

NIETZSCHE'S SIGNPOST FOR FEMINISM

by

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ABSTRACT

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This paper focuses on the apparent misogyny and anti-feminism found in Part VII of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE). Following an interpretation put forward by Maudemarie Clark, I argue that Nietzsche's claims and observations about women are purposely reflective of the dubious metaphysical assumptions of dualism and essentialism maintained with respect to biological sex. Given this, we can see Nietzsche's text as highlighting the effects of "cultural breeding" in the form of gender. Thus, this paper aims to rehabilitate Nietzsche's characterizations of women and "woman's emancipation" as an important signification of the culturally bred, latent discrimination of the sexes, which appears to be exposed later in Simone de Beauvoir's, *The Second Sex* (and continues to be remedied today). This interpretation may deliver Nietzsche's text as an invitation for movement towards the pursuit of a radical transgression of conventional classifications of sex and gender.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BGE	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i>
HATH	<i>Human All-Too-Human</i>
TI	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i>
TL	“On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense”

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Friedrich Nietzsche is often regarded as having a misogynistic and anti-feministic view, which is understandable given that his texts, in various places, appear to clearly evidence a general contempt for women. This apparent vitriol might best be illuminated in Part VII of *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which Nietzsche permits himself to tell a few of his own “truths” about “woman as such” across a span of several aphorisms (BGE, 231).¹ Here, we find a series of insults aimed at “woman,” who Nietzsche says wants to become “self-reliant”; he says she is “beginning to enlighten men about ‘woman as such’”, and for this, woman is responsible for “one of the worst developments of the general *uglification* of Europe” (232). On top of these attacks, Nietzsche denounces woman’s emancipation and equal rights as a retrogressive movement of “an almost masculine stupidity”, indicating a “weakening and dulling of the most feminine instincts” (BGE, 232-239). Some scholars have taken Nietzsche’s work to systematically cast females as servile and impotent, denying them the means for the virtuous activity of self-creation and value-creation.² One might gather that Nietzsche thinks women, according to the nature of their biological sex, have neither the capacity nor the right for self-determination or transcending their social situation, as he suggests that woman’s “first and last profession” is to “give birth to strong children”, and that, “[a] man of depth...must conceive of woman as a possession” (BGE 239; 232). A common reaction to these passages is to dismiss them altogether as a regrettable manifestation of a “time bound” conventional sexism.³ Over the last several decades, however, these passages from BGE (as well as the others) have been opened up to a thorough investigation, for better and for worse.⁴ In carrying out my own investigation, and considering many of the interpretations that have been put forward so far, I find that what Nietzsche says in Part VII of BGE can plausibly be interpreted as a highly valuable and *positive* “signpost” for feminist readers.⁵

In support of this conclusion is an important linguistic parallel Nietzsche seems to have purposely set up between earlier passages of BGE (specifically 2, 3, 5, 16, and 24) and those in Part VII, and this is seen in

¹ Though Nietzsche also writes about women in several other books, I will focus on Part VII of BGE as it perhaps most frequently cited as a clear exhibition of Nietzsche’s misogyny, by critics such as Maudemarie Clark, Linda Singer, Lewis Call, Lawrence Hatab, and Frances Oppel.

² See Singer, Thompson, and Diethel.

³ See Walter Kaufmann’s footnote to Nietzsche’s passage 238 in BGE. This observation of Nietzsche’s ironic “timeliness” is echoed in Oppel (8).

⁴ This includes but is not limited to Clark, Tirrell, Singer, Diprose, Thompson, Call, Bertram, and Hatab.

⁵ In passage 231, Nietzsche hints that his own “convictions” concerning the problem of “man and woman” shall in the future be seen as a “signpost” to the “great stupidity” he is.

an interpretation put forward by Maudemarie Clark in her article, “Nietzsche’s Misogyny” (*Feminist Interpretations*, 187-198). With Clark’s interpretive strategy in mind, I argue that one can read Nietzsche’s “truths” about “woman as such” as prejudices which Nietzsche purposely aims to show as being grounded in dubious metaphysical assumptions and valuations concerning the “feminine essence” and dualism of the sexes.⁶ Overall, the similar, parallel phrasing in BGE along with Nietzsche’s characterization of women serves to illuminate his rejection of feminist ideals as implicitly calling attention to the problem of cultural breeding as it pertains particularly to women, especially in their attempts to gain independence and social mobility.⁷

The first section of this paper will introduce the first part of the parallel in which Nietzsche reveals that his “truths” about “woman as such” are indeed prejudices, to which he nonetheless maintains a serious commitment, despite recognizing that they have no reasonable foundation. In the next section, I will discuss Nietzsche’s usage of “woman as such” in parallel with the “thing-in-itself”, in which case the former is only reflective of actual women in so far as they may be recognized in terms of a presumed social construction, i.e., an (unrealistic) ideal of the “Eternal Feminine.” In light of this interpretation, in the next three sections, I will discuss further how we might interpret Nietzsche’s placement of women in his philosophy – woman as a paradigmatic herd animal, and woman as actress of the “Eternal Feminine”, in that order. These sections will primarily address Nietzsche’s negative characterization of women in order to show that Nietzsche’s text may be deeply symptomatically reflective of the problem of cultural breeding and conditioning particularly in the case of women. The sixth section will open up the final aspect of Nietzsche’s parallel, according to which readers are invited to finally relinquish the metaphysical assumptions surrounding biological sex, and the dichotomies of man/woman, male/female, and masculine/feminine. Finally, the penultimate section of this paper will focus on bringing to light Nietzsche’s rejection of woman’s emancipation as an implicit endorsement of a much stronger alternative movement according to which we may be encouraged to begin a new, better pattern of cultural breeding that breaks down the gender dichotomy of “man and woman”

⁶ Frances Oppel’s book, *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman* is largely supportive of this thesis. Oppel argues that Nietzsche’s texts are aimed at challenging “myths and conventions that ascribe one set of fixed traits to males and another, opposing set to females” (1).

⁷ Both Oppel (32) and Thompson (211-2) refer to the notion of “breeding” with respect to discrimination of the sexes.

altogether. In the end, I hope to secure an interpretation of Nietzsche in Part VII of BGE that illuminates a signpost signifying a positive route for feminist thinkers.

I. Nietzsche's "Truths" as Prejudices

To begin to see the parallel of Nietzsche's "truths" in Part VII with "truths" in earlier passages that Nietzsche sets up, we must look at what he says in passage 231, just after he raises the topic of the "cardinal problem" about "man and woman":

...[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 problem we *are* – rather, to the great stupidity we are, to our spiritual *fatum*, to what is *unteachable* very "deep down."

After this abundant civility that I have just evidenced in relation to myself I shall perhaps be permitted more readily to state a few truths about "woman as such" – assuming that it is now known from the outset how very much these are after all only – *my* truths. (BGE 231)

In Maudemarie Clark's interpretation, this passage is read as Nietzsche's honest confession to his readers that everything he is about to claim regarding "woman as such" are "truths" he is personally inclined to believe about women, but which he understands are only true for himself (197). Thus, Clark helps to defend Nietzsche against accusations of misogyny in Part VII by supposing that Nietzsche's misogyny here is "on the level of sentiment, *not belief*" (189). Further, Clark takes this entire section on women to be Nietzsche's way of exhibiting his own virtue of honesty, and that his apparent rejection of feminism can be seen as a, "challenge to feminists to exhibit virtues comparable to what Nietzsche exhibits in dealing with his misogyny" (189). While I find nothing particularly disagreeable in this reading, I find that the conclusion we are apt to draw from Clark is one in which much of Nietzsche's statements are reduced to having little meaning in and of themselves, as they ultimately are set in place to serve as a demonstration of virtue, in which case Part VII takes on a merely instrumental value, rather than having an important message in itself.

It is easy to see that Nietzsche is absolutely admitting to readers that his so-called "truths" must really amount to an expression of "the great stupidity he is," and as such, are "more likely to produce self-

knowledge...[rather] than knowledge of [women]" as Clark points out (191). Similarly, Frances Opper, in *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman*, reinforces this point, as she states that Nietzsche "virtually tells us that the truths he is about to express are both problematic and stupid!" (32). Given this, Clark determines that we can render Nietzsche's signpost as directing us to see his own virtue of honesty and will to truth, however, I do not think that this is all we are to gather from his signpost.

First, let us look at an earlier passage in BGE, where Nietzsche criticizes other philosophers for not being "honest enough in their work":

They all pose as if they had discovered and reached their real opinions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic...while at bottom it is an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of "inspiration" – most often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract – that they defend with reasons they have sought after the fact. They are all advocates who resent that name, and for the most part even wily spokesmen for their prejudices which they baptize "truths" – and very far from having the courage of the conscience that admits this, precisely this, to itself... (BGE, 5)

Nietzsche also refers to a "baptizing" of prejudices as "the truth" in the second aphorism of BGE, and given his use of the word "truths" in 231, it seems clear that Nietzsche is purposely imitating those same philosophers he previously ridicules. At this point, we can see the virtue of not only honesty bubbling in the aphorisms about women, but also a, "courage of the conscience." Perhaps it is Nietzsche's intention to demonstrate courage and honesty by admitting that his own statements are really a matter of "inspiration", "a desire of the heart" which he can only "defend with reasons...sought after the fact." Consider BGE 25 where Nietzsche says:

[Y]ou know that no philosopher so far has been proved right, and that there might be a more laudable truthfulness in every little question mark that you place after your special words and favorite doctrines (and occasionally after yourselves) than in all the solemn gestures and trumps before accusers and law courts (BGE, 25).

Kaufmann's footnote here refers to another way Nietzsche formulates this, which goes: "[a] popular error" is "having the courage of one's own convictions" rather than "having the courage for an *attack* on one's convictions" (*Basic Writings*, 226). Here, we can see that any sense of courage Nietzsche might demonstrate is not without a sense of fearlessly encountering, perhaps even embracing, criticism. Hence, Nietzsche's own "convictions" (as worded in 231) about "man and woman" may be seen again as purposely set up for criticism; but on what grounds is this criticism meant to be carried out? I want to avoid simply excusing

Nietzsche for his claims, particularly given how obvious it is that he is deeply committed to what he says about women (which can actually be seen as problematic for embracing the rest of his philosophical enterprise⁸). We know that what Nietzsche says is self-identified as a matter of “inspiration”, “a desire of the heart” which he can only “defend with reasons...sought after the fact”, but it is not clear what must contribute to these prejudices, and how we are supposed to combat them.⁹ We may read Nietzsche as Clark does in considering that the aphorisms 231-239 are Nietzsche’s own way of “overcoming what he would like to believe about women,” but it is difficult to understand *why* such a perspicacious thinker such as Nietzsche would have an interest in believing such unbelievable things, no matter how comforting (197).¹⁰ However, if it is really a matter of “spiritual *fatum*” as an undeniable, unchangeable bred-in prejudice that Nietzsche thinks women must only give birth, that their movement towards emancipation is regressive, that woman’s “great art is the lie” and “her highest concern is mere appearance and beauty,” it seems that these remarks (along with many others) are no minor points to be glossed over (BGE 231; 232; 239). Given this, I am led to wonder just what this “spiritual *fatum*” is meant to represent for Nietzsche, and why it is so difficult to overcome, particularly when we approach the second and third elements of his parallel in BGE, in which we are reminded of Nietzsche’s own “skepticism of essences”, as Clark’s own interpretation brings to light, in addition to his questioning of our reliance on dichotomous, conventional oppositional valuations, as Oppel’s interpretation points to.¹¹

⁸ The point here is that Nietzsche’s philosophical enterprise must have his prejudiced outlook woven into it. Some have found we can overcome this, while others see it as a large detriment to our overall acceptance of Nietzsche’s view (given that it seems to rest on masculine pride and female servility) (See Singer, Diethel, and Thompson). This will be discussed in section III.

⁹ Some might contend that this is clear – that Nietzsche is simply wrong (as Kaufmann notes in a footnote to passage 238). Of course, Nietzsche already recognizes that he is largely in *error*, but *not* for reasons associated with the tenets of liberal feminism, which cannot be taken for granted as they are equally as dubiously “inspired” as the foundation on which Nietzsche’s own claims stand (see BGE 219). Thus, it is our task to piece together the puzzle, and solve the conflict of Nietzsche’s self-renunciation and his “granite of spiritual *fatum*”.

¹⁰ Frances Oppel, for example, is unconvinced that Nietzsche really wants readers to consider belief in the “Eternal Feminine” as a “comforting lie,” but that rather he wants readers to see that this ideal is a matter of “indelible prejudice” (32).

¹¹ See Oppel’s introduction to *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman*.

II. “Woman as such” and the “thing-in-itself”

Considering the point of parallel in the previous section, it is tempting to let ourselves dismiss the passages of Part VII that clearly paint a negative picture of women. If one is told that even Nietzsche realizes his claims are fundamentally unwarranted, one might think that he doesn't really mean what he says (as Clark points out (192)). However, as I've stated, Nietzsche is committed to the things he says, and to side step them might be to neglect a serious defect in his philosophy, or undermine the integrity of his entire perspective (especially if we think it could be useful for feminists). Clark realizes that in order to stop ourselves from simply shrugging our shoulders at Nietzsche's abhorrent attitude towards women, we have to carefully inspect what he says and distinguish between what we might (erroneously) conclude, and what Nietzsche actually asserts (192). Clark considers an example of a passage that might (if misinterpreted) be taken as Nietzsche's personal undertaking:

[I]o deny the most abysmal antagonism between [“man and woman”] and the necessity of an eternally hostile tension, to dream perhaps of equal rights, equal education, equal claims and obligations – that is a *typical* sign of shallowness, and a thinker who has proved shallow in this dangerous place – shallow in his instinct – may be considered altogether suspicious, even more – betrayed, exposed: probably he will be too “short” for all fundamental problems of life, of the life yet to come, too, and incapable of attaining *any* depth. A man on the other hand, who has depth, in his spirit as well as in his desires, including that depth of benevolence which is capable of severity and hardness and easily mistaken for them, must always...conceive of woman as a possession, as property that can be locked, as something predestined for service and achieving her perfection in that (BGE, 238).

Clark's interpretation is that Nietzsche writes, “not about women, but about ‘woman as such,’ which Nietzsche also calls ‘the eternal feminine.’” She says that Nietzsche “is referring to the feminine essence, a social construction that individual women need not exemplify” (192). Here, Clark points to a translation that puts Nietzsche's “woman as such” (written as, “*das Weib an sich*,” BGE 231) in parallel with his notion of, “thing in itself” (written as, “*das Ding an sich*,” BGE 16) which Nietzsche calls a “contradiction in terms” in BGE 16, in which case it seems no actual woman *could* exemplify “woman as such” (Clark, 192-3).¹² If we agree with Clark's reading that Nietzsche intentionally refers to “woman” as a kind of conceptual construct

¹² This point is temporarily set aside by Clark, and will be revisited in the following sections of this paper which will be aimed at revealing Nietzsche's characterization of women (given this interpretation) as part of his signpost to the “problem we are”, as he states in aphorism 231.

that has no reality as such, just as “thing-in-itself” is a conceptual construct that has no reality as such, we can see Nietzsche’s critique more clearly as not an affront towards individual females themselves, but rather as one against the *social classification* of individual females. Concerning the “thing-in-itself”, Nietzsche says in his essay, “Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” (TL):

The "thing in itself" (which is precisely what the pure truth, apart from any of its consequences, would be) is likewise something quite incomprehensible to the creator of language and something not in the least worth striving for (part 1, paragraph 5).

Just as we take for granted essences of objects, such as “tree” and “snake” to use the examples that Nietzsche provides, we do the same for assigning essences to humans. Thus, when we distinguish “woman” as separate from “man”, the “feminine” as apart from the “masculine”, we erroneously bring ourselves to the conclusion that there must be something essential, underlying our linguistic categorization of such things, and about the reality of humans (as well as plants and objects) that we deem as “male” or “female”, “masculine” or “feminine”, and so on. The point is that “woman” is social construct, and just like the designations we give for everything else in the world, the designation of woman to female is unnecessary, not to mention a falsification. Any properties we take to be essential to woman, as if by the female nature, are not really essential properties at all, thus the category “woman” (and every feature that gets appropriated to it) fails to capture anything that is to be necessarily true about females, even though “woman” is the typical designation of apparent feminine properties. These properties that get associated with females are merely assigned according to the self-interest of those in society who established the conventional term to distinguish “woman” from man in the first place.

An earlier passage in BGE that supports Nietzsche’s intention to align “woman as such” with the “thing-in-itself” is found in the second aphorism, in which Nietzsche criticizes the judgment of other philosophers who must think that, “[t]he things of the highest value” are “derived...from the lap of Being, the intransitory, the hidden god, the ‘thing-in-itself’ – there must be their basis, and nowhere else” (BGE, 2). It appears then that Nietzsche is using the phrase “woman as such” to deliberately characterize his valuation of “woman” as being akin to the kind of valuations that other philosophers wrongly believe must rest in an “intransitory” invisible world, something as essential as the “thing-in-itself.” From this it is even more clear

that Nietzsche's "woman as such" is not meant to refer to actual women, and, as Clark declares, "once we see that his truths about woman as such are about this construction [of femininity] rather than about individual women – especially if he thinks it involves a contradiction in terms – it is difficult to read them as either misogynistic or anti-feminist" (193). The reasoning is that Nietzsche's sentiment is towards an abstraction of what woman is, and it is not meant to hold necessarily or prescriptively for actual women, i.e., female bodied subjects. Here it seems we're given the signal once again, to ignore and let go of what Nietzsche says since he clearly recognizes the impermanence, and unreality of "woman as such."

Despite Nietzsche's understanding of "woman" as a contradictory ideal, this is not a denial of the existence of actual women, but rather it is a reflection to his readers that his criticism is intended to make sense only in so far as "woman" is expected to fill the role of the "Eternal Feminine". Thus, Nietzsche is knowingly referring to a construction that is not meant to represent actual women, but rather one that women have come to represent for Nietzsche as he sees them to have been (historically) socially conditioned to adopt for themselves the role assigned to them, namely that of the "Eternal Feminine." While it is the case that real women may serve to represent the apparent "woman as such" and have likely inspired what Nietzsche has to say here, there is no claim or prescription given as far as what actual women ought to do or accept for themselves. As Clark says, Nietzsche here "neither says nor implies that women should accept for themselves the status of property" (193). In addition Clark notes that we have little reason to take Nietzsche's statement here as evidence for how Nietzsche *himself* must have felt about women, especially considering his "skepticism about such essences" (193).

This skepticism applied to women, if we keep in mind the parallel to the "thing-in-itself", amounts to the doubt that whatever feminine characteristics we've come to identify as essential to female individuals, we are in fact not warranted in claiming those characteristics to be necessary traits for anyone to have at all.¹³ The doubt is just that it is likely that society has come to believe in the categorical essence due to conventional constructions of the female *as woman*, and the social conditioning of female as such. For Nietzsche, we have no permanent grounds for categorizing females as women (with a presupposed set of apparently feminine

¹³ This idea is explicitly found in detail in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* during the chapter on "Early Childhood" (286-340).

traits) in the first place, since that which is feminine is a construct, or an artifact, and has only been solidified through conventional and traditional social discourse.¹⁴ Therefore, Clark finds that in aphorism 238, Nietzsche is describing what a certain type of man (one who is not “shallow in his instinct”, as Nietzsche says, thus deeply embodying the so-called “masculine” role) must think about woman as long as this man thinks of individual women as examples of the “woman as such.”

Though I agree with this reading, it somewhat complicates the puzzle of figuring out how Nietzsche’s own renunciation of the building blocks of his view is supposed to fit with his simultaneous commitment to the view, without simply reducing what he says to a mere demonstration of the virtues of honesty, courage, and will to truth (thus emptying the content of its own meaning and interest). To clarify, if Nietzsche is now not only telling us that his “truths” about “woman as such” are prejudices that have no warrant, *and* that much of his discussion of women is now in reference to an essence that is equally unwarranted, it is hard to tell what Nietzsche is being so honest about anymore. If Nietzsche’s truths are concerning facts about a social construction, we wouldn’t want to undermine them as prejudices based on faulty assumptions (since the fact that women were historically treated as property of men is valuable to our understanding of women’s circumstance). The solution to this, I contend, is that we understand Nietzsche as purposely presenting a characterization of women in terms of the “Eternal Feminine” as a way to illuminate the aspect of his signpost meant to direct us towards understanding the problem of cultural breeding as I have mentioned earlier. Understanding the ambivalence latent within Nietzsche’s criticism, beneath the outward illustration of virtue, will involve understanding the problem of Nietzsche’s own sense of cultural breeding, which turns out to have an impact that even Nietzsche, whose way of thinking often seems so impervious to standard cultural conventionality and pressures of socialization, must himself succumb to.

To rehabilitate Nietzsche’s claims as not-your-average cultural product (which arguably, they aren’t), I maintain that Nietzsche’s renunciation of his own view of women is a recognition of the fact that his being brought up as man in society has instilled a sense of absolute difference (a difference in “spiritual fate”)

¹⁴ See Nietzsche’s aphorism 58 in *The Gay Science*, where he discusses the way in which “what things *are called*...gradually grows to be part of the thing and turns into its very body.” Rosalyn Diprose references this portion of Nietzsche and says: “Even if what things ‘are’ can never be decided, concepts of ‘woman’ have their material effects in the constitution of the bodily self that is a woman.” (*Nietzsche, Feminism, and Political Theory*, 23).

special with respect to those who have been brought up as women, thus when he speaks of “woman”, he has to remind readers that this is what he personally has come to perceive with respect to the common notion of woman, a category that Nietzsche himself knows to be a particularly dubious and ill-conceived category to begin with. This reminder, however, is not a shield against criticism. While we can look favorably upon Nietzsche’s own genuine virtues, what equally deserves focus is that which contributes to and inspires Nietzsche’s own incomprehensible, unreasonable, yet undeniable and concrete prejudice.

III. Nietzsche’s “Woman” (Actually)

The previous section aimed at exposing a parallel according to which we are set to interpret Nietzsche’s statements about women as being made in reference to a feminine essence also known as the “Eternal Feminine.” This idea is highly supported by Frances Oppel in her book, *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman*, where, in the introduction she summarizes that in Nietzsche’s text, “[w]hat looks like misogyny may be understood as part of a larger strategy whereby “woman-as-such” (the universal essence of woman with timeless character traits) is shown to be a product of male desire, a construct” (1). If we are to understand Nietzsche’s criticism as being aimed at women in so far as they may be understood as examples or embodiments of this “timeless” ideal character, we can begin to see the roots of his (typically negative) characterization of women.

Before approaching Nietzsche’s text directly, let us consider some of the challenges that critics have raised against Nietzsche’s characterization of women. Linda Singer puts forward an interpretation in her article, “Nietzschean Mythologies: The Inversion of Value and the War Against Women,” in which she considers Nietzsche’s statements about women to be ultimately “irresponsible” and in need of recognition as such (174). One of the main conclusions Singer draws is that Nietzsche’s use of the “Eternal Feminine” and his corresponding ridicule and distaste for women is a clear indication that women, in Nietzsche’s world, have an inescapable destiny to remain inferior, weak, servile, uneducated, and pregnant, while at the same time, they are condemnable for their superficiality and dissimulation, among other deplorable traits (Singer, 175-9).

It is apparent to Singer that the good, noble values are ultimately masculine for Nietzsche, and she writes that, “[t]hose values which Nietzsche finds distasteful are seen as feminine values” (178).

Two additional articles that back up similar claims include J.L. Thompson’s, “Nietzsche on Woman” and Carol Diethe’s, “Nietzsche and the Woman Question”. In both of these articles, it is agreed that Nietzsche privileges males and masculinity when it comes to the noble activities of self-creation and the ushering in of new values. According to Thompson, Nietzsche’s understanding of what it is to be a “herd animal” as opposed to a “noble” individual (“independent and not limited”) is that the former is necessarily feminine while the latter is masculine (208). Further, he declares that why Nietzsche

...is so determined to prescribe a subordinate role for women, is not only because his conception of an exceptional individual is so insistently masculine but because it seems that the existence of such an individual depends on the existence of a subordinate class of which women are the paradigm members (212).

His conclusion is that Nietzsche’s positive view which celebrates masculine qualities as superior and dominant, constitutive of power and nobility, bottoms out and leaves us with an individual that is nothing more than “a naked will, a force as impersonal and without ends or character as the will to power itself” (218). Overall it seems that Thompson takes Nietzsche’s positive view to be inevitably embedded in an ultimately male chauvinist framework, out of which we find little fruit to bear.

Carol Diethe draws a conclusion regarding Nietzsche’s positive view that also points to the systematic placing of females in the category of servile and passive. In referring to a quote in which Nietzsche proclaims that “woman wants to be taken and accepted as a possession” (found in *The Gay Science*, 363), Diethe states that these words of Nietzsche’s “give a spurious legitimacy to the widespread view (not wholly dead in the late 1980s) that male sexuality is by definition active, while female sexuality is passive” (868).¹⁵ Thus, Diethe severely criticizes Nietzsche for his persistent denigration of women, and similarly to Singer, she sees that Nietzsche advocates and reinforces the idea that females must continue to retain an inferior and servile role (871). Though Singer maintains we can, in a very “Nietzschean spirit”, still overcome what he says

¹⁵ Interestingly enough, Simone de Beauvoir gives a very detailed account of how this kind of myth is perpetuated when we consider the differing treatment that males and females undergo from early childhood. Males are generally *conditioned* to maintain their active traits, to test their virility, and venture out into the world, while females are generally conditioned to suppress them (286; 293).

about women (185), Diethe, on the other hand, like Thompson, maintains that Nietzsche's positive view actually relies on the subjugation of women (871).

Meeting the challenges that these views bring to the table will elucidate the way in which some of the most difficult statements from Nietzsche may be understood in the positive light of the signpost that Nietzsche raises for us in Part VII of BGE. All three of these views condemn Nietzsche for not only thoughtlessly excluding females (as women) from potentially reaping the personal rewards of living independently, creatively, healthily, and strongly, but also for permanently fixing females to one sphere of existence. What is misunderstood about Nietzsche here is that we are not warranted in reading him as giving out prescriptions for what individuals, female or not, ought to do.¹⁶ In addition, even when he does appear to accredit "nature" as the source of certain "antagonism" and inequality between the sexes (as in the passage cited by Diethe in aphorism 363 of *The Gay Science*), he ultimately calls this nature "immoral"! To help shed light on Nietzsche's intentions (or lack thereof) in this area of his discourse about women and their supposed role, it will help to draw on some central observations made over half of a century later in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

A crucial step towards understanding Nietzsche more clearly is to consider Beauvoir's charting of the social conditioning of "woman." With this we can begin to see how Nietzsche's disavowal of intransitory essences could possibly fit together with his systematic treatment of woman as resting on the basis of something "natural" (as he remarks that a woman's "*nature*, which is more "natural" than man's" in BGE 239). To start, Beauvoir makes it clear that to deny that there is a "feminine essence" stationed in women is not to deny that there *are* any women, as Beauvoir declares, "to reject notions of the eternal feminine...is not to deny that there are today...women: this denial is not a liberation for those concerned but an inauthentic flight" (4). Consider further the declaration on the same page, in which she says, "the truth is that anyone can clearly see that humanity is split into two categories of individuals with manifestly different clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, movements, interests, and occupations; these differences are perhaps superficial; perhaps they

¹⁶ In fact, reading Nietzsche as prescriptive is a common mistake, perhaps purposely designed in Nietzsche's text as "mirror writing". For an explanation of this, see Linda Williams' book, *Nietzsche's Mirror: The World as Will to Power*, chapter 5. Williams states on 109, "[i]t is *we* who jump to evaluate [Nietzsche's] descriptions prescriptively," noting that "mirror writing" is designed such that the reader's values are exposed in their interpretation of the written work (in which case, a single text can have multiple meanings).

are destined to disappear. What is certain is that for the moment they exist in a strikingly obvious way” (4). One can only surmise that at the time Nietzsche wrote, these differences were even more strongly embellished and enforced in culture, in which case, it would be disingenuous of him to ignore the distinction.

Given Beauvoir’s assertions, we can at least come to understand how Nietzsche could have possibly upheld his views about women (in BGE and elsewhere) considering his rejection of anything metaphysically necessary with respect to females (making them into women). Yet his idea that, what women *are* is somehow “natural” in his eyes gives us the impression that he *did* consider there to be a determining factor involved in the upbringing of individuals with respect to their biological sex. Though some might simply read this as an inconsistency in Nietzsche’s thought process,¹⁷ a more charitable reading might suppose that Nietzsche faced a difficulty noted by Beauvoir as she says, “[i]t is difficult for men to measure the enormous extent of social discrimination that seems insignificant from the outside and whose moral and intellectual repercussions are so deep in woman that they appear to spring from an original nature” (14). With this, we can gain a sense in which Nietzsche was not altogether *wrong* in his prejudiced judgments about women considering the fact that, as Beauvoir charts, females have historically been discriminated and socialized in such a way that brings them to behave and develop certain traits. Further, that this process, which takes place practically from birth and in such a deep and subtle way, makes it such that it *appears* there is something essential about the female sex, apart from cultural intervention, to be held responsible for their characteristics, it makes sense for Nietzsche to write about women as though they were determined this way or that. Of course, Nietzsche did not consider mere *appearances* regarding the activity and behaviors of women (or anything for that matter) to be indications of a deeper metaphysical reality, but rather as our own creations (that we may one day destroy).¹⁸

One way of understanding woman’s appearance as a kind of all-too-human creation is with the idea of breeding. Though Thompson (as cited above) ultimately takes issue with Nietzsche’s view, he recognizes that for Nietzsche, “[a]n individual’s nature is the result of breeding and self-discipline” and that, “Nietzsche believed that women were different from men, not because of their nature, pure and simple, but as the result of ‘breeding’ in all the senses of that term” (212). Of course, while Thompson and others (mistakenly) take

¹⁷ Lynne Tirrell maintains such a view, which will be addressed later in section VI.

¹⁸ See GS 58.

Nietzsche to embrace and condone woman's subordination as it is bred into them, it is my contention that Nietzsche had no such intention, and rather, his mission was, through his honest approach to the subject of women, to signal to readers that whatever socio-economic bridges it seems women must cross, and whatever "social contracts" or "will to be just" (GS 363) we might have, there are still greater unseen waters that we haven't even begun considering and constructing bridges for. If there is anything Nietzsche's "signpost" to the "problem we *are*" in Part VII of BGE (and elsewhere) ought to tell readers, it is that his symptomatic rendering of "woman" as altogether different, inferior, servile, etc., in comparison with man, is that there's a problem of discrimination and cultural breeding with respect to the sexes that is much more ingrained in us than society manages to acknowledge, despite surface adjustments. As Beauvoir maintains,

Today, thanks to feminism's breakthroughs, it is becoming more and more normal to encourage [woman] to pursue her education, to devote herself to sports; but she is more easily excused for not succeeding; success is made more difficult for her as another kind of accomplishment is demanded of her: she must at least *also* be a woman; she must not *lose* her femininity (296).

By these lights, it turns out Nietzsche may not have been so thoughtlessly unaware of the underlying problems concerning womanhood, as we find them so explicitly detailed by Beauvoir several decades later.¹⁹

IV. Woman as Paradigm Herd Animal

The previous section outlined some challenges that others have presented against Nietzsche's discrimination of women as subordinate to men. My response to these challenges was to resist accusations that Nietzsche's attitude towards women is prescriptive, and that, given what we learn from Beauvoir, Nietzsche's descriptions of women may easily be seen as a reflection of the deep seated effects of cultural breeding and social conditioning. A further move to help explain Nietzsche's seeming restriction of women's role is to explicate his identification of women as the "paradigm herd animal" as Thompson has reported (208). As Nietzsche generally condemns people of modern culture for too easily submitting to pressures of

¹⁹ Unfortunately there is not room here for a longer discussion to be had regarding the kind of cultural "training" or breeding that inflicts males and females with oppositional traits, which brings the two types of individuals to view themselves differently in the world. I hope it will suffice to say that Beauvoir's analysis of woman/womanhood yields a compelling explanation of where men and women get their differences. As she debunks many myths surrounding biological necessity and historical assumptions regarding the sexes, she provides a detailed account of the ways in which certain behaviors/feelings are socially encouraged/discouraged between males and females, to the extent that we come to perceive them even as naturally occurring out of innate, instinctual differences.

society and conventional expectations instead of standing up for themselves and creating their own values, it is plausible that Nietzsche deliberately took the notion of woman to serve as a fitting metaphor meant to shed light on the deficiencies of the mass followers of cultural norms in general. If we consider Nietzsche to view women as individuals ultimately weakened by societal interests, and who perhaps at a time had to actually embrace a position of weakness out of fear and need for self-preservation, then it seems appropriate to draw connections between femininity and herd-mentality of people in general.²⁰ We can now refer to Thompson's article in his explanation of this line of thought in Nietzsche:

[T]hough herd animals are both male and female, all of them are feminine: that is the morality of the herd and the characteristics of the individuals in it are those which Nietzsche regards as feminine: the morality of the herd, he says, is the morality of obedience, of pity and love of neighbor. Herd animals are servile, concerned about the opinion of others and at the same time envious and malicious; they are weak, they lack discipline, etc. Woman is for Nietzsche simply the most obvious embodiment of these attitudes and characteristics (208).

It appears then, that Nietzsche may not have a "war against women" as the title of Singer's article (as discussed above) suggests, but rather Nietzsche is waging war against the "feminine" in so far as it is a quality characteristic of those who lack strength of individuality. One detail that Thompson leaves out is the fact that given that males in Nietzsche's view may be seen to exhibit feminine traits, it seems unlikely that Nietzsche would also consider masculine traits to only possibly be manifest in male subjects.²¹ Thus, while Nietzsche's portrayal of the *Übermensch* (as Singer asserts) seems to exhibit what we would consider as masculine tendencies towards domination, power, force of will, and so on, we have no warrant to believe that Nietzsche meant for this status to be *only* ever procured by male bodied individuals, as Singer adamantly suggests.²²

In line with the idea of associating femininity with males (and presumably vice versa) is a particular instance found in TL, paragraph 4, part 1, where Nietzsche attributes feminine traits to men in society, as he ascribes them the characteristics of "[d]eception...wearing a mask, hiding behind convention... continuous fluttering around the solitary flame of vanity," though these are traits simultaneously attributed to women

²⁰ Clark reads Nietzsche as pointing to fear and the need to be possessed (in BGE 232) as necessary for woman's self-preservation (or protection) against the worst male hostility and abuse (Clark, 193). In addition we can see a similar understanding in Maryanne Bertram's "'God's Second Blunder' – Serpent Woman and the *Gestalt* in Nietzsche's Thought," when she remarks, "[s]ince women are afraid of the domination and control that men and society exercise in their lives, they seek power through lies" (269).

²¹ Of course perhaps this is because this observation wouldn't altogether resolve Thompson's worry, since he finds extreme masculinity to be problematically still reliant on subservience of those who are feminine, and typically women.

²² On pg. 175 of Singer's article, she states, "women in Nietzsche's world do not make themselves" and that, "adventures of self-creation that Nietzsche glorifies are explicitly denied them."

elsewhere in his work.²³ In Nietzsche's description of men's activities here as a "means for the preserving of the individual", there appears to be a feminine dimension of modern man which parallels (though is less apparent in comparison with) the character of woman. Thus, it appears Nietzsche's contempt towards woman (as the feminine embodiment, socially construed) may be translated as contempt held more broadly towards acts of dissimulation, which unfortunately must be constitutive of the woman as such, given what her socially prescribed situation allows her (or rather denies). While man unwittingly deceives himself and others in his interactions and navigating the world (see BGE 25; 40; 289), woman *necessarily* deceives, given her nature *as it is socially constructed*.²⁴ We might gather from all of this then that woman, for Nietzsche, serves as a kind of outward representation of the very deception that man subconsciously operates within, in that she is traditionally given *no choice* but to live in outward dissimulation as it is perhaps the only way of preserving herself in the midst of a society in which she is subject to serve the interests of man (lest she be ostracized and/or severely punished).

One point that should be kept afloat amongst Nietzsche's negativity regarding feminine traits, is despite that femininity might be associated with herd/slave morality as Thompson suggests, leading us to think that Nietzsche opposes all that which is conventionally feminine, we have to keep in mind that in 239 of BGE, Nietzsche's rejection of woman's emancipation seemingly relies on a warning that the "feminine instinct" is deteriorating, that the women's movement is a sign of "defeminization" of culture. The idea is, if Nietzsche was opposed to all that is feminine, then he presumably would want to *endorse* a movement that appears to be signaling an erasure of that weak instinct, rather than accrediting it with a "masculine stupidity." In addition to this puzzling aspect of Nietzsche's thought, there are instances in which Nietzsche affords women what, in his view, would actually be considered virtuous and desirable qualities, such as that of "prudence and art", lightheartedness, and the ability to provide relief from man's "seriousness...gravity and

²³ See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 361; BGE 86; 148; 232; 239.

²⁴ Ironically, Singer suggests that because Nietzsche speaks of "Eternal Feminine" and never "Eternal Masculine", Nietzsche must think there is something natural, permanent, and perpetually inherent in females, when in fact, it seems much more likely that Nietzsche's use of Eternal Feminine is actually meant to signify the *nonexistence* of such a nature.

profundity” (232). On top of it all, it has even been argued that Nietzsche indeed *avored* femininity over masculinity, despite all seeming cases of male chauvinism within his texts.²⁵

All of this is to show two things mainly, namely that, in Nietzsche’s view, (1) feminine and masculine characteristics are not necessarily restricted to females and males respectively for all time and (2) not all so-called feminine traits may be seen as bad. Given this, it is still a worthy endeavor to dig into Nietzsche’s conception of woman as a paradigm herd animal, to gain a deeper sense in which Nietzsche recognized the “woman as such” as a blind follower of convention, by definition, and that he thinks they *must* be “actresses,” above all (GS 361). While woman is characteristically herd-like, the nature of her activity is slightly different than a male herd animal in that as a female, her role is severely limited to that of the “Eternal Feminine”, which has been assigned to her.²⁶ Thus, she is socialized in such a way that limits her existence and means of attaining power (Tirrell, 2007), necessarily invites her to narcissism and pleasure in self-adornment (Beauvoir, 572; 667), draws primary concern for “mere appearance and beauty” and her art of lying (BGE 232; Bertram 269-70), and worst of all, throws her into a balancing act of shame and virtue, slavery and tyranny (Diprose, 19); repeatedly, Nietzsche’s text reflect that woman’s own will is stunted as she shapes herself to the image of her that was created by man (GS 68; 361; Oppel 22-3). It is this understanding in Nietzsche’s text that I will turn to now.

V. Women as Actresses of the Eternal Feminine

Returning back to the idea of the “Eternal Feminine”, Frances Oppel, in *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman* provides a useful description of this densely packed, historical (mythical) concept:

The phrase appears at the climactic, melodramatic end of Goethe’s *Faust*, signifying in the context of that poem the obscure but compelling attraction of the feminine to the good, the innocent, the pure and the holy – and given these terms, the obscure but compelling attraction of the masculine to the

²⁵ See Lawrence Hatab’s, “Nietzsche on Woman.” Here he states (after citing several passages from Part VII of BGE) that, “Nietzsche seems to be saying that repudiation of feminine traits in favor of masculine traits is an exchange of strength for weakness,” if “feminine traits” refer to things including playfulness, adornment, unpredictability as compared to “masculine traits” including seriousness, rationality, and de-sensualization. Also, according to Bertram, it appears femininity has as important (if not more so) a role in life’s movement and creativity as masculinity does.

²⁶ Consider the point noted by Oppel (in citing R.J. Ackermann) regarding the characters one finds in Nietzsche’s texts – he speaks of men as poets, artists, scientists, philosophers, etc. while women are always merely “women” (16).

feminine – and finally through the feminine, the redemption of the masculine. This mode of the eternal feminine reproduces the social injunction to females on the two-sex model to be wives, mothers, and moral guardians of men, and of their families...This well-known nineteenth-century image of the woman as moral inspiration and redeemer...has a content as sentimental as it is unrealistic. It is this ideal that Nietzsche's writing deplores, debunks, and temporizes, linking it to cultural fashions of the times (17).

In general, the Eternal Feminine can be understood as an ideal, a construct created by males out of their own physical desire. As Oppel points out in reference to one of Nietzsche's later aphorisms in *Twilight of the Idols* (II), this ideal of "woman" has implications of origins similar to that of man's "god", functioning similar to the false conception of god as an artifact of human desire. Nietzsche states, "Man created woman – out of what? Out of a rib of his god – of his 'ideal' " (II, "Maxims and Arrows", 13). If it is Nietzsche's intention to expose this mythical conception, his conjuring of woman as superficial, dissimulating liars, who have no interest in truth, seems to fall right in line with the concept of woman as the adorned and shimmering beauty, but whose appearance is merely that: an appearance, a disguise that men have created and projected onto her, beneath which there is nothing to be found. Consider the aphorism in II which states, "[w]omen are considered profound. Why? Because one never fathoms their depths. Women aren't even shallow" (II, "Maxims and Arrows", 28). That, "women aren't even shallow" largely hints at the fact that they never even had the chance to acquire any real depth as individual subjects given the expectation for them to be a certain way from the outset. What these lines are getting at, from Nietzsche's view, is that women clearly do *not* make themselves, as Singer's article half-correctly suggests to us, however, as maintained earlier, this isn't to say that they are determined to forever be incapable of doing anything other than being woman. Rather, what Nietzsche repeatedly seems interested to show us in his text (as it is often mistaken for absolute necessity), is just how severely women are debilitated, so much that they themselves may not even realize it.

The problem that Nietzsche so forcefully elicits us to face is the fact that women are trained actresses, whose own bodies, which cannot be escaped, are likened to a mask of their own, which women fail (presumably at no fault of their own²⁷) to ever remove or take away. As Nietzsche states in GS 361, "[women]

²⁷ Consider Beauvoir's note in the introduction (16) regarding the lapsing of "transcendence" into "immanence" (which women are conditioned to do). She states, "this fall is a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if this fall is inflicted on the subject, it takes the form of frustration and oppression; in both cases it is an absolute evil." Also consider the parable in Nietzsche's GS 68 when the sage says, "woman are doubly innocent" concerning their own (corrupt) existence.

“put on something” even when they take off everything.” In the same passage Nietzsche asks, “do [women] not *have* to be first of all and above all actresses?” In response to this, Opper points out that, “[a]cting a part is an instinctive defense for women, and as other Nietzschean texts imply, it is something with which the writer sympathizes” (Opper, 23). The idea that women must *necessarily* be actresses is profound in that it captures the idea that women’s entire construction, the extent of their role in the world, has historically been out of their hands, as Nietzsche states in a parable (quoting the words of a sage) in another aphorism out of *The Gay Science*, “it is man who creates for himself the image of woman, and woman forms herself according to this image” (GS, 68). It is this understanding of woman as an actress playing a part, who has even *forgotten* she is playing a part, that is crucial to interpreting Nietzsche’s criticisms, especially where they appear to be the most harshly delivered.²⁸

With these premises in mind concerning Nietzsche’s thoughts about “woman” and her origins, and while understanding that his characterization of women is often held within terms of the Eternal Feminine, we can begin to interpret some of the more challenging passages found in Part VII of BGE in a way that aims to signal (though harshly) the harmful effects of having adopted such an ideal of woman. Let’s start with 232, where Nietzsche says:

Woman has much reason for shame; so much pedantry, superficiality, schoolmarmishness, petty presumption, petty licentiousness and immodesty lies concealed in woman – one only needs to study her behavior with children! – and so far all this was at bottom best repressed and kept under control by *fear* of man. Woe when “the eternally boring in woman” – she is rich in that! – is permitted to venture forth! When she begins to unlearn thoroughly and on principle her prudence and art – of grace, of play, of chasing away worries, of lightening burdens and taking things lightly – and her subtle aptitude for agreeable desires! (BGE, 232)

This whole passage should signal to readers that women, under the lens of an ideal, according to a standard of “womanliness”, are revealing character traits that Nietzsche finds detestable. Here are the first signs that Nietzsche sees that modern women, who are in the process of becoming “self-reliant”, are failing in that they are giving up, or “unlearning”, the admirable skills they’ve been conditioned to have, as a part of a principled move to “venture forth.” Of course, Nietzsche recognizes that there is nothing in “woman as such” to reveal

²⁸ In reference to Bertram again (as referenced earlier in footnote 15), she writes that women, “forget that they are liars and begin to delight in the craftiness of their art of deception” (270).

(much like there is no “thing-in-itself” to be revealed in any thing), hence the “eternal boring in woman” is a signal of the reality that “woman as such”, is devoid of any interesting personality of her own.

Nietzsche is presenting an attitude towards women that reflects the apparent ignorance that woman possesses concerning *who* and *what* she is. Between the lines, Nietzsche is implying that women’s own insistence on being “woman”, will be conceded to at a high price, namely the cost of resentment for the fact that they aren’t playing their role very well (they are revealing negative traits at the expense of positive ones), and worse, they don’t even realize the role they’ve been playing all along is still deeply afflicting them, even as they make their demands “with medical explicitness what woman *wants* from man, first and last,” (232). Nietzsche continues, “[s]o far enlightenment of this sort was fortunately man’s affair, man’s lot – we remained “among ourselves” in this; and 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” (BGE 232). Nietzsche is alluding to the fact that it is worth questioning whether or not women who willingly remain under the societal auspices of the ideal, and consider themselves “women,” can possibly have the *will* to actually see themselves *as* playing a role, *as* an embodiment of an ideal that they ironically had no part in creating, yet of which they are now attempting to claim ownership, and “enlighten men”, but not without “clumsy attempts...at scientific self-exposure,” as Nietzsche mockingly retorts (232).

A way of understanding this problem is to consider the idea that “woman as such” is no more real or worthy of seeking out than the “thing-in-itself”. Nietzsche’s imperative that, “we really ought to free ourselves from the seduction of words” (in BGE 16) gives us reason to read Nietzsche in 232 as saying something about the ugly mistake that is modern woman attempting to give “scientific” accounts of who she is, when in reality, there is no truth about what woman is, there can only be false representations of woman because of the fact that she originated as an ideal as false as the god-ideal, according to Nietzsche. Perhaps this is why Nietzsche maintains that woman has no concern for truth since, “[her] great art is the lie, her highest concern is mere appearance and beauty” (232). The woman Nietzsche is talking about here, is the “woman as such” (as Clark tells us as well in her interpretation on 192), the woman of necessary dissimulation, futilely trying to shed light on her inner nature as woman, when there is no such inner nature to

get at or know. This is the woman who has been brought up in society to dissimulate, whose only defense is her ability to charm and seduce.²⁹

Returning to the passage in BGE, we find Nietzsche referring to the Eternal Feminine again, this time mocking it almost explicitly (and referring to her efforts at teaching men who is she and what she wants), as he says, “[u]nless a woman seeks a new adornment for herself that way – I do think adorning herself is part of the Eternal-Feminine? – she surely wants to inspire fear of herself – perhaps she seeks mastery” (232). Nietzsche is telling us that woman, in enlightening men about her self is either ultimately looking for a new “adornment”, or she is looking to inspire fear and perhaps seek mastery, which could be understood as attempts at gaining power.

An interesting aspect of this passage is the question mark placed at the end of the interjection, as we compare it to the remark Nietzsche makes in BGE 25 (as cited earlier), when he notes there may be “a more laudable truthfulness in every little question mark” placed after one’s “special words and favorite doctrines” than in remaining honest in the face of those most apt to judge negatively. It is as if Nietzsche is purposely putting a question mark after the reference to the Eternal Feminine to sarcastically signal, again, that after “special words” such as these, we may find ourselves closer to truth as we subject them to doubt. Nietzsche’s play on the concept and his subsequent hint at doubting it is ironic, and intended to make fun of women in so far as they continue to unwittingly adapt themselves to the role of “woman” as it remains a condemnable extension of the mythical Eternal Feminine.

One more reference to the Eternal Feminine that Nietzsche makes is found in aphorism 236 of BGE, where Nietzsche quotes Goethe, and says, “when he translated this, “the Eternal-Feminine attracts us *higher*” – I do not doubt that every nobler woman will resist this faith, for she believes the same thing about the Eternal-Masculine.” This aphorism distinguishes between two types of women, one less noble than the other, and according to Oppel, it turns out that the “nobler” woman is one who does not consciously accept the role of “Eternal-Feminine” and as she is still a woman, she then is only “capable of being drawn aloft by the ideal of the opposite sex”, which is the “Eternal Masculine” (22). I take it that this “Eternal Masculine”

²⁹ This is perhaps why Nietzsche says in BGE 84: “Woman learns to hate to the extent to which her charms – decrease.” If an individual woman’s only way of gaining appreciation in society is through her ability to acquire the admiration of males due to societal constraints, and she loses this ability, it isn’t surprising that she would become hateful.

ideal is representative of the pre-established standards and goals set up according to man's interests as cultivated so far. The less noble woman, on the other hand, is the one who does identify with the Eternal Feminine and allows her "vanity to be gratified", as Oppel contends (22). What we end up with here is a path of "no exit" for women; either they look up to themselves narcissistically in their vanity, or they look up to men, in that they strive towards the ideals and standards that have already been put in place by men, long before they could have any say in the matter.³⁰ In neither case do they assert their own values, do they nobly create what is valuable for themselves.³¹ This brings us to a final phase of interpretation of Nietzsche's Part VII in BGE, in which we will find the significance of his rejection of woman's emancipation. First, we must briefly return to the initial parallel of BGE, and consider Nietzsche's resistance to the valuation of "opposites" as it pertains to the problem of "man and woman."

VI. A Problem of Opposites

Returning to the parallel as first discussed early on in this paper, it is time to address the third, final element of this crucial interpretive strategy in order to more fully understand Nietzsche's "signpost" via his blatant refusal to accept the basic feminist ideals of woman's emancipation and equal rights. To begin, let us look at the criticism brought forward by Lynne Tirrell. Tirrell's main concern with respect to Nietzsche's textual treatment of women is not that we have nothing to gain from what Nietzsche says (as she does acknowledge his more sympathetic words about women), but that Nietzsche is ultimately inconsistent in his reasoning concerning the so-called "abysmal antagonism" and necessary "hostile tension" between "man and woman."³² Overall, Tirrell cites that there is an irreconcilable tension in Nietzsche's writing, which is not

³⁰ A perhaps more plausible reading than this is to consider the "nobler" woman as she who sets out to serve man, to submit to man as possession. This is more in line with the "balancing act" alluded to earlier that women must sustain in life, between virtue/shame, tyranny/slavery. The so-called "virtuous" are the one's who uphold the Eternal Feminine ideal by enacting it, and rest in vanity (they are tyrants because of their seductive powers). The shameful, slavish women are those who give up themselves in acts of subservience. These dichotomies are traced in Rosalyn Diproses, "The Pathos of Distance". Unfortunately the discussion of her points will have to be saved for another paper.

³¹ See Nietzsche's BGE 260: "The noble type of man experiences *itself* as determining values; it does not need approval...it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is *value-creating*."

³² A further criticism Tirrell offers is that Nietzsche unfairly rests blame on women for their slavishness even though they are majorly victims to external societal pressures (219). I found difficulty in tracing any particular references (from Tirrell or elsewhere) in which this tendency is exemplified in Nietzsche, so I will refrain from commenting further on this matter.

unlike the broader tension underlying our current discussion, which is that between Nietzsche's personal "misogynistic, hostile, and shallow" feelings towards women in conjunction with his sympathetic acknowledgment of woman as being "created by socialization" (200-1). This tension, Tirrell maintains, "defies any definitive classification of his view" when it comes to his politics concerning the sexes (201).

Let us consider the first reason for worry that Tirrell points to, which is Nietzsche's inability to cycle through his own methodology with respect to the sexes to finally drop the dualistic perspective. Though this complaint is similar to one that might be made about Nietzsche's seeming attachment to essences in his discussions of women and their "nature" despite earlier renunciations of such essences, it will strengthen the assessment I aim to put forward about Nietzsche's view of women by addressing this point specifically regarding the dualism Nietzsche maintains with respect to biological sex. Tirrell, in bringing out Nietzsche's doubt about dualisms as present in BGE (for example, the dualisms of mind/body, good/evil, truth/falsity, conscious/unconscious), points out that it is ironic that Nietzsche makes the claim that "man and woman are *necessarily* in 'an eternally hostile tension'" as she quotes Nietzsche's opening of aphorism 238 in BGE (205). It is asserted (rightly) by Tirrell that there is no formation of an "exclusive ontological opposition" between the sexes, that this opposition is a social *norm* imposed upon individuals at the time of birth regardless of their physical make-up (206). Thus, a challenge in interpreting Nietzsche about women is realizing that he did not take steps to dismantle the dualism of the sexes that he so often relies on, despite that his own philosophy called for it almost explicitly.

If we look at the passages in BGE as they parallel those in Part VII on women, we may find that it is in fact plausibly not far from Nietzsche's intention to actually lead readers to make the kind of argument against sex-dualism that Tirrell makes in her own assessment of Nietzsche. Consider aphorism 2 of BGE where Nietzsche takes issue with the "metaphysicians of all ages", who depend on realities of "the intransitory, the hidden god, the 'thing-in-itself'", Nietzsche says:

[T]his kind of valuation looms in the background of all their logical procedures; it is on account of this "faith" that they trouble themselves about "knowledge," about something that is finally baptized solemnly as "the truth." The fundamental faith of the metaphysicians is *the faith in opposite values*...For one may doubt, first, whether there are any opposites at all, and secondly whether these popular valuations and opposite values on which the metaphysicians put their seal, are not perhaps merely foreground estimates, only provisional perspectives...For all the value that the true, the truthful, the

selfless may deserve, it would still be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for life might have to be ascribed to deception, selfishness, and lust. It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of these good and revered things is precisely that they are insidiously related, tied to, and involved with these wicked, seemingly opposite things – maybe even one with them in essence. Maybe! (BGE, 2)

Before explicating this, let us turn to one more passage in which Nietzsche speaks about the nature of “opposite values”:

Even if *language*, here as elsewhere, will not get over its awkwardness, and will continue to talk of opposites where there are only degrees and many subtleties of gradation...here and there we understand it and laugh at the way in which precisely science at its best seeks most to keep us in this *simplified*, thoroughly artificial, suitably constructed and suitably falsified world – at the way in which, willy-nilly, it loves error, because, being alive, it loves life (BGE, 24).

What we get from these two passages is a clear skepticism of perceived dualities in nature, as they serve to simplify and falsify reality. It is my contention that Nietzsche deliberately invites readers to read his aphorisms about women in Part VII with in mind the very methodology that Nietzsche endorses in the above aphorisms early on in BGE. His usage of language between these two passages and those in Part VII (particularly 231 and 238) evinces a parallel according to which it would behoove readers to make the exact argument that Tirrell makes, according to which we abolish standard dualist prejudices concerning the valuation of the sexes – but this is only the tip of the iceberg, practically speaking.

In BGE 231, Nietzsche states, “we find certain solutions of problems that inspire strong faith in *us*”, and this can easily be seen in connection with the usage of “faith” in the above aphorism in referencing the metaphysicians’ “faith in opposite values.” Plausibly, opposite values may best be understood as they are perceived in *us* the way that Nietzsche’s valuing of men and women, his “spiritual *fatum*” concerning the problem of “man and woman”, is a matter of valuation that is “settled in him.” Given that his claim is that “a thinker cannot relearn but only finish learning – only discover ultimately how this is ‘settled in him’,” it seems clear that Nietzsche is telling readers directly that the expression we are about to witness concerning this “cardinal problem” of “man and woman”, is going to have to be a “signpost”, as Nietzsche says, “to the problem we *are* – rather, to the great stupidity we are,” such that we can only learn from it, and further understand just what it is that has contributed thus far to the kind of valuations among the sexes that Nietzsche finds so “deep down” and inescapable for himself (231). In short, beneath the tip of the iceberg

surfaced in the idea of relinquishing our prejudiced values concerning men and women is an obstacle of epic proportion.

When Nietzsche posits the following in BGE 238, we can see that he is abstracting the duality of “man and woman” as he puts them into quotations, signifying their status as naming devices:

[t]o go wrong on the fundamental problem of “man and woman,” to deny the most abysmal antagonism between them and the necessity of an eternally hostile tension, to dream perhaps of equal rights, equal education, equal claims and obligations – that is a *typical* sign of shallowness...

What’s more is that we are alerted to such drastic irony given Nietzsche’s explicit usage of the terms “necessity” and “eternally”, which are so overtly in contradiction with his earlier passages, that careful readers will find red flags all over this entire aphorism. Given that Nietzsche makes a very special effort to articulate such a trenchant divide between the sexes, and then calls it a “sign of shallowness” for a thinker to dream of equality between the two, it would likely be no surprise to him that we would meet his words with utter shock and dismay. However, if we were to push forward and simply deny the validity of Nietzsche’s claims here and deem them as misogynistic prejudices (like many commentators have done), we would immediately lose sight of the signpost Nietzsche so carefully constructs for us. Alternatively, if we take Nietzsche seriously we can grasp the magnitude of the difference that Nietzsche perceives to exist between “man and woman”, a magnitude that is so strong it makes it impossible for the two to ever become equals. At this point, readers would be absolutely correct to wonder just what it is about men and women that makes Nietzsche think they must be eternal enemies, and this is where we are led, by Nietzsche’s signpost, to the issue of cultural breeding and social conditioning – this is where the major ideas of Beauvoir and other later feminists come into play in further exposing the depth and intricacy of gender construction.

Not only are readers now pressured to consider the seriousness of the man/woman, male/female, masculine/feminine divide as it seemingly is one of the most toxic oppositions known to humanity in that we ourselves, for so long, have embodied these values (often without realizing it), but also readers are pressured to consider just how humanity is supposed to go about the annihilation of these values. Tirrell goes about this by subjecting the aphorisms in Part VII to Nietzsche’s own philosophy, and her argument sets us up to not only perceive men and women as originating from a single essence (as Nietzsche speculates all opposites

might just do), but also to reconsider our valuation of individuals as male/female, man/woman, masculine/feminine at all, given that this method is a way of falsifying the world around us (208).³³ What we can further gather from this, then, is that, concerning woman's enlightenment, if we suppose that women (in Nietzsche's view) can somehow simply transfer their existence as independent persons with "equal rights", we will be wrong about this, and our judgment of "men and women" as equals will only serve to further falsify the world, and serve to uphold the dichotomy that Nietzsche's philosophy so clearly seems to call for the destruction of.³⁴

VII. Woman's Movement in Society

A question worthy of asking at this point is, if it is the case that Nietzsche sees women to be situated with such an unfortunate societal fate, how could we explain Nietzsche's apparent disapproval of woman's freeing herself from this very social situation, as a way at the very least, of improving social mobility and means of expression? Certainly, Nietzsche had women friends (at least one, at one time – Lou Salomé) with whom intellectual discourse seems to have been a privilege and a pleasure for Nietzsche, thus one may wonder why it appears that Nietzsche was not readily approving of women who sought education, who would let themselves "go before men, 'to the point of writing a book,'" as Nietzsche mocks (239). It seems we would want him to say that women *should* be encouraged to escape their social role, to perhaps reconstruct themselves by means that were once unavailable to them.

Though this has somewhat already been addressed, we can clarify that since "woman's emancipation," according to Nietzsche, is for the "woman as such," what Nietzsche must clearly reject is the absurd idea that an individual who has been labeled and conditioned to be a "woman" in order to fulfill a specific role in the interests of others, could possibly become free and independent, as if her identity as a

³³ This resolution does seem to leave us with a slight problem – a paradox explicated in Lewis Call's article, "Woman as Will and Representation: Nietzsche's Contribution to Postmodern Feminism," in which we are faced with the conundrum of creating a feminist politic while at the same time somehow repealing the concept of "woman." Given this, it is imperative that we keep in mind the kind of ambivalence that allows us to discuss the experiences of actual women (and men) without assuming necessity.

³⁴ Consider Beauvoir's notice that, "the kept woman... is not freed from the male just because she has a ballot paper in her hands; while today's customs impose fewer constraints on her than in the past, such negative licenses have not fundamentally changed her situation; she remains a vassal, imprisoned in her condition" (721).

woman was something to be grasped, and subsequently move forward apart from her social role.³⁵ The word “woman” is not a word representative of any actual female being who could potentially be released from any place that isn’t the already socially ordained space of “womanhood”. In other words, there is no “woman” apart from what she has previously been socially defined as, and thus, her vision of herself stepping out of her previously locked in place is at best an illusion, or as Beauvoir puts it as mentioned earlier, perhaps an “inauthentic flight.” Given that this is an existential problem that is primarily unavoidable for women, we can still wonder why Nietzsche does not display more charity in recognizing this inability of women, and why he does not at least congenially endorse *some* social and political liberties. The solution to this is in Nietzsche’s concern that “*woman is retrogressing*” (239).

While Maudemarie Clark identifies Nietzsche’s “most explicit claims” against feminist movements as dealing with (1) a corruption of instinct and (2) a loss of “the sense for the ground on which one is most certain of victory,” I find another way of articulating Nietzsche’s main worries (192). Of course these two points are concerns of Nietzsche, and they are difficult to interpret, particularly if we wish to maintain that Nietzsche is to dispense with “feminine instinct” as an innate trait of women, and if we are to read Nietzsche as promoting *some* kind of positive movement for feminists. For this reason, these points will be kept in mind and (hopefully) resolved as I maintain that Nietzsche’s concern is best articulated as a problem of backward movement, which I suggest serves to at least hint at a potential forward movement available as an alternative. Thus, the concern I take Nietzsche to be voicing is that the feminist movement is misunderstanding (1) the reality of women’s situation (as discussed in previous sections of this paper) and consequently (2) the potential women actually have, but which might easily be erased if they continue to ignore (1). Nietzsche is critical of women as long as they continue to assimilate themselves to the standards and measures of modern man, which Nietzsche, as we know, is already highly critical of. I find overall that Nietzsche’s seemingly unapologetic rejection of the feminist movement falls right in line with the rest of his attacks on women, if we consider them in so far as they deliberately rely on a notion of “woman as such,” and the limitations associated.

³⁵ Consider BGE 29 in which Nietzsche says, “[i]ndependence is for the very few; it is a privilege of the strong.” Assuming he is talking about all individuals here, we can imagine his exceptional distaste for the idea of “woman’s independence” considering how little she understands about herself in Nietzsche’s view.

What I take Nietzsche to be saying, overall in his critique of the woman's rights movement, is that if "woman" were to truly begin to act on interests of her own, then she would no longer be deserving of the title "woman", and in her attempt to maintain this title (to make "progress" in the name of "woman" (239)), while becoming more like modern man, now venturing to *fairly* engage in intellectual (and other) affairs, is both comical and shameful when we assume "woman as such" as the focus. The problem is, woman is only swapping one "mask" for another, namely that of a man, who also fails to realize the deception he himself is still thoroughly engaged in. As an example, we can look at BGE 233, where Nietzsche criticizes the attempts of women to cite modern intellectual women (e.g., Madame Roland, Madame de Staël, and Monsieur George Sand) as evidence in favor of having strengthened "woman as such". Jeeringly, he tells readers that women fail to realize that, "[a]mong men these three are the three *comical* women as such – nothing more! – and precisely the best involuntary *counterarguments* against emancipation and feminine vainglory" (BGE, 233).

It is not surprising that he says specifically, "among men" women are thought this way, as I take it that Nietzsche is expressing the fact that these women are *still women* who are a subject to be discussed (and ridiculed) exclusively between men.³⁶ The point here is just that women who imitate men and then attempt to consider themselves to be advancing as women ultimately misunderstand that regardless of what "progress" they believe themselves to be making in the name of woman with their "standards and banners" (239), there is still a sense in which they are mere women, that is, they are individuals distinguished from men in a very crucial and debilitating way. While this reality is far from being laughable, we can see how Nietzsche, in maintaining an attachment to the woman ideal, might come to consider these seemingly progressive women as "comical".

I suspect that the apparent comedy Nietzsche observes may be related to an idea expressed in *Human All Too Human*, where he says, "[m]en of profound thought appear to themselves in intercourse with others like comedians, for in order to be understood they must always simulate superficiality" (II, 232). Nietzsche is speaking about deep thinking men who recognize the ridiculousness of their personal endeavors to have their own self understood, which involves the ironic and comedic task of first having to fabricate a

³⁶ See Nietzsche's, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On Little and Young Women" (aphorism 18 of part 1, found on page 177 in Kaufmann's *The Portable Nietzsche*).

surface appearance in order to express themselves (“their own self” being something we would tend to think is something *under* their mere appearance). Thus, women who imitate men, while they take themselves to be truly opening doors for women, enlightening others about who they are, they are still engaged in the activity of establishing a false veneer (only they do not recognize it the way a deep thinking man would recognize his own comedic enterprise). In the case of intellectual women who adopt this superficial veneer (in their likeness to men), they still attempt to communicate themselves *as women* even though they clearly are marching to a man’s drum – and this is ironic, and particularly comical for those who recognize the absurdity of the task (which can only be understood when we consider “woman as such” as the construction, the ready-made veneer that women are basically born with). Encouraging women to be more like men, and then praising women who do become more like men, as if they are proving themselves strong *as women*, is not only absurd but also counterproductive.

The reason Nietzsche would find this to be the case is perhaps the fact that women, as well as men, fail to understand the magnitude of their difference from men, in that there is still something culturally deeply ingrained in the sexes, which accounts for an apparent lasting separation between men and women, and as we have already seen, this is a real problem for Nietzsche. Concerning women’s so-called social advancement, Lewis Call in his paper, “Woman as Will and Representation,” says that Nietzsche’s “attacks on woman” here and elsewhere, are:

...aimed at what Nietzsche sees as a tremendously dangerous concept of the female. This concept relies upon the Enlightenment ideal of freedom and emancipation and seeks to acquire these boons for women. In doing so it simultaneously reinforces the Enlightenment tradition from which it draws these ideas. Nietzsche thus inveighs against modern woman in the same voice he uses to attack modern man. Both are corrupt, sick, and weak; neither can produce the kind of world Nietzsche desires” (Call, 122).

According to Nietzsche, so-called progressive women commit the same mistake that men of the Enlightenment do – they posit a conception for themselves that is ultimately fictitious, but taken as real. Since there is no essence of woman, attempts to release her from her conventional role in society by adjusting her role to overlap that of man’s conventional role in society does not only signify a decay of whatever interests (of both males and females) originally led to conditioning her to fit the category of “woman as such”, but also

signifies an undermining of the necessity of that category which she has hitherto been relegated in the first place.

Given that this conditioning is growing less and less acceptable for women, we see where Nietzsche's apparent concern regarding "defeminization" of culture is coming from. He describes defeminization as a deterioration of feminine instincts, and if we understand "feminine instincts" as whatever societal drives, motivations, and interests were at play in originally constructing the "feminine" and "woman as such", we can see why Nietzsche is emphasizing this point. Since he would not want to declare that there is some kind of innate feminine instinct that just happens to be dying out, we might read him as pointing to what would be a logical conclusion *if* we were to retain a dualistic/essentialist perspective of males and females. With this, we would see how Nietzsche is inclined to say that women are thus losing taste and modesty, as he puts it in 239, in that they no longer have an incentive to *be* like women, that is, to be afraid of men, to act prudently and secretively around others, to remain modest in their capacity to resist their social upbringing, and so on. The incentive, as explained earlier, would be tied to the benefit for women in society to remain dependent on and in service to men, given that this may have been the best way for women to navigate social life. If we take it that "woman as such" is just built on the tendencies for woman to be dependent and uneducated and so on, then it would make sense for Nietzsche to assert that the "womanliness" about woman is ironically fading.

Nietzsche states, not for the first time, that the new woman "unlearns her *fear* of man," and that, "the woman who "unlearns fear," surrenders her most womanly instincts" (239). He goes on in this same passage to explain this as a result of the "*man* in man" being "no longer desired and cultivated," and he declares that by this same token, we find that "woman degenerates." Further down, Nietzsche calls the "emancipation of woman" (which he has in quotations) an "odd symptom of the increasing weakening and dulling of the most feminine instincts." The problem that Nietzsche is calling to is that the tendencies conventionally and socially imbued upon female-bodied subjects (enforcing their signification as "women") are apparently growing less and less useful or needed, yet society insists on not only maintaining, but also *strengthening*, the type "woman", as if it could still serve to permanently and meaningfully represent a class of individuals, given their biological sex. Why this distinction is to be maintained when the original factors contributing to it are beginning to lose

their effect is a real question for Nietzsche it seems, and this is the point he's attempting to make through his critique.

Answering Nietzsche's question is going to be a matter of working through the outcomes of his own methodology when applied to the problem of the sexes. These outcomes will involve a refiguring of all of our conventional values associated with sex and gender. The alternative forward movement that I supposed could be in the background of Nietzsche's thought is one in which both man and woman, and the additional categorical valuations associated, are reconceptualized, at which point, we may find, as Opper states, "as woman is erased so is her dichotomous counter part, man-as-such, for the two are entailed in our thinking" (1), and that with this, "we are left with an empty space, a potential new horizon..." (2). At this point, we are perhaps ready to recognize Nietzsche's worry that women are losing the ground upon which they are most likely to gain power, which I contend is not because Nietzsche thinks that women must stay in their feminine role, that their power must be "derivative" and procured from within the domestic sphere (as Tirrell asserts with reference to Beauvoir (207)), but rather because Nietzsche understands that women too, are capable of creative willing, from *any* sphere, particularly now that (for the most part, in most cases) they no longer have to fear man, or dissimulate for purposes of self-defense and self-preservation, and so on.

Let us look at what Nietzsche says in 239 at length:

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 formerly one 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 and loquaciously 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; the awkward and indignant search for everything slavish and serflike that has characterized woman's position in the order of society so far, and still does....

To be sure, there are enough imbecilic friends and corrupters of woman among the scholarly asses of the male sex who advise woman to defeminize herself in this way and to imitate all the stupidities with which "man" in Europe, European "manliness," is sick: they would like to reduce woman to the level of "general education," probably even of reading the newspapers and talking about politics...

Almost everywhere one ruins her nerves with the most pathological and dangerous kind of music (our most recent German music) and makes her more hysterical by the day and more incapable of her first and last profession – to give birth to strong children. Altogether 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 schoolmasters!

In the first paragraph of this passage, it is not entirely clear that woman's "proper weapons" are those that she can wield from the home, the nursery, or the bedroom (i.e., her designated sphere). If anything, this paragraph is alluding to the fact that woman, even as a culturally bred individual whose identity has been entirely created in the interest of men, has still managed to learn valuable skills necessary for gaining power. It seems that Nietzsche thinks it is crucial for women to not abandon themselves completely, but to cultivate themselves prudently and artistically. If woman begins to, on principle, scrutinize everything "womanly" about herself and the treatment she receives from men, and then seek to abolish it, she won't have much left to stand on, because she won't even have a self that isn't a poor imitation of man.

What is most important for women according to Nietzsche, as becomes apparent in the third paragraph of the above quote, is the "force of their will." As Nietzsche laments that cultivation will only weaken the will, he is adamant when he claims that women's power will not be achieved through book learning from "schoolmasters" or "general education." None of this is to say that women must not engage in intellectual affairs, but that they at least understand that not only is their potential fathomably miles beyond what modern culture can teach her, but that her responsibility to *herself* relies on her own powers of creativity in her expression, rather than crudely raising a flag where virtually nothing has been won. Perhaps Nietzsche is attempting to demonstrate that this is the time for the other half of humanity, whose voices up until recently were rarely ever heard, to finally speak up, but most importantly, in their *own* voice, not man's voice.³⁷ We might even go so far to imagine that women, in Nietzsche's eyes, were the true forerunners of the new human being³⁸, the real *Übermenschen*, and perhaps when Nietzsche says it is woman's "first and last profession" to "give birth to strong children", he means it in the sense that "woman as such" is a passing artifact, whose first job was reproduction in that this is how she originally became "woman", and whose last

³⁷ This idea of woman's voice is gathered from observations made by Catherine MacKinnon as exhibited in Richard Rorty's, "Feminism and Pragmatism" in *Radical Philosophy* (1991, Vol. 59, p.3-14). In the opening of the article, Rorty quotes MacKinnon as "evoking for women a role that we have yet to make, in the name of a voice that, unsilenced, might say something that has never been heard" (3).

³⁸ Ibid. This idea of a "new human being" was primarily found articulated by Rorty as he speaks about the "prophetic feminists" (such as MacKinnon) whose vision is for the male-female distinction to eventually no longer be a topic of much interest (10). I think this falls directly in line with what we can read in Nietzsche, whether this was his intention or not.

job is reproduction in that it is her responsibility to help put an end to the conditioning of males and females as men and women, and rather, help condition them as strong individuals instead.

VIII. Conclusion

It is apparent that some interpretations of Nietzsche's statements about women either result in Nietzsche actually expressing deep seated misogyny, somewhat impairing our reception of Nietzsche's positive view, or that Nietzsche's comments seem rather innocuous and insignificant to his positive view. What I hope to have shown here is that not only are Nietzsche's comments innocuous, they are actually uplifting and might be seen by contemporary feminists as prefiguring thoughts that came long after Nietzsche regarding the status of women's identity (specifically Beauvoir). While Clark leaves her discussion of Nietzsche on women off at a point where we may feel permitted to mainly disregard the content of Nietzsche's statements concerning women and move on, my aim is to push the point that Nietzsche had informative things to say about women (as well as men) which could further our understanding of the kinds of obstacles we have and continue to face when it comes to sex and gender discrimination. Further, it seems that with my reading, we can see Nietzsche as having what we would now consider to be a relatively radical and progressive understanding of women's place in society, and that this is worthwhile considering.

Nietzsche never insisted on prescribing a role to women, nor did he insist on excluding them from gaining a more powerful status. Instead, his worst comments about women are primarily observational, and spoken "matter-of-factly". In order to tell his readers what he wants to tell them about man and woman, he strategically plays off of the conventional categories, *as he perceives them* to have been established. Of course, nothing he says about the problem of "man and woman" will be representative of any necessary, permanent *truth* about the subject, since there is nothing that *could* be truthfully said about those categories in the first place. Thus, it is not just that Nietzsche is trying to illustrate virtue through exposing his sentiments that might be based on his personal experience with women, or "woman" as she is established in society; it is that Nietzsche had some deep concerns for what women were doing for themselves existentially. He saw women

to be gravely mistaken about who they were, and how they were to proceed in a society where their initial function was so severely limited to reproduction and servility to men.

Just before Nietzsche comments on the “abysmal antagonism” between man and woman, he writes in aphorism 237a that, “[m]en have so far treated women like birds who had strayed to them from some height: as something more refined and vulnerable, wilder, stranger, sweeter, and more soulful – but as something one has to lock up lest it fly away.” I find statements such as this very significant. What Nietzsche is pointing at through all of the things he cites about women and men is that there are ways in which he sees the two “types” interact, and while this is not to say that there is anything essential about the sexes that must result in a certain way of their relating to one another, it is still apparent to Nietzsche that this is in fact, how they relate, and it is regrettable that this relationship, in all respects (i.e., in the private sphere of friendship, romance, family relations, and in the public sphere of work, recreation, and education) would have to be left uninvestigated and undisclosed for so long. Thus, these issues must be recognized if women, and men (but especially women), are to honestly set forth as individuals in society, and Nietzsche, surprisingly, may help us reveal a bit about the nature of these issues, which could possibly help with the advancement of more contemporary feminist theories concerning gender and personal identity.

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