

Supposing Truth is a Woman – What Then?¹

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Abstract

Nietzsche's analysis of the self-poisoning of 'the will to power' and his insistence upon overcoming its ideological outcome (the dogmatist's fake 'Truth') by recognizing the 'un-truth' of a 'logic of contamination,' demonstrates that he understands 'truth' as a paradox. What may one accordingly expect in response to the question 'Supposing truth is a woman – what then?', posed in the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* (1966)? Supported by Derrida's *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, I argue that Nietzsche could have drawn two radically different analogies between paradoxical 'truth' and 'woman.' However, due to the very kind of ideological conditioning (patriarchal), which his 'free thinking' resists in principle, he explicitly draws only one, hazarding a self-betraying performative contradiction.

The obvious move might be to retain the valuable critique of ideology made possible by his analysis of the 'will to power,' while jettisoning the self-undermining rhetoric that constructs sexual difference according to values handed down by patriarchy. However, retaining and working through the terms of sexual difference, and highlighting Nietzsche's blindness concerning women, has the advantage of calling attention to its significance. The fact that one may say in retrospect that even Nietzsche (of all thinkers!) remained blindly subject to ideological conditioning, points to its unconscious nature and raises the question of what 'overcoming' in relation to the will to power entails for the free thinkers he heralded.

The power of moral prejudices has penetrated deeply into the most spiritual world, which would seem to be the coldest and most devoid of presuppositions, and has obviously operated in an injurious, inhibiting, blinding, and distorting manner. A proper physio-psychology has to contend with unconscious resistance in the heart of the investigator, it has 'the heart' against it.
(Nietzsche, 1966: 31; §23).

In a philosophical milieu that could not abide contamination, Nietzsche's unconventional style of thinking announced itself rebelliously as the midwife of philosophy's fu-

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ture. Traditional philosophy, he argued, driven by its 'will to power,' is subject to a self-poisoning dynamic, whose outcome is the dogmatist's fake 'Truth,' characterized by an imaginary power to determine fixed, universal values for supposedly oppositional terms (whole/part, self/other, good/evil, etc.), and thus to lay fundamental grounds for science, morality, aesthetics, etc. Nietzsche insists instead upon the necessity of overcoming this will to power and liberating thinking by recognizing and negotiating a complex 'logic of contamination' that resists any simplistic division of things according to antithetical values.

For Nietzsche (1966: 3), the unforgivable philosophical error derives from a 'dream of purity' inaugurated by Plato, in whose wake traditional philosophers strive to establish fundamental concepts, the value or character of which could be determined unconditionally, whereas in fact, he insists, 'everything unconditional belongs in pathology' (1966: 90; §154). His logical style is instead based on the insight – now codified in Saussure's oft quoted dictum, 'there are no present terms only relations of difference' (1983: 75) – that a term's value cannot be determined in isolation from a complex, open-ended network of other terms that condition it, rendering it inherently indeterminate and shifting.

Moreover, because any value is contextually determined through the contaminating traces of other values, one cannot establish a philosophically grounded system for organizing things according to clearly antithetical values, between which straightforward either/or choices would be structurally possible. Nevertheless, Nietzsche complains (1966: 35; §24; see also 43; §31; 46-7; §34), crude oppositional thinking dominates intellectual life, precisely where one should acknowledge 'only degrees and many subtleties of gradation.' Further, risking 'distress and aversion in a still hale and hearty conscience,' he insists not only upon 'a doctrine of the reciprocal dependence of the "good" and the "wicked" drives,' but more radically, risking even seasickness, 'a doctrine of the derivation of all good impulses from wicked ones' (1996: 31). But he presses thinkers with the stomach for it to journey along with him. With the proposition that so-called 'evil' and its derivatives (falsity, aggressivity, lust, etc.), lie at the origin of what is ordinarily valued as 'good' (truth, stability, order, beauty, system, etc.) one confronts his formulation of 'the will to power,' succinctly expressed in his claim that (1966: 203; §259): 'Life is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation.'

New forms, to elaborate, do not drop from the blue, but emerge through 'contaminating' (destroying, dissolving, incorporating) something existing. The inventive 'traumatizes' and re-configures the conventional. Inventiveness, then, depends upon acknowledging the very possibility of such contamination, and on a new form's power to prevail over time in aggressive competition with myriad threatening forces.² Such repetition, however, entails a gesture of 'forgetting': to consolidate and stabilize new forms, to erect systems (conceptual, ethical, epistemological, ontological), one necessarily 'forgets' (represses) the possibility of contamination or 'un-truth' that underpins

² Notably, this account draws to some extent from Derrida's essay 'Psyche: Inventions of the other' (1989), where he implicitly makes much of the dynamic of the 'will to power' in his analysis of the 'event,' and its correlates, 'invention,' 'convention,' and 'adventure.' The metaphors of 'forgetting' and the 'forgetting of forgetting' are drawn from Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy* (1999: 81), where he argues that *Ent-Ereignis*, 'forgetting,' or stabilizing the oscillating play of *Ereignis*, is a necessary structural feature of the events of being as appearance (understood as world-views, programmes, or paradigms, for example), and that philosophy's troubles begin with forgetting this forgetting.

all origination. Any erection, therefore, is raised upon a lie, a fake stability, or, if you like, the necessary originating myth of its form. Paradoxically, then, while systematicity is traditionally associated with 'justice,' Nietzsche contends that any system is established by means of an originary 'injustice.'

Once a form, he adds, is erected by 'forgetting' its originary 'evil' (contamination, aggressivity) and consolidating its stabilizing fiction, it must commandeer recognition to be sustained. Its durability is directly proportional to its power to seduce or conquer others. Universalization, however, has two unfortunate consequences (Nietzsche 1966: 49; §39). Firstly, to 'move' the majority, the singular 'un-truth' in an innovative idea must be 'thinned down, shrouded, sweetened, blunted, falsified.' The more universally a form is shared, the more it is emptied of the 'un-truth' by which it was engendered, until only a superficial façade remains. Secondly, the more conventionally accepted a form becomes, the more its originator falls prey to the self-deluded belief that what was invented is indeed the Truth, forgetting that it was ever necessary to establish it by 'forgetting' an originary injustice. Thus, the invented form becomes resistant to the kind of 'evil' that engendered it by internally condemning any similar injustices.

This dynamic of originary injustice, its concealment, and the concealing of this concealment, describes the structure of ideological conditioning. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche objects to philosophy's willful blindness to its will to power, and therefore its tendency to devolve into ideology, epitomized, for him (1966; 10; §2), by the fundamental metaphysical '*faith in opposite values*.' If his aim, then, is to free thinking from its conservative tendency towards restrictive categorization in terms of binary values, one might justifiably anticipate a complex, nuanced analysis of reciprocal contamination concerning the concepts 'truth' and 'woman' in response to the question he poses in the preface: 'Supposing truth is a woman – what then?'

If truth is a woman, Nietzsche answers, then her lovers (dogmatic philosophers) have been clumsy in their efforts to win her, and, indeed, none has succeeded, nor will succeed, since philosophical methods are inappropriately designed nets for this butterfly. Traditional philosophy is constructed precisely to ensure that philosophers will never understand the nature of the prize they seek; namely 'truth.' Implicitly juxtaposed in this answer are two versions of a paradoxical truth as untruth: 1) the philosopher's 'Truth', which is an 'untruth' born of a misunderstanding that imagines some 'truth' that can be discovered, captured and pinned by the right method; 2) the 'un-truth' of the actual state of affairs, namely a state of contamination (gradations, paradoxes, aporias), which dogmatic philosophy is not designed to capture. To accept this 'un-truth' is to recognize that ultimate Truth is a fantasy projected into the past or future to serve a dogmatic desire for metaphysical closure. In different senses, then, 'truth' is found to be contaminated at the core by its opposite; namely 'untruth.'

Given the paradoxes of truth as untruth, Nietzsche may have drawn two analogies between 'truth' and 'woman,' so shaking up sedimented ideological values associated with 'woman.' Derrida examines this proposition in his essay *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (1978). Backed by the conviction that Nietzsche's logic of contamination must apply consistently, he presses Nietzsche's text beyond what is explicitly written about the notion 'woman,' to elicit its complex shadowing. Even if Nietzsche, then, became somewhat seasick when thinking about 'woman,' Derrida insists on an implicit logic of contamination at work in his texts – if one reads a little inventively.

Nietzsche's logic, refined by Derrida (1993: 20-21) into a complex matrix named the 'plural logic of the aporia,' works harder than merely insisting on a term's plurality of

meanings.³ Instead, for him, in such notions as ‘woman’, a plurality of senses is gathered into a matrix of interrelations, which form not a unified system, but multiple aporias and paradoxes. Granting a margin of non-mastery, or entropic loss without reserve, as the ‘essential limit’ of any effort at codification, without this being reason enough to ‘choose sides with the heterogeneous or the parody (which would only reduce them once again),’ Derrida risks proposing such a matrix for reading Nietzsche’s propositions concerning women (1978: 95-101). He argues that Nietzsche typically makes three aporetic propositions joining ‘truth’ to ‘woman’ (1978: 97; 101): the traditional philosopher is linked to the ‘castrated woman’ he reviled; the ‘masked artist’ to the ‘castrating woman’ he dreaded; and the ‘free thinker’ to the ‘affirming woman’ he loved. Derrida discusses the third proposition first, reading Nietzsche with a subversive twist that finds resources in his text to undermine the more obvious reading, whereby Nietzsche condemns philosophy by calling it feminized. I shall, however, begin with the obvious analogy between ‘truth’ and ‘woman’ that Nietzsche explicitly draws in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

His opening question is intended clearly enough as a provocation directed at the tradition proceeding from Plato’s inventive inauguration, the sting of which is supposed to inhere in the analogy between the philosopher’s ‘Truth’ and castrated/castrating ‘woman.’ For Nietzsche, the philosopher’s truth was not always a ‘woman,’ but was feminized at a historical juncture, namely when Plato made philosophy a matter of objectivity and intersubjectivity. The philosophical tradition, then, is the span of decadent feminization between an illustrious inaugural moment of free thinking – marked by the paraphrase of original/originary singularity, namely, ‘I Plato, am the truth’ – and the promise of the future restitution of singular ‘un-truths’ (Derrida, 1978: 87; see Nietzsche, 1968: 40). Nietzsche (1966: 53; §43) hopes that the future philosopher will have the courage to insist that: “‘My judgment is my judgment’: no one else is easily entitled to it.’

Nietzsche’s ‘logic of contamination’ tempts one to assume, however, that he must have understood such ‘un-truth’ or singular ‘truth’ as an interplay between ‘my’ singular judgment and its intersubjective confirmation, or in Derrida’s terms (1991: 577-581), the play of signature and countersignature, where ‘signature’ stands proxy for ‘my’ traumatizing power of invention, while ‘countersignature’ stands for the cur-tailing, binding, conservative force of convention (the necessary condition for repeatability and communicability). Yet, contrary to the promise of his logic, Nietzsche’s disdain for ‘the other’ makes it fitting, in his view, to condemn the feminized philosopher’s Truth by calling it ‘intersubjective.’ In his words (1966: 53; §43; see also 51; §40): ‘One must shed the bad taste of wanting to agree with many. “Good” is no longer good when one’s neighbor mouths it. And how should there be a “common good”! The term contradicts itself: whatever can be common always has little value.’ Nietzsche, in short, combines an inauspicious evaluation of both ‘others’ and ‘woman’ in the rhetoric by which he condemns the dogmatist’s fake Truth, and promotes instead the singular, masculine ‘un-truth’ of the past and future.

Ironically, what ‘castrates’ Plato here is the obscene fantasy of monumental penile hypertrophy. The ‘feminizing’ castration-effect occurs because Plato does not view

3 Derrida (1978: 101) acknowledges that there is a plurality of ‘women’ in Nietzsche’s texts: ‘There is no one woman, no one truth in itself about women in itself: that much he did say, along with the highly diverse typology, the horde of mothers, daughters, sisters, old maids, wives, governesses, prostitutes, virgins, grandmothers, big and little girls.’

philosophizing as self-fashioning through subjectively won insight, but dreams of the ultimate Philosophical Erection; or, psychoanalytically speaking, the 'Phallus,' which stands for a universal, ultimate, objective Truth that lasts an eternity (Lacan 1977: 285). In Derrida's words (1978: 87):

once this inaugural moment has given way to the second age, here where the becoming-female of the idea is the presence or presentation of truth, Plato can no more say 'I am truth.' For here the philosopher is no longer the truth. Severed from himself, he has been severed from truth.

Due to this castration-effect, he adds (1978: 89), 'the idea withdraws, becomes transcendent, inaccessible, seductive. It beckons from afar ... Its veils float in the distance. The dream of death begins. It is woman.'

So begins, for Nietzsche (1966: 16; §9), the 'ancient, eternal story' of philosophy's will to power. A philosophical idea emerges, he insists, as 'an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of "inspiration"' (1966: 12; §5) – most often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract' (1966: 12; §5). Yet it is mistaken for a Truth, not invented, but discovered through cool, disinterested reason. Moreover, its universalization derives not from a will to truth, but from an unconscious power-lust, which, he insists (1966: 13; §6), exploits 'understanding (and misunderstanding) as a mere instrument.' Moreover, every power-lust, he notes (1966: 13-14; §6), 'would like only too well to represent just *itself* as the ultimate purpose of existence and the legitimate *master* of all the other drives. For every drive wants to be master – and it attempts to philosophize in *that spirit*.' This power-lust, then, is a 'death drive' towards the absolute stasis of eternal validity.

The 'castration-effect' is not limited to those who invent ideas and dream of their eternalization. Rather, ostensibly universal Ideas act at a distance from everyone, becoming less substantial the more universally they are confirmed. This 'distance effect' of castration renders an Idea more enchanting, perhaps. However, cut off from a singularizing desire, it is rendered as passionlessly spectral as a woman; as superficial, vacuous and decadent. On Nietzsche's testimony in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1966: 162-170; §§232-239), behind the veils of dissimulating finery 'woman' bustles with petty trivia: she is false, irrational, erratic, unfaithful, weak-minded, superstitious, sentimental, animalistic, resistant to culture, swayed by emotional excess and fecund sexual urges, weak, soft, unfaithful, inconsistent, wily, cunning, sexually promiscuous, licentious, incontinent, decadent, claustrophobic, violent, unpredictable, vicious, nihilistic, frivolous, whimsical, heteronymous, swayed by love, particularistic, atavistic, uneducable, wild, and utterly un-free.

Worst of all, for Nietzsche (1974: 125; §64), philosophy's adherents become as skeptical as aged women:

I am afraid that old women are more skeptical in their most secret heart of hearts than any man: they consider the superficiality of existence its essence, and all virtue and profundity is to them merely a veil over this 'truth,' a very welcome veil over a pudendum – in other words, a matter of decency and shame, and no more than that.

If philosophers, by analogy, have ever lifted the veil to see the abyssal flux that threatens the beautiful Idea, then, like women, they cannot act resolutely upon this 'un-truth,' but veil the lack with their magnificent imaginary erections. Nietzsche raises an

eyebrow at how little is considered sufficient support for ‘such sublime and unconditional philosopher’s edifices’ (1966: 1). Effete metaphysicians, then, knowing how soft their erections are, nevertheless go through the motions, lacking both passion and an imaginative, innovative will. Skepticism, for Nietzsche represents a ‘paralysis of the will’: timidly abdicating all responsibility, skeptics ‘no longer know independence of decisions and the intrepid sense of pleasure in willing’ (1966: 130; §208).

Taking the analogy further, Nietzsche adds that woman ‘castrates because she is castrated’ (Derrida, 1978: 89). Woman, as utterly skeptical, ‘does not *want* truth’ (Nietzsche 1966: 163; §232). In fact, he claims: ‘From the beginning, nothing has been more alien, repugnant, and hostile to woman than truth – her great art is the lie, her highest concern is mere appearance and beauty.’ However, if ‘woman,’ as Derrida notes, is not the least interested in truth, and does not believe in it, she is nevertheless canny enough to see that ‘man’ needs it (1978: 53; 61; 97). As Nietzsche continues, ‘Let us men confess it: we honor and love precisely *this* art and *this* instinct in woman.’ It is in her interest to fake the Truth. She uses her seductive arts of dissimulating adornment to confound the credulous men into believing in the illusion of their power to win her, to pin her down, and in so doing she secures her power over them (‘she surely wants to inspire fear of herself’). By analogy, traditional philosophers, while secretly skeptical, still deceive, beguile and seduce others with cunning promises of elevation and delight, so mastering their desires and cutting them off from the freedom of their own inventive powers.

But in a reverse action, ‘woman’ also ‘castrates’ herself. She is unequalled, Nietzsche claims, in the art of ‘seducing one’s neighbor to a good opinion and afterwards believing piously in this opinion’ (1966: 89-90; §148). Analogously, philosophers, having mistakenly configured the world to suit themselves, force this invention on themselves and others for so long that they can no longer remember the invented status of their own Ideas, and coming in this way to believe in them, they succumb to ideological tyranny (Nietzsche 1966: 16; §9). In its feminized form, then, philosophy can only gauge its effect of truth through intersubjective confirmation, but the success with which it deceives others beguiles its adherents into self-deception. Like women, they become enchanted by the beauty of the disguise and aggressively paranoid about preserving the deception, growing poisonous in their aim to eradicate in others the very kind of inventive life that engendered their own power (Nietzsche, 1966: 35-37; §25; Derrida, 1978: 89). Feminine artistry, therefore, aiming to deceive, manipulate, stunt and control, becomes a stultifying power that is hostile to life, and since ‘life itself is *will to power*’ (Nietzsche, 1966: 21; §13), her desire for control poisons the will to power. Analogously, then, philosophy castrates philosophers. Adumbrating contemporary critiques of discursive power, Nietzsche notes that,

the most diverse philosophers keep filling in a definite fundamental scheme of possible philosophies. Under an invisible spell, they always revolve once more in the same orbit; however independent of each other they may feel themselves with their critical or systematic wills, something within them leads them, something impels them in a definite order, one after the other – to wit, the innate systematic structure and relationship of their concepts. Their thinking is, in fact, far less a discovery than a recognition, a remembering, a return and a homecoming to a remote primordial, and inclusive household of the soul, out of which those concepts grew originally: philosophizing is to this extent a kind of atavism of the highest order (1966: 27; §20).

Attributing all such ideological conditioning to the effect of 'feminine' castration, Nietzsche enjoins future free thinkers to resist poisoning the will to power by keeping a distance from 'woman.' His new philosophers will be severe men, who have no time to waste on the cunning feminine falsity of philosophical 'untruth.' In his words (1966: 134-5; §210),

They will be *harder* (and perhaps not always only against themselves) than humane people might wish; they will not dally with 'Truth' to be 'pleased' or 'elevated' or 'inspired' by her. On the contrary, they will have little faith that *truth* of all things should be accompanied by such amusements for our feelings.

Indeed, he adds, if they cannot smile at such folly, they might 'feel a genuine nausea over everything that is enthusiastic, idealistic, feminine, hermaphroditic in this vein.' Accordingly, Nietzsche claims that free thinking occurs beyond the castrated and castrating dream of establishing universal laws, grounded by objectively determined philosophical systems or principles, which merely organize existing conventional values into neat binary categories. But he dismisses as nihilistic the option of keeping an absolute distance from 'woman'; that is, pure rebellious destruction of ideological forms, which invents nothing to replace the devastation of value.

Instead, Nietzsche's free thinking becomes a matter of deliberate self-legislation. Autonomy is not new, but he insists that autonomy conventionally understood is still heteronomy; under the dictatorship of reason. Proposing that 'independent' thinking obeyed the rigors of reason, rather than blindly accepting traditional forms, philosophy assumes that what is discovered through reason, shorn not only of prejudice and habit but also of dis-orders such as paradox and aporia, can in principle command universal agreement. Nietzsche, however, insists that the true state of affairs belongs within the domain of aporia, paradox, dilemma, contamination, which conventional reason cannot abide. For him (1966: 12; §4), to face the 'truth' is to 'recognize untruth as a condition of life,' which means putting all conventional values at risk by facing the abyss that replaces them. 'A philosophy that risks this,' he adds, 'would by that token alone place itself beyond good and evil.'

Nietzsche, in sum, places the becoming-ideology of philosophy, driven by the will to power, under the rubric of 'castration' or feminization. Rejecting the outright destruction of all value as nihilistic, he commends a self-affirmative, inventive free thinking as the condition for overcoming feminization and, moreover, for genuinely ethical action. Such free-thinking, which empowers men both to keep their distance from 'woman' and to face and overcome nihilism, is placed squarely within the ostensibly masculine domain of brutal honesty about the 'truth' as un-truth. Yet, pressed by a firmer commitment to Nietzsche's 'logic of contamination,' Derrida recognizes that the free thinking he heralds demands equal attention to the alternative supposition that it is the free thinker's 'truth as untruth,' rather than the elusive object of the philosophers' desire, that is analogous to 'woman.'

Reading Nietzsche against the grain, by means of a small inventive twist in interpretative reading, Derrida derives an opposing evaluation of the feminine from Nietzsche's analogy between 'truth' and 'woman.' Proposing this unconventional reading first (as noted), he finds in *The Gay Science* (1974: 123-4; §60) the thinnest of whispers; a barely audible spectral sound that hovers above the word 'distance' (1978: 47-9). But let us play along with Derrida here, and allow him to manifest this ghost for us, for it represents a significant element of his matrix. In the fragment he cites, Nietz-

sche imagines the effect of women on men to be like the sudden appearance, to a man standing amidst crashing breakers in a stormy sea, of a great ship in the distance, which passes 'like an immense butterfly over the dark sea.' As he puts it:

as if born out of nothing, there appears before the gate of this hellish labyrinth, only a few fathoms away – a large sailboat, gliding along as silently as a ghost. Oh, what ghostly beauty! How magically it touches me! Has all the calm and taciturnity of the world embarked on it? Does my happiness itself sit in this quiet place?...

It seems as if the noise here had led me into fantasies. All great noise leads us to move happiness into some quiet distance. When a man stands in the midst of his own noise, in the midst of his own surf of plans and projects, then he is apt also to see quiet, magical beings gliding past him and to long for their happiness and seclusion: *women*. He almost thinks that his better self dwells there among the women, and that in these quiet regions even the loudest surf turns into deathly quiet, and life itself into a dream about life.

If the 'almost' is not enough to break the enchantment, Nietzsche, in explicit confirmation of the analogy first drawn, issues this warning:

Yet! Yet! Noble enthusiast, even on the most beautiful sailboat there is a lot of noise, and unfortunately much small and petty noise. The magic and the most powerful effect of woman, is, in philosophical language, action at a distance, *actio in distans*; but this requires first of all and above all – *distance*.

I have outlined how, for Nietzsche, this 'action at a distance' represents the system of castration that has trapped philosophers since Plato. Yet, for Derrida, there is enough of a symptomatic slip in this phrase to suggest, contra the conscious Nietzsche, that 'woman' is the quintessential figure of the free thinker he heralds. He here deliberately associates 'woman' and the second sense of 'un-truth' outlined above, instead of the more obvious association first discussed. Taking up Nietzsche's injunction to keep one's distance from 'the feminine operation,' which is an 'effect at a distance,' Derrida makes the subtle shift whose 'butterfly effect' is the radical transvaluation of sexual difference. Initially playing along with Nietzsche, he notes: 'A woman seduces from a distance. In fact, distance is the very element of her power. Yet one must beware to keep one's own distance from her beguiling song of enchantment. A distance from distance must be maintained' (1978: 49).

The injunction to maintain 'a distance from distance,' then, is the injunction to 'keep one's distance from the feminine operation (from the *actio in distans*),' or, that is, to become reflectively aware of it. Such reflection upon the feminine operation, Derrida (1978: 49) notes (here is the shift), does not amount to approaching it. Rather, tacitly invoking the myth of the veil of Isis, he insists, one approaches the feminine operation 'at the risk of death itself.' Why? It might be because 'woman' is not some determinable thing, comparable to other things, waiting there at a distance, to be approached, inspected, dissected, and pinned down, or ignored and left behind. 'Perhaps,' as he puts it, 'woman – a non-identity, a non-figure, a simulacrum – is distance's very chasm, the out-distancing of distance, the interval's cadence, distance itself, if we could still say such a thing, distance *itself*.'

Derrida, then, interprets the phrase 'woman's seduction operates at a distance' not to imply, as Nietzsche has it, that 'woman' remains beautiful and enchanting only at a

distance, for closer inspection reveals nothing but a superficial façade veiling ugly decadence, but that 'woman' is another name for the operation of *différance*. For Derrida (1982: 8-9; 18-20), this notion joins two incompatible, but equally necessary senses. Firstly, its operation as 'spacing' acknowledges the uncontrollable contamination or proliferation of differences that characterizes the actual state of affairs. Secondly, its operation as 'temporalization' acknowledges that, for anything to take shape, one must violently restrict or defer the play of differences for a while. Such mutual violating contamination implies that, whatever takes shape through 'temporalization' must always be a temporary fiction, which, while necessary for making-sense, can never be an eternal essence (an unconditionally present term), situated above the undermining forces of 'spacing.' Thus, for Derrida (1978: 51), one can take the 'effect at a distance' which names the feminine operation to mean that:

There is no such thing as the essence of woman because woman averts, she is averted of herself. Out of the depths, endless and unfathomable, she engulfs and distorts all vestige of essentiality, of identity, of property. And the philosophical discourse, blinded, founders on these shoals and is hurled down these depthless depths to its ruin. There is no such thing as the truth of woman, but it is because of that abyssal divergence of the truth, because that untruth is 'truth.' Woman is but one name for that untruth of truth.

Derrida (1978: 51-3), then, implicitly challenges one to re-read all instances where Nietzsche insists upon the 'complicity (and not the unity) of woman, life, seduction, modesty, and all the effects of veiling,' in a way that strengthens the proposition that 'woman' is the name for the salutary un-truth that characterizes the actual state of affairs. Take for example the following statement from *The Gay Science* (1974: 271-2; cited in Derrida 1978: 51-3): 'But perhaps this is the greatest charm of life: it puts a golden-embroidered veil of lovely potentialities over itself, promising, resisting, modest, mocking, sympathetic, seductive. Yes, life is a woman!' This statement, as Derrida (1978: 53) suggests here, could imply that 'woman' as 'un-truth' is one of the nicknames for a *différance* that remains distant, abyssal, and both seduces and mocks credulous dogmatic philosophers who understand neither 'truth' nor 'woman' if they believe in either. Moreover, he insists, she is implicitly wiser than they, for 'she at least knows that there is no truth, that truth has no place here and that no one has a place for truth.'

Similarly, Derrida takes Nietzsche's answer to the question that opens *Beyond Good and Evil*, to suggest the following: If truth is a woman, it remains in excess of what it seems to be at face value, and philosophers, seduced by this 'face-value' make of it a lie. As Nietzsche admits: 'What is certain is that she has not allowed herself to be won – and today every kind of dogmatism is left standing dispirited and discouraged. *If* it is left standing at all!' It is self-affirming 'woman' who actively limits the tyranny of dogmatic ideologies. Again, Derrida insists (1978: 55): 'Woman (truth) will not be pinned down. That which will not be pinned down by truth is, in truth – *feminine*.' The feminine is a power of self-affirmation, which shakes off all ideology (including patriarchy) – that is, she does not react against it, but is unaffected by its power, affirming, instead, her own power. Woman, then, is the quintessential figure of Nietzsche's free thinker, who understands the truth that there is no truth, without nihilistic skepticism, but with the cheerful, self-affirmative, dionysiac power of inventive renewal that he endorses as the proper reaction to such abyssal un-truth.

What! In all honesty, it takes some ingenuity to sustain this subversive gesture. Nevertheless, it remains important that Derrida is willing to risk supposing that un-truth is a woman. From this transvaluation in the domain of sexual difference, it follows that dogmatic philosophy, demanding, as Derrida puts it, 'truth, science, and objectivity in all their castrated delusions of virility' (1978: 65) – not to speak of faith, continence, consistency, sublimation as sexual abstinence, universality, predictability, coldness, obedience to reason as system, law and order, duty, progress, educability, and *Bildung* – must be understood as a matter of blind, masculine narcissism rather than feminine deception. As one of Nietzsche's new philosophers, then, Derrida accepts the complex form of his new style of thinking, but he resists the metaphorical configuration that characterizes his rhetoric, insisting instead that the castrated/castrating dynamic whereby philosophy becomes ideology is a matter of masculinization, not feminization. Here, masculine ideology, arising from a paranoid fear of the self-undermining dynamic of the will to power, is countered by 'the feminine' as the site of transgression, derived from recognizing un-truth as the actual state of affairs.⁴

It might seem strange to suggest that Derrida's thinking here accords with psychoanalytic theory, which offers similar means to adopt Nietzsche's logic of contamination while avoiding his prejudices concerning *inter alia* 'woman' and 'the other.' After all, Freud is as notorious as Nietzsche for defining women negatively as a lack of masculine accoutrements, and as pessimistic in his assessment of what Ibsen called the 'compact majority.' However, in its Lacanian re-interpretation, psychoanalytic theory indeed takes this step through and beyond Nietzsche, not by rejecting outright Nietzsche's (and, indeed, Freud's) definition of 'the feminine' as 'lack' or 'castration,' nor by insisting that ethical thinking should shift focus to the other above the individual, but, like Derrida, by insisting that Nietzsche's logic of contamination supports a transvaluation of these values.⁵ Lacanian psychoanalysis, moreover, offers the means to see this as a transvaluation, rather than a reversal of binaries, since it proposes a division in the feminine site of transgression, whereby transgression takes shape in two ways; namely the nihilistic or hysterical will to pure destruction that Nietzsche recognized as feminine, but also the self-affirmative domain of ethical action that Nietzsche typically reserves for masculinity. For Lacan, like Derrida, the self-affirmative inventiveness that characterizes free thinking belongs to the feminine, for it presupposes an initial willingness to transgress and face nihilism.

Ironically, for all his perspicacity, Nietzsche did not foresee that the proverbial 'untimely' character of his thinking would undergo a strange turnaround that renders it out of step not only with its own time, but also with 'ours.' He is *par excellence* the thinker beyond conventionally determined values and binary oppositions. His free thinking is ideally characterized by a permanent suspicion of all ideologies. This implies, of course, that he should have been the first to recognize patriarchy as an ideology. Yet his rhetorical use of the epithet 'feminization' to condemn the becoming-ideology of philosophy relies for its effect on assuming the most stereotypical and con-

4 I say the feminine, without wishing to invoke any kind of 'feminism,' because I agree with Derrida that insofar as it becomes ideological, feminism is a repetition of the masculine gesture (Derrida 1978: 65).

5 Notably, a detailed study of what in *Beyond Good and Evil* may stand as a precursor to Lacan's psychoanalytic theory in general could fill a book, for while there is hardly a mention of Nietzsche in Lacan's ethics seminar, it would be easy enough to see Lacan's treatment of the kind of ethical action promoted by psychoanalytic theory as a sustained engagement with Nietzsche's arguments in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

ventional values for the concept 'woman,' pre-given by this ideology of all ideologies that cuts across all discourses. The performative contradiction here seems obvious; in the very gesture by which he condemns the philosopher's Truth as ideological and exhorts thinkers to move beyond conventionally given values and oppositions towards the complex style of deliberate free thinking he heralded, Nietzsche reveals that he remains unreflectively subject to precisely the kind of conventional, heteronymous, and oppositional thinking he so strenuously resists in principle. Notably, acknowledging that the notion 'woman' is characterized in his texts by a diverse plurality, exacerbates the performative contradiction, for it strengthens the case that Nietzsche of all thinkers had the least reason to allow himself recourse in *Beyond Good and Evil*, of all texts, to a rhetorical construct that intends to demean traditional philosophy by calling it 'feminized.' While his previously untimely logic of contamination now so dominates the contemporary mindset that one could call it a defining characteristic, it is precisely a stronger commitment to this style of thinking that sniffs out the musty odor of an unreflectively adopted, outdated, even quaint, patriarchal conventionality that dooms his pronouncements concerning sexual difference, buttressed by a stereotypical binary opposition between the communal and the singular, to a less romantic kind of untimeliness.

In retrospect, not only does it seem rather naïve to claim as his own the stereotypes he repeated concerning sexual difference and the 'compact majority,' but again, it is precisely his logic of contamination that should have warned him against exaggerating the value of self-transparent singularity. Nietzsche, for example, insists that his own views concerning women are singular rather than a matter of 'learning.' While he grants that learning, like nourishment, changes us (1966: 162; §231), he insists that deep down lies an unteachable kernel from which 'speaks an unchangeable "this is I."' Self-knowledge, then, is a matter of taking steps along the path 'to the great stupidity we are, to our spiritual *fatum*, to what is *unteachable* very "deep down."' Nietzsche thinks that this preamble will more readily permit him 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.' Yet, he might have reminded himself of what he already knew (1966: 31; §23): 'A proper physio-psychology has to contend with unconscious resistance in the heart of the investigator, it has "the heart" against it.' The fact that even the loudest critic of ideological conditioning, and the greatest champion of honesty, singularity and individual responsibility, was yet blind to the way in which his values were unconsciously shaped by an ideology, calls for the question of the extent to which ideology can be resisted. Moreover, this places into question his claim that the masculine truth-as-untruth inheres solely in the singular, inventive power of each rugged individual who must walk his own lonely path to insight, shaking off confirmation and evaluation by others as degradation.

What can be learned, then, from Nietzsche's 'blindness and insight'? In *Beyond Good and Evil*, to sum up, Nietzsche presses philosophical thinking beyond ideological self-delusion towards self-knowledge. He exhorts future thinkers to overcome the will to power, not by eradicating this will as such (this is impossible), but by resisting the ideological outcome. This can be achieved, on his account, by risking the path opened up by the logic of contamination, acknowledging the dynamic of the will to power, and short-circuiting the devolution of invention into convention by a constant dynamic of re-inventive renewal that does not, on the other side of convention, lose itself to pure flux. Such new thinking, for Nietzsche, would return to philosophers their

ethical power. In his view, the free thinking required by a genuinely ethical stance (which he understood in terms of a singular responsibility for autonomous decision-making) occurs beyond any of traditional philosophy's ideological formations, for a person neither thinks freely nor acts ethically, but only calculates obediently, when bound by a dogma that presents itself as universally valid, complete, and invincible. Free thinking, then, as Nietzsche insists (1966: 36; §25), is less a matter of having the strength to stand up for and act upon individual convictions, than of, above all, having the courage to question them; and not just intermittently (when things go wrong). More radically, it is a matter of keeping such convictions permanently in question, since no individual, no matter how perspicacious, is capable of the absolute self-transparency required to master finally the unconscious undertow towards conventionality and habit inscribed in the will to power; precisely because it operates to a large extent unconsciously, which means that we can only make its effects visible in retrospect, when something has gone wrong with it. Nietzsche knew all this, but he did not live up to his insight, allowing himself the greatest indulgence (in his own terms, the greatest weakness of spirit) when it came to women. But no thinkers, not even Nietzsche (1966: 12; §5), can ever quite be 'honest enough in their work.'

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