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How can Nietzsche's philosophy contribute to feminist thought?

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HOW CAN NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY CONTRIBUTE TO
FEMINIST THOUGHT?

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of
Philosophy
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
Sharare Sharoki
May 2006

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ABSTRACT

HOW CAN NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY CONTRIBUTE TO FEMINIST THOUGHT?

By Sharare Sharoki

This thesis addresses a feminist interpretation of Nietzsche in order to find out how Nietzsche's philosophy can contribute to feminist thought. The reaction of feminist scholars who reject Nietzsche's philosophy is analyzed, as well as the response of those feminists who take a positive approach to Nietzsche. This inquiry intends to explore why feminists are interested in Nietzsche's philosophy.

Research on this subject reveals that there are scholars who view Nietzsche's critiques of dualism and essentialism as well as his perspectivism and social constructivism as foreshadowing later feminist positions. The author joins these scholars in arguing that Nietzsche's criticism of truth, objectivity, and reason helps feminists to challenge the exclusion of women from the history of philosophy. In addition to studying these Nietzschean themes, this paper presents an interpretation of his philosophy of power, his view on morality, and how they enrich feminism.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father, Mahmoud Shahrokhi, whose originality and strength, free spirit, creative mind, and love for life has been the greatest inspiration to me. His eagerness to face life challenges up to his last days inspired me to finish this work. He passed away in December 2004.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche Is No Feminist

The common belief about Nietzsche being a misogynist often is based on his caustic remarks about women. Far from being recognized as a feminist, Nietzsche's philosophy has invoked much controversy in feminist debates. Nietzsche has been criticized by feminists mainly for reasons such as: his privileging of masculinity and paradigms of domination, his sexual dualism and hierarchical arrangement between sexes, his remarks about women and femininity, his misogyny, and his politics. His view seems to be too close to a "typical mentality" of a man of his time regarding woman: anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian.

Although Nietzsche is no feminist, his philosophy does attract some of the feminist scholars. In their Introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1995, *FIFN*),¹ Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall explain "Why Feminists Read Nietzsche."² Oliver and Pearsall divide the essays in this anthology into two main groups: "Nietzsche's Use of Women" and "Feminists' Use of Nietzsche." In the first group, they write, "many debates have focused on how to interpret Nietzsche's remarks about women and femininity. Are all of Nietzsche's comments to be read literally, or are we to presume that he is being ironic, perhaps even parodying and subverting stereotypes

about women?” The second response arises from efforts to answer important questions such as: is Nietzsche’s philosophy useful to feminist theory? “Can we separate his philosophy from his seemingly derogatory remarks about women? Can feminists use his criticism of truth, objectivity, reason, and the autonomous subject to challenge the exclusion of women from the history of philosophy?” (*FIFN* 2)

In my study, I also emphasize the distinction between Nietzsche’s view of women and feminists’ view of Nietzsche’s philosophy. It is the latter that is important, in my view. This study focuses on distinctive aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy, which captivates feminist scholars. From this perspective, the question of whether Nietzsche was a feminist does not matter. Rather, another question becomes the focal point: how can Nietzsche’s philosophy contribute to feminist thought?

Chapter Two

FEMINISTS AND NIETZSCHE

Debra Bergoffen, in her essay, “Nietzsche Was No Feminist,”³ writes, “The question of woman, however, percolates his thought. He tells us to go to her with a whip, to suppose she is truth, to address her as life, to call her Baubo.”⁴ He calls her Zarathustra’s mistress and the stillest hour. Nietzsche always seems to be calling to, or telling us something about woman. Like almost everything else in Nietzsche’s thought, however, this something he keeps telling us is less than perfectly clear.” (*FIFN* 225) Bergoffen points out how the notion of woman is always present in Nietzsche’s writings, and how, like many other parts of his philosophy, it comes with a kind of ambiguity that leaves it open to different interpretations.

While Bergoffen is aware that in dealing with the anti-systematic thought of Nietzsche there is always a question of risky interpretation, she gets involved with “an interpretive risk” about Nietzsche’s opening to *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he writes, “supposing truth is a woman – what then?” Bergoffen claims that “there are good reasons for privileging” the supposition of “truth is a woman.” Pursuing these good reasons, she believes, helps us with understanding both Nietzsche and feminist thought. The good reasons are, according to her, the place of the thought, the *what* and the *how* of the thought. Having this supposition at the beginning of the genealogy, Nietzsche links

“the question of woman to the issue of origins.” And the fact that it raises the question of truth, she argues, “links the question of woman to the issue of philosophy” (*FIFN* 226).

Nietzsche ties the question of woman to philosophy by comparing philosophers’ search for truth with men’s hunt for women. He argues that truth seekers approach truth in an awkward way, as they do with woman. Nietzsche condemns philosophers, or the dogmatists, to be “very inexpert about women.” The point of his analogy, truth as woman, becomes clear in the first passage of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he writes “the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached truth so far have been awkward and very improper methods for winning a woman’s heart.” In other words, as it is not easy to win a woman’s heart, it is not easy to find truth, especially not with the dogmatists’ clumsy approach.

Offering her own interpretation of Nietzsche’s opening statement, Bergoffen writes, “to think of truth as a woman and of philosophers as inept, failed suitors is to make philosophy a matter between man and woman. A matter of desire” (*FIFN* 227). Man wants truth, like man desires woman. With this way of thinking, she argues, Nietzsche turns the traditional question of philosophy, “how shall man discover the truth?” into the genealogical question, “why does man want truth?” Bergoffen shows how Nietzsche, entangling all his philosophical questions with the question of feminine, ultimately “points to the ways in which the question of woman, far from being at the margins of philosophy, lies close to its heart” (*FINF* 226).

Feminists who Reject Nietzsche's Philosophy

Linda Singer, in "The Inversion of Value and the War against Women," is stunned to see that Nietzsche, "the philosopher of self-transcendence, who told of the coming of the Overman," could hold "some very bad opinions of women." Nietzsche's Zarathustra talks about "pregnancy as the only solution to women's problems." Singer writes, "not only is the cavaliness of this remark shocking, but the oversimplification it represents is in total contrast with the painstaking treatment he gives to the problems of 'human existence'" (*FIFN* 173).

In *Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes: "woman wants to be taken and accepted as a possession, wants to be absorbed into the concept of possession, possessed. Consequently she wants someone who takes...I do not see how one can get around this natural opposition by means of social contracts or with the best will in the world to be just" (*GS* 363). This natural division of power, Singer protests, "constitutes the ground of the conflict between the sexes that Nietzsche regards as an unquestionable feature of human existence." Nietzsche seems to promote the existent conflict between the sexes as natural and approve it as it is. Obviously, Nietzsche's view on this issue is in contrast with feminism whose task is to question, criticize, and even change the existent division of power between the two sexes.

Nietzsche not only considers the opposition between man and woman to be natural, but also attributes some qualities to woman as part of her nature, such as: "cunning, suppleness, naivete of egoism, and uneducability and inner wildness, possessing desires and virtues of incomprehensible scope of movement" (*BGE* 169).

Although, Nietzsche admires at least some of these qualities, Singer considers them to be “very negative.” For Nietzsche, Singer argues, “these features of female existence are testimony to her inferiority.” For example, woman is preoccupied with her appearance because she is incapable of a more substantive mode of self-expression. She believes in love, uncritically, due to her malleable and dependent spirit. Or, in Nietzsche’s view, she is shy because “she lacks the capacity for directness,” Singer writes (*FIFN* 176).

Singer argues that Nietzsche’s claim that the qualities he attributes to women are natural is problematic. By moving into the realm of nature, Nietzsche has created a situation, according to Singer, where “women cannot help but fulfill men’s negative anticipations of what can be expected from them. Both women and men are doomed to continual frustration and disappointment with each other.” Referring to these qualities and the power structure between men and women as the laws of nature leads us to believe that biology determines social role. While this conclusion is problematic from a feminist point of view, it is doubtful it can be assigned to the core of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Nietzsche’s anti-essentialism has been recognized by many feminist theorists. Many scholars have praised Nietzsche for his social constructivism which is contrary to the view that biology determines social role.

Singer sees a shift in attitude in Nietzsche’s criticism of women. There is another phase in Nietzsche’s discussion of women, she notices, that concerns “not biology, but values.” In this approach, women have moved “from the realm of predestination to a position of responsibility” (*FIFN* 177). Women are now held accountable for their values; they are taken more seriously. But, the problem is, whatever values Nietzsche

finds distasteful are seen as “feminine values.” Nietzsche turns the tables on women and inverts the scale of value in his interpretation of their conduct, she points out. Charging Nietzsche for waging a war against women, Singer mainly criticizes him for his inversion of values every time he evaluates women’s behaviors. She writes, “The scale of values has been reversed against women. Their actions have become their opposites. All their efforts work against them” (*FIFN* 175).

The purpose of this inversion, according to Singer, is to turn strength into weakness. Any effort by women to rise above their situation, in Nietzsche’s view, is only a reactionary movement of resentment. He dismisses women’s efforts toward emancipation as a gesture of retaliation by “‘abortive women’ against their fertile and well-adjusted sisters” (*FIFN* 175). She claims, that “the philosopher of self-transcendence,” Nietzsche denies women the higher task of all, the adventures of self-creation. In Nietzsche’s world, women do not make themselves.

Ofelia Schutte focuses on “Nietzsche’s Politics” in her essay. To study Nietzsche’s theory of values, she argues, a critical understanding of his politics is required. Believing that values ultimately reflect the “interests of those who can wield the most power,” she is preoccupied with questions such as, “what are the political assumptions implicit in these values?” or “who is to profit from the widespread acceptance of these values?” (*FIFN* 282) Nietzsche’s critique of traditional values, according to Schutte, must be studied in conjunction with his political view.

Schutte attacks Nietzsche’s politics for being anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian, pro-aristocratic, and pro-rank. She believes that Nietzsche supports “the right of

‘superior’ men to exploit the ‘inferior’ as a necessary condition for the existence of a high culture.” Schutte condemns Nietzsche for justifying slavery, defending aristocracy and for his endorsement of the ‘strong’ and the ‘masculine.’ Nietzsche defends the “exploitation of the masses for the advantage of the ‘higher’ individual as well as the exploitation of so-called ‘feminine’ values for the sake of a ‘masculine’ cultural ideal” (FIFN 283). She calls *Beyond Good and Evil* a “highly anti-democratic work,” and his ideal “free spirit” anti-egalitarian. Mainly, Schutte wants to prove that “Nietzsche’s defense of exploitation cannot be entirely separated from his other theories” (FIFN 285).

Feminists who Are Interested in Nietzsche

Lynne Tirrell in her essay, “On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Reading Nietzsche for Feminists,” confirms that there are two opposite sides to Nietzsche’s view. In some of his writings, Nietzsche suggests that women have an unchangeable nature. For example, he writes that a woman’s “first and last profession” is “to give birth to strong children” (BGE 239), and that “woman is *essentially* unpeaceful, like a cat” (BGE 131). However, Tirrell points out, to rely upon an essentialist conception of women’s nature would be “hypocritical for Nietzsche” since “his philosophy is so thoroughly anti-essentialist.” She writes, “it has been well documented that Nietzsche’s writings deliver an unhealthy dose of misogyny, but it has not been generally noticed that they also contain the seeds of a deconstruction of that misogyny” (FIFN 200). Tirrell’s sophisticated interpretation sees the antidote of misogyny in Nietzsche’s philosophy, which, she admits, includes misogynic elements. She believes that in the broader

philosophical context, Nietzsche's thought provides grounds for "a more sympathetic understanding of women."

Tirrell exposes a list of elements in Nietzsche's works for deconstructing misogyny. She refers to some passages in *The Gay Science* that display Nietzsche's "anti-dualism, his perspectivism, and his early existentialist notion of the self." She writes, "Once we see the destabilizing force of these passages and understand Nietzsche's remarks about women within this philosophical context, we will see that Nietzsche's works promise more insight than many feminists have previously noted." Tirrell compares Nietzsche's view to that of Simone de Beauvoir, in light of his existentialist view of the self, and points out "the potential that lies within Nietzsche's work for feminists" (*FIFN* 200).

Nietzsche's condemnations of women, Tirrell argues, fall into two categories: "he condemns them sometimes for their *nature* and sometimes for allowing themselves to be slaves to men" (*FIFN* 202). Nietzsche "reviles women for being slaves to men" and have not taken enough control of their self-creation." Nietzsche's emphasis on the creation of the self, Tirrell argues, is the foundation of the later feminist discussions of "the power of naming."

Wondering how she can be both feminist and Nietzschean, **Maudemarie Clark** asks herself, is "Nietzschean feminist" a contradiction in terms? (*FIFN* 187) French feminists, under the influence of French post-structuralism, have developed a kind of Nietzschean feminism. However, among feminists working in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, there seems to be no widespread interest in Nietzsche's work.

She asks why there hasn't been a feminist form of Nietzsche's philosophy in the Anglo-American academic and philosophical world. One possible explanation is that many feminists in the Anglo-American tradition do ethics, and in this field, obviously, there is no general recognition of Nietzsche as a resource for feminist analysis. Nietzsche is a self-proclaimed immoralist, whereas "feminism seems to be an essentially moral position" (*FIFN* 188).

Another explanation is that perhaps Anglo-American feminists have been too put off by Nietzsche's misogyny to take his thought seriously. To find out whether or not there is a foundation to this avoidance Clark starts a research on "Nietzsche's Misogyny." In her essay, under the same title, she writes, Nietzsche's "nasty comments about women have always seemed to me a reflection not of his basic ideas, but of his...all-too-human need for revenge against Lou Salome." Although she does not deny Nietzsche's misogyny, she undermines the importance of his comments. In an interesting comparison, she makes her point clear: "in contrast to Freud's phallogentric prejudices masquerading as science, Nietzsche's misogynistic comments have probably done little actual harm to women." The fact that Nietzsche's comments are foolishly extreme and childish makes them harmless. Clark believes that Nietzsche himself gives us the theoretical resources to understand his comments in this way (*FIFN* 188-189).

While some interpreters claim to find a connection between Nietzsche's misogyny and some of his other ideas, Clark wants to look carefully at the closing sections of *Beyond Good and Evil's* Part VII which seems to be tastelessly nasty. Although, Nietzsche seems to express contempt for feminism throughout these sections on woman,

and presents anti-feminism as central to his thought, Clark aims at finding out “how bad, and how connected to his other ideas” his claims are. Restricting herself to BG VII, Clark argues that “the misogyny exhibited there is on the level of sentiment, *not belief*.” She believes that Nietzsche uses these comments on woman “to illustrate points he is trying to make about philosophy and the will to truth.” Clark also suggests that one should interpret BG VII’s comments on feminism “not as a rejection of feminism, but as a challenge to feminists to exhibit virtues comparable to what Nietzsche exhibits in dealing with his misogyny” (*FIFN* 189).

Clark’s first main point is that the misogyny exhibited in BG VII is not about Nietzsche’s beliefs concerning woman, rather it is about his sentiment. She writes that Nietzsche uses “these assertions to express his feelings toward woman – for instance, his anger and resentment – even if he does not consider them true” (*FIFN* 191). Here, Clark offers a unique interpretation of “Seven Little Sayings on Woman.” While these passages are commonly interpreted as expression of Nietzsche’s own beliefs about woman, there are some who hold that Nietzsche is simply quoting these sayings from the surrounding culture without any indication that he himself believes in them. Clark, however, interprets them instead as expression of Nietzsche’s true feelings.

At the very least, Clark argues, Nietzsche is letting us know that “he is not claiming that his comments on woman are true,” when he gives us the warning that “these are after all only – *my* truths.” In other words, Clark points out that these are “only [his] truths” according to Nietzsche himself. She concludes that, either way, these expressions tell us more about Nietzsche himself than his “knowledge” of women. In

Clark's view, Nietzsche only admits in effect that "his so-called 'truths' about woman as such are really expressions of the great stupidity he is, and are therefore more likely to produce self-knowledge ...than knowledge of the world (in this case, of women)" (*FIFN* 191).

One of Nietzsche's main virtues is honesty and one of his main philosophical questions, addressed in these sections, is to see "What is it in us that wants truth?" This question does not receive its full answer until the end of part VII where Nietzsche talks about 'truths' about 'woman as such'. Clark believes that what Nietzsche is trying to tell us about both virtue and the will to truth, is perhaps "his 'truths' about woman constitute a labyrinth in which we are meant to find the threads of Nietzsche's own virtue": honesty. Clark wonders whether "Nietzsche's truth about 'woman as such' could be designed to illustrate for us the virtue of honesty" (*FIFN* 190). She believes that Nietzsche's comments on "woman as such" "*exhibit* his honesty at work" (*FIFN* 197). In her view, these comments show the conflict between what Nietzsche would like to believe and what he knows he has reason to believe.

Clark concludes that Nietzsche's truths about "woman as such" are about the social construction rather than individual woman. Contrary to others, e.g. Ofelia Schutte, she writes, "I find no evidence in it, nor in any section of *BG VII*, that Nietzsche thinks a patriarchal structure is necessary for the existence of higher culture." Clark remembers that Nietzsche calls those "shallow" who deny the antagonism between man and woman, and the necessity of an "eternally hostile tension." In her view, it makes sense for Nietzsche to believe in such hostility between the eternal masculine and feminine. She

writes, “He may be wrong about this, of course, but he neither says nor implies that women should accept for themselves the status of property. Therefore, I do not see his claim here as anti-feminist” (*FIFN* 193).

The second important point Clark makes is that Nietzsche’s comments on woman is about philosophy and the will to truth. Wondering why Nietzsche goes out of his way “to make his comments on woman in these passages appear misogynist and anti-feminist,” Clark realizes that Nietzsche sets up a parallel between truth-seekers and feminists (*FIFN* 194). She argues that Nietzsche criticizes feminists’ will to truth not for the sake of rejecting truthfulness, rather, for the similarity he finds between their style and the philosophers’ in seeking the truth. He finds this kind of will to truth problematic because it is an expression of the ascetic ideal which encourages thinkers to commit themselves to give up “what they want to believe for the sake of what they have reason to believe.” In Nietzsche’s view, Clark writes, the ascetic ideal is a life-devaluating ideal which “gives priests and philosophers a sense of mastering the material and temporal world precisely because it devalues that world” (*FIFN* 195).

Nietzsche rejects this task of philosophers because honesty or truthfulness has been interpreted in ascetic terms, meaning that they want to overcome nature. Among philosophers, or feminists, Nietzsche thinks, the will to power became a will to truth in a way that they want to give up their nature (natural desires) for the sake of their consciousness (reason). Nietzsche encourages a different kind of truth-seeking, Clark argues, the kind that promotes “translating human being back into nature, interpreting their activities, virtues, and value in completely naturalistic terms” (*FIFN* 195).

Finally, Clark interprets Nietzsche's comments on feminism as a challenge to feminists, not as a rejection of feminism. What Nietzsche rejects as feminism, according to Clark, is the "corruption of the instincts that have protected and furthered the interests of those forced to play the role of the 'eternal feminine.'" Far from encouraging us to abandon our truthfulness, Nietzsche "calls on us to perfect it," Clark optimistically proclaims. But the question is "how can we perfect our honesty without the support of the ascetic ideal?" Nietzsche shows us the way by promoting "truthfulness in its non-ascetic reincarnation." To promote feminism without the help of the ascetic ideal, we need to understand ourselves and our virtues in completely naturalistic terms. Clark's last, but not least, main point is: "Whether or not Nietzsche is anti-feminist ultimately comes down to whether a feminism beyond good and evil can and will be developed" (*FIFN* 196-197).

Chapter Three

WHY FEMINISTS ARE INTERESTED IN NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY

In her essay, "Nietzsche's Women and Women's Nietzsche," **Kathleen J. Wininger**, goes as far as studying Nietzsche's female contemporaries in order to find out why women are interested in Nietzsche. Women's interest in Nietzsche has been ridiculed by some as, for example, an "evidence of their lack of moral and intellectual seriousness." One of the examples that Wininger presents is a quote from Otto Weininger who, in his celebrated book *Sex and Character*, talks about women's appreciation of Nietzsche as a sign of "their mental inferiority." About why women are interested in Nietzsche, Weininger writes: "Any extravagance that distinguishes a man from other men appeals to their sexual ambition"⁶ (*FIFN* 236). It has not been easy for women to show interest in Nietzsche's philosophy, as they have been either ridiculed or reproached. Despite such criticism, many women, some feminists and others not, have continued to find Nietzsche's philosophy inspiring.

Although Nietzsche's misogynic comments and his sexual dualism are troubling, there are feminist scholars, men and women, who view Nietzsche's critiques of dualism and essentialism as well as his perspectivism and social constructivism as adumbrating later feminist positions. These scholars believe Nietzsche's criticism of truth, objectivity,

and reason helps feminists to challenge the exclusion of women from the history of philosophy.

Perspectivism

“One can only see the world through one’s own perspective,” Nietzsche proclaims, in *Gay Science*, sec. 374. He argues against the scientific notion of objectivity, and refutes the claim to obtain a “God’s Eye” view, as “a view from nowhere.” Nietzsche refuses to believe in absolute knowledge, and instead emphasizes the existence of different perspectives. One of the consequences of Nietzsche’s perspectivism is to suggest that men and women have different perspectives. From this point of view, one may claim a feminist perspective which is also valuable.

Daniel W. Conway, in his essay, “The Slave Revolt in Epistemology,” maintains that Nietzsche’s perspectivism is a model for feminist epistemology. Conway argues that Nietzsche’s warning against objectivity, the core of contemporary science, provides “an instructive backdrop against which we might assess the current debate among feminist theorists over the epistemic status of objectivity.” He then focuses on the two most currently authoritative parties to this debate, Donna Haraway, whose work is representative of postmodern feminist epistemology and Sandra Harding, the advocate of feminist standpoint theory. Entering this debate, Conway poses an important question, “Can the project of feminist epistemology accommodate a reconstituted notion of objectivity?”

Conway believes that Sandra Harding’s epistemological project unintentionally serves the “will to truth” characteristic of modern science. Nietzsche’s perspectivism,

according to Conway, not only foretells the postmodern strategies of feminists like Donna Haraway but also “issues a preemptive warning against the version of feminist standpoint theory espoused by Sandra Harding.” Conway argues that if the goal of feminist epistemology is “to incorporate the radically situated knowledges of women and other subjugated agents, then its practitioners must take the ‘postmodern’ turn outlined by Nietzsche and implemented by Haraway” (*FIFN* 253).

Conway declines any attempt to “claim for subjugated standpoints the same type of privilege that patriarchy claims for itself” (*FIFN* 259). There is no slave / woman privileged standpoint, he argues. Conway writes, “A subjugated standpoint may shed new light on the ways of an oppressor, but it in no way renders superfluous or redundant to science the standpoint of the oppressor. Because neither standpoint fully comprises the other, the aggregation of the two would move both parties (or a third party) closer to a more objective understanding of the world” (*FIFN* 259).

Although, Nietzsche’s perspectivism, accompanied as it is by a “host of masculinist and residually misogynist images,” seems an unlikely “precursor of feminist epistemologies,” in fact, Conway argues, “Nietzsche provides an epistemic framework that both accommodates and prizes the radically situated experiences of women” (*FIFN* 253). While Conway opposes slave / woman privilege standpoint, as a tendency in standpoint theory, he praises Nietzsche’s perspectivism which leads to an epistemology that welcomes situated knowledges and experiences of women.

Revaluation of Values

Nietzsche's perspectivism leads us to his other great insight, that "There are no facts only interpretations." Arguing against objectivity and the existence of absolute knowledge, he consequently refuses any absolute value. It is no surprise to see Nietzsche defining the main task of new philosophers as the "revaluation of all values." For Nietzsche, the world has no absolute value: we are the ones who give value to it. In this sense, if all of our value systems -social, political, and moral- are man-made, why don't we attempt to change them? Nietzsche's powerful and deep criticism of traditional and dogmatic values gives feminists the tool for a radical criticism of all patriarchal values.

One of the main reasons that many women find Nietzsche's philosophy useful is his advocacy for change. As **Kathleen Wininger** notes, "a great deal of his philosophy contains models that are meant to help understand changes." Changes range from cultural shifts to personal changes. "The idea that values and truth change, intellectual fashions change, and that these ideas are culturally embedded have often appealed to women," Wininger writes. She notices that the appeal is great especially to "women who have as their own agenda social and intellectual transformation" (*FIFN* 237).

Those who are interested only in Nietzsche's individual ethics very often, Wininger notes, "fail to realize how important the social construction of value is for Nietzsche." Some 19th /20th century feminists were positively leaning towards Nietzsche because, in his genealogical work, "a critique of specific patriarchal institutions and their attendant values" was present. However, Wininger argues, what is more important to modern feminism is what he provides methodologically. She writes, "He employs a

method or methods that demand socially and historically contextual readings of intellectual values. He sees values as changing over time.” Nietzsche encourages some kind of “moral revolution,” as Wininger puts it, suggesting that if an overthrowing of established values has happened in the past then it is possible that it can happen again. Nietzsche believes, as a philosopher, “it is his job to demand a social and cultural reform in the popular morality of his time” (*FIFN* 249-250).

Changes, in general, and value-changing in particular, are themes that attract feminists to Nietzsche’s philosophy. Values are fundamental and necessary for knowledge, in Nietzsche’s view. Without values, we cannot even begin the process of knowing. Nietzsche says, “The question of values is more fundamental than the question of certainty: the latter becomes serious only by supposing that the value question has already been answered.” In order to scrutinize a value one needs a viewpoint: “there is no such thing as science ‘without any presuppositions.’” For Nietzsche, Wininger notices, “all activity, whether it be moral or epistemological is value-laden. The ‘values’ are the presuppositions of our thought” (*FIFN* 247).

Philosophy of Power

Kathleen Wininger also finds Nietzsche’s philosophy of power useful for feminism. She believes the will to power is not to be understood as merely a psychological drive. In her view, Nietzsche’s theory of the will to power demonstrates his deep understanding of power as a complex phenomena. For instance, the social construction of values depends on the power structure of the society. For Nietzsche, according to Wininger, “Social and cultural values are not the random and chaotic

interactions of a number of self-governed individuals nor are they simply the product of the masses led in unthinking obedience” (*FIFN* 249).

Instead of focusing on Nietzsche’s individual ethics, Wininger emphasizes the importance of the social construction of values for Nietzsche. Wininger argues, Nietzsche has undermined many forms of patriarchal authority and privilege by “exposing them as cultural phenomena that are the result of power and authority.” Nietzsche’s theory of power, in her view, shows how these values do not simply exist because they are right; rather, “they exist because some people exercised their power and exerted authority” (*FIFN* 249).

“Woman” as Socially Constructed

Gender, undoubtedly, is socially constructed. If Nietzsche is an anti-essentialist, as scholars like Owen and Tirrell argue, then his philosophy can definitely help feminism. Some believe Nietzsche has already influenced many feminist scholars in their efforts to theorize the concept of “woman” as a socially constructed entity. Lynne Tirrell emphasizes the idea of *women self-creation* and focuses on *the creative power of naming* based on Nietzsche’s anti-essentialist view that suggests varieties of “woman.” Tirrell also refers the importance Nietzsche gives to education in determining the specifics of gender roles.

David Owen believes Nietzsche’s philosophy supports the idea of diversity among women by declining one single definition or image of “woman.” In a section called, “Nietzsche’s Strategies: Varieties of ‘Woman,’” Owen divides Nietzsche’s

remarks on woman into two types: those where Nietzsche attacks the idea of “woman-as-such” or “woman-in-herself,” and those where he re-evaluates the value of “woman.”

The first category includes Nietzsche’s criticism of the feminist movement. Owen argues that this critique displays Nietzsche’s interests in overcoming the will-to-truth and the will-to-equality. He believes that later in the same section Nietzsche identifies the feminist will-to-truth with “the scientific will to truth” expressed in the Enlightenment. Owen points out that Nietzsche manifests his concern as a critique of “feminism as *bad taste* in the sense that he regards feminism as exemplifying the desire for moral judgement which requires metaphysical apparatus” (*FIFN* 321).

Nietzsche’s critique of the feminist movement is connected to his interest in attacking the political Enlightenment as a *will-to-equality*. As it is clear in the following passage, Nietzsche criticizes women for following the European path of Enlightenment and blames men in this movement for misleading women. Nietzsche writes, “there are sufficient idiotic friends and corrupters of woman among the learned asses of the male sex who advise woman to *de-feminize* herself in this fashion and to imitate all the stupidities with which ‘man’ in Europe, European ‘manliness’, is sick” (*BGE* 169). Here, Nietzsche denounces the “fashion” of Enlightenment, the “stupidities” and sickness, that both men and women (in this case feminists) have brought on themselves. Following the same line of thinking, Nietzsche attacks the feminist movement as part of the political Enlightenment which demonstrates a will to equality. Nietzsche’s criticism of feminism of his time is the same as his critique of any other egalitarian movement. According to Nietzsche’s bias, Owen notes, the feminist movement is “a contribution to the ‘collective

degeneration' of humans to the level of 'the perfect herd animal' in that it operates *as a leveling movement*." This is in line with Nietzsche's criticism of herd-animal mentality that we will discuss later in a section on master/slave morality (*FIFN* 321).

In the first type of his critique of feminism, both as a form of metaphysical essentialism and as a political movement, Nietzsche addresses the crucial category of 'the feminine' which reproduces the attributes ascribed to "woman" by the metaphysical tradition. However, in the second category of comments it becomes clear, according to Owen, that Nietzsche's criticism also involves "a revaluation of 'woman' through a strategic reversal of the hierarchy of value constructed within the metaphysical tradition." Identifying truth with woman, Owen argues, Nietzsche inverts "the Platonic understanding of truth as non-perspectival ... thereby, revaluing woman." Nietzsche identifies woman with seduction, perspectivism, life, and art, and explores the different dimensions of this revaluation (*FIFN* 322).

Owen believes that we can accept Nietzsche's critique of essentialism without accepting his attack on the demand for sex equality of feminism. While Owen recognizes Nietzsche's anti-essentialist view in both types of comments, he acknowledges that Nietzsche also displays two different interests in these remarks: one is about the essentialist concept of 'woman,' the other is about feminist politics. Owen suggests, we may "accept Nietzsche's criticisms of a metaphysical / essentialist feminism without endorsing his attack on the ideas of sexual equality and democracy" (*FIFN* 322).

The question of how to read Nietzsche's declarations on women does not seem to have an easy answer. On the one hand, Owen reflects, "one may read them as simply

various aspects of a reactionary and contradictory essentialism.” On the other hand, one may read them “as masks manifesting an anti-essentialist pluralization” and a “dissolution of the category of ‘woman’.” Owen discovers two opposite ways of reading Nietzsche on woman in Ofelia Schutte’s *Beyond Nihilism* and Jacques Derrida’s *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*.⁷ One is more systematic / metaphysical while the other is a poetic reading of Nietzsche. Owen describes the situation: “The question of how to read the idea of ‘woman’ in Nietzsche’s texts, places the philosopher within the opposition between the figures of the *lawgiver* and the *poet*” (FIFN 306).

Discussing Ofelia Schutte on “Nietzsche’s Politics” earlier, we familiarized ourselves with a systematic/metaphysical reading of Nietzsche. Now, we are ready to see how different is a poetic reading of Nietzsche by looking at Jacques Derrida’s essay, “The Question of Style,” and Kelly Oliver’s elaboration on Derrida’s interpretation in “Woman as Truth in Nietzsche’s Writing.”

Nietzsche’s use of “Woman” as a Metaphor

Unlike his misogynist comments about women, when he talks non-metaphorically, Nietzsche’s use of woman as a metaphor is unique, deep, and insightful. For Nietzsche things are not simply good or evil, true or false, woman or man. Rather, Derrida argues that within Nietzsche’s writings things can be both and neither (FIFN 7). Nietzsche sees the world in its diversity, complexity, and colorful spectrum. Challenging the dualistic view, Nietzsche replaces binary notions of man and woman, reason and nature, truth and false; with a deeper understanding of our concepts regarding woman, nature, life and truth.

Jacques Derrida, in his own special style, presents a different reading of Nietzsche. He moves freely from philosophical concepts to metaphors. With no systematic reading of Nietzsche, Derrida allows us to become more creative in making connections between not usually affiliated concepts. Nietzsche, of course, provides him with seeds by speaking metaphorically about woman, life, truth, and castration. Writing about these metaphors, Derrida focuses mainly on the issue of woman: “The title ... shall have been *the question of style*. But – it will be woman who shall be my subject” (FIFN 50).

Using woman as a metaphor for life, in *Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes: “...for non-divine reality either never grants us at all the beautiful or just once! ... But perhaps that is the most powerful charm of life: it is covered with a gold-wrought veil [...] of beautiful possibilities that grant it a promising, reticent, modest, ironical allure, sympathetic, seductive. Yes, life is a woman!” (FIFN 54) By citing this rarely quoted segment, Derrida wants to display how Nietzsche develops a collusion of woman, life, seduction, modesty and the effects of veils. “Life is a woman” and “the most powerful charm of life,” like a woman, is to seductively cover “beautiful possibilities” by her promising veil. Life is as mysterious as a woman can be. Whether one puts the focus on woman or life, it seems like one needs both concepts in order to understand each. Knowing that Nietzsche essentially is pro nature and life, and that his philosophy is life promoting, one may wonder how Nietzsche brings life and woman together in a positive sense.

In a poetic reading of Nietzsche, Derrida forms a triangle, moving from Nietzsche's use of woman as a metaphor to life and then to his concept of castration and the role it plays. Nietzsche essentially rejects anything life-degrading. He is against "all the old moral monsters" because they all agree, according to Nietzsche, "that *il faut tuer les passions* ['one must kill the passions']." He offers an intelligent analogy, "We no longer admire dentists who *pluck out* the teeth so that they will no longer hurt" (FIFN 60). In other words, to avoid suffering, it is ridiculous to deny our emotions. Passion is part of human nature and any effort that aims at suppressing it is condemned, in Nietzsche's view.

Derrida believes that Nietzsche opposes "the spiritualization of passion, the Christian extirpation or castration." Nietzsche himself in the following passage, makes his point very clear by describing the connection between life and castration: "The Church fights passion with *excision* [cutting off, castration] in every sense: its practice, its 'cure,' is *castratism*. It never asks: 'How can we spiritualize, beautify, deify a desire?' It has always laid the stress of its discipline on the extirpation (of sexuality, pride, of the lust to rule, avarice, of vengeance). But an attack on the roots of passion means an attack on the roots of life: the practice of the Church is *hostile to life*. Derrida, then, concludes, "Hence hostile to woman who is life: castration is an operation of woman against woman, no less than each sex against itself and against the other sex" (FIFN 61).

In order to get to the final combination, woman-truth-castration, Derrida travels from one triangle, woman-life-castration, to another, woman-truth-distance. He refers to the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche writes, "supposing truth were a

woman,” and continues, “What is certain is that she [the truth] has not allowed herself to be laid a hold of.” Derrida insists, “What does not in truth allow laying a hold of is – feminine, which one must not hasten to translate as femininity, the femininity of woman, the feminine sexuality ...” (*FIFN* 55). It is “the feminine” in truth that makes it untouchable (unreachable), according to Derrida. It is the “feminine” characteristic that stands at the distance, in order to be seen. Regarding woman-truth-distance, Nietzsche writes, “The magic and most powerful effect of women is, philosophical spoken, action at a distance, but this requires first of all and above all else – distance!” (*FIFN* 52) The distance, thus, makes the woman, or the truth, more desirable. As Derrida explains, “Woman’s seduction operates at a distance, distance is the element of its power” (*FIFN* 53). Distance, according to Derrida, separates truth and philosophy, by making it transcendent, inaccessible, and seductive” (*FIFN* 59).

In his poetic reading of Nietzsche, Derrida concludes, “The whole process of the feminine operation is spaced within that appearance of contradiction. Woman is twice the model, in contradictory fashion, she is praised and condemned at once.” In the first model of truth, Derrida writes, she enjoys a “seductive power that rules the dogmatism and disorients, making credulous men, the philosophers, flee.” In the second one, she is again the model, but this time, she is a good model, or rather the bad model as good model. This time she does not believe in truth: “she plays at dissimulation, cosmetics, lying, art, she the philosopher artist, she is a power of affirmation” (*FIFN* 57-58).

The question of art, style, truth can therefore not be dissociated from woman, Derrida argues. Referring to “*The story of an error*,” in *Twilight of the Idols* (1888),

Derrida draws our attention to an important point. He writes, “All the attributes, characteristic traits, attractions that Nietzsche had recognized in woman, seductive distance, captivating inaccessibility, infinitely veiled promise, transcendence producing desire, [...] all belong indeed to the story of truth as (hi)story of an error.” In that story, Nietzsche writes, “Progress of the idea: it becomes more refined, more captious, more unreachable – *it becomes female*” (*FIFN* 59).

Derrida summarizes his reading on Nietzsche’s use of woman and comes up with three value-positions for woman, found in Nietzsche’s writings, which represent three fundamental propositions. These are:

1. Woman is condemned, debased, scorned as figure or power of lying.
2. Woman is condemned, debased, scorned as figure or power of truth, as a philosophical or Christian being, either identified with truth or, at a distance still enjoying it and using it as a fetish for her advantage without believing in it.
3. Woman is recognized, beyond this double negation, and affirmed as affirmative power, dissimulating, artist, Dionysian. She is not affirmed by man but herself affirms herself, in herself and in man. Antifeminism is in its turn reversed, he didn’t condemn woman but to the extent that she was responding to the man of the two reactive positions. (*FIFN* 62)

The value implied in each pattern (or plot) has to be decidable into a couple of oppositions in the triangle of woman-truth-castration. Derrida, then, presents his own

judgment on how Nietzsche himself would fit into these three schemes. He writes, “He was and dreaded such a castrated woman. He was and dreaded such a castrating woman. He was and loved such affirming woman” (*FIFN* 63).

The most important outcome of this reading is to see how, for Nietzsche, “There is not *a* woman, a truth in itself of woman in itself.” According to Derrida, through the “varied typology, the crowd of mothers, daughters, sisters, old maids, wives, governesses, prostitutes, virgins, grandmothers and granddaughters, of his work;” Nietzsche presents a variety of possibilities of being a woman. For that very reason, Derrida concludes, “there is no one truth of Nietzsche or of Nietzsche’s text” (*FIFN* 63).

One reads in *Beyond Good and Evil*, “These are *my* truths,” precisely in a paragraph on women. “My truths,” implies that they are not truth since they are multiple, multicolored, contradictory. Derrida argues, “there is therefore no one truth in itself, but additionally, even for me, of me, truth is plural” (*FIFN* 64). There is no essence to woman, for Nietzsche. With his metaphors, Nietzsche develops, according to Derrida, “the complicity rather than the unity of woman, life, seduction, modesty and all the effects of veils” (*FIFN* 53-54).

Welcoming the use of woman as metaphor, Kelly Oliver elaborates on Derrida’s interpretation. She accepts and radicalizes the Nietzschean woman/truth connection of Derrida. She believes that the Derridean triad is a perfect model that corresponds to the three value-position of woman and truth. In her own reading of Nietzsche, she identifies the castrated woman as will-to-truth, the castrating woman as will-to-illusion, and the affirming woman as will-to-power.

“Woman” and Truth in Nietzsche’s Philosophy

“Nietzsche is as notorious for his struggle with woman as he is for his battle with truth,” says **Kelly Oliver** in opening her essay, “Woman as Truth in Nietzsche’s Writing.” Oliver believes Nietzsche’s writing is a mixture of reverence and contempt for both woman and truth. According to her, Nietzsche has the same love-hate relationship to woman which he has to truth. She specifically emphasizes the distinction between Nietzsche’s relationship to woman and his discussion of truth and woman. She writes, “The connection between truth and woman does not simplify the task of formulating Nietzsche’s relationship to woman” (*FIFN* 67).

For Nietzsche, both truth and woman are elusive, Oliver claims, and distance is their power. She refers to Nietzsche’s famous saying, “Suppose truth is a woman ... What is certain is that she has not allowed herself to be won – today every kind of dogmatist is left standing dispirited and discouraged.” *Truth is as ambiguous in Nietzsche’s writings as woman*, she articulates, following Derrida’s footsteps. This ambiguity is no coincidence. The ambiguity of truth, is parallel to ambiguity of woman: “for while developing a theory of truth we are unpacking the symbol of woman. Inversely, while developing a theory of Nietzsche’s philosophy of woman, we are unpacking a metaphor for truth” (*FIFN* 67).

Oliver focuses on the triad borrowed from Derrida’s *Spurs*, which describes Nietzsche’s relationship to woman. She accepts it as a grid for interpreting Nietzsche. First, Oliver acknowledges that Nietzsche both identifies with and reacts against the three positions of woman suggested by Derrida, the castrated woman, the castrating woman,

the affirming woman. She reformulates Derrida's judgment on how Nietzsche himself would fit into these three schemes. She writes, Nietzsche in these schemes: "He was, He dreaded this castrated woman. He was, He dreaded this castrating woman. He was, He loved this affirming woman" (*FIFN* 67). Then, she moves the discussion even further and writes, "This tri-positioning of woman corresponds neatly to the tri-positioning of truth which we can extract from Nietzsche's works – truth as a manifestation of the *will to truth*, the *will to illusion*, and the *will to power*" (*FIFN* 67).

Oliver notices something important about this tri-positioning in Nietzsche's view, according to her, "each of the three positions of truth and woman can serve either ascending or declining life." In every one of these three plots, the woman who serves ascending life celebrates life in a great profusion; while the one who serves declining life suppresses it. Embracing this crucial point, Oliver eloquently summarizes the three positions of truth and woman: "The castrated woman is the feminist who uses the will to truth either to enhance survival or dominate life. The castrating woman is the artist who uses the will to illusion either to playfully affirm the multiplicity of life or cunningly deceive us in order to gain advantage. The affirming woman is the will to power which either creates or destroys life" (*FIFN* 68).

The Triad

The Castrated Woman

The castrated woman demonstrates a will to truth. She wants to be the "woman as she is," without being pretentious. She is far from being a deceiver, she is the champion of honesty. The Christian, philosopher, and feminist are good examples of this type.

Nietzsche considers these cowards since they sacrifice creative multiplicity for a false security. They need to discover values instead of creating them. Oliver describes Nietzsche's view in this way: the castrated or de-sexed woman "assumes a position as a second type of man... she is the feminist who negates woman in order to affirm herself as man." She refers to Nietzsche's statement that says: "there are enough...corrupters of woman amongst [...] masculine sex who advises woman to de-feminize herself in this matter" (*FIFN* 68).

The Castrating Woman

The castrating woman manifests a will to illusion. She wants to be the "woman as appears." She knows how to create illusions and forge the truth. She is very seductive. The artists and actors / actresses are the best examples for this group. Although she remains within the discourse of truth, Oliver describes, "the castrating woman uses illusion craftily in order to cut the power of the metaphysic of truth. She is the actor or the artist who plays with truth" (*FIFN* 72). Like an actor, "the castrating woman assumes a role which she knows is only an illusion yet she convinces the metaphysician and his truth-centered culture that she is for real." She is the type of woman who uses all of the feminist ideas about woman "as she is," in order to get "what she wants," without really believing them. Via her illusions and role playing "she manipulates the dogmatist's castrated truth." She "chooses appearance over reality, the 'as-it-appears' over the 'as-it-is.' She learns that illusion is more effective than reality" (*FIFN* 73). As Nietzsche describes the "young female artists" attitudes, he also shows the difference between the two types: "if they [female artists] wish to have power over men the game of hide-and-

seek with the beautiful body is more likely to win than naked or half-naked honesty.”

After all, honesty is not as powerful as illusion! The honest science reaches its limit, while “illusion can continue forever” (*FIFN* 74).

The Affirming Woman

The affirming woman is not only loved by Nietzsche, but also might be adored by contemporary feminists as well. Contrasting the other two types, Oliver shows us where the affirming type stands: “Whereas objective truth de-sexed the castrated woman, and the castrating woman, through illusion, de-authorized objective truth, the affirming woman is outside the discourse of truth. The affirming woman, says Nietzsche, has no need for truth.” She can go beyond the two type of negation and positively claims her place, Oliver describes, “The affirming woman has no need for truth; she affirms herself without man and his logocentricism. She is the inarticulate ‘truth’ which is more original than the metaphysic of truth [castrated woman] or the illusion of art [castrating woman]” (*FIFN* 76).

Confirming the above interpretation, Sarah Kofman adds, Nietzsche “still distinguishes different types of women, just as he distinguishes different types of men. From a genealogical point of view, an affirmative woman is closer to an affirmative man than a degenerate woman” (*FIFN* 40).

Chapter Four

HOW CAN NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY CONTRIBUTE TO FEMINIST THOUGHT?

Perspectival Seeing and Situated Knowledge

“There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective ‘knowing’; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be” (*Genealogy of Morals* III:12).

With his theory of perspectivism, Nietzsche not only challenges the scientific claim of objectivity, but also distances himself from relativism. In using “more eyes, different eyes” to observe *one* thing, Nietzsche looks for a more complete concept of that thing. Having “more eyes, different eyes”, we can gain a better understanding, a better view, of a thing. The fact that Nietzsche seeks a more complete vision or understanding of the object, shows his perspectivism differs radically from relativism. Nietzsche believes one can only see the world through one’s own perspective and there is no absolute knowledge, only different point of views (*Gay Sciences* 374).

Nietzsche’s realization that “there are no facts, only interpretations” is a breakthrough. This view opens up the possibility of seeing the world through different perspectives. First and most importantly, acknowledging that there are different

interpretations of the world gives way to the non-dominant perspectives to claim a valid position. Among these, a feminist perspective can seek recognition as well.

The second important assumption this theory may invoke is that each perspective can claim to hold a better view. We have to remember that a better view on a particular matter is different from the best view. When we are talking about different views of a matter, rather than “the truth of the matter,” we are faced with diversity. Among these multiple views, there is, of course, room for battle over a better view. However, we need to be aware that without the first and the most important assumption, here, different interpretations / different point of views, the second assumption, seeking a better view, may be interpreted as seeking the best view which is another version of objectivism. Nietzsche believes in perspectivism instead.

What can help feminism, in my view, is not objectivism but perspectivism. Acknowledging multiple views helps feminists to not only be able to introduce their view as an alternative to the male dominant one, but also to make room for more than one feminist point of view. The latter, especially, will help feminists to understand and explain better the diversity of views within the feminist movement. Nietzsche believes that there is no one meaning behind this world, rather, there are many meanings. This pluralistic view of the world is what feminists need in order to understand, and respond to, the complexity of today’s world.

Besides his theory of perspectivism, Nietzsche’s own perspective can also help feminism. He presents a broad perspective and that by itself helps feminists to find a better position to revisit and reinvestigate women’s issues. Establishing new values and

creating powerful theories requires a rich and fresh field to cultivate. Nietzsche's perspective opens up a lot of new areas for feminists to explore.

Defining Feminism: Revaluation of "Male-dominated" Values

One of the main foci in Nietzsche's philosophy, an important area for feminists to inquire into, is the question of values, in general, and moral values in particular. Nietzsche considers "*revaluation of all values*" as the main task for the "new philosophers." While reevaluating traditional values is nothing new for feminists, defining "revaluation of all values" as the main goal, as Nietzsche suggests, is something new for most feminists. Although feminists have been involved practically in the process of revaluation of many social and political values since the beginning of the movement, they have not defined their goal to be "revaluation of all values." I suggest defining feminism as an ongoing process of revaluation of male-dominated values. This is something that feminists have been doing in the past, and need to continue to do in the future.

Revaluation of All Values

The "new philosophers," according to Nietzsche, must be brave enough to face the danger of a world without values. Knowing that there is no absolute value only manmade values; they need to be ready to dare to reevaluate existing values or create new values that give new meanings to life. Feminists are new philosophers, in my view. They always dare to challenge the existing moral, social, and political values. Without this, there would not have been any feminist movement. How deeply they have criticized these values and how wide a range they have covered is another issue worth studying.

Meanwhile, feminists can learn a great deal from the depth of Nietzsche's criticism of morality and his attack on the foundation of the structure of knowledge.

Nietzsche's Attack on Dualism

To show Nietzsche's deep criticism of the structure of knowledge, just to mention a few examples, let us consider his attack on the mind / body, reason / emotion, consciousness / instinct, and culture / nature dualism. This list of binaries is one of the main foci of feminist analysis today. The binaries provide powerful tools for feminist theorists to attack the male-dominant value structure.

Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall, in their "Introduction: Why Feminists Read Nietzsche," write, "Traditionally, philosophers have valued mind over body, culture over nature, reason over irrationality, truth over illusion, and good over evil. Women, femininity, and maternity have been associated with body, nature, irrationality, illusion; and even evil" (*FIFN* 3). They believe feminists' criticisms of the history of philosophy share important elements with Nietzsche's criticisms of philosophy. For instance, Nietzsche, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, describes the traditional values that give priority to mind over body as the result of resentment. In his criticism of traditional philosophy, Nietzsche inverts the priority given to mind over body. Since women have been identified with the body, they argue, "Nietzsche's emphasis on the importance of the body seems promising for feminist philosophy" (*FIFN* 3).

Nietzsche also challenges the hierarchy of reason over irrationality and claims that our preference for reason is a product of the grammar of language. Referring to Nietzsche's argument in *On Truth and Lie in the Ultramoral Sense*, Oliver and Pearsall

argue that “the notion that language creates rather than merely reflects reality holds out the promise to feminists that we can not only diagnose sexism, patriarchy, and women’s ‘inferiority’ as creations rather than natural facts but also use language differently in order to create a new nonsexist reality” (*FIFN* 4). From this analysis, feminists’ use of the power of language, in general, and “the power of naming”⁸, in particular, emerges.

Nietzsche not only criticizes reason but also brings irrational elements back into philosophy. Nietzsche praises the Greek god Dionysus which was the god of fertility and wine, associated with passion and intoxication. Oliver and Pearsall conclude that Nietzsche’s revaluation of bodily passions and irrationality could also revalue women.

In a section called “Nietzsche’s Attack on Dualism,” Lynne Tirrell describes how Nietzsche’s early dualist metaphysic in *The Birth of Tragedy* is followed by a powerful attack on standard philosophical oppositions such as good/evil, mind/body, truth/falsity, conscious/unconscious thought, in his later writings. For instance, Tirrell argues that Nietzsche challenges our belief in the opposition between conscious and unconscious thought by claiming that most of conscious thought, even philosophical thinking, should be considered instinctive, even philosophical thinking. He writes, “Most of conscious thinking of a philosopher is secretly guided and forced into certain channels by his instincts” (*BGE* 3).⁹ In another section, he declares, “a thought comes when ‘it’ wishes, and not when ‘I’ wish” (*BGE* 17). Challenging dualism, Nietzsche inverts the values of these opposites. In the Western tradition, for example, conscious is valued more highly than unconscious thought, but Nietzsche associates it with error (*FIFN* 205).

Unconscious thought, or instinct, has been traditionally associated with the body, while conscious thought has been associated with the mind. Tirrell invites us to see how one duality involves another (*FIFN* 204). In order to explain the duality of conscious/unconscious thought, or mind/body, Nietzsche suggests, we do not have to posit two substances. Nietzsche's non-reductive monism leads him to claim that the soul or mind, for instance, is not a different kind of substance than the body, Tirrell argues, "it is a refinement of the same stuff." For Nietzsche, body is not simply what Descartes called "extended substance" nor is mind "unextended substance."

Unlike a reductive monist, who accepts the legitimacy of the opposition and then reduces one of the two poles to the other, Tirrell points out, "Nietzsche attacks the very legitimacy of the opposition" (*FIFN* 204). She writes, "Nietzsche's strategy for disarming the dualist is to claim that the distinction in question is not a distinction in *kind*, but only in degree. One value is not the opposite of the other, but its *refinement*. ...in taking one value to be primary we exercise our will to power, imposing ourselves on the world." According to Nietzsche, she reminds us, we submit ourselves to this "*faith in opposite values*" (*BGE* 2) because it simplifies life (*BGE* 24) and "it provides such a powerful and tidy vehicle for our exercise of the will to power" (*FIFN* 205).

Re-Evaluating Morality

Moral values, in particular, are the focus of Nietzsche's many writings. As part of his task, revaluation of all values, he starts an investigation into the origin of morality. As a result, he forms his theory around the distinction between "master" and "slave" morality.

Nietzsche's Criticism of Morality

In *Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Nietzsche questions the value of moral values, scrutinizing morality. When he writes, “we need a *critique* of moral values,” he mainly emphasizes that “*the value of these values themselves must first be called in question*” (GM 6).¹⁰

In his criticism of morality, Nietzsche attempts to invert the value of some moral values, for example, he wonders whether so-called “evil” may actually be “good.” He demands from his readers to have some kind of hesitation, at least, in supposing “‘the good man’ to be of greater value than ‘the evil man.’” Questioning the verity of these moral values, Nietzsche wants to see what happens if “the reverse were true”? Nietzsche’s project is to traverse the enormous land of morality with questions as such (GM 7).

For the purpose of questioning the value of moral values, Nietzsche argues, we need to understand the “conditions and circumstances in which ... they evolved and changed” (GM 6). Trying to understand these “conditions and circumstances,” he asks, “Under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil? And what value do they themselves possess?” Nietzsche discovers, in the land of morality, two distinct climates in which two different sets of values grow: slave and master morality. His theory of “master morality” and “slave morality” is his response to the above questions (GM 3).

Slave Morality vs. Master Morality

Nietzsche introduced these two concepts for the first time in the following passage: “Wandering through the many subtler and coarser moralities which have so far been prevalent on earth, ...I found that certain features recurred regularly together and were closely associated – until I finally discovered two basic types and one basic difference. There are master morality and slave morality” (*BGE* 260). The basic difference between the two types of moralities, according to Nietzsche, is that one has originated among “the ruling group”, masters, while the other originated among the “ruled”, slaves. Nietzsche elaborates on this major difference between the two types of value. He specifically analyzes the master’s choice of “bad” versus the slave’s choice of “evil,” in opposition to “good,” as a moral value. Nietzsche believes that there is a reason why the master calls the opposite of good “bad” and the slave calls it “evil.” In his view, the term “evil” is loaded with anger and resentment, something that the concept of “bad” lacks. Therefore, Nietzsche’s choice of *Beyond Good and Evil* as a title for his book, instead of *Beyond Good and Bad*, for instance, signifies his criticism of slave morality.

Analysis of Nietzsche’s Criticism

Some feminists, like Ofelia Schutte, have criticized Nietzsche’s politics for being pro-aristocracy and anti-democracy. Schutte writes, “It is important to emphasize that Nietzsche was a strongly anti-democratic thinker.” For Schutte, even Nietzsche’s criticism of morality seems to be about politics: “with the ethical theory of the ‘higher’ man Nietzsche offers a strong defense of aristocracy – that is, aristocracy understood as

government by the best men or ‘higher’ men” (*FIFN* 288). Based on Nietzsche’s own statement that all systems of values are inherently political (*GM*), Schutte wants to draw our attention to the political implications of Nietzsche’s theory of value. Believing that “values are not necessarily philosophical truths, rather interests of the most powerful,” Schutte aims to prove that Nietzsche’s defense of the moral values of “noble man” is actually a defense of aristocratic government.

Unlike Schutte, I perceive Nietzsche’s criticism of Christianity and democracy to be about morality more than politics. It is true that Nietzsche endorses an order of rank, as Schutte emphasizes, but his praise for “noble man” is more an attack on “slave morality” than a defense of aristocratic government. Contrasting slave morality to master morality, he is concerned with the type of values each attitude presents. Hence, the issue of values continues to be at the center of Nietzsche’s criticism.

Schutte claims that her study is an investigation of the logical relationship between Nietzsche’s politics and his critique of traditional morality. Assuming that she has found such a logical relationship between the two, one may still wonder whether or not this relationship is as direct, linear, or one-dimensional as Schutte suggests in the following passage: “Nietzsche’s counterproposal of higher/lower, politically translated as the opposition between aristocrat and slave” (*FIFN* 292). Either way, I argue, Nietzsche’s theory on morality does not have to be “politically translated” to be understood. A direct (literal) translation of slave/master morality as a representation of a class struggle in an aristocratic society would miss the main point of Nietzsche’s

criticism of morality. Schutte's interpretation, I argue, misleads us and takes our attention away from "What Nietzsche *really* said." ¹¹

Nietzsche's proposal of higher/lower, as Schutte also notices, "involves a reduction of human beings to *sameness of type* within a *dualistic structure of inequality*" (FIFN 292). While I agree with Schutte on the importance of this critical point in Nietzsche's theory, I do not agree that Nietzsche emphasizes the "sameness of type" among human beings "to propose that any human being should reduce another human being to the status of a slave or an instrument" (FIFN 292). The whole criticism of "slave morality," in my view, is a fight against those moral values that encourage this "sameness of type" or mediocrity. Nietzsche's anti-Christian and anti-democratic position, more than anything else, is about attacking the herd animal (or slave) mentality which encourages mediocrity.

Anti – Egalitarian View

Schutte writes, "Nietzsche's critique of traditional morality – whether of the Christian, Kantian or utilitarian type – rests on his disagreement with the notions of human equality and of the universality of moral maxims" (FIFN 289). Nietzsche's criticism of the notion of human equality without a doubt is one of the controversial issues regarding his philosophy. Nietzsche himself says, "To me justice speaks thus: 'Men are not equal.' Nor shall they become equal!" (FIFN 289) The second part of this statement is probably more shocking than the first part. The first claim, "men are not equal," may be interpreted as a "descriptive" statement, but the second part, "nor shall they become equal!" definitely raises suspicion. Is that supposed to be the ideal image of

a society of a “higher culture”? How can one justify this anti-egalitarian view in Nietzsche’s philosophy?

There is no doubt that Nietzsche endorses an order of rank in a hierarchical society. The question, though, is why he is against human equality? Nietzsche’s major “opposition to universal human rights,” Schutte points out, “was the idea of reducing everyone to being the ‘same’ as everyone else (i.e., “equal” to everyone else in a reductionist sense)” (*FIFN* 292). Reducing everyone to being mediocre is what Nietzsche rejects in a democratic movement. He mainly objects to democratic ideas because they carry Christian values at heart. Whether we agree with Nietzsche on this matter or not, the important thing is to find out why and from what point of view he rejects both of these systems of value. Nietzsche describes his view perfectly in the following passage: “Indeed, with the help of a religion which indulged and flattered the most sublime herd-animal desires, we have reached the point where we find even in political and social institutions an ever more visible expression of this morality: the *democratic* movement is the heir of the Christian movement” (*BGE* 202).

What “the peacefully industrious democrats” and “ideologists of revolution,” and socialist, moralist, religious people have in common, from Nietzsche’s point of view, is their “hostility to every other form of society except that of the *autonomous* herd.” Nietzsche writes, “They are at one, in their faith in the community as the *savior*, in short in the herd, in ‘themselves’.” Nietzsche rejects the common ground, in this camp of diverse forces, for their refusal to acknowledge any kind of special claim: “They are at one in their tough resistance to every special claim, every special right and privilege

(which means in the last analysis, *every* right: for once all are equal nobody needs ‘rights’ any more)” (BGE 202). Nietzsche’s concept of “special right and privilege” in this context is complicated. But it is easy to see that he is defending special rights rather than attacking equal “rights.” It is no surprise to see someone like Nietzsche, who openly and passionately argues in favor of higher culture, elevated personality, and self empowerment, defend the right of being special, unique, and a “genius.” I, therefore, argue that it is the “sameness” of the people, the herd-animal type, which Nietzsche rebels against, and not the equality of rights.

Besides Nietzsche’s bold comments opposing democracy, his praise of “noble” versus “slave” character, is further evidence, according to critics, of his anti-egalitarian view. Nietzsche is undoubtedly pro rank and hierarchy, as Schutte emphasizes. But his anti-egalitarian view, and consequently his anti-democratic view, originates in (and is intertwined with) his feelings about mediocrity. Without understanding Nietzsche’s criticism of mediocrity one cannot fully grasp his attack on slave morality.

Against Mediocrity

Fear, Nietzsche claims, is “the mother of morals.” He writes, “After the structure of society is fixed on the whole and seems secure against external dangers, it is this *fear of the neighbor* that again *creates new perspectives of moral valuation*” (BGE 201). Here, Nietzsche describes a circumstance in which new perspectives of moral valuation appear. Fear of the neighbor is the condition that gives birth to slave morality. The “love of the neighbor” is secondary in relation to “fear of the neighbor,” according to Nietzsche. *This “fear” forms a special kind of moral valuation that honors mediocrity.*

Slave morality is this kind of this moral valuation. Nietzsche believes that encouraging mediocrity is a serious problem and a real danger. In order to understand why mediocrity is dangerous, let us first see why Nietzsche says “fear” is the originator of moral values.

There are “certain strong and dangerous drives” in human nature, “like an enterprising spirit, foolhardiness, vengefulness, craftiness, rapacity and the lust to rule.” In a society of rules and morality, these drives are experienced “as doubly dangerous, since the channels to divert them are lacking,” Nietzsche explains. These highest and strongest drives are “branded as immoral” because they are dangerous. How much or “how little a drive is dangerous to the community” or “dangerous to equality” constitutes the moral perspective, Nietzsche argues. In whatever constitutes the moral perspective, “fear is again the mother of morals” (BGE 201).

The fear of these dangerous drives gives birth to those moral values, such as Christian values, that preach the equality of all human beings. What Nietzsche finds problematic in this quest for equality is *the danger of making everyone mediocre*. He writes, “High and independent spirituality, the will to stand alone, even a powerful reason are experienced as dangers.” Nietzsche analyzes the source of this mentality when he says, “everything that elevates an individual above the herd and intimidates the neighbor is henceforth called evil; and the fair, modest, submissive, conforming mentality, the *mediocrity* of desires attains moral designations and honors.”

Nietzsche worries that eventually “the opportunity and necessity for educating one’s feelings to severity and hardness is lacking more and more,” and “any high and hard nobility and self-reliance is almost felt to be an insult and arouses mistrust.”

Nietzsche defends noble characteristics and values while he attacks slave morality. High spirituality and independent personality is what he advocates as opposed to submissive and conforming mentality (*BGE* 201).

Nietzsche's attack on democratic ideas goes beyond politics, indeed, he rejects the mentality that promotes mediocrity: "to us the democratic movement is not only a form of the decay of political organization but a form of the decay, namely the diminution, of man, *making him mediocre* and *lowering his value*" (*BGE* 203). For Nietzsche, lowering our values is the worst consequence of making everyone mediocre. By making us all to be the same, *equally* the same average, slave mentality, or Christian morality, opposes any kind of outstanding and superiority. While the egalitarian view seems to be fair and just, it denies nobility, uniqueness and greatness.

Two Different Mentalities

For Nietzsche, master morality and slave morality represent two different mentalities. Focusing on why moral values are created, Nietzsche wants to show how different mentalities beget different types of values. Values are Nietzsche's concern. The notion of slave/master morality, in Nietzsche's philosophy, is about a battle between two sets of values. The following passage that appears right after the first mention of slave/master morality in Nietzsche's writing is a good indication of how he perceives them as two different attitudes. He writes, "These two moralities," slave and master morality, can "occur directly alongside each other *even in the same human being*, within a single soul" (*BGE* 260).

While Nietzsche rejects one type of morality, slave morality, he opens up the possibilities for many other types. His attack on absolutism prepares the road to create an environment in which more than one type of morality can grow. In this sense, one can claim, Nietzsche believes in some kind of *moral pluralism*. Although, he prefers one type of morality, master, over the other, slave; the fact that he acknowledges the existence of more than one possibility for morality gives room to moral pluralism. Nietzsche describes his view in the following passage: “*Morality in Europe today is herd animal morality - ... merely one type of human morality beside which, before which, and after which many other types, above all higher moralities, are or ought to be, possible.* But this morality resists such a ‘possibility’” (BGE 202). Nietzsche presents another good reason for considering herd animal morality to be problematic: it does not let other possibilities, like higher moralities, blossom.

Why Against Slave Mentality?

I have argued that to comprehend Nietzsche’s attack on slave morality we need to understand his criticism of mediocrity. So far, we have seen why Nietzsche believes making everyone mediocre is the main danger of slave morality. Lowering our values, opposing any kind of superiority, and resisting other possibilities for morality are the major consequences of the domination of slave mentality. To expose the slave mode of thinking, Nietzsche goes even deeper in his criticism. He puts his finger on some characteristics of this mentality that have not been normally criticized. He opens up a new gate to look critically at some commonly accepted values and attitudes. Resentment and pity are two of these areas that Nietzsche examines harshly (under his magnifier). He

presents his unique theory on these two characteristics of slave morality: resentment and pity.

Herd-animal Morality

Although Nietzsche has been criticized by some feminists as siding with the “master” against the “slave” (Ofelia Schutte), or blaming slaves/victims for their own conditions (Lynne Tirrell); I find his attack on slave morality, as herd animal morality, insightful. Feminists who are interested in finding out why women internalize some sexist moral values may find Nietzsche’s critique of slave morality inspiring. While holding a different view from Nietzsche on condemning slaves, in this case women, as the creators of the slave morality, I agree with him that internalizing this type of value takes away the autonomy and self-empowerment of an individual. Women, as well as men, are responsible for the type of value they believe in. Feminists, in my opinion, should urge women to reexamine their own value systems along with the Society’s. Our system of values can empower or weaken our personality. Being autonomous and independent, women can create a stronger movement from within. Slave mentality seems to reverse this process.

Whether slave morality is a creation of “slaves”, as Nietzsche suggests, or an invention of a male-dominated society, as I argue, women need to learn how to overcome the slave mentality in order to empower themselves and become autonomous. Reevaluating moral principles and reexamining internalized values are part of the learning process of overcoming slave mentality.

Slave Morality: the Culture of “Pity”

One of the most common misunderstandings about Nietzsche is that he is all against compassionate feelings. Although Nietzsche argues against the morality of pity and rejects it as one of the characteristics of slave morality, he does not deny the feelings of compassion completely. He writes: “the noble human being, too, helps the unfortunate, but not or almost not, from pity, but prompted more by an urge begotten by excess of power” (*BGE* 260). It is important for Nietzsche to clarify why one shows concern for others. If it is out of pity, he denies it. If not, he even embraces helping “the unfortunate”. Nietzsche praises “noble and courageous human beings” because they are removed from the morality of pity that encourages “acting for others.” Nietzsche admires one who has “faith in oneself, pride in oneself.” This noble type has “a fundamental hostility and irony against ‘selflessness’” and is caution “regarding compassionate feelings.”

There is a fine line between compassion and feeling sorry. Consequently, “pity” carries two different meanings: on the one hand, pity can have a meaning of sympathy, kindness, and care for others; on the other hand, it can mean feeling sorry for the other. One is an indication of emotional identification with someone (sympathy) while the other is about being sorry for someone else. As long as, one does not lose her/his own self and power in that connection with the other, Nietzsche does not deny it, I argue. He rejects “selflessness” and the encouragement of becoming powerless. And this is what Nietzsche criticizes when he ridicules the culture of “pity” in slave morality.

Another way one can defend Nietzsche's attack on the morality of pity is to show how his rejection of pity may be compared with his repudiation of revenge. His attack on pity is very similar to his attack on "ressentiment." Both pity and resentment display a kind of powerlessness. In one situation, one feels powerless by displaying anger in revenge while, in the other circumstance, one makes someone else feel weak by showing pity. In resentment, Nietzsche does not deny the existence of anger as a natural reaction, rather; he detests the way the slave morality disguises it. For pity, it is not the feeling of compassion that Nietzsche opposes but how the slave mentality plays with this feeling.

Resentment: Hostility to the External World.

"The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, [...] and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge" (*GM* I: 10).

In his comparison of the attitude towards revenge in both noble and slave morality, Nietzsche reveals the depth of his criticism and paints a clear picture of what exactly he rejects as slave morality. His well-known conception of "ressentiment" is the key to understand the difference between the two modes of valuation.

Revenge, or resentment, takes up a different meaning in the slave mode of valuation than in the noble mode. Slave mentality denies the natural reaction to hatred; instead, it gives way to "an imaginary revenge," Nietzsche insists. Resentment is the slave reaction to this unsatisfied hatred which Nietzsche calls "the vengefulness of the impotent." Looking outward instead of inward, in Nietzsche's terminology, is the core of

ressentiment. He writes, “the “*need* to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself – is of the essence of resentment: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world”(GM I: 10). To focus one’s attention on the external world rather than one’s own self is a sign of *weakness*, for Nietzsche. One who *needs* “a hostile external world” in order to function at all displays nothing but a reacting (counteraction) mode of existence. One who cannot originate an act, instead, reacts to someone else’s actions is impotent and powerless.

With the noble mode of valuation, the reverse is the case: the “love of one’s enemies” replaces the “love of one’s neighbor.” Unlike the slave, whose action is actually a reaction to a “hostile external world,” the noble “acts and grows spontaneously; it seeks its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly” (GM I: 10). In his analysis of resentment, Nietzsche contrasts the two different attitudes towards revenge in noble versus slave morality. In the noble man, resentment itself, “consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction and therefore does not poison,” Nietzsche points out. A natural (instinctive) and direct reaction to anger is what Nietzsche prefers as a healthier response. In his view, to “be incapable of taking one’s enemies” seriously “is the sign of strong.” Only for a powerful and capable, Nietzsche declares, a “genuine ‘love of one’s enemies’ is possible - supposing it to be possible at all on earth.” Respecting the enemy is one of the characteristics of noble attitudes. Such reverence is, Nietzsche persists, “a bridge to love” of one’s enemy (GM I: 11).

Comparing the two modes of valuation, slave versus noble, Nietzsche illustrates how different conditions promote different attitudes. The following passage is a good

example of Nietzsche's description of the two different mentalities: "While the noble man lives in trust and openness with himself (...), the man of *ressentiment* is neither upright nor naïve nor honest and straightforward with himself." It is important to note that Nietzsche not only values openness and honesty, but also specifically pays attention to whether or not one is honest and open with oneself. Here, Nietzsche, in my view, seeks an ultimate kind of honesty. He rejects cover-ups, secrecy, and insincerity in the other mentality, the slave: "His soul *squints*; his spirits loves hiding places, secret paths and back doors, everything covert entices him as his world, his security" (*GM* I: 10). The slave finds security in concealment. Slave morality says No to what is "outside," what is "different," for the lack of self confidence. Unlike slave, "every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself."

The need to redirect one's view outward, instead of back to oneself, is what is problematic about slave morality. This inversion of "the value-positing eye" creates a different perspective, a different way of looking at the world. In his effort, trying to find out "under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil," Nietzsche discovers two different styles, two different manners of thinking and habits of mind. Digging deep into the mentality behind *ressentiment*, Nietzsche finds the key point of difference, he writes, "one should ask rather precisely *who* is 'evil' in the sense of the morality of *ressentiment*. The answer, in all strictness, is: *precisely* the 'good man' of the other morality, precisely the noble, powerful man, the ruler" (*GM* I: 11). The slave defines the ultimate opposite of good as "evil", and this "evil" is no one but the powerful,

the “good man” of the other morality. Power, therefore, plays an important and crucial role in the difference between slave and noble morality.

Morality as Perspectival

Two different Perspectives: Powerful vs. Powerless

Lynne Tirrell writes, “The basic difference between master morality and slave morality is *perspective*.” This difference in perspective, she continues, “is illustrated by how each acquires values” (*FIFN* 211). Tirrell emphasizes Nietzsche’s point that the master looks to himself (or herself) for his own values; the slave, on the other hand, seeks values from outside himself (or herself). Slave morality, Tirrell restates Nietzsche’s view, “looks with resentment and fear at the same aristocracy and calls it evil.” Tirrell concludes, at the end, “Slave morality is the morality of the powerless” while the nobles see “themselves as powerful, with power over others as well as over themselves, their actions are spontaneous, not reactive” (*FIFN* 211).

Different conditions urge different mentalities and, consequently, different manners of thinking create different perspectives. When Nietzsche links the concept of the “evil”, for the slave, to be the “good man” of the other morality, he actually presents slave and noble moralities as two different perspectives. The noble, in the slave’s eye is “dyed in another color, interpreted in another fashion, seen in another way by the venomous eye of *ressentiment*” (*GM* I: 11: 40). Having a different point of view, a different way of seeing, slave morality distinguishes itself from the noble morality. Regardless of what Nietzsche prefers, noble or slave morality, the important point is that

he introduces them as two different perspectives. Power is the key factor to distinguish between the noble and slave mentality.

Thus, Nietzsche's account of slave versus master morality is based on his perspectivism. Nietzsche himself calls these moralities perspectives, he writes, "it is this fear of the neighbor that again *creates new perspectives of moral valuation*" (BGE 201). From a feminist point of view, considering slave and master moralities as two separate perspectives on moral values, one may wonder, how Nietzschean inspired feminists will avoid slave-morality and resentment? Could feminists embrace some aspects of the master-morality and reject the resentment?

A Feminist Rejection of "Ressentiment"

A feminist interpretation of Nietzsche's analysis of slave morality that says this mentality looks outward instead of inward (for an enemy) may suggest that we redirect our attention from blaming the outside enemy, "men," towards the inside problems (short comings, lackings, weaknesses). The chauvinistic moral values that have been internalized by women may become the women's worst enemies. In this sense, Nietzsche's criticism of slave morality helps feminists to focus on women's internal weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and problematic values. The important step for women is to admit that women could also be a source of chauvinistic values. Women are not free of male-dominated values just because they are biologically female. In today's world, the deconstruction of gender roles, the practice of transsexual identity, and gay and lesbian life-styles and practices leave no room to doubt how socially constructed are the roles of "man" and "woman."

Feminists need to encourage women to take a powerful position towards their enemies. Instead of hiding their natural anger and hatred about their situation and compensating themselves with imaginary revenge, women should openly and directly attack their internal enemies as well as the external ones. The man-made categories of “women” versus “men” have been used to cover some real issues. Feminists should go beyond these categories, as many of them already have done, and tackle serious problems that have created an artificial hierarchy between men and women and have built obstacles to their communication with each other.

Praising the Noble

The noble is “a creator of values,” Nietzsche declares. While the slave seeks values from outside, the master looks to him/herself for his/her own values. The power of creating values, for oneself, is what Nietzsche praises highly in the noble. Moreover, Nietzsche venerates that, “the noble human being honors himself [herself], who is powerful, also as one who has *power over himself*, who knows how to speak and be silent, who delights in being severe and hard with himself and respects all severity and hardness” (*BGE* 260). In addition to value creating, having power over oneself to overcome one’s own weaknesses and enduring the hardship of the whole process are what Nietzsche applauds.

Creation of values is the end, for Nietzsche. Will-to-power is about how to achieve that goal. Similarly, for feminists, revaluation of all values, and creating new values, including moral values, can be defined as an important goal. How feminists can achieve that goal and what may empower them is the next topic of our discussion.

Using Nietzsche's Philosophy Can Empower Women

There is no one single interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy of power. There are different understandings of his theory. One can understand Nietzsche's "will to power" as an exercise of power over the external world, including other people. One may, for example, perceive Nietzsche's theory of power as encouraging the "ruling class" to increase their power over the lower part of society. In this view, Nietzsche's "will to power" is mainly about political, physical, and financial power.

There is another interpretation that views Nietzsche's philosophy of power to focus on internal power with the purpose of self-overcoming. From this point of view, Nietzsche's theory of power is about personal growth, internal strength, and the power of overcoming one's own weaknesses. Accordingly, the process of overcoming that Nietzsche describes in Zarathustra, for instance, is all about self-overcoming. And Nietzsche's "will to power" is nothing but the will to spiritual, psychological, intellectual, artistic, and moral power.

Now, let us see which one of these readings of Nietzsche, and his theory of "will to power", can be useful for feminists. In other words, which interpretation is more compatible with feminism?

A Feminist Interpretation

Feminists are concerned about social relationships. They want to empower women in order to demolish male domination in a patriarchal society. Consequently, the conception of power plays a crucial role in feminist theories. They deal with the power structure of the society. Therefore, from a feminist point of view, the purpose of the

“will to power” for Nietzsche becomes important; in such a way that one may wonder whether this “will to power” wants to create or to dominate?

Considering Nietzsche’s will to power to be about politics, and stretching his theory to apply it to the social structure, one is likely to find it in conflict with feminist views regarding social equality. By contrast, understanding the “will to power” as a process of self-overcoming that focuses on internal power can empower women and be compatible with feminism. Evidently, there are pro and con arguments in regard to the meaning of the “will to power” for Nietzsche. I suggest that, regardless of what Nietzsche “*really*”¹⁰ and personally intended, contemporary feminists can decide in favor of one interpretation of his theory so that we gain the will to obtain the power to create and cultivate.

Will to Power: Self-Overcoming or Overcoming One’s Neighbor

Zarathustra is the first published work of Nietzsche that contains any mention of the “will to power.” Although, “On Self-Overcoming,” in part II; is the first long discussion of the concept, Nietzsche presents his theory in an earlier chapter, in part I, “On the Thousand and One Goals”, where he first speaks of the “will to power.” In both cases, as the title, “On Self-Overcoming,” suggests that the will to power is introduced as the will to overcome oneself.

According to Walter Kaufmann, while “self-overcoming” may not be the most adequate translation for the German word *Selbstüberwindung*, it is the best choice compared to such alternatives as “self-surpassing,” “self-transcendence,” and “self-conquest.” Considering all these different ways of translating the title of the chapter, we

get back to the same understanding of Nietzsche's point, here: it is about overcoming oneself. Conceptually, also, Nietzsche does not leave us with any doubts; these two chapters show that he is mostly concerned with personal growth and having power over oneself.

Walter Kaufmann believes that "besides self-overcoming Nietzsche thinks of overcoming one's neighbor." He refers to Nietzsche's example of four nations in "On the Thousand and One Goals," to show how "in Nietzsche's vision the globe becomes a Greek gymnasium where all nations vie with each other, each trying to overcome itself and thus to excel all others" (Nietzsche 201).¹² One thing that Kaufmann seems to overlook is Nietzsche's emphasis on the purpose of overcoming. Unlike Kaufmann, I think the goal is not "to excel all others," rather; it is to reach a higher level of self-improvement. In other words, the direction of the process of overcoming is inward instead of outward.

Robert Solomon notices the German word that Nietzsche uses for "power" is "*Macht*, not *Reich*, indicating something more like *personal strength* than political might." Solomon writes, "None of these points to anything resembling political power, or ...power over other people. Indeed, what Nietzsche most often celebrates under this rubric is *self-discipline* and creative energy" (*What Nietzsche really said* 17).

By defining the will to power as self-overcoming, the whole issue of power turns to be about the internal power rather than external. In other word, it is all about our internal forces, overcoming our own weaknesses, and empowering ourselves. Nietzsche's ideas about "free spirit" can inspire women for a challenging process of self-

empowering. Freedom from oppression for women can start internally. In the process of self-overcoming, women gain the courage to become more assertive, independent, and self-creative.

“Woman” as Self-Created by Women: The Power of Naming

Linda Singer claims that Nietzsche denies women the highest task of all, the adventure of self-creation. Singer, like many other Nietzsche scholars, acknowledges that self-creation is the highest task for Nietzsche. Women start the adventures of self-creation regardless of Nietzsche denying or allowing them the task. However, women need to pay attention to many other areas in Nietzsche’s philosophy that can help them. For instance, in a challenging process of self-empowering, women can benefit from Nietzsche’s concept of “free spirit”: spirit “strong and original enough” to revalue and invert values (*BGE* 203). The power of creating values for oneself is what Nietzsche praises highly. As part of the personal growth, self-overcoming and having the power over oneself stays at the core of his doctrine: “will to power.” His adulation for self-discipline and creative energy spreads out through his writings.

Creation of values has not only a personal but also a social dimension. Nietzsche’s emphasis on the importance of the social construction of values presents an additional perspective. His methods, according to Kathleen Wininger, require an understanding of values in a social and historical context. Daniel Conway points out that Nietzsche’s perspectivism leads us to acknowledge that all knowledges are situated. Different perspectives bring different values, and, depending on the social settings, values

are changing over time. Therefore, values are constantly created at both social and personal levels.

Nietzsche is an anti-essentialist. According to his view, there is no predefined “essence” for woman. Gender is socially constructed and social identity is a human invention. Based on Nietzsche’s anti-essentialist view that suggests varieties of “woman,” Lynne Tirrell promotes the ideas of women’s self-creation and the creative power of naming. According to Tirrell, education plays an important role in determining gender roles, for Nietzsche. If gender is socially constructed then one may learn to play different roles, and call each a different name. As Jacques Derrida notes, for Nietzsche, “There is not *a* woman a truth in itself of woman in itself.” Nietzsche presents a variety of possibilities of being a woman, Derrida writes, through the “varied typology, the crowd of mothers, daughters, sisters, old maids, wives, governesses, prostitutes, virgins, grandmothers and granddaughters, of his work.” As it becomes evident that social identity is a human invention, one realizes the importance of the power of naming and value creating.

The Power of Creating Values

The most important point about the master morality, for Nietzsche, is that “the noble type of man experiences itself as determining values.” Value-creating is what Nietzsche admires the most about the “noble man.” Unlike the “slave”, the noble type of human being does not need approval of others; s/he “judges” herself. She is the value-creator (*BGE* 260). It is in this context that Nietzsche talks about having a different faith. His faith “towards *new philosophers*” is, as he describes, “toward *spirits strong and*

original enough to provide the stimuli for opposite valuations and to revalue and invert ‘eternal values’.” This is what Nietzsche calls, “a revaluation of values,” and only such leaders as “free spirits” are able to grow their soul to such a height for such tasks (*BGE* 203).

Being independent and able to stand alone, a powerful type chooses her own values, and she creates new ones, in case she is not happy with her options. Being autonomous and creative, a feminist woman is capable of satisfying Nietzsche’s requirements for becoming a “new philosopher.” A feminist must have a strong spirit and be original in many ways. Challenging the antiquated social structure, feminists need to be able to revise the ‘eternal values’ and invert traditional systems. And this is an impossible task to achieve without revolutionizing our value systems. Nietzsche envisions a similar path for the new philosophers. He writes that “the future task of the philosophers” is “the solution of the problem of value, the determination of the order of rank among values” (*GM* I: 17). Feminists not only have to deal with “the problem of value,” but also they aim at the “order of rank among values” inevitably. Feminists are capable of achieving at least part of “the future task of the philosophers.”

Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

In search of finding an answer to the main question, *how can Nietzsche's philosophy contribute to feminist thought*, a reflection on feminist scholars' discussion about Nietzsche becomes inevitable. The study of feminists and Nietzsche starts with Debra Bergoffen and continues with *feminists who reject Nietzsche's philosophy*, such as, Linda Singer and Ofelia Schutte; and *feminists who are interested in Nietzsche*, like Lynne Tirrell and Maudemarie Clark. While no one denies that *Nietzsche is no feminist*, some find his philosophy useful for feminism.

To figure out how his philosophy can help feminism, one needs first to find why feminists are interested in Nietzsche. Kathleen Wininger calls Nietzsche's idea of "revaluation of all values" revolutionary. She finds his philosophy of power useful and his emphasis on the importance of the social construction of values crucial for feminism. Daniel W. Conway focuses on Nietzsche's perspectivism; and David Owen on his anti-essentialist view. Owen argues that Nietzsche's philosophy supports the idea of diversity among women by declining one single definition or image of "woman."

Nietzsche's use of Woman as a Metaphor is an attractive topic that draws attention of some philosophers such as Jacques Derrida. Following Derrida's footsteps, Kelly Oliver focuses on *Woman and Truth in Nietzsche's Philosophy*. Derrida and Oliver

talk about *The Triad* that they find in Nietzsche's writings which portrays women in three different positions: the castrated woman, representing the will to truth; the castrating woman, symbolizing the will to illusion; and the affirming woman, exemplifying the will to power.

With the help of Nietzsche's philosophy, I argue, feminists can move from the position of "castrated woman" to become "the affirming woman." The honesty of castrated woman and the creativity of "castrating woman" can be combined in an alternative way of being: the affirming woman.

Studying Nietzsche's criticism of morality and his theory of slave versus master morality, I find that Nietzsche is against slave mentality, and what he calls "the herd-animal morality," mainly because it encourages mediocrity. Nietzsche argues strongly against the culture of "pity" and "resentment." A re-evaluation of Nietzsche's view shows that he distinguishes the two types of morality based on their different perspectives: powerful versus powerless. Nietzsche praises the noble for holding a perspective of power and for having the power to create values.

A feminist interpretation of his philosophy of power focuses on power as a creative force. The process of self-overcoming and creativity empower women to focus on self-creation and the need to select and create their own values. Rejecting "ressentiment," some feminists have already distanced themselves from slave morality and hold a perspective of powerful by choosing and creating values.

Moving Beyond Nietzsche

“Whether or not Nietzsche is anti-feminist ultimately comes down to whether a feminism beyond good and evil can and will be developed” (Clark, *FIFN* 197).

Reading the “will to power” as the will to create helps feminists to go beyond “good” and “evil”. They can learn how to free themselves from the “resentment” of “slave” morality. To move beyond “master-slave” morality, feminists need to create alternative values (their own values) to stand above this dualism. Nietzsche calls on us to move beyond dualism such as appearance and reality, body and soul, reason and emotion, and culture and nature but he himself does not go beyond the master/slave duality. We need not only feminist interpretations of the external world, including our social settings, but also a feminist creation of values, including revaluation of values. Feminism can benefit from Nietzsche and move beyond. Feminist who challenge Nietzsche have already paved the road and started the development of a feminism that goes beyond good and evil.

Notes

¹ Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998). For this work, references to text title will be abbreviated as: *FIFN*.

² Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall, Introduction, *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998): 2.

³ Debra B. Bergoffen, "Nietzsche Was No Feminist," *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*, eds. K. Oliver and M. Pearsall (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998): 225-235.

⁴ Sarah Kofman, "Baubo: Theological Perversion and Fetishism," Translated by Tracy B. Strong, *FIFN* (1998): 44. Kofman writes, "By calling life 'Baubo,' one identifies it not only with woman but also with her reproductive organs: *Baubo* is the equivalent of *koilia*, another of the "improper" words used in Greek to designate the female sex. *Baubon*, the symbol of the male sex, derives from *Baubo*." [...] "Baubon and *Baubo*, as personifications of the two sexes, appeared under this aspect of the Eleusian rites where *Baubo* is an animated *koilia*. In the Eleusian mysteries, the female sexual organ is exalted as the symbol of fertility and a guarantee of the regeneration and eternal return of all things." [...] "The figure of *Baubo* indicates that a simple logic could never understand that life is neither depth nor surface, that behind the veil, there I another veil, behind a layer of paint, another layer. It signifies also that appearance should cause us neither pessimism nor skepticism, but rather the affirming laugh of a living being who knows that despite death life can come back indefinitely and that 'the individual is nothing and the species all.' "

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Translated by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House, 1974): 363. References to text title shall be abbreviated as: *GS*.

⁶ Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (New York: AMS Press, 1975): 104.

⁷ A references to Ofelia Schutte (in *Beyond Nihilism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984) and Jacques Derrida (in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987).

⁸ See Lynne Tirrell, Conclusion, *FIFN* (1998): 220.

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Translated by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House, 1989). References to text title shall be abbreviated as: *BGE*.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, (New York: Random House, 1974). References to text title shall be abbreviated as: *GM*.

¹¹ A reference to the title of a book, “What Nietzsche *really* said,” by Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins.

¹² Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974): 287-306.

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