Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory

Edited by Paul Patton

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Notes on contributors

Keith Ansell-Pearson is currently Lecturer in Political Theory in the Department of Political Studies at Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, and from September 1993 will be Lecturer in Modern European Philosophy at the University of Warwick.

Howard Caygill is Lecturer in the School of Economic and Social Studies at the University of East Anglia, and is the author of Art of Judgement (1989).

Daniel W. Conway is Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Pennsylvania State University.

Penelope Deutscher is a Lecturer in Philosophy at The Australian National University, Canberra, where she teaches feminist theory and contemporary French philosophy. She has published in the Newsletter of the Freudian Field and Australian Feminist Studies.

Rosalyn Diprose is a Lecturer in Philosophy at The Flinders University of South Australia. She co-edited, with Robert Ferrell, Cartographies: Poststructuralism and the Mapping of Bodies and Spaces (Allen & Unwin, 1991), and is the author of The Body of Woman: Ethics and Sexual Difference (Routledge, forthcoming).

Elizabeth Grosz is Associate Professor in the Institute for Critical and Cultural Studies at Monash University. She has published Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists (Allen & Unwin, 1989), Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction (Routledge, 1990) and is currently completing a book on the body and sexual difference.

Frances Oppel lectures in literary and cultural studies at Griffith University, Queensland. She is writing a book on ‘woman’ in Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

Paul Patton lectures in philosophy at the University of Sydney. He has published numerous articles on contemporary European
Introduction

American philosopher and social critic, the first president of the University of Chicago, has written extensively on education, the history of science, and the philosophy of religion. His works have been influential in shaping modern thought and have been translated into many languages. He is known for his contributions to the fields of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.

Mary Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, was a prominent figure in the early 19th century. She is known for her works on women's rights and political philosophy. Her most famous work, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," was published in 1792 and remains a seminal text in the field of women's rights.

Despite their differences in methodology and approach, both thinkers have contributed significantly to the development of modern philosophy. Wollstonecraft's work on women's rights and political philosophy has had a profound impact on subsequent feminist movements. Meanwhile, Mill's emphasis on the importance of education and his critical approach to traditional institutions has had a lasting influence on modern thought.

In this paper, we will examine how Mill and Wollstonecraft's ideas have been applied to contemporary issues, such as the role of education in society and the nature of political power. Through a detailed analysis of their works, we hope to shed light on the enduring relevance of these thinkers in the modern world.
7 Ressentiment and power
Some reflections on feminist practices

Marion Tapper

Nietzsche's remarks on *ressentiment* and power and Foucault's analytics of power form the backdrop to this chapter. My concern is with certain feminist discursive and non-discursive practices, primarily in those institutions in which feminists have achieved a degree of success – bureaucracy, educational institutions and the professions. The question is: in what strategies of power are these practices participating and with what conception of power are they operating?

The thesis is that some feminist practices, in so far as they are motivated by the spirit of *ressentiment*, have been preoccupied with power as control and that this involves a double-edged danger. On the one hand it risks playing into the hands of, rather than resisting, the modern mechanisms of power that Foucault identified as operating by techniques of surveillance, normalization and control. On the other, it involves a blindness to or forgetfulness of other forms of the will to power which are positive, those active forms concerned with self-formation and autonomy. In particular, I hope to identify what I shall call the logic of a psycho-politics that seems to be emerging in a specific feminist configuration of power/knowledge. It shifts from identifying and seeking to redress injustices to finding 'evil' everywhere, and not only in actions and practices but also in the 'soul' – of individuals and types of individuals, of language, discourse, culture and sexuality. It then requires and produces experts to detect the 'evil' and special discourses to expose it.

My procedure will be to outline some instances in which I think we can see a shift from wanting equal power within existing institutions to attacking those institutions themselves, from criticizing practices and discourses to finding everything 'evil'. I then ask whether this makes sense in terms of the structure of *ressentiment*

and, if so, what implications this has for our understanding of and participation in relations of power. Again I consider some instances of feminist practices in institutions. In conclusion I discuss some ways in which some feminist practices, rather than resisting power, might be complicit in it.

One desires freedom so long as one does not possess power. Once one does possess it, one desires to overpower; if one cannot do that (if one is still too weak to do so), one desires 'justice', i.e. equal power.

(Nietzsche 1968: 784)

Let me start by saying that I take it as given that men have had and in many respects still do have power over women, however differently it may be exercised in different places and times and for different classes. But it does not follow from this that women were powerless; in any case, this is certainly not true now.

In response to this women have engaged, and quite properly so, in much of what Nietzsche might call nay-saying: insisting on the extirpation of sexism from language, of harassment from everyday relations, of exploitation from economic practices, of sexist bias from theories and discourses, of objectification from representations, and so on. And also much yea-saying: for control over our bodies, for safe movement, for equal opportunity, affirmative action, legal changes, and for representation in positions of power.

On the face of it it would be hard to deny that these are all worthwhile as actions extending the principles of freedom, equality and justice to include women. Also, on the face of it, we would have to admit that these actions have been reasonably successful though by no means completely. (In any case at least it is clear what further would be required to fulfil the intentions of these actions.) In the academies, for example, women have by and large achieved equality. That there is not equal representation has a largely historical explanation in that it is only relatively recently that women have been undertaking postgraduate degrees and applying for jobs in large numbers. Women can now get jobs and promotions if they produce the amount and quality of work that men do; most if not all committees require female representation; there is an enormous growth in publishing by and about women; and academies now have procedures to deal with instances of sexual harassment and other grievances such that few academics would dare to behave in ways which only a few years ago were the cause of justifiable complaint. My interest is in why and in what ways
Passion, and power.

Simmonds, with an earlier essay, remarks made by male philosophers.

For some years Feminist philosophers have been trying to overcome their own limitations by reclaiming the voice of women. Some philosophers have claimed that women's contributions to philosophy have been overlooked, and that their views have been dismissed or ignored. Others have argued that women's perspectives offer a fresh and valuable perspective on traditional philosophical issues. In this essay, I will explore some of the ways in which women have contributed to philosophical thought, and discuss the potential for further development in this area.

In general, we might say that early feminist philosophy, and their...
while the bad things were removed. In contrast some contemporary radical feminists tend to proclaim themselves against the whole of western discourse and society. We find wholesale denunciations of men, patriarchy, sex, language, philosophy, and so on. We find claims that men have all the power and women none and that men use that power to repress women; differences are acknowledged between women and men and between women, but not between men; everything considered unacceptable is associated with men; and monolithic univocal explanations of this are proposed: either by such concrete things as 'the nature of men' or more abstractly, the institution of 'compulsory heterosexuality'.

The question I want to raise about this is whether it might be motivated and thereby explained by the spirit of ressentiment? A number of features which are pertinent here characterize this spirit. First, an inability to 'let go', to forget, it cannot have done with anything (Nietzsche 1969: 58). It is both a backward-looking spirit - it needs to keep on remembering past injustices - and an expansive spirit - it needs to find new injustices everywhere. In the kinds of institutions I am concerned with, those in which women have roughly achieved equal power, it can be expressed in the following kind of phenomenon. Where those with institutional power cannot justifiably claim that they are being discriminated against at the level of actions and practices they can maintain their political integrity, their claim to ideological purity and sense of powerlessness by resorting to finding 'evil' and injustice in wider and wider circumstances and at deeper and more concealed levels. The issue is no longer just what men say about and do to women but the very nature of language, discourse, culture and society. The enemy is no longer someone with whom you disagree and hence with whom you can argue, but a type - man - who is uncomprehending and unable and unwilling to try, a type whose very being is recautelrantly to virtue, who is evil.

The person motivated by the spirit of ressentiment looks for 'evil', needs to recriminate and distribute blame, to impute wrongs, distribute responsibilities and to find sinners. As Nietzsche says, they want others to be evil in order to be able to consider themselves good (Nietzsche 1969: 39). As Deleuze says, the man of ressentiment feels 'the corresponding object as a personal offence and affront because he makes the object responsible for his own powerlessness' (Deleuze 1983: 116). There seems to be two elements here. One is the need to see the other as powerful and responsible for my powerlessness, and then the transformation of this thought into the thought that my powerlessness is a proof of my goodness and the other's evil. And this works by a revaluation of the enemy's values - an act of the most spiritual revenge, as Nietzsche says (Nietzsche 1969: 34). This makes sense of two aspects of feminist thought. First, the need to see women as helpless victims, as abused, misrepresented, as powerless in the face of such an onslaught of sexist, patriarchal, male power in every dimension of life and thought. Second, in the now frequently asserted claims of women's moral superiority: that women are caring, nurturant, their relations non-hierarchical, and so on. And seeing ourselves as good gives us a right to demand that others conform to our values.

One further aspect of ressentiment worth mentioning here is the inability to admire and respect. In contrast with envy, which allows for the possibility of admiring the work and qualities of those we envy, ressentiment allows for no such thing. If a man gets a job or promotion or a publication it is explained away by the fact that he is a man, using old boys' networks and so on. And now that women are getting jobs and so on we can see the same type of response on the part of men: she got it only because of affirmative action policies or because of her sexual behaviour.

However, in the discussion of ressentiment I do not mean to be attributing particular psychological states to particular individuals, but rather to be diagnosing the spirit of some current feminist discursive and non-discursive practices. The issue is why it is that now that women have achieved considerable formal and substantial equality - at least in the institutions I am concerned with - this has not proven enough. My concern is not with ressentiment as individual psychology but with the way this is played out politically. Women have quite reasonably wanted power, but perhaps, entangled in the spirit of ressentiment (quite unsurprisingly given our oppression throughout history) we have failed to be sufficiently critical about what it was that we wanted in wanting power. We wanted what it was that we believed the others had: power over.

In his Preface to the English translation of Nietzsche and Philosophy Deleuze says that Nietzsche is misunderstood if the will to power is interpreted as 'wanting or seeking power' and if the Nietzschean 'slave' is understood as someone who finds himself dominated by a master, and deserves to be (Deleuze 1983: xii). We could not disagree if this is all that Nietzsche is meant to mean by will to power and slave. But Deleuze also tells us that to want or seek power is a form of the will to power - its lowest degree, 'its negative form, the guise it assumes when reactive forces prevail
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In the context of this, if it is not supported by any evidence, it is not applicable. It is not applicable. It is not applicable. It is not applicable. It is not applicable. It is not applicable. It is not applicable. It is not applicable.
through all the proper procedures and still find some reason or another for not considering her to be the most suitable or best candidate for the position. Of course if there is a man they do not wish to appoint they can always find some reason for not doing so. Only now, in the case of women, committees can claim that they have done it legally and morally, for now they can claim that they have not ignored women candidates, they can claim that they have given women more consideration than they otherwise or previously might have.

In the context of discussing problems faced by the Women’s Studies Program at the Australian National University, Matthews and Broom consider a number of options for improving the situation of women and women’s studies. One is for ‘all future appointments in the faculty of Arts to require expertise in women or gender’ (Matthews and Broom 1991: 14). Apart from their specific problems this could be seen as a solution to the problem I discussed above. But again this would seem to me to be either ineffective, except in the short term, or dangerous in several respects. It would be ineffective in that before too long every ambitious candidate, or anyone with any sense, would tack on to whatever else they do a project concerning women’s issues. And once again the committee’s proceedings can continue as before, possibly resulting in men who have little sympathy with women’s interests being appointed. I do not take it that just because someone has published on feminism that they are sympathetic, and in the proposed context it would be even less likely. One would have to assume that to write on feminism would bring about a conversion and this is obviously false as shown by the existing writers on feminism who are virulently opposed to it. Short of adopting a positive discrimination policy, which would not exclude those women who are hostile or indifferent to feminism, the only way to avoid this outcome would be to ensure that the ‘right kind’ of people get on to selection committees so that the candidates with the ‘right kind’ of research projects are selected. And who are the ‘right kind’ of people and which are the ‘right kind’ of research projects? Us and ours – whoever we may be; that is whoever can control the committees. Men might have dominated the academics and the disciplines but they were not always this hegemonic, at least they allowed for some pluralism among themselves. In any case, surely we do not want to repeat this pattern.

There is also a danger in the implicit demand that all research activities have a women’s issues component or that all researchers have this as a component of their interests. Matthews and Broom (1991) restrict their proposal to Arts faculties but, as Allen (1991) and others who refer to ‘disciplinary masculinism’ even in the sciences and engineering make clear, there is no reason to stop there. The danger I see is that of a kind of intellectual authoritarianism, or at least an excessive privileging of some interests. We could, for instance, agree that nuclear research should be correlated with social and political concerns – for the health and safety of nuclear plant workers and the surrounding population, for the implications for world peace and so on – without thinking that it should be the direct concern of the scientists themselves, and without claiming that the matter is of special concern to women. Some research areas have no immediate socio-political implications, much less any particular relation to women as a group, mathematics and some areas of philosophy for example. And those areas which clearly or arguably do have a direct relation to or impact on women would probably fall into one or two categories: if they did not discuss women’s issues they would not be good research, or, the technical aspect of the research might be considered a legitimately separate activity though we might also consider it deplorable that the researcher was not also interested in the implications of the research.

This demand vis-à-vis research and appointments is so far only at the stage of a proposal. But a similar demand vis-à-vis teaching, coming from Equal Opportunity Offices, is much closer to being implemented in some universities. At the University of Melbourne, for example, there is a document on Gender-Inclusive Curriculum which covers teaching methods and assessment, language and content, as well as the environment in which this occurs. This will, I suspect, have similar effects to the proposal concerning appointments: non-compliance with the spirit if not the letter of the law; its exploitation by those who seek job security or promotion while at least some of those who already bring feminist concerns to their teaching practices and content might find themselves disadvantaged; or an increasing control and surveillance of what we teach and how.

This last point brings me back to the issue that concerns me most here: the unreflective complicity in the modern forms of power. It concerns me most because ethically I am not opposed to the idea that in the present context special consideration should be paid in and to the appointment of women and that attention should be given to the exclusion of women’s interests and needs from research and teaching. But the question is: what are feminists doing in the way in which we are attempting to redress such injustices?
General understanding of our economy, politics, and society is crucial for making informed decisions and engaging in meaningful discussions. To foster a deeper appreciation for the complex interplay between power, politics, and economics, we will explore various aspects of these fields through a series of case studies and discussions.

The Importance of Understanding Power: Power dynamics shape our lives in countless ways, from the institutions that govern us to the companies that influence our daily choices. By examining power structures, we can better understand the forces at play and work towards creating a more equitable society.

Case Studies: Throughout the course, we will delve into specific examples to illustrate key concepts. These case studies will cover a range of topics, from historical events to contemporary issues, providing a comprehensive overview of the subject matter.

Discussion and Participation: We encourage active participation in class discussions. Your insights and questions are valuable, and they will help us create a dynamic and engaging learning environment.

Course Objectives:
- Develop a foundational understanding of political and economic theories
- Analyze case studies to understand their implications on power dynamics
- Foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills

This course is designed to be a comprehensive exploration of power, politics, and economics. We look forward to a dynamic and thought-provoking learning experience together.
as patriarchal any discourse that is committed to truth and objectivity or any model of intellectual inquiry that requires formal logic or aims for unambiguous, precise modes of articulation (Grosz 1986: 199, 203) then it is not clear how such feminists could conduct themselves in the academy without denying the autonomy of most of its members. If feminism started out with the laudable intention of increasing the kinds of individuality available and acceptable, and to dissociate them from forms of domination, it is now, I suggest, in danger of doing the opposite. The use of feminist discourse, the specific power effects it has induced, and its deployment in and use of existing structures of power in institutions is not acting as a ‘road block’ to repression but introducing a new form of it.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


