. This view obviously incorporates notions of anti-essentialism, but expands the framework to include a critique of gender and an etymology of gender classifications.

De Beauvoir's theory, though a breakthrough in feminist theory, still operates within a gender binary and presents as unified definition of "woman", and of gendered categories. De Beauvoir's theory, therefore, operates within the same essential and coercive structure of power as oppressive politics does, and it unable to offer a robust critique of this power and its conclusions. De Beauvoir, while attempting to define what "woman" is in order to advocate for political and social autonomy, essentializes "woman" by defining the terms as relative to "man." A unified and essential classification is presented in order to define and represent "woman" for a feminist

critique. De Beauvoir also enforces a sex/gender binary by assuming that masculinity and femininity or "man" and "woman" are the only two gender and sex categories. Thus, autonomy to identity as mixed-gender or mixed-sex, or outside of the paradigm of binaried sex and gender, is not distinguishable under de Beauvoir's feminist theory. In an attempt to liberate and include "woman" with the social and intellectual privileges that "man" is awarded, de Beauvoir entails various forms of oppression by defining "woman" as an essential and unified category of analysis, and limiting the sphere of sex and gender to the widely-accepted gender/sex binary. In order for feminist theory to be fully inclusive and avoid being paradoxical, the sex gender binary must be deconstructed and essentialist notions of identity and unification must cease to be utilized for feminist theory and identity politics. If not, feminism will continue to be a form of oppression and thus struggle to operate outside of oppressive sociopolitical power and the binding categories that this power entails.

Butler's move into "third wave" feminist theory offers a workable framework for feminism to challenge oppressive charges brought against it, and to challenge coercive power and the sex/gender binary. Under this conception, "woman" is not a unified category defined by some type of shared identity or essential characteristic. This ideology fails to consider the difference in subjects of "woman," and serves as a mode of oppression for those who do not fit the white, middle-class, heterosexual idea of what "woman" is as defined by sociocultural norms. A universal identity cannot account for cross-cultural, historical, or sexual differences. A type of feminist theory that universalizes "woman" as something that essentially "is" consequently serves to enforce a regulative power structure that defines individuals and enforces the oppressive norms of

the structure that it is attempting to criticize. Though the idea of creating a recognized subject seems necessary for political emancipation, the practicality of that action enforces the oppressive means that the subject is attempting to emancipate itself from.

Appealing to a political power structure for emancipation is, as an act, paradoxical, since the political power structure is the force that creates and subjugates the situation of "woman" in the first place. Political power serves as the regulatory force that creates and produces situations, values, and ideologies that define a context or subject. Through prohibitive and regulatory laws, but under the guise of being the natural and logical sources of representation, political power creates the subject and subjects 'situations. It also creates the binaried structure of sex/gender, in order to conform to the heterosexual ordering of society. Notions of binaried gender are created, opposed, and serve to create sex and dominates language and discourse within that given structure. "Representational" power creates the structure of gender and desire, naturalizes it, and thus controls subjects. Gender, therefore, is not binaried or natural; it is a trope established by power in order to situate social relations in a manipulative and heteronormative way. With this understanding, gender is not limited to the framework of the female feminine and the male masculine, but based on individual desires existing within, but subverting, the heterosexual matrix. Butler utilizes notions of anti-essentialism and anti-binaried conceptions of gender to present a powerful and subversive critique, while dismantling rigid notions of gender categories and the elusive criterion that define them. Heteronormative standards are deconstructed and the notion of normativity within gender, sexual, and social identities is challenged. Butler, as opposed to James, Nietzsche, and de Beauvoir, offers a critique of power and normative standards

without using oppressive and exclusionary methods, or the methods utilized by coercive

power itself.

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