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## nietzsche's dissent

Women have been victimized and objectified for thousands of years. Starting in Ancient Greek philosophy, and even in texts as early as the bible, women have constantly been disregarded and silenced. Though in general, philosophy is not a discipline that is easy to figure out and understand, early philosophers strove for clarity. For example, in Plato's *Republic*, Socrates designs a society based on the truth. His society depended on class complexes and supreme authority. Socrates also manipulated women and the family in Plato's text. Whether or not Plato's philosophy was itself technically and stylistically clear, it was in the name of greater truth and simplicity. On the other hand, Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy is neither clear nor does it claim to be simple and understandable. He is even unsure about the audience who read his own work, for the subtitle to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is "A book for all and none." *Beyond Good and Evil*, the text I will be focusing on in this essay, presents complex and opposing ideas in its title, too. How can something be All and None? Good and Evil? Nietzsche's philosophy is a radical deviation from common understandings. He writes several times in *Beyond Good and Evil* that the honorable should strive for secrecy and hide themselves behind masks and veils. It is evident that Nietzsche's texts are not easy to fathom. In the same text he presents deeply misogynistic ideals throughout the work, but opens it by equating women with the truth. Even the

acknowledgment of women is a radical change for traditional philosophy. Nietzsche's texts offer critiques of ideas that were accepted and appreciated by philosophers in and before his time. His philosophy criticizes notions of truth, reason, and autonomy. These criticisms show Nietzsche's inner struggle and rebelliousness. Do these critiques show that Nietzsche's texts are not solely works of misogyny, but works advocating for women, too? Nietzsche's struggles with the feminine justify the use of his texts in order to oppose and attack the thousands of years of hatred towards women in the world of philosophy. Using both Nietzsche's texts and modern feminist interpretations of his writing, I seek to show that Nietzsche's philosophies are useful to develop feminist theories on politics, women, and truth.

Nietzsche's philosophies are intricate and his texts are complicated. From the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil*, it is hard to figure out what Nietzsche's actual ideas are. He opens by deconstructing much of western philosophy, but one paragraph later discounts his own initial assumptions. "Supposing truth is a woman - what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women?" (Nietzsche 1). Nietzsche shows that philosophic authorities have disregarded women. Here, he is letting woman stand on her own. He goes on to contradict his own argument. "Speaking seriously, there are good reasons why all philosophical dogmatizing...have been no more than a noble childishness and tyronism" (Nietzsche 1). Nietzsche continues to tarnish ancient philosophy by assuming that even Socrates was at fault. "Could Socrates have been the corrupter of youth after all? And did he deserve his hemlock?" (Nietzsche 2). In both examples, Nietzsche makes radical assertions about highly praised philosophers and

philosophies. He makes claims against dogmatism and presents new and dangerous ideas. However, also in these very examples, he explicates his own traditional views; a sort of hatred towards women, which is an issue I will address later in the essay. In Part One of *Beyond Good and Evil* (in the prologue alone, he has already presented many progressive notions), he supports chaos and unknowing. "Suppose we want truth: *why not rather* untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance?" (Nietzsche 9). Here he advocates for beliefs many philosophers, such as Plato, fought against, and, in Socrates' case, was put to death for. Nietzsche's rebelliousness never ceases.

In Part Two, he opens up by mocking philosophy and making complaints about the validity of certain arguments. He takes on a sarcastic voice and pokes fun at notions of truth and clarity. "How we have made everything around us clear and free and easy and simple! how we have been able to give our senses a passport to everything superficial..."(Nietzsche 35). Nietzsche begins to play another character. His writing deviates from serious and collected narrative on truth to uncontrolled ridicule of simplicity. Is this one of Nietzsche's masks? He again makes claims for ignorance and untruth. "And only on this now solid, granite foundation of ignorance could knowledge rise so far...the will to ignorance, to the uncertain, to the untrue..." (Nietzsche 35). Just as he did in the prologue, he shows his discomfort with common philosophy.

However, this witty internal dialogue will be put at odds, for only one page later, Nietzsche begins to explore the idea of self-suppression. "Flee into concealment. And have your masks and subtlety, that you may be mistaken for what you are not, or feared a little" (Nietzsche 36). Does Nietzsche's praise for secrecy invalidate his previous thoughts that derided much of western philosophy? One could say that

Nietzsche himself has covered his text with a mask and seeks to prevent the reader from deciphering and truly understanding his writing. "Every choice human being strives instinctively for a citadel and a secrecy where he is saved from the crowd..." (Nietzsche 37). He alludes to the notion that he is protecting himself from the many. He is hiding within his published philosophy. One could assume that Nietzsche feared the potential reception of his work. He goes on to profess his love of masks and equates those who are hidden with those who are great.

"Whatever is profound loves masks...every profound spirit needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually, owing to the constantly false, namely shallow, interpretation of every word, every stem, every sign of life he gives." (Nietzsche 50-51)

Nietzsche appears to be uncomfortable with the implications of his self-proclaimed "profound" ideas. His philosophy is his mask that grows around him, leaving readers of his texts to ponder what his ideas actually are.

Though his dissenting and veiled philosophy are key aspects to *Beyond Good and Evil*, the inherent misogyny of this book is important to explicate, too. In Part Seven, Nietzsche seriously considers the role of gender in life. He makes claims about what woman wants and who she is. "Woman wants to become self-reliant -- and for that reason she is beginning to enlighten men...Woman has much reason for shame; so much pedantry, superficiality..."(Nietzsche 162-163). Nietzsche talks down to woman and makes her feel ashamed about herself. However, despite the fact that this passage - and many others - are deeply misogynistic, Nietzsche expresses some uncertainty about women, too. A few lines earlier, he struggles with identity. "Whenever a cardinal

problem is at stake, there speaks an unchangeable 'this is I'; about man and woman, for example, a thinker cannot relearn but only...discover ultimately how this is 'settled in him'" (Nietzsche 162). He is trying to figure out his own role in the world. His ideas are not yet definite. He is trying to create himself and his philosophy. He is on a journey.

Nietzsche continues to disparage woman by claiming that she is uninterested in veracity and has a need for distress. "Unless a woman seeks a new adornment for herself that way...she surely wants to inspire fear of herself -- perhaps she seeks mastery. But she does not *want* truth: what is truth to woman?" (Nietzsche 163). Again, even though he says that woman does not desire truth, he struggles with woman's identity. He expresses his ignorance of woman, for he plainly asks, "What is truth to woman?". He goes on to proclaim that woman should not speak and should not seek enlightenment:

"We men wish that woman should not go on comprising herself through enlightenment -- just as it was man's thoughtfulness and consideration for woman that found expression in the church decree: [woman should be silent in church] It was for woman's good when Napoleon gave the all too eloquent Madame de Staël to understand: [woman should be silent when it comes to politics] And I think it is a real friend of woman that counsels them today: [woman should be silent about woman]." (Nietzsche 164)

Nietzsche is deeply troubled by woman. He does not know how to interact with her. His only recourse is to force her to be silent and invisible. This is only a small sample of Nietzsche's misogynistic thinking. The rest of Part Seven is full of anti-feminine banter; he compares women to birds and claims that women are not thinking creatures

(Nietzsche 164-167). Despite the fact that such a great portion of Nietzsche's texts are devoted to belittling women, one should still wonder what his true thoughts are and should still try to understand his struggle, for, as I detailed earlier, Nietzsche often says that he is hiding himself. His philosophy, again, has become his "citadel of secrecy." It is not easy to understand Nietzsche from a feminist's perspective, especially after reading his thoughts against women, but one cannot forget how his philosophy is complex and multi-faceted.

Philosophers have struggled with how to classify and understand Nietzsche and his philosophy, but this endeavor is even harder for feminist philosophers. It is difficult for many feminists to even consider Nietzsche's often misogynistic philosophy. However, when feminist philosophers have examined Nietzsche's words, it has often benefited their own feminist ideals. Considering the history of exclusion of women from philosophy, politics, and society, Nietzsche's philosophy is a deviation from the norm. In the Introduction of a book titled *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall show that Nietzsche often offers objections to cultural and philosophical standards. "Many feminist philosophers have pointed out that philosophy has traditionally been written by men who promote specific values over others in the name of objectivity of truth" (Oliver and Pearsall 2). Philosophy has excluded women and feminist perspectives. Oliver and Pearsall compare Nietzsche's philosophy to some feminist theory. "In his writings, Nietzsche makes similar criticisms of objectivity and truth. He argues that all truth is perspectival; every truth comes from a particular perspective" (Oliver and Pearsall 3). They claim that Nietzsche is critiquing current philosophies, just as many feminist thinkers do. In the same introduction, they

assert that feminists *also* believe that truth must be reconsidered. "Some feminists have argued that what has passed for objectivity and truth must be reexamined and that only when different people are involved in philosophy can it hope to become objective or speak the truth about human experience" (Oliver and Pearsall 3). Oliver and Pearsall believe that even though Nietzsche's texts are misogynistic, they still must be studied to truly understand truth and woman.

Later in their introduction, they cite more instances where Nietzsche deviates from traditional philosophy. They note his use of supernatural powers in his texts. "In addition to his criticism of reason, Nietzsche brings irrational elements back into philosophy" (Oliver and Pearsall 4). Nietzsche has introduced new ideas into the world of philosophy . Oliver and Pearsall again compare and equate Nietzsche's philosophy with feminist notions: "Nietzsche's philosophy and its feminist engagements pose some of the most difficult and central problems for contemporary feminist philosophers..." (Oliver and Pearsall 5). They go on to list a series of questions asked both by Nietzsche and feminist thinkers. All are questions that challenge the validity of classical beliefs.

Later in *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Kelly Oliver writes of Nietzsche's battle with the feminine and notes both his respect and contempt for truth and woman. "Nietzsche is as notorious for his struggle with woman as he is for his battle with truth: his writings are a mixture of awe and disdain for both" Oliver and Pearsall 66). One is not able to classify Nietzsche's philosophy, for his texts explicate his convoluted journey and internal struggle with philosophy. His ideas are constantly changing. Later in the same book, Maudemarie Clark writes about Nietzsche's

misogyny. She says that it is actually his hatred of women that makes him stand out. "After all, misogyny distinguishes Nietzsche from few other male writers of his time, and in contrast to, for instance, Freud's phallogocentric prejudices masquerading as science, Nietzsche's misogynistic comments have probably done little actual harm to women." (Oliver and Pearsall 188). She says that Freud's philosophy, or his "masquerading as science," injures his readers, but Nietzsche's philosophy is harmless. She also understands that Nietzsche directly interacts with woman in his texts, while it appears that Freud is more preoccupied with the male. Clark continues to examine the complexity of Nietzsche's texts. "What I discovered is that I had underestimated Nietzsche...and that the misogyny...is not the simple and straightforward matter it appears to be" (Oliver and Pearsall 189). She has encountered Nietzsche's mask and veil. In order to truly understand his thinking, she must dig deeper into his texts. "I shall argue that the misogyny exhibited there is on the level of sentiment, *not belief*, and that it is used by Nietzsche to illustrate points he is trying to make about philosophy and the will to truth" (Oliver and Pearsall 189). She believes that Nietzsche has a deeper connection to woman and that his apparent hatred may actually come out of an act of love for woman.

Other feminist readings of Nietzsche also note his complexity. Paul Redding, in an essay entitled "Child of the English Genealogists," believes that Nietzsche's philosophy lies all over the philosophical spectrum and that his philosophy cannot be put in one place. "It is difficult to think of a philosopher who has been assigned to a greater number of places on this spectrum than Nietzsche himself" (Patton 204). Lynne Tirrell also realizes the complications of Nietzsche's texts. She begins an essay by

noting the concerns shared by both Nietzsche and feminist philosopher, but goes on to describe the discord present in his texts. "In particular, his attack on dualisms...the discussions of the power of discourse...and beyond, the discussions of the importance of power...are but a few of the issues of shared concern for Nietzsche and for many feminists" (Burgard 158-159). Despite the fact that Nietzsche's texts are deeply misogynistic, they present and share opinions with feminist thinkers and advocate for shifts of power.

Tirrell goes on to summarize Nietzsche's views on women. She accounts for two questions he asks about women. The first is on the state of gender in himself, and the second is on the relationship between the sexes (Burgard 159). She notes that "the answers to the first question are overtly misogynistic, hostile, and shallow..." but that "the answers to the second question suggest a much more sympathetic conception of woman..." (Burgard 159). Nietzsche's different philosophies and his ever-present mask come forth in the answers to these questions, for his responses appear to be totally contradictory. She then describes the conflict present in Nietzsche's texts. "Taken together, we see that the two aspects of Nietzsche's thought on women create a tension in his writing that defies any definitive classification of his view (Burgard 159). When one deeply considers Nietzsche's philosophy, it is evident that Nietzsche shares many concerns and beliefs with feminist philosophy. "Like many feminists, Nietzsche rejects many kinds of philosophical dogmatism in his attempts to articulate his conception on these issues" (Burgard 177). By the end of her text, Tirrell is directly comparing Nietzsche's philosophy to common feminist thinking. Like feminist philosophers,

Nietzsche is concerned with the male dominated and created worlds of truth, reason, and body.

Nietzsche's texts are complex. His philosophy deviates from the clear and simple truths presented during the enlightenment. He is obsessed with truth and woman. Most traditional philosophical texts only deal with man and the masculine state of being. For example, Rousseau's state of nature forgets woman all together. Nietzsche's writing, on the other hand, directly interacts with woman. Even though he expresses his hatred of woman, he acknowledges the feminine. He lets woman stand on her own, even as he attacks her. Nietzsche has taken a great step towards feminism by simply recognizing woman. He dissents even more by questioning aspects of traditional philosophy, such as dualism, truth, and power. Finally, he puts his entire philosophy at odds by suggesting that he is writing from behind a mask and a veil. He hides his identity in his philosophy. As shown earlier, these are issues feminist philosophers are also concerned with. Feminist thinkers must consider Nietzsche's work, simply because he is possessed by the woman. Unlike other philosophers, Nietzsche reveals his discomfort both with classical philosophy, but also with ideas of feminism. Like feminist philosophers, Nietzsche spoke out against cultural, political, and philosophical norms. He began to propose change. Many thinkers (feminists, too), are too quick to dismiss his philosophy as typical male-dominated misogynist doctrine. As I said earlier, Nietzsche's mind does not rest in one place. His philosophy is not static. Instead, it flows. With each new text, paragraph, sentence, and word, Nietzsche presents new and radical ideas that change the sphere of philosophy.

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