

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Marcia J. Lilley entitled "Nietzsche's Critique of Women's Roles." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Philosophy.


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NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE OF WOMEN'S ROLES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to provide an interpretation of Nietzsche's remarks concerning women which differs from the bulk of previous Nietzsche scholarship in two primary ways. First, Nietzsche's remarks on this particular subject are integrated into the major schemes of his philosophy. As they are not treated as mere appendages to his texts, Nietzsche's remarks on women serve as a frame of reference by which to evaluate his observations of the human race, and his perceived need to go beyond that race, regardless of gender. Secondly, in contrast to previous interpretations, the view which attributes misogyny to Nietzsche is seen to be ill-founded.

An operant distinction is made between those attributes which Nietzsche ostensibly holds to stem directly from women's psychological nature and those attributes which are acquired as a result of women's social situation. The significance of such a distinction appears in the interpretation that Nietzsche's apparent opposition to women is not grounded in a repulsion toward any intrinsic feminine nature which is inherently inferior to a masculine nature. Rather, Nietzsche's remarks are construed to indicate that women's social behavior, as typified in their assumption of traditional social roles, is an overt index of social and cultural weakness in general.

On similar grounds, Nietzsche's concept of the Eternal-Feminine is explicated as social myth, a device created for social control and

stability. Nietzsche's perception of the traditional relations between the sexes in love and in marriage and his subsequent analysis of the sexual difference as one of appropriation point toward the interpretation of his alleged misogyny residing in the social roles of the sexes. That women have traditionally assumed secondary roles is not a necessary consequence of their gender, but rather an indication of a subservient social mentality.

Yet Nietzsche remains adamant in his opposition to feminism as it is generally construed. While he does reiterate several of the traditional arguments against feminism, Nietzsche also offers his own opposition. His aristocratic ideal, which entails that universal movements toward humanization preclude the possibility for greatness in individuals, is interpreted, in part, as an allusion to a 'higher feminism' and subsequently to a higher culture from which women are not necessarily excluded.

Such a position is reinforced by an examination of Nietzsche's metaphors of life, truth, and wisdom as women when they are considered within the context of the major tenets of his epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics. The Übermensch, Nietzsche's ideal creator-type and apex of his higher culture, is interpreted partially as an androgynous ideal. In his exhortations to creative, valuable action, Nietzsche does not arbitrarily exclude women, nor are the criteria varied on the basis of gender. Nietzsche's stringent individualism, however, entails that the new options which he illuminates are generally perceived as untenable by virtually all persons, male and female.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Despite the broad spectrum of literature dealing with Nietzsche and virtually every aspect of his work, very little attention has been given to his numerous and varied remarks concerning women. Such attention as has been given is, at best, cursory and fails to reflect the significance which Nietzsche attributed to his observations in his autobiography, Ecce Homo: "May I here venture the surmise that I know women? That is part of my Dionysian dowry. Who knows? Perhaps I am the first psychologist of the eternally feminine. . . ."¹ Questions of egoism and/or madness aside, Nietzsche's views on women point toward a remarkably contemporary sensitivity to the much-debated problems of the sexes. While Nietzsche's most frequently quoted remarks (e.g., "You are going to women? Do not forget the whip!"²) have led to a characterization of him as a profound misogynist, there remains much in his work, generally unquoted, to indicate--alternately--admiration, respect, fear, awe, and even hope for women.

Within the body of available literature on the topic of Nietzsche and women, one popular approach toward interpretation is a biographical one. Generally, this tradition holds that Nietzsche's personal failures

¹Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1969), p. 266.

²Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche, trans. and ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, Penguin Books, 1976), p. 179.

to sustain relationships with women culminated in his failure to find anything redeeming in them. As one representative proponent of this view holds:

His relations with his mother and sister became strained . . . they had shaped his affective life until he was unable to adjust himself to other women. . . . Had his father not died too early, leaving his son a prey to women and to feminine ideals, leaving no masculine vicegerent except a visionary hero?³

Such frustration, according to the same author, inevitably led to the verbal attacks on women as "Nietzsche's last rebellion against the piety of Naumburg, against the fatherless home, against omnivorous motherhood, and the eternal feminine."⁴

Even outside the familial circle, Nietzsche fared no better. While "Nietzsche's relations with women were outwardly studiously correct, and belie any suggestion of misogyny to be found in his writings,"⁵ one author holds that the mere fact that Nietzsche was never loved by a woman suffices as adequate interpretation of his views on women: "had he been [loved], who can doubt that many of the spiteful and uncomplimentary things he had to say about them would never have found a place in his works?"⁶ With regard to the one woman whom Nietzsche apparently did love, Lou Salomé, her failure to return his love is said to have induced his various diatribes against women; "after Lou . . . he would

³Eric Bentley, A Century of Hero-Worship: A Study of the Idea of Heroism in Carlyle and Nietzsche, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 109.

⁴Ibid., p. 110.

⁵R.J. Hollingdale, Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 209.

⁶Ibid., p. 211.

be revenged upon the female intelligentsia whose company he had sought."⁷

As an extension of the biographical tradition of interpretation, a type of long-distance psychoanalysis is frequently offered in explanation of the apparent changes of mind and the inconsistencies which are characteristic of Nietzsche's remarks concerning women. Projecting Nietzsche's personal failures with women into the miscellaneous parts of his work, one author finds a "frightful jocosity with tortuously bad taste which betrays a repressed sensualism and its needs whilst normal inhibitions are already crumbling."⁸ Yet another author imparts the following characterization to the totality of Nietzsche's work: "It is the happy combination of a delicate feminine sensitiveness, with a rather harsh masculinity of style and form that lends to his books an intriguing charm, often making his style more convincing than his ideas."⁹

That Nietzsche's ambivalence with regard to women was a consequence of his own divided mind, vacillating between masculine and feminine aims, is articulated at great length and imposed on the outstanding features of his text:

Nietzsche was a personal failure. He failed in health, in his profession, in love. He had no power over men. Within his breast was a conflict which he expressed differently at different times. He strove to unite Dionysos and Apollo, Dionysos and Ariadne, Dionysos and Christ. An offshoot of this struggle of masculine and feminine, the idea of the superman partakes of both halves of the sundered psyche. . . . The doctrine of the eternal

⁷Bentley, p. 107, referring particularly to Zarathustra. See also, Rudolph Binion, Frau Lou: Nietzsche's Wayward Disciple (Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 129, referring to Nietzsche's remarks in Beyond Good and Evil.

⁸Thomas Mann, Nietzsche in the Light of Contemporary Events (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1947), p. 7.

⁹Janko Lavrin, Nietzsche and Modern Consciousness (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1973), p. 6.

recurrence . . . reveals to what curious shifts Nietzsche's feminine nature was driven in its fight with his masculine ambitions. . . . If he could not realize his virile dreams of power, he would yield himself like a woman in a trance of mystical joy.¹⁰

To the extent that masculinity or femininity can be alternately predicated of virtually anything, such an interpretation, while perhaps tenable, is nonetheless of little use in attempting to discern the various nuances of Nietzsche's views of women.

Some authors have preferred to dismiss further discussion of the question of women in Nietzsche's work by asserting the now rather cliché interpretation that Nietzsche adopts "a Schopenhaurian view of womankind . . . a common condemnation."¹¹ Still others, while not directly fueling the charges of misogyny leveled against Nietzsche, admit of some largess toward women in Nietzsche's writings:

Nietzsche's attitude towards women is usually mistaken. Far from despising the whole sex as he is usually made out to do, he expresses his regard for women over and over again. But what he did decidedly object to was a certain type of unbalanced woman engendered by modern civilization.¹²

Withing this tradition, one author reminds us that in spite of the "unkind things" Nietzsche writes about women, "at the same time he is quite frank in the pleasure he takes in their outward parts and in their ability to be gay and frivolous."¹³

¹⁰Bentley, pp. 104-06.

¹¹Paul Carus, Nietzsche and Other Exponents of Individualism (New York: Haskell House, 1972), p. 54.

¹²J.M. Kennedy, Nietzsche (New York: Haskell House, 1974), p. 63.

¹³Hollingdale, p. 210.

Still further, we are informed that:

Essentially, one feels, women were for Nietzsche something strange, mystifying, and above all, tempting; if there is one persistent refrain running through his writings about them, it is that they lure men from the path of greatness, and spoil and corrupt them.¹⁴

If such interpretations of Nietzsche's texts are intended as apologetic toward women, thus alleviating the force of many of Nietzsche's assertions, the effectiveness of such appeals is lost in attributing such a limited significance to his views of women. While interpretations of this sort are plausible, they nonetheless appear rather narrow in their focus.

Certainly, the easiest method by which to dismiss the topic of Nietzsche and women is that of trivialization:

It is true that Nietzsche often gave expression to opinions he had not questioned critically. In his writings . . . we must distinguish between the human and the all-too-human elements. Nietzsche's writings contain many all-too-human elements--especially about women--but these are philosophically irrelevant and ad hominem arguments against any philosopher on the basis of such statements seems trivial and hardly pertinent The unjust and unquestioned prejudices of a philosopher may be of interest to the historian as well as to the psychologist; but Nietzsche's prejudices about women need not greatly concern the philosopher.¹⁵

Even within this dismissal, however, one finds an apology (or at least an excuse) for what might have been said within the confines of "hardly pertinent" topics. In partial defense of those who attribute Nietzsche's views on women to his biography, it might be remembered that for

¹⁴Hollingdale, p. 210.

¹⁵Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-christ, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 84. Also, in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 120, Kaufmann asserts that "Nietzsche's remarks about women are surely, more often than not, second-hand and third-rate."

Nietzsche himself, there was no sharp division between one's life (or more precisely, one's way of living it) and one's philosophy. Thus to initially preclude from consideration those aspects of his work which are not generally considered areas of philosophical investigation is to preclude a possibly significant contribution to an understanding of his work.

The typical shortcoming of authors dealing with Nietzsche's views of women is that of considering the relevant epigrams and aphorisms in isolation, apart from the totality of his philosophy.¹⁶ A major assumption of this study is that those sections which treat of women are not mere appendages to Nietzsche's texts. Rather, Nietzsche's remarks concerning women can be integrated, at least partially, into the major schemes of his philosophy--particularly with regard to the pre-eminent philosophical concerns of truth, wisdom, and life, which he represents throughout his work as feminine images. Certainly women are not Nietzsche's major concern, philosophical or otherwise, but his critique of women, and of that omnipresent concept "Woman", provides yet another frame of reference by which to evaluate his observations of the human race, and his perceived need to go beyond that race, regardless of gender.

Without attempting to explain away every inconsistency, real or apparent, with regard to Nietzsche's remarks concerning women, an effort will be made to reconcile those which are obviously condemnatory of the

¹⁶More recent exceptions to this include: Jacques Derridas, Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Maryanne Bertram, "God's Second Blunder--Serpent Woman and the Gestalt in Nietzsche's Thought," Southern Journal of Philosophy 19 (Fall, 1981): 259-77; Lawrence J. Hatab, "Nietzsche on Woman," Southern Journal of Philosophy 19 (Fall, 1981): 333-45.

sex, for whatever motive, with those which might be characterized loosely as "feminist". Nietzsche is not always on the offensive (nor necessarily on the defensive) against women; while certain fragments do resound of misogyny, his remarks taken as a complex bear a surprisingly unbiased tone. Yet there is no obvious dichotomy between misogyny and feminism in Nietzsche, nor are the terms applicable to Nietzsche in the sense in which they are generally employed. To apply conventional labels to Nietzsche is no simple, or possibly even warranted, task--particularly with regard to his views on women. That the label of misogynist frequently attributed to Nietzsche is not an accurate description of the total complex of his work is another focal point of this study.

Of equal significance, however, is the inability to characterize adequately Nietzsche as a feminist. There is much in Nietzsche to justify such a claim-- but not without qualifications; one can gather an arsenal of fragments in which Nietzsche expresses great potential for women, viewed as individuals in much the same way as he does for individual men. Yet Nietzsche is no democrat, and the notions of sexual equality and equal rights--as they are currently construed in reference to feminism--are certainly pure anathema to him. Nietzsche's exhortations to distinctive individuality rather than to collectivity render the various contemporary theories of social behavior unintelligible. A view such as Nietzsche's does not obliterate the sexual difference, but rather transcends it.

In Chapter II, Nietzsche's most pertinent remarks about women are examined, and a distinction is established between those attributes which Nietzsche holds to be essential to woman's psychological nature (here termed the 'essential predicates') and those attributes which are

acquired as a result of women's social situation (termed the 'acquired predicates'). The significance of such a distinction appears in the interpretation that Nietzsche's apparent opposition to women is not grounded in a repulsion toward any intrinsic feminine nature which is inherently inferior to a masculine nature. Rather, Nietzsche perceives women's social behavior, as typified in their assumption of traditional social roles, as an overt index of social and cultural weakness in general. On similar grounds, Nietzsche's concept of the Eternal-Feminine is explicated as social myth, a device created for social control and stability.

In Chapter III, Nietzsche's perception of the traditional relations of the sexes in love and in marriage is examined. His analysis of the sexual difference via the concept of appropriation, again, points toward the interpretation of Nietzsche's alleged misogyny residing in the social roles of the sexes. That women have traditionally assumed secondary roles is not a necessary consequence of their biology, and Nietzsche advances proposals for new options for both sexes.

In Chapter IV, Nietzsche's opposition to feminism is expounded. Following a reiteration of the traditional arguments against feminism, Nietzsche's own opposition, which is expressed as a denial of any sense of equality among human beings, is examined. His aristocratic ideal, which entails that universal movements toward humanization preclude the possibility for greatness in individuals, is interpreted, in part, as an allusion to a 'higher feminism' and thus to a higher culture from which women are not necessarily excluded.

In Chapter V, Nietzsche's recurrent metaphors of life, truth, and wisdom as women are examined within the context of certain of the major

aspects of his thought. After a brief summary of the basic tenets of his epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics, in conjunction with the metaphors, Nietzsche's ideal creator-type, the Übermensch, is considered. Again, the suggestion is advanced that Nietzsche does not arbitrarily exclude women from his philosophy; toward that end, the apex of Nietzsche's higher culture is interpreted as an androgynous ideal.

CHAPTER II

'WOMAN AS SUCH': HER NATURE AND ROLES

The ambivalence traditionally ascribed to Nietzsche's critique of women may lie in his vacillation between his criticism of that which he perceives as essential characteristics of the female sex and his criticism of that which he perceives as women's social roles. Within the ongoing philosophical debate between essentialism and accidentalism, as it is applied to the question of women, the former position holds that the manifested characteristics of each sex are determined solely by biology, while the latter position maintains that so-called sexual characteristics are simply the result of responses to acculturation and socialization.¹ The general trend of current scholarship appears to classify Nietzsche as an essentialist;² certainly, Nietzsche's frequent invocations of the phrase 'the Eternal-Feminine', which connotes an archetypal and universal feminine essence, do suggest such essentialist interpretations. Further, Nietzsche's appeals to the primacy of nature itself serve to reinforce those conclusions.

Beyond all of this, however, lies a facet of Nietzsche's thought which is rarely considered--that of his critique of society and social

¹Anne Dickason, "The Feminine as a Universal," Feminism and Philosophy ed. Mary Vetterling-Bruggin, Frederick A. Elliston, and Jane English (Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams, & Co., 1978), pp. 79-80.

²For example, Lawrence J. Hatab, "Nietzsche on Woman" and Maryanne Bertram, "God's Second Blunder . . ." express forms of the essentialist interpretation.

actors. His insight into social phenomena, particularly that of social roles, reveals another frame of reference by which to interpret his remarks concerning women. The significance of such an insight (which may be characterized roughly as accidentalist) lies in its ability to account for those factors relating to personal development for which biology can take neither credit nor blame. In a particularly Nietzschean vein, an examination of social phenomena can also account for the individual exceptions to the biological 'rules.' The distinction between essential nature and social role is thus a vital one: it is intimately connected with Nietzsche's themes of fate and choice, and of destiny and self-overcoming.

Throughout his work, Nietzsche invokes a wide variety of predicates to characterize women, and those predicates tend to fall into two general categories. In accord with the essentialist-accidentalist distinction, those predicates which refer ostensibly to aspects of female character which arise as a direct consequence of biology will be termed 'essential predicates,' while those traits which appear to arise as a result of the socialization process will be termed 'acquired predicates.' The essential predicates, which Nietzsche employs to define women's capacity and to indicate subsequent limitations on that capacity, must be predicable of all women, and admit of no exceptions, as they arise strictly by virtue of biology. Conversely, the acquired predicates are not necessarily predicable of all women, as Nietzsche uses such terms to make characterizations concerning women's overt social behavior and not to characterize any intrinsic feminine nature.

A. The Essential Predicates: Woman's Nature

In attempting to define the essential nature of women, Nietzsche invokes a number of predicates to characterize the female sex, in particular, weakness and subjection. The attribution of such characteristics, however, is dependent upon the assumption that there is indeed such an essential nature, that there is 'woman as such.' Occasionally, Nietzsche himself appears to doubt the existence of such an essence: "With women, one never fathoms their depths; they don't have any, that is all. They aren't even shallow."³

Yet Nietzsche devotes a considerable amount of space to an examination of feminine nature; the following passage is among the most representative:

What inspires respect for woman, and often enough even fear, is her nature, which is more "natural" than man's, the genuine, cunning suppleness of a beast of prey, the tiger's claw under the glove, the naivete of her egoism, her uneducability and inner wildness, the incomprehensibility, scope, and movement of her desires and virtues.⁴

The apparent equation of femininity and animality in this passage lends credence to the essentialist interpretation, that is, that there does exist a primordial principle of femininity of which all women, in all ages, partake.

What renders such an interpretation problematic, however, is Nietzsche's somewhat unconventional use of the term 'nature.' While he does exalt a 'return to nature' in the sense of a destruction of the

³Friedrich Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1969), p. 322.

⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1966), p. 119.

stultifying artifices with which the human race has surrounded itself, Nietzsche's exhortations are made in a progressive, and not in a regressive, sense. In Nietzsche's view, 'nature' is not an absolute given; it is not a fact of existence of which humans must take cognizance and upon which they subsequently order their lives; rather, nature is something yet to be attained.⁵ Thus for Nietzsche, nature is neither a normative principle nor a static condition; as a continual process, nature, applied to the individual, is, in Kaufmann's terms, a "dialectical force," so that "living 'according to nature' means trying to overcome nature."⁶

Women, however, are not generally perceived as engaging in the Nietzschean prescription of self-overcoming; thus, Nietzsche's remarks on women ostensibly revert to a critique of feminine psychology, which is typically viewed as inextricably grounded in biology. Weakness, for example, is a recurrent characterization of women:

One-half of mankind is weak, typically sick, changeable, inconstant--woman needs strength in order to cleave to it; she needs a religion of weakness that glorifies being weak, loving, and being humble as divine: or better, she makes the strong weak--she rules when she succeeds in overcoming the strong.⁷

All women are subtle in exaggerating their weaknesses; they are inventive when it comes to weaknesses in order to appear as utterly fragile ornaments who are hurt even by a speck of dust. Their existence is supposed to make men feel guilty and clumsy on that score. Thus they defend themselves against the strong and "the law of the jungle."⁸

⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 73-74.

⁶Kaufmann, Nietzsche, p. 260.

⁷Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 460.

⁸Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1974), p. 125.

Aggression and warlike nature belong to strength, as vengeance and rancor belong to weakness. Woman, for example, is vengeful: that is due to her weakness, as much as her susceptibility to the distress of others.⁹

Pity is elicited for woman in that she appears to be more in need of love, more vulnerable, more suffering, more condemned to disappointment than any other animal.¹⁰

Nietzsche nowhere stipulates that weakness is a necessary condition of female nature; rather, the weakness typically manifested in women's behavior is a readily-apparent index of social and cultural weakness in general. One of the "great crimes in psychology" is that weakness is taught as being desirable;¹¹ weakness, which is not necessarily inherent in women or in men, is a character trait encouraged by a society which Nietzsche perceives as requiring weak constituents for its perpetuation. While not inherent, weakness (under which Nietzsche subsumes other social virtues such as obedience, chastity, and justice) is developed instrumentally in proportion to social needs.¹²

Much the same holds true of subjection, another seemingly essential predicate attributed to women. Those of the essentialist camp are prone to regard Nietzsche's condemnatory remarks such as "Woman wants to serve, and finds her happiness therein. . . ,"¹³ and "there are those who would lose their whole joy in living if their duty were taken from them--especially the womanly, the born subjects;"¹⁴ as the final word on the

⁹Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, p. 232.

¹⁰Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 169.

¹¹Nietzsche, The Will to Power, pp. 166-67.

¹²Nietzsche, The Gay Science, pp. 92-94, 238.

¹³Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 314.

¹⁴Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 522.

apparently inherent relation between women's biology and their sole destiny. The essentialist interpretations link Nietzsche's remarks on subordination with women's natural and subordinate role in procreation.¹⁵ Such interpretations are not without foundation in Nietzsche: in re-writing one of Lou Salomé's essays on women, he referred to pregnancy as "the cardinal state which, gradually, over the centuries, fixed the nature of woman."¹⁶

Yet Nietzsche's antagonism may arise, not in reaction to any inherent female character trait, but rather from his repugnance with a subservient social mentality. Nietzsche's concept of resentment is particularly fitting with regard to his discussion of women, especially in the context of the opposition of natural and social values. As a reaction against what is not like oneself, resentment arises out of a feeling of powerlessness, out of fear and dread against which one can seemingly take no action. From a hatred of their powerlessness, women have established a system of sorts by which to enshrine and view as positive their powerlessness. Thus Nietzsche writes of the 'sick woman' (resentment): "No one can excel her in the wiles to dominate, oppress, and tyrannize."¹⁷ Voluntary subjection is not, then, a characteristic stemming from woman's intrinsic nature; it is a device by which to secure a

¹⁵For example, Robert Baker and Frederick Elliston, ed. Philosophy and Sex (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1975), p. 23; and Abigail L. Rosenthal, "Feminism Without Contradiction," The Monist 57 (January, 1973): 34-36.

¹⁶Binion, p. 82.

¹⁷Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 123.

modicum of power in an otherwise powerless situation. That Nietzsche should characterize Christianity as "feminine" and "anti-natural"¹⁸ is thus not surprising. As the supreme system, on Nietzsche's view, by which fundamental drives have been perverted, Christianity employs the mechanisms of sin and guilt to pervert natural strength, thus granting power to the originally powerless. Analogously, given Nietzsche's characterization of modern life as a lack of self-control and as a denial of the natural self, societal values of cooperation, normal interactions, and normal expectations propagate the traditionally-espoused characteristics of the nature of women.

Weakness and subjection, then, may be viewed as proven means of social survival for women and not necessarily as innate predispositions toward certain behaviors. Of particular importance for Nietzsche is the presence of weakness and subjection in many men as well; the culture which Nietzsche finds so detestable requires members of both sexes to foster certain social ideals of which these two are basic. As their origins in biology are questionable, weakness and subjection may thus not qualify as 'essential' predicates. What remains significant, however, is that women often do manifest such characteristics, and to such an extent, perhaps, that certain traits have come to be regarded as defining characteristics of feminine nature. *

¹⁸Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 485. Also, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 64f, and Dawn of Day, trans. J.M. Kennedy (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), pp. 76-77.

B. The Acquired Predicates: Women's Roles

Having failed to discern a particularized natural essence in women, Nietzsche considers the 'social essence' of women in his discussion of roles and role faith: "Reflect on the whole history of women: do they not have to be first of all and above all actresses? . . . they "put on something" even when they take off everything. . . ."19 Roles arise out of a need to make a living, and whether they be freely chosen or predetermined, in the case of women, the roles have followed a definite and stable pattern:

It is a sign of women's wisdom that they have almost always known how to get themselves supported, like drones in a beehive. Let us just consider what this meant originally, and why men do not depend upon women for their support. Of a truth it is because masculine vanity and reverence are greater than the feminine wisdom; for women have known how to secure for themselves by their subordination the greatest advantage, in fact, the upper hand. Even the care of children may originally have been used by the wisdom of women as an excuse for withdrawing themselves as much as possible from work. And at present they still understand when they are really active (as housekeepers, for instance) how to make a bewildering fuss about it, so that the merit of their activity is usually ten times over-estimated by men.²⁰

The issue of social roles based on sex has received considerable press recently, and to a large extent, Nietzsche initiates the discussion. Fundamentally, perhaps, the issue of whether there actually are innate psychological dispositions directly correlated with gender is not a debate to be decided by philosophy. Rather, more vital philosophical concerns include the justification of social encouragement

¹⁹Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 317.

²⁰Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, p. 303.

and sanction of sex roles and the legitimacy of restricting individuals to single avenues of development.

Three arguments are typically advanced in favor of social roles based on sex: that from inevitability, in which it is claimed that innate psychological differences between the sexes inevitably lead to sex roles; that from efficiency, in which it is argued that social efficiency is best promoted when each sex performs tasks for which it has the greatest innate ability; and that from well-being, in which it is urged that persons are happier when they fill those social niches to which they are naturally suited.²¹ Each of these arguments is ultimately dependent upon the assumption that there are indeed innate psychological differences between the sexes. In the absence of such a conclusion, however, an examination of women's traditional choices of social roles may reveal whether Nietzsche stands closer to the essentialist or accidentalist frame of reference. As women have traditionally assumed the roles of seductress, wife, and mother (and generally in that particular sequence), Nietzsche devotes most of his attention to these roles.

The role of seductress is the most intriguing for Nietzsche; in this particular role, women's 'art' comes to the fore. In this role, moreover, a woman's 'true nature' is not even a relevant consideration:

There are women who, when one examines them, have no inside, but are mere masks. A man is to be pitied who has connection with such almost spectre-like and necessarily unsatisfactory creatures, but it is precisely such women who know how to excite a man's desire most strongly; he seeks for their soul, and seeks evermore.²²

²¹Joyce Trebilcot, "Sex Roles: The Argument from Nature," Ethics 85 (April, 1975): 249-55.

²²Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, p. 300.

The appearance of changeability and unfathomability are women's most "bewitching characteristics;"²³ their greatest advantage, distance,²⁴ manifests itself in two ways: first, as the appearance of unavailability (despite the desire to be considered available), and second, as the direct inverse of what men believe them to be.

The beliefs held by men as to what women actually are, while not necessarily grounded in 'fact', are nevertheless of prime importance. Nietzsche proclaims that "man has created woman out of the rib of his ideal;"²⁵ thus, man's own idealization has contributed to woman's role as seductress:

. . . . Woman, conscious of man's feelings concerning women, assists his efforts by adorning herself, walking beautifully, dancing, expressing delicate thoughts; in the same way, she practices modesty, reserve, distance, realizing instinctively that in this way the idealizing capacity of the man will grow Given the tremendous subtlety of woman's instinct, modesty remains by no means conscious hypocrisy; she divines that it is precisely an actual naive modesty that most seduces a man and impels him to overestimate her. Therefore woman is naive--from the subtlety of her instinct, which advises her of the utility of innocence. . . .²⁶

Women's 'cleverness' consists precisely in furthering the ideal; that Nietzsche felt no small admiration for the art and the power of seduction is evident. Yet the role of seductress is generally only temporary --an initial phase preceding the more socially-sanctioned roles. Thus, as women progress into their roles as wives and mothers, much of the

²³Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 125

²⁴Ibid., p. 123.

²⁵Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 468.

²⁶Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 425.

magic--and power--of the first phase is lost:

"Better to rot than to be a woman without charm." When once the Muse thinks thus, the end of her art is again at hand. But it can be a tragic and also a comic finale.²⁷

On Nietzsche's view, women have been traditionally less successful in the roles of wife and mother than in that of seductress. Perhaps this is at least partially due to the loss of their charm and the acquisition of mediocrity and stunted self-development; with the 'ideal' so close at hand, it becomes increasingly less compelling until, ultimately, man's ideal has all but faded. Here, the predicates of weakness and subjection re-enter the scenario:

However highly women may honor their husbands, they honor still more the powers and ideas recognized by society; they have been accustomed for millenia to go along with their hands folded on their breasts, and their heads bent down before everything dominant, disapproving of all resistance to authority. They have therefore unintentionally, and as if from instinct, chained themselves as a drag on the wheels of free-spirited independent endeavor, and in certain circumstances make their husbands highly impatient, especially when the latter persuade themselves that it is really love which prompts the action of their wives. To disapprove to women's methods and generously to honor the motives that prompt them--that is man's nature and often enough his despair.²⁸

While Nietzsche admits that women are generally not psychologically prepared for marriage and its ensuing duties and that women's education is sorely deficient in readying them for even their traditional roles in society,²⁹ one finds little sympathy in Nietzsche for the plight of women in marriage; has it not been, after all, their sole

²⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part II, trans. Paul V. Cohn (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 56.

²⁸Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, p. 315.

²⁹Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 127.

destiny? Women are, in terms of their espoused weakness and subjection, "voluntary victims":

There is nothing by which able women can so alleviate the lives of their husbands, should these be great and famous, as by becoming, so to speak, the receptacle for the general disfavor and occasional ill-humor of the rest of mankind. Contemporaries are usually accustomed to overlook many mistakes, follies, even flagrant injustices in their great men, if only they can find someone to maltreat and kill, as a proper victim for the relief of their feelings. A wife not infrequently has the ambition to present herself for this sacrifice, and then the husband may indeed feel satisfied--he being enough of an egoist to have such a voluntary storm, rain, and lightning-conductor beside him.³⁰

The role of mother, that which Nietzsche perceives as women's greatest inadequacy, bears Nietzsche's strongest wrath, perhaps due to the importance he places on the institution of motherhood:

Everyone bears within him an image of woman, inherited from his mother: it determines his attitude towards women as a whole, whether to honor, despise, or remain generally indifferent to them.³¹

While at its height, maternal love can resemble an artist's love for his work, in its basest forms, it appears as dominating, possessive,³² and covetous: "as a rule, a mother loves herself in her son more than the son."³³ That a mother should project her own unfulfilled ambitions onto her offspring is, for Nietzsche, the greatest horror: "He who has had such an experience will never be able to forget all his life who has been his greatest and most dangerous enemy."³⁴ For the purpose of

³⁰Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, p. 313.

³¹Ibid., pp. 295-96.

³²Nietzsche, The Gay Science, pp. 128-29.

³³Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, p. 296.

³⁴Ibid., p. 308.

balance, it should be noted that Nietzsche was none too kind with regard to the role of father, either. The father, as well as the mother, regards the child as yet another possession, ready to be molded accordingly into the proper social niche.³⁵ Both parents, consequently, are responsible for the "inner sufferings"³⁶ that plague the child throughout his life.

Initially, it might seem somewhat incredible that Nietzsche would dispel any pretensions to competence which women possess regarding their traditional roles. Such a claim seriously erodes the essentialist interpretation of Nietzsche: if women are innately disposed toward such roles as wife and mother, their inherent abilities in those areas of endeavor would seem to preclude such large-scale incompetence. Yet the accidentalist account does not completely suffice, either: if these are roles into which women are encouraged by society, it would seem that society would have the foresight to steer persons into roles for which there would be guaranteed at least a modicum of success.

Perhaps, however, one does not have to make a definitive choice between the essentialist and accidentalist interpretations, between woman's destiny as determined by genetics and woman's destiny as determined by social mores. In his discussion of roles and role faith, Nietzsche offers a unique resolution to the apparent dichotomy: *"... the role has actually become character, and art, nature."*³⁷ Women have come to be identified with the roles they have assumed and

³⁵Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 107.

³⁶Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, p. 293.

³⁷Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 302.

maintained; inasmuch as their original nature (whatever that may be, on Nietzsche's view) gave way to art, their art has become so constant that it, in turn, is viewed as identical with women's nature.

With regard to less traditional roles of women, Nietzsche offers little specific comment. He does claim, however, that women, as 'real' artists or authors, "dabble" and experiment, thereby "losing their instincts;" as scholars, they sacrifice their femininity.³⁸ Here, Nietzsche seems particularly opposed to the possibility that women emulate the weaknesses of men. By relying on the continued availability of their traditional roles, and on the relative ease with which those roles can be fulfilled, women have simply "never learned to work properly."³⁹ As for the potential for roles that have yet to be defined, Nietzsche maintains a guarded and somewhat reluctant optimism:

A deep and powerful alto voice of the kind one sometimes hears in the theater can suddenly raise the curtain upon possibilities in which we usually do not believe. All at once we believe that somewhere in the world there could be women with lofty, heroic, and royal souls, capable of and ready for grandiose responses, resolutions, and sacrifices, capable of and ready for rule over men because in them the best elements of man apart from his sex have become an incarnate ideal. The intention of the theater, to be sure, is not at all that such voices should create this notion of women; what they are supposed to represent is usually the ideal male lover such as Romeo. But to judge by my experience, the theater regularly miscalculates on that point, as does the composer who expects that kind of effect from such a voice. Such lovers are unconvincing; such voices always retain some motherly and housewifely coloration--most of all when they make one think of love.⁴⁰

³⁸Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 433; Twilight of the Idols, p. 469; Beyond Good and Evil, p. 89.

³⁹Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, p. 297.

⁴⁰Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 127.

C. The Concept of the Eternal-Feminine

Nietzsche employs the phrase "Eternal-Feminine" in a variety of contexts to refer to women's psychological nature as well as to their more overt social behavior. Thus, the phrase appears as a catch-all term encompassing everything known and knowable about women. Generally, the phrase is regarded as being used in a derogatory fashion; in a characteristic formulation, the Eternal-Feminine establishes the destiny of women as "to know too little," "to be bad learners," "to simply have to lie."⁴¹

Ostensibly, the phrase "Eternal-Feminine" would seem to point toward a conceptualization of a natural feminine essence; the phrase itself would then denote the various characteristics predicated of such an essence and, having the feature of immediate recognizability, would thus serve to indicate a universal principle of femininity. As has been seen, Nietzsche has difficulty locating empirically discernible traits of a general female psyche, yet he continually invokes the concept of the Eternal-Feminine throughout his discussion of women. Thus, the question is raised as to whether Nietzsche intends the concept to be construed on a literal or on a metaphorical level.

One clue may lie in Nietzsche's assertion that man has created woman out of his ideal.⁴² In one passage, Nietzsche equates this notion of man's ideal with the concept of the Eternal-Feminine: emancipation of women goes "against men's faith in a basically different ideal

⁴¹Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 239.

⁴²Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 468.

that he takes to be concealed in woman, something Eternally-and-Necessarily Feminine. . . ."⁴³ The implication that any universal principle of femininity is properly construed only as myth is not unique to Nietzsche;⁴⁴ what is significant about Nietzsche's treatment of the subject is his perception of the sequence of events involved. For Nietzsche, the myth itself precedes any manifestations of the universal principles it claims to embody; already existent universal principles do not give rise to the myth.

Myth has a significance for Nietzsche which is not diminished by its vagueness or imprecision, by its apparent irrefutability, or by its evasion of propositional truth or falsity. Myth has as its function, after revealing salient features of a culture, the rendering intellectually and socially tolerable of what would otherwise be experienced as incoherence.⁴⁵ For Nietzsche, the conscious creation of a myth is simply to tell a story to do a job; in the case of the concept of the Eternal-Feminine, that job is to explicate the social situation traditionally occupied by women. What women appear to be in their social situation is thus construed as what they are essentially.

The concept of the Eternal-Feminine combines just those attributes of women (particularly, those pertaining to their limited capacities for any endeavors but the most 'natural') which, through social observation, render the myth plausible. As a device created for social control, the

⁴³Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 168.

⁴⁴Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Bantam Books, 1952), pp. 130f, 174.

⁴⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Anchor Books, 1956), pp. 60f, 163f.

Eternal-Feminine insures that women will occupy those positions--the traditional roles--which apparently maximize social utility. As a normative social principle, the Eternal-Feminine is guaranteed majority acceptance and adherence, and it provides means of censure for those who choose against adherence.

What is unique about the concept of the Eternal-Feminine, as opposed to other social myths which serve only a temporary usefulness, is its ability to persist through time. If man has indeed created woman out of his ideal, through the creation and perpetuation of the myth of the Eternal-Feminine, his own idealization has contributed to the manifestations of those feminine predicates which he claims to find repulsive. Yet women are not to be considered unwitting victims of the myth of the Eternal-Feminine. Nietzsche's crucial point is that it is not nature that defines woman but she who defines herself; traditionally, she has defined herself as a consequence of man's definition of her. Thus, women are equally responsible for the perpetuation of the myth.

The merits of Nietzsche's individualism are such that women, as well as men, must assume full responsibility for their own destiny, in spite of the tenacity of social myth. Yet myths die hard, and most women, collateral with their male counterparts, apparently do not desire to abandon their traditional roles nor their traditional conceptions of what they believe to be the nature of the other sex. An examination of the relations of men and women will illustrate the pervasiveness of the concept of the Eternal-Feminine as social myth.

CHAPTER III

THE SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

That there is a discernible difference between the sexes is a tenet which Nietzsche obviously wishes to maintain. The existence of a fundamental difference between the sexes could manifest itself in one of two possible modes: as arising directly from the inherent nature of each of the sexes, or as stemming from the characteristics acquired from the respective traditional roles of the sexes. Nietzsche's assertion that "the same affects in man and woman are yet different in tempo; therefore man and woman do not cease to misunderstand each other,"¹ suggests that he does not hold the sexual difference to be an essential one, in the sense of an innate psychological difference, but rather, a difference in the response of each sex to the social situation in which it finds itself. The ambiguity with which Nietzsche typically addresses the question, however, appears to preclude a definitive resolution.

The utilization of myth is also apparent in Nietzsche's discussion of the relations of the sexes: "The sexes deceive themselves about each other--because at bottom they honor and love only themselves (or their own ideal, to put it more pleasantly)."² A sort of narcissism, of which each sex brandishes its own peculiar version, forms the basis for discord between the sexes:

¹Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 82.

²Ibid., p. 87.

The intellect of women manifests itself as perfect mastery, presence of mind, and utilization of all advantages. They transmit it as a fundamental quality to their children, and the father adds thereto the darker background of the will. His influence determines as it were the rhythm and harmony with which the new life is to be performed; but its melody is derived from the mother. For those who know how to put a thing properly: women have intelligence, men have character and passion. This does not contradict the fact that men actually achieve so much more with their intelligence: they have deeper and more powerful impulses; and it is these which carry their understanding (in itself something passive) to such an extent. Women are often silently surprised at the great respect men pay to their character. When, therefore, in the choice of a partner men seek specially for a being of intelligence, brilliancy, and presence of mind, it is plain that at bottom men seek for the ideal man, and women for the ideal woman,--consequently, not for the complement but for the completion of their own excellence.³

Nietzsche goes to great lengths to catalogue the differences between the sexes, drawing largely upon his previous characterizations of the Eternal-Feminine:

After a personal dissension and quarrel between a woman and a man the latter party suffers chiefly from the idea of having wounded the other, whilst the former suffers chiefly from not having wounded the other sufficiently; so she subsequently endeavors by tears, sobs, and discomposed mien, to make his heart heavier.⁴

If it is conceded to a woman that she is right, she cannot deny herself the triumph of setting her heel on the neck of the vanquished; she must taste her victory to the full. On the other hand, man towards man in such a case is ashamed of being right. But then man is accustomed to victory, with woman it is an exception.⁵

Men use a new lesson or experience later on as a ploughshare or perhaps also as a weapon, women at once make it into an ornament.⁶

³Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, pp. 302-03.

⁴Ibid., p. 307.

⁵Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part II, p. 141.

⁶Ibid., p. 141.

Women turn pale at the thought that their lover may not be worthy of them; men turn pale at the thought that they may not be worthy of the women they love. I speak of perfect women, perfect men. Such men, who are self-reliant and conscious of power at ordinary times, grow diffident and doubtful of themselves when under the influence of a strong passion. Such women, on the other hand, though always looking upon themselves as the weak and devoted sex, become proud and conscious of their power in the great exception of passion,--they ask: "Who then is worthy of me?"⁷

In the foregoing passages Nietzsche alludes to a sexual difference by reference to the characteristic predicates of women: the appearance of weakness for the purpose of domination, a vindictiveness typical of the recurrent loser, a preoccupation with trivial rather than with substantial pursuits, and again, the exertion of power through the assumption of a seemingly subordinate position. In only one instance does Nietzsche invoke biology as a justification for a sexual difference:

That the male sex has a worse temperament than the female follows from the fact that male children have a greater mortality than female, clearly because they "leap out of their skins" more easily. Their wildness and unbearableness soon make all the bad stuff in them deadly.⁸

The sexual difference, if indeed there ultimately is one, will manifest itself most apparently in the traditional relations of the sexes--in love and in marriage. That each sex has its own conception of love and a particular traditional role in marriage apparently follows from the predicates of the Eternal-Feminine (and from their implied opposites in the male), in that each sex fulfills a socially useful function for which it is ostensibly most suited. Yet Nietzsche maintains that the effects of the disparate attitudes create "a natural opposition" between the sexes which cannot be denied "by means of social contracts or the

⁷Nietzsche, Dawn of Day, pp. 300-01.

⁸Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part II, pp. 328-29.

best will in the world to be just;"⁹ such, in brief, is his concept of appropriation.

A. The Sexes in Love

On Nietzsche's view, love is woman's ultimate destiny--the apparently single option in the pursuit of self-fulfillment; for woman, "love is total devotion, an unconditional renunciation of rights."¹⁰ As women have such a high investment in love, and expectations which generally cannot be fulfilled, they are prone to disappointment:

The love idolatry which women practice is fundamentally and originally an intelligent device, inasmuch as they increase their power by all the idealisings of love and exhibit themselves as so much the more desirable in the eyes of men. But by being accustomed for centuries to this exaggerated appreciation of love, it has come to pass that they have been caught in their own net and have forgotten the origin of the device. They themselves are still more deceived than the men, and on that account also suffer more from the disillusionment which, almost necessarily, enters into the life of every woman--so far, at any rate, as she has sufficient imagination and intelligence to be able to be deceived and undeceived.¹¹

In their dependence upon men for happiness, women have lowered themselves both in men's eyes and in their own. Any felt inadequacies on the part of the women with regard to men or any belief that love can be completely reciprocated are purely imagined and not indicative of any 'true nature' of women. Nietzsche perceives the inequity in the typical love-relationship:

The storm of desire will sometimes carry a man up to a height where all desire is silenced, where he really lives in a better

⁹Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 319.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 319.

¹¹Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, p. 304.

state of being rather than in a better state of choice. On the other hand, a good woman, from true love, often climbs down to desire, and lowers herself in her own eyes.¹²

Both sexes, however, are susceptible to the various deceptive colorations which love may induce; a certain mystique and an artful lie are apparently necessary to maintain the semblance of a sexual difference and thus to maintain normal relations between the sexes:

A woman secretly loved a man, raised him far above her, and said to herself hundreds of times in her inmost heart, "If a man like that were to love me, I should look upon it as a condescension before which I should have to humble myself in the dust."--And the man entertained the same feelings about the woman, and in his inmost heart he felt the very same thought. When at last both their tongues were loosened, and they had communicated their most secret thoughts to one another, a deep and meditative silence ensued. Then the woman said in a cold voice: "The thing is quite clear! We are neither of us that which we loved! If you are what you say you are, and nothing more, then I have humbled myself in vain and loved you; the demon misled me as well as you." This very probable story never happens--and why doesn't it?¹³

B. The Sexes in Marriage

From love, the sexes generally enter into the socially-sanctioned relation of marriage, and on Nietzsche's view, marriage is a largely dispensable institution:

We approve of marriage in the first place because we are not yet acquainted with it, in the second place because we have accustomed ourselves to it, and in the third place because we have contracted it--that is to say, in most cases. And yet nothing has been proved thereby in favor of the value of marriage in general.¹⁴

As the smallest cell of a decaying society, marriage, as traditionally

¹²Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part II, p. 136.

¹³Nietzsche, Dawn of Day, pp. 293-94.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 287.

construed, has lost any vestige of rationality.¹⁵ Marriages contracted out of love are particularly lacking in substantive value since love, as has been seen, causes one to recognize only the best (or ideal) and to neglect the worst (or real) in the character of one's potential spouse.¹⁶

If the institution of marriage is to be valuable and enduring, it can have only two purposes. First, the idea of marriage as a partnership is not unknown to Nietzsche; this is not in the currently-espoused sense of marriage as an equal partnership in all respects, but rather in the sense of competitive self-development for each spouse:

A marriage in which each wishes to realize an individual aim by means of the other will stand well; for instance, when the woman wishes to become famous through the man and the man beloved through the woman.¹⁷

If one or both of the parties in a marriage is elevated by the relationship, the marriage is valuable; however, that is not the typical consequence. The desire for exclusive possession of one's mate generally prohibits the fulfillment of an individual's ambitions, and Nietzsche believes women to be especially guilty of such suffocation of their mates.¹⁸

Second, the other--and higher--aim of marriage, that of producing offspring, is generally taken too lightly as, in Nietzsche's estimation, marriage properly construed is "the will of two to create the one that

¹⁵Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 544.

¹⁶Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, pp. 297-99; Dawn of Day, p. 163.

¹⁷Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, p. 299.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 298; Dawn of Day, p. 162.

is more than those who created it."¹⁹ Nietzsche's sympathy with the plight of children born to inadequate parents has been noted. To increase the chances for successful marriages on both counts, Nietzsche makes the following proposals for the future of the institution:

. . . . Marriage regarded in its highest aspect, as the spiritual friendship of two persons of opposite sexes, and accordingly such as is hoped for in the future, contracted for the purposes of producing and educating a new generation, such marriage, which only makes use of the sensual, so to speak, as a rare and occasional means to a higher purpose, will, it is to be feared, probably need a natural auxiliary, namely, concubinage. For if on the grounds of his health, the wife is also to serve for the sole satisfaction of the man's sexual needs, a wrong perspective, opposed to the aims indicated, will have the most influence in the choice of a wife. The aims referred to: the production of descendants, will be accidental, and their successful education highly improbable. A good wife, who has to be friend, helper, child-bearer, mother, family-head and manager, and has even perhaps to conduct her own business and affairs separately from those of the husband, cannot at the same time be a concubine; it would, in general, be asking too much of her. In the future, therefore, a state of things might take place the opposite of what happened in Athens in the time of Pericles; the men, whose wives were then little more than concubines, turned besides to the Aspasia's, because they longed for the charms of a companionship gratifying both to the head and heart, such as the grace and intellectual suppleness of women could alone provide. . . .²⁰

C. The Concept of Appropriation

While Nietzsche was seen to be incapable of discerning precise character traits derived exclusively from gender, he nonetheless wishes to maintain the existence of a fundamental sexual difference. The origins of such a difference, whether of an essential psychological nature or of assumed social roles, are of primary importance. In the first instance,

¹⁹Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 182.

²⁰Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, pp. 309-10.

biology would determine inevitably and unalterably the personal capacities and social relations of men and women so as to preclude any deviations from the biological and, subsequently, social, norms. In the second instance, allowances are made for such deviations; the assumption of non-traditional roles would seem to alter social perception of the traditionally-conceived sexual difference.

In the conflict of social roles based on sex, the opposition of the sexes perpetuates the apparent difference between them; "comparing men and women on the whole, one may say: woman has an instinct for a secondary role."²¹ Nietzsche's use of the term "instinct" in this context would ostensibly seem to point toward an essentialist view, as the term is generally used to refer to a natural, inherent predisposition toward certain behaviors. Throughout his work, however, Nietzsche employs "instinct" in a variety of contexts which do not admit of the traditional definition; for example, we are said to have an instinct toward morality, and philosophical thinking is said to be instinctive.²² In the latter context, Nietzsche asserts that instinct is not strictly dichotomous with conscious action, so that, within the above context of his discussion of women's roles, interpretation is not necessarily limited to an essentialist view. References to women's 'instinct' may not address merely an aspect of a natural essence but may address as well conscious action as, for example, in the assumption of roles.

While women have traditionally acted in accordance with such a characterization of secondary roles, men have also fostered this

²¹Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 89.

²²Ibid., p. 11.

'instinct':

Men have so far treated women like birds who had strayed to them from some height, as something more refined and vulnerable, wilder, stronger, sweeter, and more soulful--but as something one has to lock up lest it fly away.²³

Nietzsche's characterization of sexual love as one of appropriation is also his decisive characterization of the sexual difference itself.²⁴ That the male is he who takes and the female, she who is taken, is not particularly surprising in view of the fact that the male has generally been regarded and socially sanctioned as the dominant aggressor and the female, the inverse. In opposition to the view that such a relation is unjust, Nietzsche contends that life itself is a continual process of appropriation: the "overpowering of what is alien and weaker, suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation, and at least, at its mildest, exploitation."²⁵ That it is women who have been traditionally so 'overpowered' is simply another manifestation of their weakness and voluntary subjection. However, such a relation is neither necessary nor inevitable; that the occurrence be construed as merely 'symbolic' reiterates the idea of myth:

For two lovers in the complete and strong sense of the word, sexual gratification is not essential and is really no more than a symbol: for one party, as already said, a symbol of unconditional submission, for the other, a symbol of assent to this, a sign of taking possession. . . .²⁶

The sexual difference, then, is a necessary consequence of traditional roles; that it is not inevitable follows from the potential for

²³Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 126.

²⁴Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 429.

²⁵Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 203.

²⁶Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 388.

changed social roles for both sexes, entailing subsequent changes in their relations to each other. In Nietzsche's overall philosophy of power, the concept of appropriation may be conceived as a relation between members of the human species and not necessarily as a particular relation holding only between the sexes. Yet a certain tension does exist in Nietzsche's thought with regard to the sexual difference, as the following parable aptly illustrates:

Someone took a youth to a sage and said: "Look, he is being corrupted by women." The sage shook his head and smiled. "It is men," said he, "that corrupt women; and all the failings of women should be atoned by and improved in men. For it is man who creates for himself the image of woman, and woman forms herself according to this image." "You are too kindhearted about women," said one of those present; "you do not know them." The sage replied: "Will is the manner of men; willingness that of women. That is the law of the sexes--truly, a hard law for women. All of humanity is innocent of its existence, but women are doubly innocent. Who could have oil and kindness enough for them?" "Damn oil! Damn kindness!" someone else shouted out of the crowd; "women need to be educated better!"--"Men need to be educated better," said the sage and beckoned to the youth to follow him.--The youth, however, did not follow him.²⁷

Ostensibly, the parable reiterates the notion of a fundamental difference between the sexes; it is ambiguous enough, however, to point toward a possible revision of that difference. Such ambiguity, as has been seen, is characteristic of Nietzsche's discussion of women; the distinction between essential and acquired predicates is proposed and subsequently blurred in the invocation of the concept of the Eternal-Feminine; the sexual difference is heralded as 'law', and then described as an ongoing process of appropriation. While there appears in Nietzsche a tendency to revert on occasion to an essentialist attack on women, there also exists evidence that his perception is not always so myopic. While it

²⁷Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 126.

is difficult to draw any definite conclusions from Nietzsche as to his 'true' view of women, it is possible to piece together a conception which does not seem so disparaging of women as an initial consideration might suggest.

Yet Nietzsche is not willing to grant the equality of the sexes any more than he is willing to grant the basic equality of persons in general. His reputation as a vehement anti-feminist might initially seem to preclude any hope for redemption from the traditions in which women have mired themselves. Nietzsche may be viewed, however, as offering options to women which they have not considered previously and which, upon consideration, they may not be ready to choose.

CHAPTER IV

THE CASE AGAINST FEMINISM

Nietzsche's opposition to feminism and to feminist movements provides some of his most seemingly scathing remarks against women, and it is upon this aspect of his discussion that most contemporary criticism has seized. While Nietzsche reiterates many of the traditional arguments against feminism, he also offers his own opposition. Given the advent of rights movements in Nietzsche's century and the rapid proliferation of such movements in this century, Nietzsche asserts a unique frame of reference by which to gauge the merits of universal humanness--in Nietzsche's terms, to make everyone human is to make no one human. Thus, he perceives feminism as an instance of misguided social effort in which individuality is eroded for the sake of common humanity. Yet, in spite of his opposition to feminism as a universal movement, Nietzsche does not preclude the possibility of greatness in individual women. His aristocratic ideal may be seen to allude to such a 'higher feminism'.

A. Reiteration of the Traditional Arguments

Among the arguments generally espoused against feminism is the assertion that the absence of 'great' women to date precludes the possibility of such women. This argument is based on the assumption that, in comparison with men and their accomplishments and successes, women are found deficient. Nietzsche echoes this sentiment:

Would any link at all be missing in the chain of art and science if woman, if the works of women were missing? Admitting exceptions --they prove the rule--woman attains perfection in everything that

is not a work: in letters, in memoirs, even in the most delicate handiwork, in short, in everything that is not a *métier* --precisely because in these things she perfects herself, because she here obeys the only artistic impulse she has--she wants to please.¹

Nietzsche's remarks also suggest the response generally offered in opposition to this anti-feminist stance: that women have failed thus far to contribute anything of worth because of their preoccupation with their more traditional roles. Of particular significance in Nietzsche's discussion, however, is his thesis of individual achievement. The distinguishing characteristic of women's traditional roles is not necessarily that they are less difficult or laborious than those of men, but rather that they epitomize activity lacking in intrinsic value. While not all of the activities in which men typically engage could be characterized as being directed toward valuable goals, the achievements of art and science (which are, on Nietzsche's view, so directed) remain an almost exclusively male province. Conversely, women's traditional pursuits are oriented toward the selfless pleasing of others. The debate as to whether men or women themselves are ultimately responsible for such a state of affairs has generally proven fruitless, but Nietzsche offers a hint of optimism that the continuation of such a state is not inevitable:

Can women be at all just, when they are so accustomed to love and to be immediately biased for or against? For that reason they are also less interested in things and more in individuals: but when they are interested in things they immediately become their partisans, and thereby spoil their pure, innocent effect. Thus there arises a certain danger, by no means small, in entrusting politics and certain portions of science to them (history, for instance). For what is rarer than a woman who really knows what science is? Indeed the best of them cherish

¹Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 432; see also, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 164.

in their breasts a secret scorn for science, as if they were somehow superior to it. Perhaps all this can be changed in time; but meanwhile it is so.²

Another traditional argument against feminism espoused by Nietzsche is that of the 'already-superior position' of women: "Woman, the more she is a woman, resists rights in general hand and foot: after all, the eternal war between the sexes, gives her by far the first rank."³

In no age has the weaker sex been treated with so much respect by men as in ours: that belongs to the democratic inclination and basic taste, just like disrespectfulness for old age. No wonder that this respect is immediately abused. One wants more, one learns to demand, finally one almost finds this tribute of respect insulting, one would prefer competition for rights, indeed even a genuine fight: enough, woman loses her modesty. Let us add immediately that she also loses taste. She unlearns her fear of man: but the woman who 'unlearns fear' surrenders her most womanly instincts. . . .⁴

The general tenet of this argument is that, through their naturally subordinate position, women have actually gained the upper hand, in that they have been spared the rigorous demands placed upon men, yet they, too, have reaped the benefits. According to Nietzsche:

. . . woman is retrogressing. Since the French Revolution, woman's influence has decreased proportionately as her rights and claims have increased . . . one wants to make her more "cultivated" and, as is said, make the weaker sex strong through culture--as if history did not teach us as impressively as possible that making men "cultivated" and making them weak--weakening, splintering, and sick-lying over the force of the will have always kept pace, and that the most powerful and influential women of the world (most recently Napoleon's mother) owed their power and ascendancy over men to the force of their will--and not to the schoolmasters!⁵

That feminism is synonymous with defeminization is another

²Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, p. 305.

³Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, p. 267.

⁴Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 167.

⁵Ibid., pp. 168-69.

frequently espoused argument by the anti-feminist camp. According to this stance, women, in aspiring to the roles traditionally occupied by men, acquire masculine attributes, thereby losing all vestiges of those indefinable factors which make them peculiarly women. Such is perhaps Nietzsche's favorite of the traditional anti-feminist arguments, and he offers a conception of what 'defeminization' includes:

. . . to lose the sense for the ground on which one is most certain of victory; to neglect practice with one's proper weapons; to let oneself go before men, perhaps even "to the point of writing a book," when one formerly disciplined oneself to subtle and cunning humility; to work with virtuous audacity against men's faith in a basically different ideal that he takes to be concealed in woman, something Eternally-and-Necessarily-Feminine--to talk men emphatically out of their notion that woman must be maintained, taken care of, protected, and indulged like a more delicate, strangely wild, and often pleasant domestic animal. . . .⁶

Feminism, then, is feared and opposed, at least in part, because it destroys, or attempts to destroy, the myth of the Eternal-Feminine. The characterizations of the sexes, which once seemed so rigid, stemming as they did from 'true nature', are now obscured by new assertions. That which was formerly taken for granted has been cast into doubt by the scepticism that things are not always as they seem. 'Defeminization,' then, becomes the birth of a person rather than the demise of a woman, with freedom of choice and action limited only by personal initiative and neither by psychological nor social type-casting. In two fragments, Nietzsche shows a remarkable insight into the dichotomy of masculine and feminine characteristics: "There is little of man here, therefore, their women strive to be mannish. For only he who is man enough will release

⁶Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 168.

the woman in woman,"⁷ and "if a woman has manly virtues, one feels like running away, and if she has no manly virtues, she herself runs away."⁸ The dichotomy cannot be maintained strictly in all cases; a myth cannot sustain social utility unless it finds acceptance and adherence on all social levels. Once an initial, strong challenge is asserted, the ostensible validity of the myth is tempered; in the case of the myth of the Eternal-Feminine, the loss of the myth's strength is not without cost:

In the three or four civilized countries of Europe, it is possible, by several centuries of education, to make out of women anything we like--even men, not in a sexual sense, of course, but in every other. Under such influences, they will acquire all the masculine virtues and forces, at the same time, of course, they must also have taken all the masculine weaknesses and vices into the bargain: so much, as has been said, we can command. But how shall we endure the intermediate state thereby induced, which may last two or three centuries, during which feminine follies and injustices, woman's original birthday endowment, will still maintain the ascendancy over all that she has otherwise gained and acquired? This will be the time when indignation will be the peculiar masculine passion; indignation, because all arts and sciences have been overflowed and choked by an unprecedented dilettanteism, philosophy talked to death by brain-bewildering chatter, politics more fantastic and partisan than ever, and society in complete disorganization, because the conservatrices of ancient customs have become ridiculous to themselves, and have endeavored in every way to place themselves outside the pale of custom. If indeed women had their greatest power in custom, where will they have to look in order to reacquire a similar plenitude of power after having renounced custom?⁹

B. Nietzsche's Own Opposition

When the battlelines are drawn with regard to a cause, a stated position is generally perceived either as assent or dissent, for or

⁷Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 281.

⁸Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 470.

⁹Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, pp. 310-11.

against; shades of grey are largely impermissible. Nietzsche's own opposition to feminism may very well fall within that grey area, for while his most vehement opposition to feminism is in its form as a universal movement, he appears quite willing to admit of the advantages of feminism for individual women. Perhaps part of the problem of Nietzsche's apparent indeterminacy or ambivalence with regard to the question of feminism is with the term "feminism" itself. As it is generally construed, "feminism" refers to an elevation of the social and legal position of women to a level commensurate with that currently occupied by men. The projected consequence is a broad, sweeping equality of the sexes by which no one can be favored or denied on the basis of gender alone. For Nietzsche, "thoughts of equality betray shallowness," ignoring the sexual difference, and its incumbent "eternally hostile tension."¹⁰ Feminism as the drive toward sexual equality is, however, only one of a number of displaced efforts in Nietzsche's view:

A predominance of mandarins always means something is wrong; so do the advent of democracy, international courts in place of war, equal rights for women, the religion of pity, and whatever other symptoms of declining life there are.¹¹

Nietzsche's fear and loathing of the inversion of the strong and the weak in social organization, particularized in the case of feminism, find their basis in his characterization of life in general:

Life itself recognizes no solidarity, no "equal rights," between the healthy and the degenerate parts of an organism: one must excise the latter--or the whole will perish.--Sympathy for decadents, equal rights for the ill-constituted--that would be the profoundest immorality, that would be anti-nature itself as morality.¹²

¹⁰Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 166.

¹¹Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, p. 154.

¹²Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 389.

Nietzsche's opposition to feminism is thus made more apparent; the theoretical equality of all persons precludes the possibility of greatness in any individual--including women:

What I fight against: that an exceptional type should make war on the rule--instead of grasping that the continued existence of the rule is the precondition of the value of the exception. For example, the ladies who, instead of feeling their abnormal thirst for scholarship as a distinction, want to disrupt the status of woman in general.¹³

The methods of feminism are also opposed by Nietzsche: "The woman who tries to defend 'woman as such' usually fails. One hardly provides the best defense of his or her own ideal."¹⁴ That women are largely incapable of promoting their own cause and that they are unaware of precisely what they hope to gain are recurrent themes in Nietzsche:

. . . . "Emancipation of women"--that is the instinctive hatred of the abortive woman, who is incapable of giving birth, against the woman who is turned out well--the fight against the man is always a mere means, pretext, tactic. By raising themselves higher, as 'woman in herself', as the higher woman, as a female idealist, they want to lower the level of the general rank of woman; and there is no surer means for that than higher education, slacks, and political voting-cattle rights. At bottom, the emancipated are anarchists in the world of the 'eternally feminine,' the underprivileged whose most fundamental instinct is revenge. One whole species of the most malignant idealism--also encountered among men--this typical old virgin which aims to poison the good conscience, what is natural is sexual love.¹⁵

. . . . Whatever women write about woman, we may in the end reserve a healthy suspicion whether woman really wants enlightenment about herself--whether she can will it. . . . Has a woman ever conceded profundity to a woman's heart? And is it not true that on the whole 'woman' has so far been despised most by woman herself and by no means by us?¹⁶

¹³Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 476.

¹⁴Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, p. 117.

¹⁵Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, p. 267.

¹⁶Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 163.

Nietzsche thus characterizes feminism as a war of women against women, of women against themselves, and not necessarily as a war of women against men. The concept of the Eternal-Feminine, elevated to the status of social myth by both men and women, is dependent upon continued acquiescence for its survival. Feminists as 'anarchists' relinquish whatever modicum of power they possessed under the domination of the Eternal-Feminine with each victory they secure in seeking to destroy the myth. On Nietzsche's view, feminism as a social movement is doomed to failure in that women can never regain the strength of their original social position.

C. 'Higher Feminism'

Nietzsche's aristocratic ideal dispenses with any notions of equal virtues and strengths in persons, regardless of gender, and thus with any notion of equal rights. His concern is not with the maintenance of social order as applied to common humanity but rather, with the individual who would defy the social norm, and women are not necessarily excluded from his ideal. Nietzsche's criteria for valuable action entail a departure from the bounds of common humanity; individual potential is denied so long as one remains within the herd. The catalyst for action arises in a single aspect of life which the individual finds unbearable; everything cannot be changed, for that would render the attainment of one's chosen task impossible. All responsibility for action lies on the individual; one becomes the standard, the sole determiner, of that which is worth being and worth willing.

The creation of new values for life and the creation of a new individual outside the social sphere may be said to represent, in

Nietzsche's discussion of women, a different category of feminism, a 'higher feminism'. More specifically, such would involve a becoming of an individual woman, and not merely a realignment of social custom. Self-overcoming of the 'all-too-human', which appears as a constant vacillation between self-contempt and self-respect, is a particularly important point with regard to women: "What is the seal of liberation?--no longer being ashamed in front of oneself."¹⁷ Nietzsche further indicates that there is much more in woman to be overcome; "the perfect woman is a higher type of humanity than the perfect man, and also something much rarer."¹⁸

Contemporary feminism, which itself has become something of a social norm, will undoubtedly oppose such a conception; as, to date, feminism has expressed as its purpose a reorganization of society within the limits set by society. An operant distinction has been made between feminism as moral reform and feminism as moral revolution:¹⁹ moral reform, to which feminism has degenerated, seeks to preserve existing values by advocating change only insofar as it conforms to the existing norms of the established social structure; moral revolution, of which Nietzsche may be viewed as a leading (and perhaps solitary) proponent, seeks to create new values. As opposed to contemporary feminism, the 'higher feminism' alluded to by Nietzsche expresses "a truth for which the time has come--all of us are no longer material for a society."²⁰

However elusive Nietzsche's 'truths' about women may be, and

¹⁷Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 220.

¹⁸Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, p. 295.

¹⁹Kathryn Pyne Parsons, "Nietzsche and Moral Change," Feminist Studies 2 (1974): 57-76.

²⁰Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 304.

however tentative the extension of his primary tenet, that of the creation of new value for life, to include women may appear, the contention that Nietzsche arbitrarily excludes women from his aristocratic ideal or that he places women at the bottom of his natural order of rank, is ill-founded. It has been suggested that Nietzsche's prototype creator, the Übermensch, embodies an androgynous ideal; in the following consideration of the recurrent images of woman in Nietzsche's texts, that suggestion will be seen to be highly tenable.

CHAPTER V

THE METAPHORS: LIFE, TRUTH, AND WISDOM AS WOMEN

A discussion of Nietzsche's remarks of women would be incomplete without an examination of his metaphors; the most colorful expressions of the primary tenets of his epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics involve feminine images. Throughout his work, Nietzsche represents as women the three pre-eminent philosophical concerns of life, truth, and wisdom. Such a representation is not without precedent; there exists the classical tradition of personifying certain ideals as women. Also, that Nietzsche chooses to use female personae in his admonitions to future philosophers perhaps stems from no other reason but that, by invoking images of women, he utilizes readily available examples by which to convey major themes of his work.

However, metaphor possesses a unique significance for Nietzsche, as metaphor-formation essentially comprises the whole of human knowledge. The process, which involves the transfer of an image from perceptual experience to concept-formation to subsequent expression in language,¹ serves to underscore the experiential basis and perspectivism of Nietzsche's thought. Thus, it is asserted that, for Nietzsche, "language is taken to be the metaphorical, and therefore, inexact, approximate intimation of our being in the world."² When Nietzsche employs a

¹Daniel Breazeale, trans. and ed. Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979), p. 83f.

²J.P. Stern, A Study of Nietzsche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 186.

feminine image in certain of his discussions, that image may be said to perform a dual function: primarily, to stand in lieu of a philosophical concept and also, to reflect, to some degree, an awareness of those values which give form to life. Such a dual function renders possible, for the purposes of this study, a connection between Nietzsche's critique of women and the context of his broader work.

A reconsideration of the predicates of the Eternal-Feminine reveals a striking resemblance to the stylistic content of the metaphors. Truth as a woman "finds it necessary to stifle her yawns when she is expected to give answers . . . she should not be violated."³ Wisdom as a woman is "changeable and stubborn;" "when she speaks ill of herself, she is most seductive;" "one thirsts after her and is never satisfied."⁴ Life as a woman is "changeable and wild" and is "presented by men with their own virtues: profound, faithful, eternal, mysterious."⁵

A. The Philosophical Task: Truth versus Art

While Nietzsche, through his metaphors, links the image of women with philosophy and philosophizing, the traditional relation of philosophers to women has been one of aversion. Nietzsche is not only cognizant of this fact, he underscores it repeatedly:

A philosopher may be recognized by the fact that he avoids three loud and glittering things: fame, princes, and women--which is not to say that they do not come to him. . . .⁶

³Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 148.

⁴Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 220.

⁵Ibid., p. 220.

⁶Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, p. 110.

. . . . All the great excellencies of ancient humanity owed their stability to the fact that man was standing side by side with man, and that no woman was allowed to put forward the claim of being the nearest and highest, nay even sole object of his love, as the feeling of passion would teach. Perhaps our trees do not grow so high now owing to the ivy and vines that cling round them.⁷

The natural inclination of women towards quiet, regular, happily tuned existences and intercourse, the oil-like and calming effects of their influence upon the sea of life, operates unconsciously against the heroic inner impulse of the free spirit. Without knowing it, women act as if they were taking away the stones from the path of the wandering mineralogist in order that he might not strike his foot against them--when he has gone out for the very purpose of striking against them.⁸

The free spirit will always feel relieved when he has finally resolved to shake off the motherly care and guardianship with which women surround him. . . . Of what consequence is a genuine disadvantage, loss, misfortune, sickness, illness, fault, or folly more or less in his life, compared with the bondage of the golden cradle, the peacock's-feather fan, and the oppressive feeling that he must, in addition, be grateful because he is waited on and spoiled like a baby? . . .⁹

Due to the stifling effects of women, be they wives or mothers, on philosophers and other free spirits, Nietzsche advises that such men simply avoid women. Yet he also maintains that it was women who affected, however negatively, the greatness of his two favorite philosophers:

Xantippe "forced" Socrates into becoming "the greatest Athenian street-dialectician,"¹⁰ and Schopenhauer had to overcome a "vain and pretentious mother."¹¹ As evidenced in their relations with men and in their own lives (to whatever extent they may be said to have lives in the absence

⁷Nietzsche, Dawn of Day, pp. 350-51.

⁸Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human, Part I, pp. 313-14.

⁹Ibid., pp. 312-13.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 314.

¹¹Friedrich Nietzsche, Schopenhauer as Educator, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), pp. 180-81.

of men), women are depicted by Nietzsche as choosing the methods of expediency and comfort, which serve to reinforce their socially subordinate position as well as their relative lack of achievements, over a more rigorously defined individuality. Thus not only do men striving for greatness, such as Socrates and Schopenhauer, have to overcome that part of the psyche so adversely affected by women; but more importantly, perhaps, women themselves must overcome the complacent mentality which precludes achievement.

Nietzsche's recurrent theme of self-overcoming points toward his characterization of Western philosophy as embodying an inherent dualism.¹² In dwelling on such dichotomous schemas as mind and body, reality and appearance, essence and existence, philosophy, Nietzsche maintains, has virtually excluded any possibility of the creation of values necessary for the growth of a unified, higher culture.¹³ The same dichotomies also appear in the context of Nietzsche's discussion of women: here, as in philosophy, the self and the world are maintained as disparate entities. The self, perceived as victim or pawn, is set against and generally subsumed under the operations of an impersonal world. The process of self-overcoming entails a recognition that the two are bound inextricably.

When philosophers have failed, or perhaps have not sought, to avoid women, the results have been less than spectacular. To return to the metaphors, and to women on a figurative, rather than a literal level:

Supposing truth is a woman--what then? Are there not grounds

¹²Bernd Magnus, Nietzsche's Existential Imperative (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 179f.

¹³Breazeale, pp. 69-76.

for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists have been very inexperienced about women? That the gruesome seriousness, 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? What is certain is that she has not allowed herself to be won--and today every kind of dogmatism is left standing dispirited and discouraged.¹⁴

That there can be no dogmatism, no absolute standard of truth and value, is a major tenet of Nietzsche's thought. His rejection of philosophical systems on the basis that a system cannot validate its own primary assumptions, which are seemingly self-evident, engenders a type of experimentalism with regard to both his style of philosophizing and his philosophy. The consequence of Nietzsche's experimentalism is that his concern appears to be 'telling the truth' as opposed to making true statements, and 'telling the truth' is a highly individualized matter:

Learning changes us. . . . But at the bottom of us, really "deep down," there is, of course, something unteachable, some granite of spiritual fatum, of predetermined decision, and answer to predetermined selected questions. 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 finish learning--only discover ultimately how this is "settled in him." At times we find certain solutions of problems that inspire strong faith in us; some call them henceforth their convictions. Later--we see them only as steps to self-knowledge, signposts to the problems we are, to our spiritual fatum, to what is unteachable very "deep down."¹⁵

Nietzsche's perspectivism entails a continual construction of the world through individual interpretations. What is ultimately important is not truth per se, but belief that our interpretations are truthful:

What does the truth matter to man? The highest and purest life is possible with the belief that one possesses truth. Man requires belief in truth. Truth makes its appearance as a social necessity. Afterwards, by means of a metastasis, it is applied

¹⁴Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 2.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 162.

to everything, where it is not required. All virtues arise from passing needs. The necessity for truthfulness begins with society. Otherwise man dwells within eternal concealments. The establishment of states promotes truthfulness.¹⁶

Thus, Nietzsche holds that human beings are compelled to maintain various beliefs as true for the purposes of predictability and security. Particularized in the case of the myth of the Eternal-Feminine, this 'drive' requires that society predicate of women certain characteristics which are believed to be true and which are thus capable of promoting social order.

A complete denial of externally-imposed value and meaning is a prerequisite to creative action. Any truth and value that there is to be in the world must be created, yet any meaning bestowed upon the world will eventually pass away; for Nietzsche, the crucial point is to create anyway. Given one's choice of projects, even suffering in the fulfillment of that project is rendered endurable and, similarly, worthwhile. Nietzsche's frequent allusions to creativity as spiritual pregnancy entail an acceptance of both the joy and pain involved in the decisive, creative act:

Is there a more sacred state than that of pregnancy? To perform every one of our actions in the silent conviction that in one way or another it will be to the benefit of that which is being generated within us--that it must augment its mysterious value, the very thought of which fills us with rapture? . . . Our child must be born from all that is best and gentlest. . . . We should and can live under the influence of such a blessed inspiration! Whether what we are looking forward to is a thought or a deed, our relationship to every essential achievement is none other than that of pregnancy, and all our vainglorious boasting about "willing" and "creating" should be cast to the winds. . . .¹⁷

¹⁶Breazeale, pp. 34-35.

¹⁷Nietzsche, Dawn of Day, pp. 383-84.

That Nietzsche holds truth to be of no significance to women (on the literal level) reflects the eventual supplantation of truth by art for him:

. . . she does not want truth: what is truth to woman? Her great art is the lie, her highest concern is mere appearance and beauty. We men honor and love precisely this art and this instinct in woman.¹⁸

Nietzsche's metaphor of truth as a woman and this identification of woman and art are not necessarily contradictory. Rather, they serve to signify his perspectivism; as one author has commented:

That which will not be pinned down by truth is in truth--feminine. This should not, however, be hastily mistaken for a woman's femininity, for female sexuality, or for any other of those essentializing fetishes which might still tantalize the dogmatic philosopher, the impotent artist or the inexperienced seducer who has not yet escaped his foolish hopes of capture.¹⁹

Yet Nietzsche's criticisms of dogmatic philosophy and his advancement of perspectivism do not dissolve into random subjectivity. Instead, as a standard of what is to be judged valuable, and thus vital, he proposes an "aesthetic criterion."²⁰ Through art, which itself is creative illusion and appearance, we are able to accept and affirm the world as it is, a construction of our beliefs in truth, or in more Nietzschean terms, our necessary lies. Art and philosophy, the self-proclaimed science of truth, thus appear as collateral; "the philosopher should recognize what is needed, and the artist should create it."²¹

¹⁸Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 163.

¹⁹Derrida, p. 55.

²⁰John D. Arras, "Art, Truth, and Aesthetics in Nietzsche's Philosophy of Power," Nietzsche-Studien: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung, 9 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), pp. 239-259.

²¹Breazeale, p. 8.

Nietzsche's view of tragedy is as a paradigm of human culture, the tragic situation itself. Essentially, tragedy is an artistic conquest of the horrible. In facing up to the terrors of nature and history, the Greeks did not seek negation of the will as refuge but rather created tragedies in which life is affirmed as beautiful in spite of everything. The focal point of Greek tragedy, that achievement entails responsibility for its consequences, is a view of the world without essential form but having energy. For Nietzsche, such is a highly desirable culture: creativity is a continuous process in spite of the impossibility of optimism. If philosophy is to serve in the development of such a culture, it must take cognizance of the importance of art:

The mastery of science occurs not only by means of art. It is a question of value judgments concerning knowledge and polymathy. How enormous is the task, and how worthy of it art is! It must create everything anew and, all by itself, it must give birth anew to life. The Greeks show us what art is capable of. If we did not have them, our faith would be chimerical.²²

B. New Values for Life

As action only comes through individuals, and the individual will is thus crucial, life is to take power over wisdom. As the purpose of wisdom is ostensibly to serve life, life and valuation must dominate wisdom. Thus, for Zarathustra, "life was dearer to me than all my wisdom ever was."²³ In his metaphor of life as a woman, Nietzsche reiterates the Greek conquest of the horrible and describes the conditions of life which stand in need of affirmation:

²²Breazeale, p. 12.

²³Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 163.

. . . . I fear you near, I love you far; your flight lures me, your seeking cures me: I suffer, but what would I not gladly suffer for you? You, whose coldness fires, whose hatred seduces, whose flight binds, whose scorn inspires: Who would not hate you, you great binder, entwiner, temptress, seeker, and finder? Who would not love you, you innocent, impatient, wind-swift, child-eyed sinner? Whereto are you luring me now, you never-tame extreme? And now you are fleeing from me again, you sweet wildcat and ingrate?²⁴

Nietzsche's conception of eternal recurrence provides for the continual affirmation of life. By the creation of one's own value, one gives meaning to one's life by achieving perfection and exalting in every moment. Nietzsche's formula for greatness, amor fati, entails a doing of necessity by joyfully embracing the consequences of the eternal recurrence. A person who achieves self-perfection and affirms all being--including his own--desires the eternal recurrence of his joy in the moment. Such an individual no longer feels concerned about justification of the world--he simply affirms it.

The Übermensch serves for Nietzsche as the ideal prototype of completed self-overcoming, of whose self is overcome every moment. The value of the Übermensch lies in himself as he embodies that state of being which possesses the only ultimate value there is. In his cognizance of how completely his creative being is necessarily connected with the universe, the Übermensch is able to make that joyous affirmation of his own being as well as of any other being--past, present, and future. In the 'choice' between the joy of affirmation and the despair of nihilism, Nietzsche finds the motivating power of eternal recurrence--one creates because joy is better than despair:

²⁴Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche, p. 337.

The world is overfull of beautiful things but nevertheless poor, very poor when it comes to beautiful moments and unveilings of these things. But perhaps this is the most powerful magic of life: it is covered by a veil interwoven with gold, a veil of beautiful possibilities, sparkling with promise, resistance, bashfulness, mockery, pity, and seduction. Yes, life is a woman.²⁵

The suggestion has been advanced that Nietzsche's apex of culture and ideal of self-overcoming, the Übermensch, represents yet another ideal, that of androgyny. On this view, full creative potential is possible only for those persons who exhibit and actualize a more-or-less even blend of traits considered essentially masculine and essentially feminine; the manifested tension between the sexes, when internalized, becomes the creative tension of the Apollonian-Dionysian duality from which new values arise.²⁶ While Nietzsche was seen to be incapable of enumerating specific traits based exclusively on gender, he could be perceived nevertheless as portraying an individual with common humanity (which pervades both sexes) to be overcome and with a decisive sense of one's own humanity (which includes a complex of personality traits) to be utilized in that process of overcoming.

Germane to this conception of the Übermensch is the interpretation of the image of the eagle and serpent in Thus Spake Zarathustra as a representation of an androgynous ideal. The conjunction of the eagle, which is construed as masculine, and the serpent, which is construed as feminine, is interpreted to signify "the achievement of self-transcendence."²⁷

²⁵Nietzsche, The Gay Science, pp. 271-72.

²⁶Hatab, pp. 341-43.

²⁷David S. Thatcher, "Eagle and Serpent in Zarathustra," Nietzsche-Studien: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung, 6 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), pp. 240-60.

While Nietzsche never directly addresses the possibility of a woman attaining the level of the Übermensch, his references to the eagle and serpent in conjunction with Zarathustra's self-overcoming suggest that the Übermensch may indeed embody a unity of masculine and feminine. Particularly, the eagle and serpent proclaim the doctrine of eternal recurrence to Zarathustra,²⁸ thus bringing his self-overcoming to an end. Also, in a section summarizing the criteria for the creation of new value, Nietzsche advances the following prescription: "Thus I want man and woman: the one fit for war, the other fit to give birth, but both fit to dance with head and limb."²⁹ While the passage would seem ostensibly to delineate a difference between the sexes (on both literal and metaphorical levels), it suggests, at the same time, a transcendence of that difference. On this view, then, Zarathustra's overcoming is, in part, an overcoming of the dualism of masculine and feminine. A culture erected without that dualism is well on its way toward the vital unity Nietzsche exalts.

²⁸Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra in The Portable Nietzsche, pp. 332-34.

²⁹Ibid., p. 322.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

A woman studying philosophy is suspect, not as much now as once was the case (so we are told), but suspect nonetheless. It is as if the academic community had internalized the Nietzschean maxim, "if a woman shows scholarly inclinations, there is usually something wrong with her. . . ."¹ A woman studying philosophy who confesses to reading Nietzsche and to finding something in Nietzsche to make that reading worthwhile, is doubly suspect. From the philosophical community in general, she is viewed with professional hesitation, and from her feminist colleagues, it is likely that she receive the label of 'traitor'.

In part, the motivation behind this study was to attempt to show that the two--women and Nietzsche--are not mutually exclusive. Certainly, the large number and wide variety of Nietzsche's remarks on women serve to fuel confusion. In one instance, he appears to condemn the entire female sex, while in another, he offers indications that all is not lost. Thus, we are left with the problem of which set of remarks to consider Nietzsche's 'true statement' on the issue and which set to ignore.

Such extremes in method of interpretation lead to branding Nietzsche himself as an extremist (in this case, as misogynist), a characterization which, while perhaps not incorrect, is inaccurate and misleading. The significance of examining Nietzsche's distinction between 'natural essence' and social role is revealed in his insight that women are not

¹Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 89.

necessarily limited in their pursuits in strict virtue of their biology. Rather, one's choice of projects is one's own; Nietzsche intimates that women generally have perceived that choice as an option between being a person and being a woman, that is, as a choice of a larger sphere of freedom with its incumbent responsibility and risk of failure or of a more restricted sphere with its advantage of social sanction and reward. Given the pervasiveness and tenacity of the concept of the Eternal-Feminine as social myth and a lack of personal initiative, women have settled for less than was actually necessary. If Nietzsche is to be regarded as a misogynist, an additional qualification must be included in that characterization; that which he appears to hate in women does not derive from any archetypal principle of femininity to which women are born victims but rather from a subservient social mentality accepted and propagated without question. On that view, Nietzsche's 'misogyny' is not at all unwarranted.

Yet neither is Nietzsche, at the other extreme, a 'feminist'. While Nietzsche's appeals to a higher culture do not arbitrarily exclude women from his projected characterizations of a new type of individual, Nietzsche is not willing to grant that men and women share in any fundamental sense of equality. There does exist for Nietzsche a difference between the sexes, and although this difference arises only as a result of traditional social roles, it is a necessary one for social organization. Nietzsche's higher culture requires a broad base; for his new individuals to arise, the continuation of tradition and custom is essential.

In an era when virtually everyone within every conceivable group is asserting new claims and demanding equal rights, and the powers that be are at least taking cognizance of those claims, Nietzsche can hardly

be viewed as presenting viable social theory. Currently, individualism of even the most minimal variety is relegated to back-room and ivory tower discussions and does not appear in forums of public policy. The stringent individualism espoused by Nietzsche denies solidarity in species-being; claims to universal humanness preclude the possibility for greatness in special individuals. Thus, if Nietzsche is to be construed as a 'feminist', it must be in a restricted sense of the term. Viewed as a universal movement on behalf of all women, feminism is to be opposed; viewed in the sense that women are not automatically excluded from the aristocratic ideal, Nietzsche appears willing to admit that women do indeed form a vital part of his higher culture.

Granting the possibility of a 'Nietzschean woman', what would she be like? On this issue, idle, yet interesting speculation abounds. First of all, perhaps, she would not be "a woman who aspires to be a man."² Although Nietzsche is unable to discern a particularized natural essence of women, he nonetheless retains the belief that men and women manifest an obvious difference. Moreover, he is opposed to the idea that women emulate weaknesses of men. In looking to the Greek culture of which he was so fond, Nietzsche is described as admiring "such ideal figures as the Olympian women, together with Penelope, Antigone, and Electra"; further, he also asserts that modern culture could not support such women.³

Within his own era and culture, the sole female mortal whom Nietzsche seemed to admire, if only temporarily, was Lou Salomé, who is

²Derrida, p. 65.

³H.A. Reyburn, Nietzsche: The Story of a Human Philosopher, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1948), p. 162.

characterized as "remarkable. . . , precocious, quick, and brash . . . and proud of being free of old-fashioned inhibitions."⁴ Another biographer has quoted one of her contemporaries as saying that she was:

. . . too odd a girl to be easily made out . . . a likable, winning, truly feminine being who renounces all womanly resources in the struggle for existence and instead takes up men's weapons with a certain harsh exclusiveness.⁵

Nietzsche's own characterization of her, ". . . she has an incredibly definite character, and knows herself exactly what she wants without asking all the world or troubling about the world,"⁶ seems to point toward his prescriptions for creative action. What Nietzsche would expect of women is no more and no less than he would expect of men; such expectations, however, are generally perceived as highly untenable.

⁴Kaufmann, p. 50.

⁵Binion, p. 113.

⁶Christopher Middleton, ed. and trans., Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 186.

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