

Existential Ethics, Racism and the Problem of Evil

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Abstract

Through the philosophy of Existential Ethics, the author examines the problem of evil as a problem of contemporary racism. The author specifically focuses on Existential Ethics as it is presented by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Given the author's argument that Beauvoirian Existential Ethics is one that enables us to embrace our personal freedom and to better develop and foster our relationships with others, the author also argues Existential Ethics can help us come to terms with the problem of evil—another way of putting it, in the problem of human error. The author supports this claim because the persistent practice of war and violence—physical or psychological, and the harms that it causes on the freedom of others—is a problem of human error, and therefore the problem of evil.

Introduction

In what follows, I examine the views of Beauvoir on Existential Ethics to point to what Existential Ethics adds to the practice of Ethics. I also examine what I call *Beauvoirian Existential Ethics* so to help those of us who are often confused about the prospects of Existential Ethics. Given my argument that Beauvoirian Existential Ethics is one that enables us to embrace our personal freedom and to better develop and foster our relationships with others, I also argue that Existential Ethics is up to date in aiding us to solve some of the problems of our present times, such as the problems with the practice of war and violence and the problems with knowing when others are harmed and their freedom are being violated. I claim that Beauvoirian Existential Ethics helps us come to terms with the problem of evil—another way of putting it, in the problem of human error. I support this claim because to me, the persistent practice of war and violence—physical or psychological, and the harms that it causes on the freedom of others—is a problem of human error, and therefore the problem of evil.

Apart perhaps from the unpredicted predicaments of natural disasters, there is not anything worse than harming other people, especially when they are being harmed violently. For the purpose of this paper, *Beauvoirian Existential Ethics* by definition is an ethical judgement or action that is based on the context of life situations and/or circumstances in the existence of humans and for the purpose of this paper, *the problem of evil* by definition is synonymous with *human error* and it means a judgment on evil based on which a man can be thought of as being capable of doing evil deeds without being inherently evil or evil by nature and yet at the same time be morally responsible for the consequences resulting from the capacity of doing evil deeds.

The Overview: The Problem of Evil in Context

Although I would label myself an existentialist, I often wonder what the prospects of Existential Ethics would be if it were to be understood as a contemporary and up-to-date practice of Ethics. Usually contemporary field of Ethics, such as Applied Ethics, “usually assuming an affirmative answer to the existence question, addresses the moral permissibility of specific actions and practices.”¹ My concern for practicing Contemporary Ethics has led me to question the relation between this field of philosophy and Existentialism. I have been interested in the prospects of Existential Ethics as it has been developed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, and I make this distinction because the tradition of Existential Ethics can be traced back to the writings of nineteenth-century thinkers such as Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard. Even the ethics of Sartre is not always the same as the ethics of Beauvoir.

I examine the views of Beauvoir on Existential Ethics to point to what Existential Ethics adds to the practice of Contemporary Ethics. If we focus on Beauvoir’s Existential Ethics, we will observe that her ethics is preoccupied with the moral permissibility of specific actions and practices. She is also preoccupied with the ways humans have morally transgressed. We can use Existential Ethics to understand how acts of unfreedom—such as when a White person racially discriminates against a minority person-- can inform moral actions. We can understand how the oppressor is not free when he or she attempts to take the freedom or rights of the oppressed. We can also understand how the oppressed person’s lack of freedom does not negate the privilege that they have in understanding their situation as that of oppression. Beauvoirian Existential Ethics enables me to claim that holding the oppressor accountable for their moral failure when he or she commits racist acts alludes to the ethics of the oppressed. It is the appropriation of moral failure that relates the ethics of the oppressed to Existential Ethics. In recognizing their oppression and acting against their oppression, the oppressed can attempt to become ethical. Through giving context to the situation of the oppressed, we can begin to understand that a moral act is not always determined by the status of one’s ontological freedom. *A person can fail to be free and still be ethical* as well as *a person can be free and fail to be ethical*, all this is dependent of the situation from which the individual person acts. Not achieving freedom is a moral failure just as much as overestimating one’s freedom is a moral failure. This alludes to the reciprocity between the lack of freedom in the situation of the oppressed and the oppressor—the reciprocity in the moral failures of both the oppressed and the oppressor.

I examine what I call *Beauvoirian Existential Ethics* so as to help those who are often confused about the prospects of Existential Ethics. Given my argument that Beauvoirian Existential Ethics enables us to embrace our personal freedom-- which is to better develop and foster our relationships with others-- I also argue that Existential Ethics is up to date in aiding us in solving some of the problems of our present time, such as the problems with the practice of war and violence and the problems with knowing when others are harmed. These issues are some of the questions that the applied ethicist attempts to address. I claim that Beauvoirian Existential Ethics helps us come to terms with the problem of evil or the problem of human error. The persistent practice of war and violence—physical or psychological-- and the harm that they cause on the freedom of other is a problem of human error which is understood by Beauvoir as the problem of evil.

While I focus on Beauvoir to address my viewpoint on the problem of evil, the views of Hannah Arendt concur with my analysis on this issue. Arendt expressed her view on the problem of evil, from “radical evil” or evil that stems from human nature that in turn affects evil deeds—evil actions—to a view of evil more aligned with Beauvoir’s view, whereby evil is not in human nature but only in the circumstances of our actions, a type of evil action that Arendt coined the “banality of evil.” In early Arendt, her view on radical evil can be found in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, while her later views on the banality of evil can be found in her volume *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. She stated her views on the banality of evil not as a theory, but as a judgment on evil based on which a man can be thought of as being capable of doing evil deeds without being inherently evil or evil by nature. Despite the similarities between Beauvoir and Arendt on the problem of evil, I have chosen to pursue my analysis on this subject with the views of Beauvoir because her analysis on “evil actions” is not devoid of an individual sense of responsibility—or not devoid of *freedom of choice*, whereby people can be imagined as being compromised from choosing to do evil instead of doing what is fair or more responsible. Thus, to Beauvoir, evil actions are not always thoughtless, which is the difference between Arendt and Beauvoir. I mention Arendt here to reference the more famous accounts on the problem of evil in comparison to the views of Beauvoir on this issue.

Also, I mention Arendt in this paper so as to situate my analysis within the greater philosophical discussions on the problem of evil. Finally, mentioning Arendt points to the case that in the field of philosophy, the problem of evil is a topic of race relations. I posit that racism as a problem of evil persists in the backlash of World War II and the development of antiracist political documents, such as the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights. Rethinking the problem of evil can help us think further on how to end or solve sociopolitical racism. So in this paper when I speak of racism I speak of the problem of evil and vice versa.

The Problem of Evil: Is it about Ethics or Politics?

To support my argument and to share the method of approach developed in this paper, my analysis draws on three perspectives that stem from Beauvoir’s Existential Ethics as presented in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. The first perspective, which I label “The Question of Method,” traces how Beauvoirian Existential Ethics is related to the field of philosophy. The second perspective, “Personal Freedom and Others,” examines the prospects of Beauvoirian Existential Ethics as it relates to personal freedom and the freedom of others as forms of *expression de vivre* or even *savoir faire*. The third perspective, “Freedom and Liberation,” examines Beauvoirian ethics as a form of political manifesto against war, violence, and oppression. All three perspectives will be touched upon interactively in the body of my paper.

Furthermore, the examples that I use in brief to support my argument are

- (1) The Nazi Occupation of France.
- (2) The relationship between the colonized and colonizer in France’s colonies.
- (3) The situation that developed after French women were given the right to vote in France in 1944.
- (4) Post 9/11 laws, such as the Patriot Act and the Freedom Act.

My examples are made to represent the positions of people who are ostracized women and people at the margins vis-à-vis the dominant group or the powers of neocolonial *white supremacy*.

The breakdown of my analysis is presented as mentioned above because I have observed that we tend to use Ethics to combat the bad in human behaviors that we deem immoral; however, we rarely use Ethics to combat wars and political conflicts based on racial oppression and white supremacy because we assume that racism is a problem of Politics and rather not of Ethics. I argue that racism can also be combated through Ethics-- specifically, through the Existential Ethics developed by Simone de Beauvoir. One thing that will resonate after reading my analysis is that to be racist, since the idea of race is a political rhetoric, is not just about being a bad person from the perspective of Politics, but also it is about being an unethical person from the perspective of Ethics. Combating racism entails being able to navigate both the realm of Politics and Ethics from the perspective of Justice or Just actions. My commitment to understand contemporary racism from this perspective is to show the impracticality of racism in modern society. It is not enough that we create academic fields and government programs to combat racism. We also have to work towards giving a timeline to anti-racist movements—practices and/or policies, since racism is impractical.

When Beauvoir advances claims such as “lynching is an absolute evil; it represents the survival of an obsolete civilization, the perpetuation of a struggle of races which has to disappear; it is a fault without justification or excuse,” we have to ask ourselves the following; under what context does Beauvoir see the relation between race and ethical failure, between race and the lack of justice in our democratic society? Do we have a moral obligation to pass judgment against racism? Under what condition is racism morally impermissible? Under what condition is racism too bad to be allowed? These questions are not only Existential questions, but as well Contemporary Ethics questions.

Since my ethical concerns against racism may appear to be political, it has been noted to me that since Politics is informed by moral laws, the laws of Politics and Ethics are one in the same and since I take issue with the problem of racism in Politics, I may have a problem with the unethical predicaments of policies (particularly racist policies) and rather not Politics as an ideal. I agree with this claim; however, since the racists policies which are founded according to the laws of Politics are discriminatory in practice, I argue that racist policies create a dissonance between Politics and Ethics. Racist policies create more distance between the laws of Ethics and the laws of Politics. Racism and racist policies make the laws of Politics and Ethics uneven and not necessarily the same. Racist policies imply that the Just and human rights protections are not the same for everyone, since in the United States, minorities are discriminated against by unjust policies such as the Patriot Act, while Whites are spared by this racist policy.

Before I move on with my analysis in which I breakdown the Beauvoir’s ethics, the critique that I anticipate about my position on the possible use of Beauvoirian Existential Ethics to attempt to render justice within the self-other relationship between whites and people of color may be that I am appropriating a form of Ethics that has roots in the Imperial history of France—in Western humanism, which in turn reveals the contradiction in my project. Some would argue that the differences between Virtue Ethics, Deontology and Existential Ethics are slim, since these fields of Ethics are European in origins and reflect the legacy of racial imperialism. My response to this criticism is that within the Imperial history of France or even the West, there has always been a place of resistance among white people who were against the oppression of people of color and also against the ignorance of their conditions and struggles. There were white people who were against the system of slavery in the United States and in Haiti, and, from its very beginning, there

were white people who were against colonialism and European imperialism in Africa, the Americas, the Pacific, and Asia.

With the development of a racial consciousness that began during the occupation of France by the Nazis during the early 1940's, I argue that Beauvoir and her philosophy were part of the resistance against slavery, colonial and imperial oppression. Well conscious of racism, sexism, and economic oppression, Beauvoir learned to speak up against these human errors or evils, despite problems with the intersectionality of racism and sexism in the situation of women of color. She did not have the words, language, or social and literary education to *speak with* and not *speak for* women at the margins.² It is a gross generalization to assume all European thoughts are based on imperialism. Some of the greatest challenges to Western imperialism have come from European men, such as Marx's thoughts in *Capital* or Lenin's thoughts in *Imperialism, the Higher Stage of Capitalism* as well as European American men, such as Noam Chomsky's thoughts in *On Western Terrorism*.

Sartre argued that the problem with white racism against blacks is a problem not for blacks to solve but rather for white people to solve for themselves, because modern racism started to exist in the consciousness of not black people but white people. Based on Sartre's reflection on how racism against blacks should be solved, I claim here that I am using Beauvoir's Existential Ethics as an attempt to show how the intellectual legacy of a white French woman can be used as an example of how white people can learn to *speak with*, alongside women of color, on the *white* problems of neocolonial racial oppression, and thereby I bring along Beauvoir in my attempts to eradicate racial injustice and oppression.

There are also contemporary intellectuals, such as Linda Alcoff, who urge white people to become *critical* participants in the movement toward the abolition of racism.³ But as Alcoff notes, the job of white people in the antiracism movement is to eradicate white privilege,⁴ which would then lead to possibly less racial animosity. Given Alcoff's suggestions on how whites can contribute to the abolition of racism, Sartre's analysis on the inclusion of whites on solving the black problem should not be interpreted from a cynical perspective. I use the ethics of Beauvoir as a *philosophy of resistance*, and from this perspective, I do not feel conflicted about developing and moving on with my own analysis and criticism of her philosophical inquiry. I propose that Simone de Beauvoir is complicit to white power but not an outright traitor to the white race.

The Situation: Existential Ethics

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, originally published in France in 1947, Beauvoir presents a genealogy of Modern ethics to situate Existential Ethics within the field of philosophy. Drawing primarily from the philosophy of Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Sartre, Beauvoir wished to show how Existential Ethics is a philosophy that negates human values, or a philosophy whereupon everything or every action is neither good nor bad, which in turn points to "the ambiguity of action." Existential Ethics points to "the ambiguity of action," because human action creates situations that are unclear and in turn shows how human action can be understood in more than one way-- contradicting the moral principle that human action should be interpreted from the perspective of either its goodness *or* its detriment—or how bad it is-- not both at the same time.

To Beauvoir, the history of the living experience of human beings points to the ambiguity of action.⁵ She argues that "as long as there have been men and they have lived, they have all felt

this tragic ambiguity of their condition.”⁶ From the records on the living experience of human beings, we can trace inconsistencies in the actions of people. Beauvoir examines the context of occupied France during World War II to show the contradictions in the actions of many Frenchmen, who felt torn between collaboration with or resistance to the Nazi regime; all this despite the obvious evilness of the Nazis. Beauvoir says the following, “Many Frenchmen also sought relief in this thought— [of coming to terms with the great uncertainty of the French nation]—in 1940 and the years which followed. ‘Let’s try to take the point of view of history’ they said upon learning that the Germans had entered Paris. And during the whole occupation certain intellectuals sought to keep ‘aloof from the fray’ and to consider impartially contingent facts which did not concern them. But we note at once that such attitude appears in moments of discouragement and confusion; in fact, it is a position of withdrawal, a way of fleeing the truth of the present.”⁷ Regardless of the reality that the occupation of France by the Germans infringed upon the rights of members of the French empire, many Frenchmen felt conflicted about coming out against the political oppression of the Nazi regime. Thus, the human error in this political situation was that many Frenchman did not necessarily believe they had to resist the Germans, which in turn revealed to Beauvoir the ambiguity and contradiction of human action.

The ambiguity of human action reflects a negation principle because it is devoid of values, an analysis that stems from the philosophy of Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, in which he presents a nihilistic approach to human action. His brand of nihilism is not just a rejection of all religious and moral principles. It is both the affirmation and negation of moral principles. The negation principle in Beauvoirian Existential Ethics is about the rejection of the law of noncontradiction where the context of morality can be understood in terms of contradicting actions or behaviors, which in turn removes the decisiveness of fundamental values in human action.

Through the perspective of the negation principle and borrowing from Sartre, Beauvoir claims that Existential Ethics is a philosophy of the absurd and of the despair,⁸ always fleeing away from any noncontradictory understanding. Beauvoir says that Existential Ethics “encloses man in a sterile anguish, in an empty subjectivity. It is incapable of furnishing him with any principle for making choices. Let him do as he pleases. In any case, the game is lost.”⁹ The context under which man exercises human actions is already doomed and cannot always lead to any decisive resolution. From the perspective of Existential Ethics, demanding as an imperative from many of the Frenchmen who lived during the German occupation of Paris to resist the Nazis might be a pointless goal because Existential Ethics accepts the view that not knowing what to do in a wartime situation is in itself a form of choice because such an absenteeism reflects the choice to comply with the Nazis. Affirming one of Sartre’s famous philosophical position that to do nothing is still the representation of a positive political act. Through Existential Ethics, Beauvoir can both praise and condemn the many Frenchmen who were silent observers of the German occupation of Paris as simply *despairing* collaborators.

Beauvoirian Existential Ethics is about embracing the logical contradiction that defies the attempt to capture ethics through reason, language, or any other rational method. The ambiguity of action is about the disbelief in values that can be consistently imbued in freedom of action. Beauvoir argues that Existential Ethics is a form of radical humanism.¹⁰ Existential Ethics is a form of radical humanism because it stems from the tradition of modern ethics. From this perspective, it becomes understandable why Beauvoir traces the theoretical underpinning of Existential Ethics to the tradition of modern philosophy, specifically from the tradition of Kant’s,

Hegel's, and Marx's philosophies. From Kant, Beauvoir borrows the principle of the freedom of the will. From Hegel, she borrows the historicity of the concept of freedom of action. Finally, from Marx, she borrows the subjectivism of the concept of freedom of action. Beauvoir draws from these thinkers to contextualize how the ambiguity of human action is the centerpiece for understanding the prospects of Beauvoirian Existential Ethics.

Understanding Beauvoirian Existential Ethics from the humanism of Kant, Hegel, and Marx points to the theoretical movement of the field, from subjective and formal to objective and temporal—or situational. Beauvoir wants us to understand this movement to show both the objectivity and situationality of the freedom of the will in human action. Thus, through an analysis on the freedom of the will, Beauvoir wants to theoretically explain the contingency in the *intentionality* of freedom in human action. On the subject of freedom and its theoretical underpinning, Beauvoir says the following, “By affirming that the source of all values resides in the freedom of man, existentialism merely carries on the tradition of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, who, in the words of Hegel himself, ‘have taken for their point of departure the principle according to which the essence of right and duty and the essence of the thinking and willing subject are absolutely identical.’”¹¹ Understanding the values that can be imbued on the ambiguity of human action is about coming to terms with the subjectivism of freedom of the will as the motor for the situationality of human action. What gives rise to values and meaning in Beauvoirian Existential Ethics is the understanding of the intentionality of freedom as a situation and rather not as a concept in the actions of humans, and it is not about judging the potentiality of human actions at face value in terms of disembodied or uncontextualized moral principles.

We cannot speak of the situationality of personal or individual freedom without attending to its prospects on the personal freedom of others. In Beauvoirian Existential Ethics, freedom is the basis of the moral obligation we have toward other people. As Kristana Arp observes in *The Bonds of Freedom*, in which she presents a thorough breakdown of Beauvoir's Existential Ethics, Arp notes that Beauvoir “shows how an individual can only develop moral freedom by interacting with other morally free subjects.”¹² In freedom, the *me-others* relationship is as indissoluble as the subject-object relationship.¹³ In addition to focusing on the situationality of freedom in the ambiguity of action, Beauvoir wants to emphasize that the dual nature of the human condition is not only based in ourselves but also based in those we perceive as others. To will oneself free is also to will others free.¹⁴ But Beauvoir regresses from this position by claiming that existentialism as a field of Ethics cannot always guarantee the development of individual freedom toward the freedom of others. As Lori J. Marso argues in her examination of Beauvoir's Ethics, “when confronting others, we should not seek to control them; nor should we see our own freedom as a zero-sum game in competition with the freedom of others. Instead, the meaningful exercise of our own freedom depends on acting to make possible the kind of political conditions that lessen or eliminate violence, including the structural violence of oppression.”¹⁵ For this reason, Beauvoir focuses the development of her brand of Existential Ethics, in Part II of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, on the many ways the subjective practice of freedom leads to a false consciousness that points to the numerous ways people deny their freedom by falling into the problems with human error and the evils of not embracing the freedom of others.

Beauvoir then examines the numerous ways human beings are thrown into the world of unforeseeable choices from birth on and from which they are not acting morally and do not care for the freedom of other people. From this context, Beauvoir gives us this example: the colonialist

who denies the freedom of the colonized in Algeria by engaging himself in the serious project of building roads that are based on the forced and underpaid labor of the colonized. Beauvoir references the French white woman who acquires the right to vote in 1944 but poorly represents herself politically by voting in the legislative elections in 1946 against the general interests of women in France, by voting for a more conservative or strong presidential government that supported the post–World War interests of people like General Charles de Gaulle.

Through her analysis on the relation between personal freedom and the freedom of others, Beauvoir examines how the lack of individual human beings' interest in the freedom of others leads to the evils of oppression, whereby the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, between women and men, the colonized and the colonized, blacks and white, and Arabs and white, are fraught with a bad conscience, *bad faith* and human error—or ethical mistakes. But to Beauvoir, the purpose of Existential Ethics is to point to the attempt to resolve the uneven relationship between the self and the other, which is fraught with relations that lean to the ultimate ethical mistake or human error, the problem of oppression and violence, and its degeneration into political conflicts, war, and intercontinental terror.

Beauvoirian Existential Ethics is about how the situationality of freedom in the *me-others* relationship can morph freedom into a form of *liberation* against political oppression. Given¹⁶ the context of freedom and liberation in Beauvoirian Existential Ethics, I argue that this Ethics speaks not to the development of moral principles but rather to an understanding of *moral failures*. Beauvoir's ethics helps us understand the difficulty of acting ethically whereby our sense of individual justice or freedom is always being demarcated by the freedom and liberation of others or the freedom and liberation of the oppressed—women, blacks, Arabs, and all unnamed others.

Beauvoirian Existential Ethics: Its Prospect on Contemporary Issues or on The War on Terror

The prospect of Beauvoirian Existential Ethics as it relates to personal freedom and the freedom of others represents an *expression de vivre* or even *savoir faire*, whereby we are compelled to both act well and mean well toward other people, individually and as a collective. Beauvoirian Existential Ethics is ultimately a way of living that can help us understand how the situationality of freedom is based within the *me-others* relationship. Given the political conflicts in this neocolonial world and in this post-9/11 political climate, existentialism as ethical attitude is surely feasible as a contemporary practice of *le savoir faire* or of “the good life” that could help us to not negate the freedom of oppressed people who could be violently harmed by the dominant members of our society and who are blamed as the root cause of the War on Terror.

From the perspective in which Ethics is understood as a form of *savoir faire*, such acts as the Patriot Act of 2001 passed under President George W. Bush, including its extension and ratification as the USA Freedom Act of June 2015 under President Obama, and President Trump's failed attempts at creating a travel ban against six Muslim countries (Syria, Iran, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, and Somalia)—all would have never come to fruition or be the subject of public debate reported by news anchors in the United States and abroad. I regard the results of political laws and social relationship as the rhetoric of Ethics. By regarding political laws and social relationships as the rhetoric of Ethics and not of Politics, or as a rhetoric of uneven power relationships among

members of the majority group and the oppressed, I am attempting to put into question the impact of political laws and social relationships as potential consequences of unethical behaviors.

From my attempt at utilizing Beauvoirian Existential Ethics to gauge the truths of the politics of recent American presidencies, I want to put pressure on the realm of politics with the values of Ethics, whereby the treatments of marginalized others are compromised by dominant political powers, who are in turn not behaving politically but rather unethically. For example, Bush's War on Terror; Obama's roving wiretap (or a wiretap that follows governmental surveillance targets, such as when he attempted to surveil and raid of a large portion of the members of Osama bin Laden's family) and also Obama's drone warfare¹⁷; and finally, Trump's unanimous attempts to ban people from the six Muslims countries mentioned above to enter into the United States are based on uneven political rhetoric that should be checked from the perspective of Ethics, such as Existential Ethics à la Simone de Beauvoir, that are based on the fruition or the liberation of the freedom of others within the self-other relationship.

Through my analysis, we can say that the legislative and executive treatment of people of color by Bush and Trump is reprehensible, and, in the case of Obama, though he sympathized with the cause of blacks, his legislative and executive treatment of Arabs was also deplorable. The recent American presidents should learn to better ethically treat the Other of American politics. My pursuit in Beauvoirian Existential Ethics is about practicing a philosophy of resistance against the status quo.

Given the context of my reading of Beauvoir's ethics, observing Beauvoir criticize French men and women as a French woman or observing me criticize Obama's administration as a black person should not make the reader feel conflicted. My analysis suggests then that the ultimate critique to political oppression can only occur when we are complicit within the very system. While as a black woman I feel ethically complicit in the unethical development of Obama's administration, he is not necessarily my ally.

As a president of a First World nation, I did not expect Obama to behave any differently than the previous members of the United States who have occupied his position. As it has been argued by Jo Becker and Scott Shane, the "'Secret 'Kill List' proves a test of Obama's Principles and Will"¹⁸ as a law professor. While intellectuals such as Bonnie Mann might criticize me for not putting too much weight on the race of Obama,¹⁹ I do not put any extrajudicial and political expectation on Obama simply because he is a black man whose success was built on the legacy of the civil rights movement—on the legacy of Martin Luther King—and, because I believe that political institutions affect the actions of people. Obama is not above it and I do not believe that Obama had the power to change the American political machinery or the development of the War on Terror, for that matter.

Yet, given my ethics as an existentialist, from which I view Obama as a man of choice and freedom of action, I view him to be just as responsible as Bush and Trump on the negative and unethical development of the War on Terror. In view of my analysis on the Ethics of Politics, I blame Obama for not refusing to oppress some members of the Arab and Arab American community. I then question Obama's politics/ethics and rather not his identity. As Cornel West would agree, we are after the responsibility of Obama's actions and not his being.²⁰

Following the legacy of French intellectuals of the colonial era, I conclude that like Sartre, Fanon, Albert Memmi, and Beauvoir, the problem with representation of the Arab as the ultimate enemy of the War on Terror is like the problem with the mass incarceration of black men in the

American prison system, as Angela Davis has been arguing,²¹ a problem that concerns us all, regardless of our race and personal identities. The human error in the development and process of the War on Terror is that it has molded the face of the radical Other into the image of the Arab—a problem that echoes Edward Said’s criticism on the representation of the Arab in both *Covering Islam*²² and *Orientalism*,²³ while at the same time forging grounds where discrimination against women, blacks, and immigrants can be further entrenched. As Elena Ruiz observes in her article “Existentialism for Postcolonials,” we are living at a time when racism against non-European peoples pass for patriotism, with women and girls bearing a disproportionate amount of the harm.²⁴ Following the thoughts of Ruiz, despite the end of colonialism, discrimination against women and people of color persists within the establishment of our new democracy. Based on Ruiz’s analysis, we can begin to understand how the War on Terror in the United States is inter-related to the development of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the DACA or Dreamers Movement, from which the minority population is arguing that their lives are not valued nor preserved by the law in 2018.

The breakthrough of my analysis is not that there are political injustices that have been done to Arabs and other people of color; instead, it is that the injustices done to Arabs and people of color are unethical, and we may need to change our democracy so that it mirrors the parameters of *Beauvoirian Existential Ethics*, since I have argued that it is a form of Ethics that has the resources to evaluate what is deemed ethical in politically unpure and contradicting situations. Thus, my critique of politics is based on the lack of peoples’ commitments to the practice of Existential Ethics—the ethical practice of reasonable self-other relationships.

A solution to combating this type of Ethical/Political injustice would be to end the War on Terror in which Arab Muslim men have become the main target. The War on Terror has created a ripple effect on the rights of all other minorities. Just as the end of World War II created a change in the racial situation of Jews, the end of the War on Terror can create a change in the racial situation of Arabs, and this change can alleviate some of the types of racism faced by Arabs, such as racial profiling. This will also ameliorate the types of racism faced by other minority groups. The War on Terror has created an increase of police control at the borders of the United States, and people such as Mexican immigrants are being targeted at the borders-- despite the fact they do not fit the racial profiling description of the contemporary terrorist originating from the Islamic world. While some may argue that the case of Mexican immigration is different than the case of Muslim discrimination, I argue instead that the War on Terror has created a toxic atmosphere where racial misdeed can occur more often to immigrants in the United States and at its borders.

Conclusion: Existential Ethics is Not Here to Stay and so is The War on Terror

The postscript of my analysis is that I foresee the end of the use of Beauvoirian Existential Ethics when the context of our lives becomes less contradictory and messy and more just. Given how dynamic Beauvoirian Existential Ethics is, it will evolve into something else once the problems of Politics of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century have been eradicated or resolved. Combating the problems in Politics with Ethics encompasses staying on our toes and always trying to update our philosophy and/or methods of approach in terms of the context of our living situations or lived experience. What World War II is for Beauvoir is what the War on Terror is for me. The War on Terror, like World War II, is an example of human error, and the violence

that the War on Terror created against people at the margins points to the problem of evil. As an existentialist, I claim that if the ethical situation is always subject to change, it then follows that our present methods of approach cannot always apply to the development of a new political reality—without racism, sexism, and class oppression—and, perhaps in a world that is more based on ecocentric worldviews and less based on ethnocentric/Eurocentric worldviews. In the future, the real human error is not going to be solely about taking away the freedom of others, but it is also going to be about not having the creativity to think outside the realm of Politics—outside the establishment of *democracy* as the ideal of Western humanism. In the meantime, I will continue to reference Simone de Beauvoir as a philosopher of resistance, who has attempted to solve, through a good sense of *savoir faire*, the problems with human error, even within the very development of Ethics as a field of inquiry, as the problem of evil. From this perspective we can begin to understand that the questions raised in Existential Ethics as in Contemporary Ethics are not absolute.

¹ “Ethics, Applied | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ap-ethic/>.

² Kathryn T. Gines, “Comparative and Competing Frameworks of Oppression in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 35, no. 1–2 (2014): 251.

³ Linda M. Alcoff, “What Should White People Do?” *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 12–24.

⁴ Alcoff, “What Should White People Do?” 6–7.

⁵ Anne Morgan, “Simone de Beauvoir’s Ethics of Freedom and Absolute Evil,” *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (December 10, 2008): 75.

⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Reissue edition (New York: Philosophical Library/Open Road, 2015), 6.

⁷ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 81.

⁸ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 8.

⁹ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 8–9.

¹⁰ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 17–18.

¹¹ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 16.

¹² Kristana Arp, *The Bonds of Freedom: Simone de Beauvoir’s Existentialist Ethics* (Chicago; Berkeley, CA: Open Court; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2001), 3.

¹³ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 78.

¹⁴ Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

¹⁵ Lori J. Marso, “Simone de Beauvoir on Violence and Politics,” in *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir* (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 306.

¹⁷ Naomi Klein, *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump’s Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 103.

¹⁸ Jo Becker and Scott Shane, “Secret ‘Kill List’ Tests Obama’s Principles,” *The New York Times*, May 29, 2012, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/29/world/obamas-leadership-in-war-on-al-qaeda.html>.

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²⁰ Cornel West, “Pity the Sad Legacy of Barack Obama,” *The Guardian*, January 9, 2017, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/09/barack-obama-legacy-presidency>.

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²³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 31–48.

²⁴ Elena Ruiz, “Existentialism for Postcolonials: Fanon and the Politics of Authenticity,” accessed May 12, 2017,

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