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Nietzsche's *Scala Amoris*: Nietzsche and Diotima on Eros and Philosophy

by

Paul R. Murphy

Under the Direction of Jessica Berry, Ph.D.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

Nietzsche's conception of eros and its role in the development of philosophers is similar to the conception of those same topics espoused by Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*. Nietzsche and Diotima agree that eros is an insatiable desire to possess the beautiful, that eros aims at immortality through reproduction, and that philosophy requires an ascent beyond sexual desire to "higher" forms of eros, which nevertheless are still modeled on heterosexual reproduction. Understanding these facets of Nietzsche's view leads to an apparent contradiction in that Nietzsche thinks of philosophy on the model of reproduction and ascribes to the philosopher both the female and the male roles in heterosexual reproduction. I argue that this ambivalence reflects Nietzsche's view that practicing philosophy requires balancing two conflicting philosophical tendencies: on the one hand, pursuit of truth, which involves dissatisfaction with oneself; on the other hand, creation, which involves acknowledgment of one's own capacity and value.

INDEX WORDS: Metaphilosophy, Desire, Plato, Symposium, Nietzsche, Diotima

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DEDICATION

For Lindsay and Mom.

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I am extraordinarily grateful to Dr. Berry for her advice, help, and encouragement. I am also very thankful to Dr. Rand and Dr. Piñeros-Glasscock for the help they have given me, not only while working on this thesis but throughout my time at Georgia State.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | V |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS | VII |
| 1 INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 2 THE LADDER OF LOVE | 2 |
| 3 EROTIC <i>AGON</i> AND THE WAR OF THE SEXES..... | 11 |
| 4 FEMININE PHILOSOPHERS..... | 14 |
| 5 NIETZSCHE ON BEAUTY AND ANDROGYNOUS PHILOSOPHY | 17 |
| 6 CONCLUSION | 21 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 23 |

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil*

BT = *The Birth of Tragedy*

D = *Daybreak*

GM = *On the Genealogy of Morality*

GS = *The Gay Science*

HAH = *Human, All Too Human*

TI = *Twilight of the Idols*

1 INTRODUCTION

In Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates recounts a conversation with a "wise woman of Mantinea" named Diotima (201d).¹ Socrates says that it was Diotima who taught him "the art of love" – a lesson Socrates greatly appreciated, since he says in the *Symposium* "the only thing I say I understand is the art of love" (177e).² We know that Nietzsche took Socrates' self-evaluation seriously.³ In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche envisions the aftermath of Plato's *Symposium*, when Socrates leaves at dawn, "while behind him on the benches and on the floor his fellow carousers remained behind asleep, dreaming of Socrates, the true eroticist" (BT 13). At the other end of his productive life, Nietzsche makes clear that Socrates' erotic prowess extends beyond the dreamworld, saying "Socrates was a great *erotic*" (TI II 8).

Nietzsche engaged extensively with both Socrates and Plato and did so in a nuanced and multifaceted way. On the whole, however, Nietzsche tends to adopt a critical and even antagonistic relationship toward both. In the preface of *Beyond Good and Evil* he says that "the worst, most prolonged, and most dangerous of all errors" was "Plato's invention of pure spirit and the Good in itself," and also insinuates that Socrates might be responsible for Plato's error (BGE Preface).⁴ Surprisingly, given his frequent criticism of Plato, Nietzsche's conception of eros and its role in the development of philosophers is similar to the conception of those same topics espoused by Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*. Nietzsche and Diotima are in agreement that eros is an insatiable

¹ All translations of Plato's *Symposium* are by A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, in Cooper 1997. Actually, the story of the *Symposium* is recounted by Apollodorus, many years after the alleged discussion between Socrates and the other celebrants at the symposium. However, there is not space here to examine the significance of this "frame narrative."

² Socrates also claims in the *Phaedrus* to possess an "erotic art" (257a).

³ According to Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche designated the *Symposium* as his *Lieblingsdichtung* when graduating from school (Kaufmann 1984: 474).

⁴ Walter Kaufmann argues that Socrates was, in fact, a model for Nietzsche (Kaufmann 1984). Kaufmann suggests that Nietzsche's animosity toward Plato has mistakenly led commentators to overlook Nietzsche's deep agreement with and admiration for Socrates. Nevertheless, even Kaufmann admits that Nietzsche felt obligated to distance himself from Socrates and criticize Socrates (Kaufmann 1984: 479).

desire to possess what is beautiful, that eros aims at immortality through reproduction, and that philosophy and other great cultural achievements require an ascent beyond sexual desire to “higher” forms of eros, which nevertheless are still modeled on heterosexual reproduction. Understanding these facets of Nietzsche’s view helps to make sense of Nietzsche’s comments on the development of philosophers, the agonistic nature of eros, and the hostile relationship between men and women. However, such an understanding also leads to an apparent contradiction in that Nietzsche thinks of philosophy on the model of reproduction and ascribes to the philosopher both the female and the male roles in heterosexual reproduction. I argue that Nietzsche’s ambivalence about whether philosophers are essentially like men or like women reflects his view that philosophical development requires balancing two conflicting philosophical tendencies: on the one hand, pursuit of truth, which is motivated by desire and therefore involves dissatisfaction with oneself; on the other hand, the ability to create, which involves acknowledgment of one’s own capacity and value. In my view, the affinity between Nietzsche and Diotima has been overlooked and recognizing this affinity affords a better understanding of Nietzsche’s metaphilosophical views.

2 THE LADDER OF LOVE

We can begin to see the similarities between Nietzsche and Diotima when we consider two claims at the heart of Diotima’s lesson on eros. First, she claims that lovers want to possess whatever it is that they love *forever*. Second, she claims that those who are “pregnant in soul” (a phrase of Diotima’s, which I will later explain in more detail) should move on from ordinary love of human bodies upwards through love of customs and knowledge until finally reaching love of the beautiful itself. The hierarchy involved in the second of these lessons is often called Diotima’s

scala amoris or “ladder of love.” This ascent, which subordinates the physical to some ethereal “in-itself,” looks antithetical to Nietzsche’s philosophical project, because Nietzsche explicitly formulated that project in opposition to the “otherworldliness” of Platonism. Though I will ultimately argue that this conflict is merely *apparent*, there are certainly good reasons why some have seen Diotima and Nietzsche as in conflict.

Robert Pippin, for example, considers Nietzsche and Diotima to be in significant disagreement. According to Pippin, Diotima’s account implies that the lower rungs of the ladder must be unsatisfying if individuals are to be spurred “upwards” toward the beautiful itself (Pippin 2001: 89). Pippin says that “Diotima’s defense of such a claim rests on something that Nietzsche is most concerned to attack: the assumption that no one could find sexual satisfaction in such a body, or any finite, limited delight in the beautiful, ultimately satisfying” (Pippin 2001: 89). The ladder seems to involve striving toward a perfect love – a love beyond particularity and temporality. In Pippin’s view, such an idealized conception of love is precisely what Nietzsche is mocking when he calls philosophers clumsy and inexperienced lovers (Pippin 2001: 90; BGE Preface). A competent lover would not be so insecure as to demand guarantees of the eternal possession of the beloved. Pippin holds that for Nietzsche, “the so-called ascent described by Diotima is not an ascent but a diversion of eros, away from what can only be enjoyed with great risk and uncertainty, toward what will satisfy souls already so fearful, even contemptuous of time and finitude” (Pippin 2001: 89-90).

Laurence Lampert, similarly, interprets Diotima and Nietzsche as deeply opposed to one another. In the course of interpreting Leo Strauss’s *Note on the Plan of Beyond Good and Evil* (1973), Lampert identifies “dogmatic Platonism” with “Diotima’s Platonism” (Lampert 1996: 28). In light of Nietzsche’s explicit and vehement opposition to dogmatic Platonism, Diotima thus

becomes Nietzsche's antagonist. Lampert and Pippin both allow for the possibility that Diotima is not representative of Plato's views. They both suggest that a subtler interpretation of the *Symposium* or of Plato's dialogues in general might reveal a more human understanding of love, one that is more compatible with Nietzsche's own perspective on eros.⁵ However, I will argue that even in the words of Diotima herself (as recalled by Socrates, as reported by Aristodemus, as told by Apollodorus, as written by Plato) there are several fundamental tenets with which Nietzsche agrees.

Diotima sets the stage for ascent by asking Socrates what the lover of beautiful things desires. Socrates answers that the lover of beautiful things desires that beautiful things "become his own" (204d). Love, according to Diotima, is the desire to possess. Similarly, Nietzsche says, "sexual love... is what most clearly reveals itself as a craving for new property," but he also suggests that nearly all love is essentially such a "craving for new property," only slightly less clearly revealed (GS 14).⁶ He writes, "Greed and love: such different feelings these terms evoke! And yet it could be the same instinct, named twice" (GS 14). Thus, Nietzsche and Diotima agree that erotic desires are impulses toward possession.

Knowing the goal of eros, we can evaluate what Diotima and Nietzsche both say about the conditions under which the goal can be achieved and eros satisfied. Diotima says that Eros desires good and beautiful things because he lacks them (202d) and that "anything he finds his way to always slips away" (203e).⁷ Pippin is clearly right that Diotima's account makes nearly all erotic

⁵ In 1864, the young Nietzsche himself wrote a very short essay arguing that the *Symposium* should be interpreted holistically and with sensitivity to its dramatic characteristics (see Nietzsche, 1864 in bibliography). I do think there is something extremely important to be said about Nietzsche's understanding of the distance between Plato and Platonism, but to quote Pippin "doing so would lead us quickly into many issues in Plato" (Pippin 2001: 90). I want to confine myself as much as possible to Nietzsche and, more importantly, I think that the affinity between Nietzsche and Diotima has been overlooked.

⁶ I say "nearly" because Nietzsche suggests one rare exception to the greediness of love: friendship (GS 14).

⁷ Here I capitalize Eros because Diotima is describing the *daimon* or spirit Eros using the language of personification. However, this description of the *daimon* is intended to shed light on the phenomenon of eros.

relationships out to be unsatisfying; I do not think, however, that Pippin is right to claim this feature of Diotima's eros as a point of disagreement between her and Nietzsche. Nietzsche in fact seems to echo Diotima when he says, "We slowly grow tired of the old, of what we safely possess, and we stretch out our hands again; even the most beautiful landscape is no longer sure of our love after we have lived in it for three months... possession usually diminishes the possession" (GS 14). There are myriad passages in which Nietzsche advises both men and women that they will remain attractive to a particular lover only so long as they remain somehow outside the full grasp of that lover. These passages, to which I will return in the second section of this paper, indicate Nietzsche's belief that eros is essentially a striving and cannot be maintained once a person has attained what they were striving for. Nietzsche and Diotima certainly must differ in their explanations of why eros cannot be satisfied, since Nietzsche's explanation cannot involve anything like the Platonic forms, but the importance of that difference can only be appreciated after grasping their agreement on the insatiability of eros.

For Diotima, eros is so insatiable that it ultimately ends in a desire to possess its object forever (206a). Such eternal possession is possible only on the basis of immortality, and so eros aims to "give birth in beauty," because reproduction is the closest human approximation of immortality (206e-207a). Whatever object is desired, immortality is the aim of eros.⁸ The distinction between the object of erotic desire and its aim is evident in the fact that we can ask *why* a person wants to possess the object of their desire (Fine 2020: 14).

Though the aim of all eros is to achieve immortality by giving birth, Diotima distinguishes between those pregnant in body, who are destined to strive for immortality through actual sexual

⁸ See Fine 2020 for the distinction Diotima makes between the object and the aim of erotic desire: "The object is the intensional description under which something is desired. The aim is what one's desire is ultimately directed toward, whether desired under that description or not" (Fine 2020: 14).

reproduction, and those pregnant in soul, who are destined to give birth to works of art, ideas, and theories.⁹ According to Diotima, those who are by nature pregnant in soul should proceed upwards through several stages of loving. First, they should love one beautiful body, eventually all beautiful bodies, then beautiful customs, then various beautiful kinds of knowledge, then finally Beauty itself. Pippin is right that the lower kinds of love must here be unsatisfying in order to spur the would-be philosopher upwards, but it is also true that Diotima views each step on this upward journey as good and necessary. Similarly, to be pregnant in soul is clearly superior in Diotima's view, but it is important that Diotima believes *both* forms of pregnancy are honorable: "when a man and a woman come together in order to give birth, this is a godly affair. Pregnancy, reproduction – this is an immortal thing for a mortal animal to do" (206c).

Nietzsche similarly holds that the greediness of eros aims ultimately at reproduction. He says of Schopenhauer "he thinks that the drive to procreate is *negated* by beauty," but Nietzsche says in response to Schopenhauer "someone is contradicting you, and I am afraid it is nature. Why are the tones, colors, smells, and rhythmic movement of nature beautiful in the first place? What does beauty *bring out*?" (TI IX 22). The clear implication is that the real purpose of beauty is to incite sexual desire and reproduction. Nietzsche even alludes to Diotima's speech in order to counter Schopenhauer's claim that beauty is a respite from sexuality, suggesting she might be right that beauty is a temptation to procreate "from the most sensual all the way up to the most spiritual" (TI IX 22). Then, in TI IX 23, Nietzsche writes:

Plato goes even further. He says, with an innocence that only a Greek could have (and not a "Christian"), that there could never have been a Platonic philosophy without such beautiful young men in Athens: the sight of them is what first puts the philosopher's soul in an erotic rapture and won't let it rest until it has sunk the seed

⁹ Diotima does say at 206c that "all of us are pregnant both in body and in soul" but later, at 208e-209a, plainly says that "some people are pregnant in body... while others are pregnant in soul." It may be that all people have some degree of potential for both types of pregnancy, but those she calls "pregnant in soul" are "those who are even more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies" (209a).

of all high things into such beautiful soil. Another bizarre saint! – You cannot believe your ears, even if you *can* believe Plato.

He goes on to say, “I still remember, *against* Schopenhauer and in Plato’s honor, that the whole higher culture and literature of *classical* France also grew on the ground of sexual interest” (TI IX 23). Nietzsche is *against* Schopenhauer here, and he suggests that you *can* believe Plato’s claims about the sexual origins of philosophy.

Of course, the picture of desire as insatiable, appropriative, and born from lack is very Schopenhauerian. Given that Nietzsche largely agreed with Schopenhauer’s vision of a world of striving and suffering, the similarity of this vision of desire to Schopenhauer’s might constitute more evidence that Nietzsche would not have straightforwardly opposed Diotima’s view. Nietzsche disagrees with Schopenhauer, though, that we ought to reject desire merely because it has such a character. Nietzsche, like Diotima, wants to acknowledge the fact that higher culture and philosophy originate out of sexual desire. As Maudemarie Clark describes it, in Nietzsche’s view, the initial drive to theorize stems from a desire to “appropriate the foreign” (Clark 2015: 148; BGE 230). As we have seen, such a desire to appropriate is precisely what eros is. In the case of the philosopher, this desire is even so strong as to want to assimilate, incorporate, or digest the objects of its desire (BGE 230). Here “the foreign” means whatever a person does not yet have. Just as a beloved or a landscape is more alluring the more unknown they are, the suggestion is that the same dynamic is what motivates knowledge.¹⁰ In saying this about philosophers, Nietzsche reemphasizes that these “needs and abilities are the same ones that physiologists have established for everything that lives, grows, and propagates” (BGE 230). That is, again, philosophy is motivated by the same “base” drives that maintain and propagate life.

¹⁰ Because Diotima also holds that eros is the desire for something you do not yet have, insofar as Diotima claims that philosophy is a form of eros, she also holds that philosophy is a desire to appropriate the foreign.

However, just as it was important to emphasize for Diotima that the lower rungs of the ladder from sexual desire to philosophy are still honorable, it is important that Nietzsche believes that philosophy and higher culture require growing beyond the sexual, rising to the level of the spiritual – the soul cannot be contented with interest in beautiful bodies. The initial sexual desire and then romantic love is necessary to start the journey toward philosophy, but Nietzsche also notes that it is important that philosophers “not be stuck to any person, not even somebody we love best” (BGE 41). What’s more, the philosopher must not become stuck to their homeland or “some field of study” (BGE 41). Nietzsche expresses this concern in GS 285, where he says, “no more resting place stands open for your heart.” He there uses the metaphor of a lake that rose higher when it “formed a dam where it used to flow off” (GS 285). Mirroring Diotima’s “ladder of love,” we can see here Nietzsche’s concern that would-be philosophers will become “stuck” on some lower object of love, failing to proceed to a higher form of the “spiritualization of sensuality” (TI V 3). Nietzsche says that for the sake of truth, “the thinker must always from time to time drive away those people he loves... so that they may display their sting and malice and cease to *seduce* him” (D 479). In GS 285, when Nietzsche says that “no more resting place stands open for your heart” he also says that in order to dam yourself up you must, “arm yourself against any ultimate peace” and “will the eternal recurrence of war and peace.” Driving away loved ones is not meant to extirpate love or desire, in fact it will likely enhance it, given Nietzsche’s view that we can only desire what is unfamiliar, what we lack. Denying oneself access to readily attainable objects of desire is like damming oneself up, reigniting desire by aiming it at new and higher objects. Erotic desire is both necessary and necessarily frustrated in the course of developing a higher spirituality.

Such necessities go some way to explaining why Nietzsche says that philosophers have always avoided and should always avoid marriage and sex (GM III 7-8). Clark notes that this claim

of Nietzsche's, made in the context of expositing the priestly origins of philosophy, is commonly understood as a merely practical concern about the conditions most conducive to philosophizing, suggesting Nietzsche believes that marriage interferes with the philosopher's need to be left alone to get work done and sexual desire distracts from intellectual work (Clark 2017: 104). I don't necessarily disagree with this common interpretation but merely want to note that Nietzsche, in this passage, is also making a separate point about the relationship between philosophy and sexuality.¹¹ He says, "as for the 'chastity' of philosophers, this kind of spirit obviously has its fruitfulness somewhere other than in children; perhaps elsewhere also the continued existence of their name, their little immortality" (GM III 8). Thus, it is not desire that is problematic for philosophers, but only certain expressions of it. We also see in this quote from GM III 8 an implied connection between reproduction and immortality. Whereas most people might seek "their little immortality" through children, philosophers seek it in another way. Elsewhere, Nietzsche says, "to create things on which time will try its teeth to no avail; to be concerned in form, *in substance* with a little immortality—I was never humble enough to demand less of myself" (TI IX 51). Thus, Nietzsche and Diotima are in agreement that eros is an insatiable desire for possession of what is beautiful, that eros aims at immortality through reproduction, and that those pregnant in spirit should ascend to higher objects of desire and new forms of fruitfulness.

As Suzanne Obdrzalek has noted, the insistence that carnal desire should be transcended makes Diotima's ladder appear so excessively ascetic that much recent scholarship on the *Symposium* has been motivated by a desire to find an interpretation which lessens Diotima's

¹¹ Clark, while offering a reading of this passage that is in many ways similar to my own, must, I think, have a different conception of spiritualization or sublimation than the one I am utilizing here. She suggests that the ascetic ideal can only be overcome by "drawing the erotic drives into philosophizing and finding ways to give them sublimated satisfaction therein" and concludes that avoidance of marriage and sex is not a necessary trait for Nietzsche's philosophers (Clark 2017: 132, 126). I, on the other hand, take the ascetic practices of avoiding marriage and sex to be aids in the achievement of sublimation. If marriage and sex are not avoided, it seems to me that sublimation has not taken place, as the sex drive is continuing to express itself in its original form.

asceticism (Obdrzalek 2010: 437). Obdrzalek resolves this interpretive difficulty by simply accepting that Diotima is an ascetic, but such a “solution” is not possible in Nietzsche’s case, since he is emphatically opposed to asceticism. It is true that Nietzsche says, “a certain asceticism... a hard and lighthearted renunciation with the best of intentions, belongs to the most favorable conditions of the highest spirituality” (GM III 9). This is not, however, a pernicious asceticism of the kind Nietzsche opposes, because “sensuality is thus not suspended... but rather only transfigures itself and no longer enters consciousness as a sexual stimulus” (GM III 8).¹² The philosopher’s “asceticism” raises the sights of desire in service of a higher fruitfulness, whereas the ascetic priest is totally forbidden any form of reproduction and aims to repress rather than elevate desire (GM III 11). Having said this, there is still a danger of excessive self-denial in the philosopher’s asceticism, even if such asceticism serves to help realize a greater productive potential. I will return to this danger in Section IV.

One way to understand why the “spiritualization” of eros need not be ascetic is to grasp that, while the erotic drive may at one time take a person for its object and at another time take the truth for its object, it nevertheless remains the same drive.¹³ The erotic drive is *not* repressed in the course of the ascent, rather it is sublimated, in approximately the Freudian sense of being redirected from a purely sexual expression to some other outlet (though, as Ken Gemes has astutely noted “often, but not always, sublimations have repressions as antecedents”; Gemes 2009: 48). Nietzsche’s view of sublimation is not identical to Freud’s and Nietzsche did not use the term “sublimation” to refer to this phenomenon whereby a drive is redirected (Gemes 2009: 56, note 16). Nonetheless, Nietzsche does distinguish between individuals who can restrain a drive by

¹² I think that the same can be said for Diotima, as eros is at each stage in the ascent still eros. However, there is a much stronger interpretive motivation to overcome the charge of asceticism in Nietzsche’s case.

¹³ Perhaps Diotima is making a similar point in saying that all desire is eros (205d). Given the analogy to poetry and creation, however, Diotima’s point may just be that eros can be used synecdochally for desire.

turning the strength of the drive towards another end, and those who repress their drives by attempting to weaken or eradicate them (Gemes 2009: 47-48). The distinction between repression and sublimation is evident in TI V 1-2: “The Church combats the passions by cutting them off in every sense: its technique, its ‘cure’, is *castration*. It never asks: ‘how can a desire be spiritualized, beautified, deified?’” (TI V 1).

3 EROTIC AGON AND THE WAR OF THE SEXES

If we take Nietzsche’s ladder of love to be similar to Diotima’s, we are naturally brought to consider the relationship between men and women, because the view takes all eros to be modeled on sexual reproduction, in that it aims at giving birth. As we have seen, the desire depicted in the ascent is unidirectional. There is a lover and a beloved and it is only the desire of the *lover* that matters for determining whether an erotic relationship exists between a person and something or someone else. That the beloved person can be replaced by such non-sentient beauties as a law or a landscape makes evident that the beloved is merely the passive object of the lover.

For Nietzsche, these active and passive roles are associated with masculinity and femininity, respectively.¹⁴ In BGE 206 Nietzsche says that a genius is “a being that either *begets* or *gives birth*,” these two alternatives being “the two most valuable acts performed by humanity.”

¹⁴ In my view, the text suggests that this is true for Diotima as well. For Diotima, higher forms of eros are supposed to aim at a production that is analogous to sexual reproduction and therefore it seems that the archetypal erotic relationship is that between a man and a woman. Though homoerotic relationships are central to the *Symposium*, even these relationships are, I think, supposed to be understood in terms analogous to reproduction through heterosexual relationships. If that is Diotima’s view, it would not be unique to her; in ancient Athens, one of the two partners in relationships between two men was often called womanly, so that there was still a masculine and a feminine position even in relationships between two men (Foucault 1984: 46-47; Robson 2013: 58). The presumption was that being the passive object of a lover, or attempting to make oneself into such an object through beautification, was womanly (Robson 2013: 60-61). The important point, though, is Diotima’s non-reciprocal conception of eros, which involves an active lover and a passive beloved. The two poles of that non-reciprocal relation are, at least *for Nietzsche*, associated with men and women, respectively.

In BGE 248 he elaborates, saying that those geniuses who “let themselves be impregnated,” a phrase which Nietzsche himself puts in quotation marks, “inherit the female problem of pregnancy and the secret task of forming, ripening, and bringing to completion.” In GS 72, the task of pregnancy is associated with being “gentler, more patient, more timid, more pleased to submit.” Such female genius is juxtaposed to the begetting type of genius, “peoples tortured and delighted by unknown fevers who irresistibly leave themselves, loving and lusting after foreign races” (BGE 248).¹⁵ Similarly, in BGE 209 the “skepticism of a bold masculinity” is associated with “the genius for war and conquest,” voyages of discovery, appropriation, and possession. Recall also my description above of how antagonism and readiness for war are necessary for maintaining and elevating desire. Masculinity is thereby associated with being a lover, one who desires possession, while femininity is associated with both pregnancy and passivity. We find this dichotomy pithily expressed in GS 68, where a wise man tells a boy “the way of men is will; the way of women is willingness.”

The equation of male with activity and female with passivity is, of course, an old sexist trope, not at all unique to Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s picture is not so simple as that, however. While he thinks women are in some sense passive, he takes this to be part of a strategy that women adopt to achieve comfort and security (GS 66, HAH I 356, 412, BGE 239). Women *make themselves* into the image that men expect of them and so must be *active* in playing the passive role (Abbey 1996: 242; Derrida 1979: 109). Nietzsche thus frequently compares women to actresses.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche does maintain a certain dichotomy between the feminine type of genius who is fundamentally characterized by pregnancy and masculine geniuses who “leave

¹⁵ BGE 248 is in fact a description of the begetting/begetter dichotomy as it applies to “peoples of genius,” such as the Greeks, French, Romans, and Jews. However, the first and last sentences of the passage make it evident, I think, that the description might just as well apply to individual geniuses. In BGE 209, Nietzsche does not distinguish between the masculinity of Frederick the Great and the masculinity of the Germans as a people.

themselves, loving and lusting” after what is other.¹⁶ The presumption, evident in Nietzsche’s famous metaphor of truth as a woman, is that a philosopher is like a man pursuing a woman (BGE Preface, GS Preface 4). Philosophical eros, like all eros, is understood on the model of heterosexual desire because eros is supposed to aim at a sort of giving birth that is analogous to the reproduction of individuals and of the species. On this heterosexual model, maleness is connected to externally-directed pursuit, i.e. to being a lover, and femaleness is connected to the internal condition of pregnancy and to the passive role of beloved.

Given the central role that the erotic relationship between the sexes has in Nietzsche’s conceptualization of philosophy, and given the immense importance for Nietzsche of philosophy, this most valuable product of higher culture, his comments on the relationship between men and women should be understood in the context of his belief that desire is the route to philosophy. In the first sentence of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche proclaims “the immediate certainty of the view that the continuing development of art is tied to the duality of the *Appollonian* and the *Dionysian*: just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, which are engaged in a continual struggle interrupted only by temporary periods of reconciliation.” In BGE 238, Nietzsche suggests it would be wrong “to deny the most abysmal antagonism and the necessity of an eternally hostile tension” between man and woman. On the other hand, someone who is right about this “fundamental problem of ‘man and woman’” will be “someone who has the same depth in his

¹⁶ Here I have changed the word “foreign” into the word “other” to highlight the fact that Nietzsche means foreign both in the sense of unfamiliar and in the sense of ontologically distinct. There is a basic ontological distinction between oneself and others, and words like conquest or incorporation seem to suggest erasing that distinction by turning something external into a part of oneself (as is suggested by the metaphor of empire). But I am arguing that Nietzsche views such conquest as motivated by essentially the same force that attracts someone to an alluring stranger or drives adventurers to seek out new landscapes. Familiarization, possession, conquest, and incorporation may each be different in degree and connotation, but they are fundamentally similar to one another. Nietzsche puts a friendlier face on this tendency in Daybreak 532, entitled “love makes the same,” where he says “love wants to spare the person to whom it dedicates itself every feeling of *being other*, and consequently it is full of dissimulation and pretence of similarity.”

spirit as he does in his desires,” i.e., someone capable of spiritualizing his desire. Such a person “needs to understand the woman as a possession,” that is, as an object of desire. Eternally hostile tension is necessary because eros survives only so long as such tension exists (see above p. 5 on the necessity of tension and p. 8 on the necessity of hostility). The tension necessary for eros requires an “othering” of the beloved. Nietzsche expresses the importance of such distance in GS 60, titled “Women and their action at a distance”: “the magic and the most powerful effect of women is, to speak the language of the philosophers, action at a distance, *actio in distans*: but that requires, first and foremost – *distance!*” (GS 60). According to both Diotima and Nietzsche, comfortability, the sense that the object of desire is within one’s grasp, causes desire to ebb. At least for Nietzsche, erotic desire must not ebb, because it is necessary for both life and philosophy. Nietzsche indicates that in proclaiming an eternal war between the sexes, he is thinking above all of the interests of philosophers: “Did anyone have ears for my definition of love? It is the only one worthy of a philosopher. – Love – its method is warfare, its foundation is the deadly hatred between the sexes” (EH III 5).

The view of love as a struggle is another point where Nietzsche acknowledges his agreement with the Platonic Socrates. Nietzsche says that the reason Socrates fascinated those around him was that he had discovered, in dialectics, “a new type of *agon*,” an erotic agon (TI II 8). In the passage mentioned above, where Nietzsche “honors” Plato over and against Schopenhauer, Nietzsche says that “philosophy *à la* Plato is more accurately defined as an erotic contest” (TI IX 23). This would also be an accurate definition of philosophy *à la* Nietzsche.

4 FEMININE PHILOSOPHERS

The preceding section suggests that Nietzsche’s ladder of love relies on a sexual dichotomy

and that philosophers adopt the male role, which is the active role of the lover pursuing a beloved. Yet Nietzsche's work is also full of suggestions that philosophers are like women. Nietzsche says of "we philosophers" that "we must constantly give birth to our thoughts out of our pain and maternally endow them with all that we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and disaster" (GS Preface 3). Elsewhere he describes the philosopher's "motherly' instinct, the secret love of that which grows in him" (GM III 8). Nietzsche holds that such "philosophical motherhood" is associated with supposedly feminine character traits: "Pregnancy has made women gentler, more patient, more timid, more pleased to submit; and just so does spiritual pregnancy produce the character of the contemplative type, to which the female character is related: these are male mothers" (GS 72). Nietzsche here acknowledges the feminine character of those spiritually pregnant people who are predisposed to philosophy.

We should recognize here how strange the talk of "male mothers" is. As I discussed in Section II, Nietzsche often suggests that philosophers pursuing truth are like male lovers pursuing a beloved woman. That philosophers are *also* portrayed as pregnant seems to conflict with the notion that philosophers are male, collapsing male lover and pregnant woman into one person. Of course, the talk of male mothers also does not fit with any traditional biological understanding of human reproduction. This same strangeness is present in Diotima's story, where the philosopher is a masculine lover and yet also pregnant. If we recall that reproduction is essential to both Nietzsche's and Diotima's conceptions of eros, and that eros is for both of them central to philosophy, then I believe that we have to see this strangeness as something more than an artefact of a confused attempt to analogize philosophy to biology. Rather, we should see this strangeness as an important problem to untangle in order to understand Nietzsche's conception of philosophy.

There are even suggestions that motherhood is an answer to Nietzsche's central problem

of how to justify existence in the face of suffering, without turning to asceticism (posed, e.g., in GM III 28).¹⁷ At the conclusion of *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche describes the Hellenic “mysteries of sexuality” which according to Nietzsche venerated “procreation, pregnancy, and birth” (TI X 4). Nietzsche claims that these mysteries guaranteed to the Hellenes “*eternal* life, the eternal return of life... the triumphal yes to life over and above all death and change...” (TI X 4). He goes on to say that “in the doctrine of the mysteries, *pain* is pronounced holy: the ‘woes of woman in labor’ sanctify pain in general,” and that “there has to be an eternal ‘agony of the woman in labor’ so that there can be an eternal joy of creation, so that the will to life can eternally affirm itself” (TI X 4). Nietzsche calls these mysteries “Dionysian” and in the next section Nietzsche declares himself “the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus” (TI X 5). Just as the mysteries guarantee the eternal return and affirmation of life, Nietzsche declares himself “the teacher of the eternal return” (TI X 5). These comments suggest that Nietzsche is identifying himself with the Hellenic veneration of motherhood and its potential as a method of affirming life in the face of suffering.

The notion that Dionysus is a philosopher is an extremely interesting one and Nietzsche repeats this claim in the final section of *Beyond Good and Evil*.¹⁸ Nietzsche there describes

¹⁷ Throughout *On the Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche describes how what he calls ascetic morality came to dominate human life to such a great extent. In brief, his theory is that ascetic morality gives meaning to the suffering involved in life and thereby makes life bearable. However, ascetic morality, typified by the Christian belief that all people are inherently guilty, also leads to self-hatred and hatred of life. Nietzsche therefore asks whether an alternate meaning for existence and suffering can be found.

¹⁸ Strauss identifies Nietzsche’s claim that gods philosophize as a point of disagreement between Nietzsche and Diotima, who says that gods do not philosophize (Strauss 1973: 189; *Symposium* 204a-b). However, Strauss also acknowledges the similarities between Socrates and the description given of Dionysus in BGE 295, calling this Dionysus a “super-Socrates” (Strauss 1973: 189). In fact, just as the “tempter god” of BGE 295 is a “genius of the heart” and “born pied piper of consciences,” Socrates is described in GS 340 as a “love-sick [verliebte] monster and pied piper of Athens.” EH III 6 contains a quotation of the description of the “tempter-god” from BGE 295, except that Nietzsche adds in EH, “incidentally, I won’t allow any speculation as to who I am describing here.” Perhaps he is describing both Socrates and Dionysus. At any rate, it seems at least possible that TI X 5 and BGE 295 are something more like a play on Diotima’s claim that gods do not philosophize, rather than a direct contradiction of that claim.

Dionysus as “the tempter god,” who possesses a “genius of the heart” (BGE 295). Recalling also the link between Dionysus and woman implied in the opening of *The Birth of Tragedy*, it seems that the genius of the heart (one might say the erotic art), which belongs to the godly philosopher of whom Nietzsche says he is a disciple, is a kind of genius Nietzsche associates with women.

5 NIETZSCHE ON BEAUTY AND ANDROGYNOUS PHILOSOPHY

At this point there are two problems that I would like to address. First, how can we make sense of the fact that Nietzsche seems to place himself and other philosophers alternately on *both* sides of the reproductive relationship that he takes to be central to philosophy? Second, even if Pippin was wrong to place Diotima and Nietzsche in opposition to one another with respect to their positions on the dissatisfaction inherent to eros, Pippin is right that Diotima and Nietzsche have different *explanations* for the dissatisfaction. For Diotima, the trouble is that no instance of beauty is “beauty in itself,” but Nietzsche says that “‘beauty in itself’ is an empty phrase, not even a concept” (TI IX 19). What, then, is Nietzsche’s explanation?

First, let us examine the question of why, for Nietzsche, no object of desire satisfies eros. Nietzsche says that “people find beauty in everything that throws their image back at them” (TI IX 19). This phenomenon is exemplified in the above-mentioned passage on women and their action at a distance, where Nietzsche suggests that women are like ships gliding past on the sea, onto which men project their happier and immortalized selves (GS 60).¹⁹ Picking out an *especially* desirable sea-faring woman, Nietzsche says that Greek men saw in Helen of Troy “the ideal image

¹⁹ Note once again the role that immortality plays in desirability. I take Nietzsche to be saying here, as elsewhere, that men desire women because they see in them the possibility of achieving immortality.

of their own existence” (BT 3).²⁰ Whereas Diotima claims that beautiful things imperfectly partake of beauty in itself, Nietzsche says that beautiful things merely reflect the beauty of the self. In other words, Nietzsche’s explanation of the dissatisfaction inherent in eros is that lovers are searching outside themselves for something that can only be found within themselves. As he says, “People think that the world itself is overflowing with beauty, – they forget that they are its cause” (TI IX 19).

Recall that Nietzsche characterizes philosophers, insofar as they are lovers, as those who “leave themselves, loving and lusting” after truth. In *Daybreak* 549 he describes what I take to be the same intellectual tendency, associating it with conquerors and with action, as he does in BGE 248. However, whereas this appropriating tendency of the lover might sometimes be assumed to evince the swaggering self-confidence normally associated with an Alexander or Napoleon, in the *Daybreak* passage Nietzsche points out that wanting to flee from oneself might just as well signify that these conquerors are “gloomily inclined towards themselves.” What is characterized in BGE 230 as the intellect’s tyrannical drive to incorporate, is in D 549 instead called a longing “to dissolve into something ‘outside.’” Elsewhere, Nietzsche describes how lovers “abandon themselves and want to be the same” as those that they love (D 532). *Daybreak* 516 notes that the sort of person who “flees from himself” is engaged in self-hatred. Hence, Nietzsche declares a desire to “seduce him into loving himself” (D 517). Self-denial is the extreme result of adopting the viewpoint of the lover, because desiring involves placing value on something *other* than oneself.

The eros that lies behind the drive to philosophize involves yearning for something outside

²⁰ See also: TII 13: “Man created woman – but out of what? Out of a rib from his God, his ideal.” and BGE 131: “The sexes deceive themselves about each other: which means they basically only love and honor themselves (or their own ideal, to say it more nicely –).”

oneself, “leaving oneself” in pursuit of what is other. Yet, because this feeling of lack, self-dissatisfaction, or erotic yearning is so central to the development of philosophers, they have a strong tendency toward asceticism (GM III 7-10). In the first section of this paper I argued that Nietzsche’s sublimation is not inherently ascetic (at least not in the pernicious sense of being genuinely self-negating), but it turns out that Nietzsche thinks erotic desire itself has an inherent tendency toward self-negation. That is, anyone consumed by erotic desire has a tendency toward self-negation, whether or not that desire has been sublimated. Achieving a desire rapacious enough to try to conquer the world through thought, that is, achieving the degree of desire Nietzsche associates with philosophers, requires turning outwards. It ends in philosophers finding the whole world beautiful (desirable) but forgetting that they are the cause of this beauty.

Nietzsche begins *Beyond Good and Evil* by posing “the problem of the value of truth,” i.e., the question of what could make “truth in itself” desirable (BGE 1). He believes that the value of truth, what makes it desirable, is something projected onto the truth by the philosophers themselves. To make the world appear beautiful is, Nietzsche says, to make it one’s own image (TI IX 19). To make the world in one’s own image is, Nietzsche also says, the most fundamental nature of philosophy (BGE 9). In fact, what Nietzsche most respects about philosophers is that they can create systems of valuation, giving meaning to things. The danger of asceticism is real, however, and so Nietzsche must remind philosophers that it is *they* who have made the truths they value and desire valuable, desirable, beautiful. Nietzsche must therefore balance two conflicting tasks, if he wishes to promote the development of philosophers: the need to goad would-be philosophers outwards and upwards along the ladder of love and the need to cultivate respect for the creative potential within. The latter task requires that Nietzsche remind these philosophers that

lovers, even lovers of truth, are artists who create for themselves what it is that they love (GS 59).²¹

Returning to the problem of Nietzsche's ambivalence about whether philosophers are like women or men, it is now evident that the ambivalence results from Nietzsche's conception of a philosopher's development. In Nietzsche's story and in Diotima's, it is not the beautiful beloved who gives birth, but rather the lover. To reach the point of being ready to give birth, the philosopher must engage in what Nietzsche sees as a hypermasculine pursuit of what he desires. This masculine position requires a negative stance toward the self, as the philosopher projects the qualities that he most desires outwards, onto external things. In the hope of preparing the way for a philosopher of the future, Nietzsche suggests a warriorlike approach to philosophical eroticism, as in the epigraph before GM III (taken from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), "Carefree, mocking, violent—thus wisdom wants *us*: she is a woman, she always loves only a warrior." Yet the ultimate aim of philosophy is to give birth. In order to do that honestly and probably in order to do that best, the philosopher must recognize her own potency. This is the sort of life-affirmation that Nietzsche associates with motherhood and femininity. The philosopher therefore must contain both the genius of begetting and the genius of giving birth (BGE 206). Nietzsche is suggesting that the philosopher can be both halves of a reproductive pair. He associates these two roles with masculinity and femininity, respectively, and thus his comments on masculinity and femininity reflect the fact that he sees these two roles as both important, yet in tension and conflict with one another (and that he sees something of each in himself).

One way to interpret what Nietzsche is saying is that the philosopher's ascent involves

²¹ One example of how Nietzsche walks this tightrope is his use of the aphorism. For Nietzsche there is a connection between the esotericism of aphorisms and the desire for truth. As Jill Marsden says, a Nietzschean aphorism "awaits a catalyzing power that only the reader can supply" (Marsden 2006: 31). The esoteric nature of the aphorism (an esoteric nature also present, more subtly, in Nietzsche's non-aphoristic writings) does two things: (1) it provokes philosophical desire by implying that a truth lies behind the exoteric text but it also (2) prompts the reader into an active stance more conducive to recognizing the role of her own creative ability in the pursuit of such truth.

what is characterized as masculine behavior, but that the final destination reached is the feminine condition of pregnancy and giving birth. This picture seems to fit with the late preface to HAH, for example, in which “volcanically erupting desire” (HAH P 3), successful avoidance of the danger that the spirit may “become infatuated and remain seated intoxicated in some corner or other” (HAH P 4), “wandering,” “hardness,” and “self-alienation,” (HAH P 5) all unconsciously pave the way for pregnancy (HAH P 7). In Diotima’s picture, however, erotic pursuit, pregnancy, and birth, are present at each stage of the ascent: at the apex of the ascent one can give birth to true virtue (212a), but at earlier stages in the ascent one can give birth to ideas, theories, and speeches (210c-d). We might interpret Nietzsche similarly, so that the masculine and feminine forms of genius are both necessary parts of the philosopher, but neither represents the ultimate conclusion of the process. In other words, we might take Nietzsche’s view of pursuit, pregnancy, and birth to be episodic. Nietzsche does characterize the “war” between the sexes as eternal, and in his discussion of the the Hellenic mysteries he associates “procreation, pregnancy, and birth” with “the eternal return of life” (TI X 4). In the Preface to *The Gay Science* Nietzsche compares his production of the book to both a long period of pregnancy followed by giving birth (GS Preface 3) and to a long winter followed by “April weather” (GS Preface 1), suggesting a cyclical sort of philosophical production. If the philosopher’s act of giving birth is something like creating an image of a world that is desirable, then this would be something that takes place throughout the ascent, and in fact spurs the ascent onwards.

6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to identify some of what is missing from my account. The interpretation I have put forward ignores and elides a great deal of Nietzsche’s nuance. It also does

not say much about Nietzsche's views on *actual* women and their social and political position. The fact that Nietzsche thinks men are capable of taking on and should take on feminine characteristics and "female" responsibilities and that women can do the inverse (e.g., GS 72 and HAH I 425) might suggest an understanding of gender as mutable. Such a conception of gender seems to fit with the possibility both that women could be philosophers and with the broader notion that there is nothing preordained about the fact of women's oppression. On the other hand, the fact that Nietzsche equates women, pregnancy, and passivity seems crudely reductionist and sexist. Moreover, Nietzsche opposed equal rights for women (just as he opposed equal rights in general) and seemed to think that the domination of women by men was ultimately in the best interests of women. I have not been able to say much about how these facts relate to what Nietzsche says about men and women, masculinity and femininity, in the context of philosophy. One thing I think is clear is that Nietzsche's normative views on the relationship between men and women are informed by his understanding of how desire and reproduction are best promoted. Given Nietzsche's view that entire civilizations are justified by only a few great individuals, I suspect that much of his position on men and women in society and politics can be understood by referring back to the conditions that he thinks are necessary for the development of philosophers.

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