

# Nietzsche, Ethics & Sexual Difference

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There are many women in Nietzsche's texts. There is the old woman, the sceptic and the enigmatic love object, or woman as masquerade. There is The Woman, the *jouissance* of which is Lacan's God – the Truth behind the veil. There is the other as object of evaluation and there is the reactive, castrating feminist. And there is the woman as mirror who, like the scientist, is an instrument – a reflection of forms not her own. Like the rest of Nietzsche's philosophy, his comments about women are often offensive, always colourful and never black and white.

The subject of this paper is Nietzsche's feminist, although his other women will necessarily enter the scene. For it is Nietzsche's anti-feminism which has attracted the more black and white responses from commentators. The following small sample may indicate why:

Woman, the more she is a woman, resists rights hand and foot: after all, the state of nature, the eternal war between the sexes, gives her the first rank ... Has my answer been heard to the question of how one cures a woman – 'redeems' her? One gives her a child. Woman needs children, a man for her is only a means...<sup>1</sup>

And so on. Offensive? Yes. Descriptive or prescriptive? It's hard to tell.

Kaufmann apologises for Nietzsche's lapse in decency when addressing the subject of feminism,<sup>2</sup> and Christine Allen blames Nietzsche's attitude on his failed seduction of Lou Salomé<sup>3</sup> – a possibility I don't discount. More recently, Kelly Oliver has offered a psychoanalytic reading of Nietzsche's anti-feminism as symptomatic of his desire to possess woman as mother. This is posited against Derrida's claim (or, more correctly, against Krell's reading of Derrida's claim) that Nietzsche desires to *be woman*.<sup>4</sup> In another recent critique, Ellen Kennedy argues that Nietzsche opposes women's emancipation because it serves to 'destroy the will to power and to encourage the herd mentality'.<sup>5</sup> According to this reading, Nietzsche's woman is determined by her biology and, hence, should remain in her subservient position as wife and mother. Kennedy's is a particularly curious reading despite its neat fit with the quote given above. The will to power cannot be destroyed and there is no essential biology for Nietzsche, rather, a socially constructed arrangement of forces.

While Nietzsche's feminist is my subject, I wish to distance myself from these readings. Not because I condone

Nietzsche's misogyny but, rather, because my objection to his anti-feminism can only be raised via a different path. We could, of course, ignore Nietzsche's wider philosophy and thus reduce his comments on women to unconditional and personal misogyny. Yet there may be something of interest to salvage, even beyond a 'proper' interpretation of a 19th-century philosophy. The path I will take to Nietzsche's anti-feminism is one that attempts to salvage what is, ironically, of use to feminism – his critique of the liberal subject and the ethics of self-creation that this critique entails.

Contemporary feminists, for all their differences, seem to share a discomfort with the assumed authenticity of the rational subject as he is positioned at the norm of a politics of equality. Michèle Le Doeuff, for example, claims that in order to avoid the existential equation between oppression and moral error, feminism 'needs another problematic than that of the subject, and another perspective than that of morality'.<sup>6</sup> Marion Tapper, in her paper 'Can a Feminist be a Liberal', argues that liberalism's abstract conception of the individual obscures the way in which the evaluation of sexual difference operates to disadvantage women in the public sphere.<sup>7</sup> And Catharine Mackinnon reaches a similar conclusion: the concept of equality reproduces the power imbalance between men and women. She argues that, as the social norm of valued subjectivity is the male body, then the evaluation of sexual difference is an expression of power, in that difference means dominance, and 'equality' as sameness is impossible.<sup>8</sup>

It might seem somewhat paradoxical to claim that Nietzsche, while lacking this specific detail and hardly a champion of women's rights, does share these sentiments about equality, difference and dominance. In *Twilight of the Idols* and elsewhere, he condemns 'equality' as a 'certain actual rendering similar' which, as an expression of the will to power, 'belongs to decline'.<sup>9</sup> Against this he evokes a morality of 'many coloured actions', a celebration of a 'multiplicity of types' and the 'will to be oneself'.<sup>10</sup> To support this distinction between equality and a celebration of differences, Nietzsche provides a notion of the subject as a corporeal entity – socially constructed in relation to the other's difference. This notion, in turn, allows him to undermine the supposed autonomy, rationality and moral responsibility of the liberal individual and to unmask the ethical mode of evaluation which sustains this subject as the norm in the democratic state.

## I. Ethics, the Creation of the Self and the Other

In order to fully appreciate Nietzsche's ethics of self-creation and the place of sexual difference within it, it is necessary to look closely at his understanding of morality. Morality, he claims, is 'a system of evaluations that partially coincides with the conditions of a creature's life'.<sup>11</sup> It is also defined by him as a 'theory of relations of dominance under which the phenomenon "life" arises' (BGE 19). Thus Nietzsche foreshadows Foucault's nexus between knowledge, power and the body by positing an intimate relation between 'moral systems of evaluation', 'relations of dominance' and the 'creation of life'.

### (i) Evaluation and the Creation of Life

For Nietzsche, the operation of systems of evaluation involves more than the attachment of the moral values 'good' and 'bad' to individual actions. The production of all knowledge involves interpretation (WP 481) whereby 'our values are interpreted *into* things' (WP 590). Morality, as the evaluation of all sensations and activities is, it seems, at work everywhere:

As soon as we see a new image, we immediately construct it with the aid of all our previous experiences, *depending on the degree* of our honesty and justice. All experiences are moral experiences, even in the realm of sense perception (GS 114).

To say that 'our values are interpreted *into* things' suggests, not only that moral evaluation is all-pervasive, but that it produces more than a point of view. It creates life. At a most general level this means that, for Nietzsche, neither the object of interpretation nor its value and meaning exists in essence prior to our evaluation of it. It is through the process of interpretation, drawing upon a shared system of evaluation, that we transform what is 'in flux, incomprehensible and elusive' into apparently organized, enduring 'things':

The reputation, name and appearance, the usual measure and weight of a thing, what it counts for ... all this grows ... until it gradually grows to be part of a thing and turns into its very body (GS 58).

This applies to any 'thing' and any 'body'.

The body of particular interest to feminism is the sexed body. On this subject Nietzsche would appear to have little to say. However, appearances can be deceiving. The space for the creation of the sexed body can be located in more general references to the creation of a particular part of life – the phenomena we call 'self' and 'other'. Nietzsche's concern with the way in which moral evaluation governs the creation of, and relation between, self and other undermines what is most sacred to a liberal empiricist tradition and what is most frustrating to feminism – the notion of an autonomous, rational, morally responsible individual.

It follows from Nietzsche's more general claims about the relationship between systems of evaluation and the creation of 'life' that it is through the process of interpretation that the phenomenon 'self' arises, as well as the phenomenon 'other'. Let me first consider the constitution of the self as the subject, although, in practice, this cannot be separated from his relation to the other. Nietzsche insists that the unity of Descartes' subject, as the cause of mental and other acts, cannot be presupposed. The will, ego or 'I' is a unity 'only in a word'.<sup>12</sup> Nor is the body a pre-given unity, separate from the mind but, rather, is a multiplicity of activities. The body, as we know it,

is a product of a relation between commanding and obeying forces (BGE 19) and consciousness is a reflection of this relation (WP 477 and GS 354).

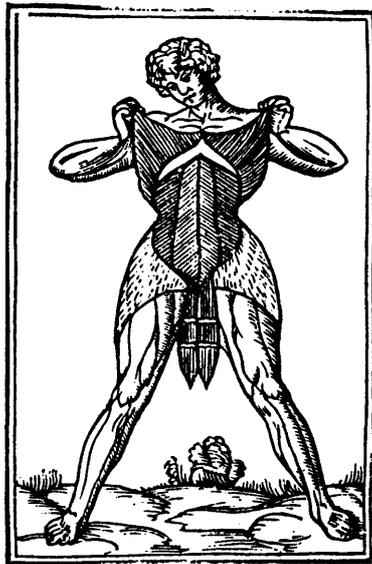
While the 'mind is an idea of the body' it is an idea mediated by those systems of evaluation which organise life in general. A plurality of material sensations, a multiplicity of forces of constraint, compulsion, resistance, pressure and motion is organised by the introduction of social norms – moral values and concepts like 'cause' and 'effect' – and through this imposition the unity of the 'self' is created. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for example, Nietzsche describes how the creation of a selective memory through the mnemotechnics of pain and punishment unifies the subject according to social convention (GM II 1 and 2). Memory brings unity to a selection of activities, effects and disparate events, past, present and future, such that the subject can safely say 'I will have done'.<sup>13</sup> This creation of a subject 'who makes promises' also involves a tradition of disproportionate evaluation of different parts of the body, used as a system of guarantees against failure to fulfil a promise or repay a debt (GM II 5). And 'forgetting' is transformed into an active, socially convenient, faculty of repression against the dangers of social psychosis. Forgetting ensures that 'chance' sensations and unending, unmediated impressions do not disrupt the uniformity of, and link between, discrete events now belonging to the responsible subject (GM II 1). Thus Nietzsche can claim that 'everything of which we become conscious is [always already] arranged, simplified, schematized, interpreted through and through' (WP 477). The 'I' represents only a conscious symptom of part of the body's possibilities – possibilities already organised and interpreted according to social convention.

The more obvious implication of Nietzsche's observations on this unified, responsible subject is that it is a fiction. It is only through convention and the 'interpretation of surface phenomena that accompany acts' that we separate the doer from the deed. We thereby assume a unified will that causes the deed and a substantial ego as causal antecedent to thought (TI p. 49). Both the authenticity and the unity of the rational subject are consequently thrown into doubt. A further implication is that, while the subject is divided, this division is



between socially mediated consciousness and the repressed, not between mind and body. The body is the seat of subjectivity, not in the sense of a pre-given causal biology, but as a socially constructed arrangement of forces. Hence, sexual difference cannot be located in either an essential causal biology or in a purely mental state as the object and product of

social conditioning. Rather, Nietzsche's model of subjectivity suggests that, just as the male subject is a product of interpretation which draws upon a shared system of evaluation, so is the mark of sexual difference.



As I have suggested, the mark of sexual difference can be located in the distinction between subject and other. The subject is fundamentally divided – not just between consciousness and the repressed, but between self and other. In that, given the work involved in the 'active forgetting' necessary to maintain the subject's unity, he must at times suffer an identity crisis. It is to prevent the collapse of the assumed autonomy and unity of the subject that a certain construction of the other is required. And allow me to introduce some of Nietzsche's more attractive women in this context:

When a man stands in the midst of his own noise, in the midst of his own surf of plans and projects, then he is apt also to see quiet, magical beings gliding past him and long for their happiness and seclusion: *women*. He almost thinks that his better self dwells there among the women (GS 60).

A certain image of woman, operating at a distance, seems to hold the key to the completion of the subject's identity. His better self appears to dwell there in an image that promises to organise and silence the noise of the repressed. His desire, then, is to possess this image. Or, as Nietzsche puts it: 'Our pleasure in ourselves tries to maintain itself by again and again changing something new *into ourselves*: that is what possession means' (GS 14). To incorporate the other woman, what he is not, would secure the presence of the subject's identity. But, Nietzsche warns: 'The magic and most powerful effect of woman is, in philosophical language, action at a distance ... but this requires first of all – *distance*' (GS 60).

What these passages reveal, in the first instance, is the position of woman in relation to the male subject – she is his other and, as such, is crucial to the creation and maintenance of his identity. Thus the autonomy of the subject is also thrown into doubt in that the social systems of evaluation which give rise to the subject only do so in a field of relations with others. And, as Nietzsche's definitions of morality suggest, this field is one of domination as well as one of interpre-

tation. To say that morality is a 'theory of relations of dominance' brings Nietzsche's notion of the will to power onto the scene of interpretation and the creation of the subject.

## (ii) Evaluation and Relations of Dominance

If the apparent unity of the subject is a product of interpretation then, as Nehamas suggests, the notion of an interpreter behind the interpretation is also a fiction.<sup>14</sup> If this is the case then who or what interprets? Our needs, manifest as drives, interpret, answers Nietzsche, and 'every drive is a lust to rule' (WP 481). Or, to put this another way, as he does: 'the will to power *interprets* ... it defines, limits, determines degrees' (WP 643). This power is not so much something that the subject 'has' but is the productive force of interpretation of which the delimited subject is an effect. It is a relational entity 'designated by the effect it produces and that which it resists' (WP 634).

By equating interpretation with productive power in this way, Nietzsche is claiming that 'reality' consists, not of fixed, passive entities, but of material centres of force which seek to extend their own effects and activities. Centres, including the phenomenon 'self', which seek to grow stronger and resist domination by others through the interpretation and evaluation of their own effects as separate from, and in relation to, others. Hence:

every centre of force adopts a perspective toward the entire remainder, i.e. its own particular valuation, mode of action and mode of resistance... Reality consists precisely in this particular action and reaction of every individual part toward the whole (WP 567).

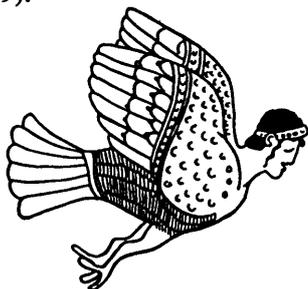
Translating this general claim into the specific question of the human Being Nietzsche proposes that 'the only "Being" vouchsafed for us is changing, not identical with itself, it is involved in relationships...'<sup>15</sup>: relationships of power and dominance which are established and reinforced by the interpretation of the subject's own activities as distinct from others.

We can perhaps begin to see how the corporeal image of the other woman is, at least partially, an effect of the subject's will to power. Woman, like the male subject, is not born of an essence but of an interpretation. What defines the subject as unified and separate from her is the selective interpretation of his activities and of his relations with, and differences from, other collections of effects. Just as 'the thing is the sum of its effects' (WP 551), 'I am an effect' (BGE 19) and so is woman. The division between inner and outer world, the subject and object, the subject and other is an arbitrary (although enduring) product of interpretation wherein we assume some effects belong together. This process of production generates a hierarchy of identity in that, given woman's role in constituting and maintaining the subject's boundaries, her corporeal image is constructed in deference to his and is, therefore, less discrete.

Woman is socially inscribed as the ambiguous point against which the subject identifies himself. At a distance the corporeal image of woman thus created operates to re-affirm the subject's unity and autonomy; as a possible source of increased power for the subject, in the sense of a proliferation of his effects, she is the object to be possessed. A contradictory double image of virtue and shame is essential to the self-certainty of the subject – a self-certainty maintained at woman's expense. This precarious, ambivalent relation between subject and other is the essence of sexual difference and the creation of the subject relies on such an interpretation of difference: 'it is man who creates for himself an image of

woman, and woman forms herself according to this image' (GS 68).

The apparent willingness with which women act out the subject's fantasy is a bit of wishful thinking on Nietzsche's part. Women are not merely 'reactive' – they have their own modes of action and valuation beyond the needs of the subject. Nietzsche at least admits to the impossibility of maintaining simultaneously both virtue and shame and suggests that women's scepticism and silence 'casts anchor at that point' (GS 71). But silence and retreat are not the only avenues of resistance women have to the power of interpretation. Any active expression of subjectivity beyond the needs of the subject would have its material effects upon the subject's identity. Nietzsche acknowledges this when claiming that woman would be unable to hold men if 'we did not consider it quite possible under certain circumstances she could wield a dagger (any kind of dagger) *against us*. Or against herself – which in certain cases would be a crueler revenge' (GS 69).



Finally, sexual difference is not just a symptom of interpretation which organises materiality and establishes and maintains relations of dominance. But, as I have suggested, interpretation implies the designation of value. The only fundamental ontological differences that Nietzsche seems to admit, including presumably those between the sexes, are 'variations in power' – differences in quantity arising from the 'desire to be more' (WP 564). While there is no quality or value-in-itself, differences in quantity are felt and interpreted as differences in quality (WP 563). The quantitative reckoning, weighing and measuring of the self as distinct from the other involves the construction of a hierarchy of qualitative differences between self and other. Neither exists *in essence* apart from their relational effects and the interpretation of those relations as differences in quality. Hence it is no accident that women are evaluated differently from men against a male norm – the norm itself is maintained in its dominant position by such evaluation.

Given that Nietzsche's understanding of morality firmly re-inserts politics, epistemology and ontology back into the realm of ethics, it is not surprising that his philosophy continues to provoke some discomfort. The ethical problem for him is that in order to delimit the subject as autonomous, authentic and re-located at the centre of the universe we need to 'invent and fabricate the person with whom we associate – and immediately forget we have done so' (BGE 138). This is not for him a harmful or indifferent process. The system of evaluation which gives rise to the liberal subject is inflected with the will to domination. Yet we cannot simply unmask the essential self or other behind the power of interpretation – for neither exists. Rather, Nietzsche's genealogy of morals unmasks the subject's investments and the violation, appropriation and domination involved in circumscribing and evaluating intersubjective differences. However, it remains to be seen whether his concern can stretch to include the violation of women – the subject's other *par excellence*.

## II. Towards an Ethics of Difference

That a particular kind of individual endures indicates, Nietzsche suggests, that a particular species of interpretation also endures (WP 678). The kind of individual that endures is the subject that operates normatively in our democratic institutions. The species of interpretation which maintains this creature is the mode of evaluation which we would call 'dichotomous'. It is within an excursion through dichotomous systems of evaluation that Nietzsche's explicit critique of a politics of equality can be found.

Through his gesture *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche attacks the apparent indifference of dichotomous systems of evaluation. Contrary to appearances, he claims, nothing and no one is good-in-itself: 'It might even be possible,' he suggests,

that *what* constitutes the value of those good and honoured things resides precisely in their being artfully related, knotted and crocheted to those wicked, apparently antithetical things... (BGE 2).

The designation of value is not indifferent to difference, nor is it without its material effects. We create valuable things through the devaluation of difference. The thing is fetishized – becomes a valuable thing-in-itself – by forgetting this process of production. 'We put value into things and this value has an effect on us long after we have forgotten that we were the donors.'

But what *is* the effect on us? In particular, what is the effect on the subject of assigning value to the other's difference? Nietzsche's most systematic answer can be found in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In describing how *ressentiment* creates values, he claims that: 'slave morality from the outset says No to what is "outside", what is "not itself", and *this* No is its creative deed' (GMI 10). The negation of the other's difference is the subject's denial of heterogeneity and this is creative in an ontological sense. The man of the 'herd' reacts against difference: he creates the other as evil, as an opposite, and from this he, himself, evolves. The constitution, status and identity of the subject is, therefore, an effect, more precisely an after-effect, of evaluating the other's difference.

As 'translation is a form of conquest' (GS 83), the other does not emerge from this process unscathed. Creating and maintaining the normative subject through a contempt for difference is merely a veiled expression of the will to power: the subject's will to extend his own activities, impose his own values and 'create the world in his own image'. As a result of this reaction to difference, the other may be deemed socially inferior and marginalized accordingly. Or the other's difference, so determined, may be effaced through the process of 'making equal' or making the same. Either way, the creative power of dichotomous evaluation lies in giving rise to a certain kind of subject as an after-thought to creating, then negating the other's difference.

Putting aside the specific question of sexual difference temporarily, I want to trace the general sentiment of Nietzsche's opposition to this mode of self-creation as it operates in an ethico-politics of equality. Rather than being measured and measuring others against a social norm of value, Nietzsche proposes a 'morality of many coloured actions'. 'We want to become what we are,' he says, 'human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves' (GS 335). Rather than negating the other's difference, we seek our honour, our value through affirming ourselves (TI p. 46).

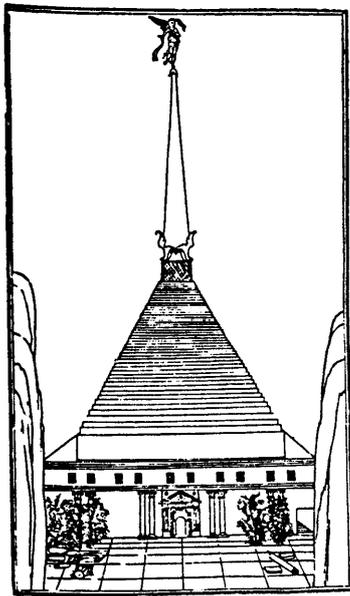
The problem with Nietzsche's alternative ethics of af-

firmation for a liberal empiricist tradition is locating what is affirmed and from where new values can emerge. The position from which we can create ourselves by affirming what is new, different and incomparable is, it seems, the position of 'other' to reactive evaluation. Nietzsche's wider definition of the 'other' as the profound spirit, the enigmatic, the poet and the artist allows the space for us to insert into this position anyone who is interpreted as profoundly different to the social norm (on the basis of sex, colour, ethnicity, sexuality etc.) by a dichotomous mode of evaluation.

Where the normative subject is created and maintained through a comparative distaste for otherness, the 'other' will always remain enigmatic. The corporeal image of the other is, in part, an image *for* the subject. Such consideration of difference by the subject involves the selection of a few effects and characteristics from a continuum of possibilities. And just as the other's possibilities can never be fully appreciated in this way, the other's difference can never be fully captured, silenced and effaced by an ethico-politics of equality. As Nietzsche claims in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

Every profound spirit needs a mask, more around every profound spirit a mask is continually growing thanks to the constantly false, that is to say *shallow* interpretation of every word he speaks, every step he takes, every sign of life he gives (BGE 40).

The process of reactive evaluation creates the mask that is the other's socially inscribed difference. But, unlike in Hegel's synthesis of the dialectic, a remainder of difference is always deferred in the creation of this mask. This is particularly the case if the other does not merely 'react' or conform to the subject's interpretation. This remainder, itself constantly shifting, is the space that allows the possibility of affirming



oneself against the social norm of interpretation. What Nietzsche affirms here is not unlike what Derrida describes under the motif of *différance* – the infinite deferral and delaying of the presence of meaning and value.<sup>16</sup>

It is clear from Nietzsche's descriptions of the operation of morality that there is no *essential* corporeal value behind the mask to be retrieved and affirmed. Rather, there is a 'tempo of one's style' which is lost in translation (BGE 28); a multiplic-

ity of possible permutations and combinations of effects which resists simplification. Or, as Nietzsche would have it, an excess feeling of power, abundance and plenitude which seeks to create the self differently rather than subtract from the other (TI p. 72). Hence, in Nietzsche's ethics of self-creation there is no end point of self-realization or authentic subjectivity as Stern suggests<sup>17</sup> – no unmasking or construction of an essential self. What Nietzsche describes is an inevitable, yet positive mode of resistance to social domination and normalization; a process of re-interpreting one's own activities and effects; a will to ambiguity and self-affirmation which draws upon what exceeds interpretation and which finds its pleasure in thwarting and subverting a mode of evaluation that seeks to simplify and efface differences.

Feminists, self-defined or not, are, of course, familiar with this will to ambiguity. It is practised every day. Not in a simple reversal of the values that re-inforce women's oppression but in the way women oppose, re-interpret and weave around the simplistic categories that evaluate their differences from men. And, given Nietzsche's recognition of the unique role that sexual difference plays in sustaining the subject's status and identity, one would expect that women would be given a privileged place in his ethics of self-affirmation. However, just as the liberal subject which Nietzsche attacks is male, so is the 'we' located at the creative site of undecidability.

For Nietzsche, the 'other' placed most at risk by an ethics of equality is not woman but the sometimes cruel, sometimes enigmatic, always exceptional Noble spirit. The way Nietzsche appears to single out a sole aristocratic victim is somewhat surprising to a contemporary reader and has drawn criticism from some commentators. However, that Nietzsche appears to seek to save an elite and somewhat frightening figure from the workings of the democratic state is, in part, a product of historic necessity. It was the noble man, embellished by a memory of Greek nobility, who, more than any other, symbolized what was thrown into relief by the rise of the liberal individual in the nineteenth century. But this is no longer the case: a century of 'equality' has created its own hierarchy of value and, hence, its own order of differences to be marginalized and effaced. All the same, on the question of Nietzsche's explicit exclusion of women from this possibility of self-creation, the excuses run out.

So, what about the masks behind woman's mask of virtue and shame? What of the dagger of other possibilities wielded beyond the dance to man's tune? At times Nietzsche comes close to recognizing the power of women's positive resistance to the domination of social sameness. This is certainly implicit in his acknowledgement of the role of woman as the subject's other, as in comments that hint at feminine dissatisfaction as the necessary pre-condition to change (GS 24). On the question of other possibilities for women he, at times, hypothesizes:

All at once we believe that somewhere in the world there could be women with lofty, heroic and royal souls, capable of and ready for grandiose responses, resolutions and sacrifices, capable of and ready for rule over men because in them the best elements of man apart from his sex have become an incarnate ideal (GS 70).

However, he is quick to discount this possibility: 'such voices always retain some motherly and housewifely coloration.' This is, in part, a denial of an essence behind the mask of woman – a belief that motivates man's desire for more – and of the futility of simply reversing existing oppositions. But it

is also a sign that Nietzsche remains unsympathetic to feminist attempts, in any form, to improve woman's lot. More than unsympathetic – he seems positively hostile.

Nietzsche's anti-feminism is not so much inconsistent but symptomatic of his own *ressentiment*. His opposition to feminism of equality is in keeping with his opposition to the material effects of reducing all differences to a social norm. However, there is a small but significant difference between feminism and democratic normalization in general. Feminists of equality may implicitly seek to make women the same as the male subject – at least for the purposes of evaluation before the law. But, as Nietzsche himself implies, the norm is male, making such a project partial, at best. More important, for feminism to be a threat to Nietzsche's *male* poet, artist and enigmatic noble spirit, it would have to have the power to make men the same as women. Such a power has not, to my knowledge, ever been a reality.

So why this stubborn obsession? A hint of an answer can be found, I think, in the comments prefacing Nietzsche's more vitriolic attacks on feminism. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, he claims that the comments to follow on 'woman as such' are spoken by an 'unchangeable "this is I"'. They are, therefore, 'my truths' he claims, emphatically (BGE 231). Similarly, in *Ecce Homo* and in a manner reminiscent of Lacan's "love letters",<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche introduces an even more notorious attack on female emancipation (which includes the quote given at the beginning of this paper) with the following:

May I venture to say that I *know* women? That is part of my Dionysian dowry. Who knows? Perhaps I am the first psychologist of the eternally feminine. They all love me – an old story – not counting *abortive* females, the 'emancipated' who lack the stuff for children (EG p. 266).

Bearing in mind the uncertainty of this 'know', Nietzsche claims to know women – perhaps better than they do themselves. He is venturing his truths – not just in the sense of his opinion, but in the sense of what his 'this is I' requires of woman to ensure its unity. The 'we' who practice this ethics of affirmative self-creation require, it seems, the same image of the eternally feminine to guarantee its value. Nietzsche insists that this 'we' should not be 'deprived of the stimulus of the enigmatic' (WP 470). But the feminists wield the dagger that threatens to take away this enigmatic image of the eternally feminine – the mirror that gives him back his own reflection. Nietzsche, on the question of 'woman as such', lines up with the liberal subject which he seeks to subvert – they are both interpreting an image of themselves at woman's expense. The difference is that Nietzsche admits it.

But he is doing more than ambiguously acknowledging man's debt to woman. He also claims to speak from experience – from the position of the eternally feminine ('that is part of my Dionysian dowry'). The problem that 'woman as such' presents for Nietzsche is that the corporeal image of woman is already ambiguous, divided in-itself. Whilst the 'other' position women thus occupy is a result of a 'shallow interpretation' (to adopt Nietzsche's phrase) and is not to be envied, nor uncritically embraced, it does make women the obvious source of other possibilities – for affirming the otherness of the other. Yet Nietzsche would have us believe that, at the site of affirmative subversion of dichotomous evaluation, he would be a more effective 'woman' than women. As hard as he tries, he cannot occupy that particular position and perhaps that is where his scepticism and silence, on the question of the dagger women wield against the normative subject, casts its anchor.

If we can still speak of origins then I can venture to say that Nietzsche sowed the seeds for an ethics of difference based on a genealogy of the divided self. An anti-philosophy, if you like, which can be mapped to the present through psychoanalysis, structuralism and semiotics. His philosophy is, therefore, useful to feminism for its observations, rare in Western philosophy, on the subject as a material construction – the unity of which is dependent upon the domination and devaluation of an indiscrete and contradictory image of woman. It is useful too for the space it thereby opens to women to explore possibilities for change beyond the impasse of equality. However, just as with the philosophy of Nietzsche's contemporary male disciples, we need to tread carefully through this new terrain. A celebration of differences runs the risk of reproducing modes of subjectivity and power relations which fall within familiar and esteemed boundaries. And it occasionally shows signs, explicit in Nietzsche's philosophy, of what Spivak calls the 'double displacement of woman' – a displacement of woman from the site of otherness – just when this site has been acknowledged as both the condition of possibility of the subject's authenticity as well as the source of his possible demise.

## Notes

- 1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 267 in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, Walter Kaufman (trans.), Vintage, 1967. Hereafter referred to as GM (followed by essay and section number) and EG (followed by page number for this edition.)
- 2 See, for example, Kaufmann's introduction to *The Gay Science*, Walter Kaufmann (trans.), Vintage, 1974, p. 24. Hereafter referred to as GS followed by section numbers.
- 3 Christine Allen, 'Nietzsche's Ambivalence About Women', in Lorene Clark and Lynda Lange (eds.), *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1979, p. 125.
- 4 Kelly Oliver, 'Nietzsche' Woman: the Poststructural Attempt to do Away with Women', *Radical Philosophy*, No. 48, 1988. While I share Oliver's concerns I have only touched on the important debate about 'writing as woman' as Derrida presents it in *Spurs/Eperons*, Alan Bass (trans.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979. A more detailed critique is provided by Gayatri Spivak in 'Displacement and the Discourse of Woman', Mark Krupnick (ed.), *Displacement: Derrida and After*, University of Indiana Press, N.Y., 1982 and 'Love Me, Love My Ombre, Elle', *Diacritics*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Winter 1984.
- 5 Ellen Kennedy, 'Nietzsche: Woman as Untermensch', in Ellen Kennedy and Susan Mendus (eds.), *Women in Western Political Philosophy*, Wheatsheaf, Sussex, 1987, p. 190.
- 6 Michèle Le Doeuff, 'Operative Philosophy', *Ideology and Consciousness*, No. 6, Autumn 1979, p. 57.
- 7 Marion Tapper, 'Can a Feminist be a Liberal', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplement to Vol. 64, June 1986.
- 8 Catharine A. Mackinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1987, especially chapter 2.
- 9 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), Penguin, 1968, p. 91. Hereafter referred to as TI followed by page numbers for this edition.
- 10 *Ibid.* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), Penguin, 1972, p. 215. Hereafter referred to as BGE followed by section numbers.
- 11 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann (ed. and

- trans.) and R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), Vintage, N.Y., 1967, p. 256. Hereafter referred to as WP followed by section numbers.
- 12 For example, TI p. 37, BGE 19 and WP 485-561.
- 13 See also TI p.46 for the notion that the present individual is also his past and future.
- 14 Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1985. I am partly indebted in this section to Nehamas' refreshing account of the relation between interpretation and the will to power as described in the chapter 'The Thing is the Sum of its Effects'. While Nehamas' account relates to the 'thing' as product of interpretation, I seek to emphasise the effect of interpretation on the subject of interpretation.
- 15 Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, G. Colli and M. Montinari (eds.), Berlin, 1967, Vol. V, section 2, p. 468, quoted in J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche*, Fontana, London, 1978, p. 146.
- 16 See, for example, Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', *Margins of Philosophy*, Alan Bass (trans.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982. Such an understanding of Derrida's descriptions of the operation of 'différance' is, in turn, essential to his reading of Nietzsche as 'writing as woman' in *Spurs*.
- 17 *Op. cit.*, pp. 76 and 77.
- 18 'There is a *jouissance* proper to her, to this "her" which does not exist and signifies nothing ... and of which she herself may know nothing' (p. 145) and to 'these mystical ejaculations ... *Add the Écrits of Jacques Lacan* which is of the same order' (p. 147) in Jacques Lacan, 'God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman' and 'A Love Letter', Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality*, Macmillan, London, 1982.
- 19 'Displacement and the Discourse of Woman', *op. cit.*

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