**Abhandlung**

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# Pregnancy as a Metaphor of Self-Cultivation in *Dawn*

**Abstract:** Nietzsche employs the concept of pregnancy metaphorically at various points in his writings; discussing the pregnancy of philosophers (GM III 8, BGE 292), spiritual pregnancy (EH, Clever 3; GS 72) and being pregnant with thoughts or deeds (D 552). I explore how Nietzsche uses the notion of pregnancy in *Dawn*, arguing that it connects to the theme of self-cultivation. I employ the various associations that Nietzsche makes with pregnancy, including the unknown, selfishness, strangeness, and solitude, to elucidate Nietzsche's understanding of self-cultivation. I show how the metaphor of pregnancy, in which we do not control what we give birth to, both expresses and helps us explore the problem of what, if the self is made up of and directed by many competing drives, shapes and directs self-cultivation. I argue that Nietzsche's deliberate references to the context of Plato's discussion of pregnancy involve a self-conscious challenge to Plato's concept of the philosopher, and of philosophy, and a reimagining of what they will give birth to. The appropriation of Plato's famous metaphor thus underscores how Nietzsche's concept and method of self-cultivation contrasts to Plato's care for the soul and is rooted in attentiveness to the body and its drives.

**Keywords:** Metaphor of pregnancy, *Dawn*, Plato, Solitude, Health

## I Introduction

At various points across his writings Nietzsche employs the concept of pregnancy metaphorically, discussing the pregnancy of philosophers (GM III 8, BGE 292), spiritual pregnancy (EH, Clever 3; GS 72), and the possibility of being pregnant with thoughts or deeds (D 552). In doing so Nietzsche clearly echoes Plato's famous use of the metaphor. As both Paul Patton and Alison Ainsley have rightly pointed out we would expect to find a radical difference in how the metaphor is understood and employed in the context of Nietzsche's philosophy from that of Plato's use of spiritual pregnancy.[1] However, I will argue

1 Paul Patton, "Nietzsche and the Body of the Philosopher," in Rosalyn Diprose / Robyn Ferrell (eds.), *Cartographies: Poststructuralism and the Mapping of Bodies and Spaces*, St. Leonards 1991, 43–54: 50, and Ali-

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that in *Dawn* (1881) Nietzsche takes up the metaphor as a deliberate response to Plato, which therefore frames his use of it. Nietzsche describes Plato as a "genius," along with Spinoza and Goethe (D 497), thus worthy of entering into dialogue with, and he makes very deliberate references to the context of Plato's discussion of pregnancy. In particular, the long discussion of pregnancy in D 552, which will be my focus in this article, is preceded by aphorisms that explore knowledge, beauty, and virtue; themes which similarly situate Diotima's exploration of spiritual pregnancy as reported by Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*. We can, therefore, read Nietzsche's adoption of the metaphor of pregnancy in *Dawn* as a self-conscious challenge on Nietzsche's part to Plato's concept of the philosopher, and of philosophy, and as a reimagining of what they will give birth to.

In taking up the metaphor, Nietzsche has been accused of continuing the appropriation of pregnancy by male philosophers. For example, Amy Mullin suggests that Nietzsche focuses only on spiritual pregnancy whilst denigrating women's physical pregnancy, and on the product of pregnancy and not the process.[2] Certainly, Nietzsche's approach to pregnancy is shaped by Plato, rather than starting from a careful consideration of the experience of pregnancy for women, as contemporary philosophers of pregnancy aim to.[3] And there are important aspects of pregnancy and women's experience that he neglects which later thinkers explore.[4] But I will argue below that the wider context of *Dawn*, and the resonances with Plato's *Symposium*, both support reading the aphorism, and the use of the metaphor of pregnancy that Nietzsche develops there, as relating to self-cultivation. Indeed, Mullin herself acknowledges that for Nietzsche it is ultimately oneself that one gives birth to.[5] Given that self-cultivation concerns process, this suggests, contra Mullin, that so does Nietzsche's interest in pregnancy. Further, we can expect that unlike Plato, Nietzsche will remain tethered to our corporeality in his

son Ainsley, "'Ideal Selfishness': Nietzsche's Metaphor of Maternity," in David Farrell Krell / David Wood (eds.), *Exceedingly Nietzsche: Aspects of Contemporary Nietzsche Interpretation*, London 2011, 78–87: 78.

**2** Amy Mullin, "Pregnant Bodies, Pregnant Minds," *Feminist Theory* 31/1 (2002), 27–44: 27–30.

**3** Philosophy of pregnancy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has sought to redress the neglect of women's subjective experience of being pregnant and to draw on this experience as a resource for reassessing fundamental concepts in philosophy, including the nature of subjectivity. For example, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray have all in different ways used the pregnant female body to rethink the subject, with Irigaray and Kristeva stressing the ethical importance of an experience of otherness within (Rachel Jones, *Irigaray: Towards a Sexuate Philosophy*, Malden, MA 2011, 30–1).

**4** Nietzsche's appeal to pregnancy is clearly partial and incomplete leaving many dimensions for future writers to explore. For example, Irigaray will later investigate the mediating role of the placenta in conversation with Hélène Rouch and elaborate the importance of the placental economy (Luce Irigaray, "On the Maternal Order," in *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. Alison Martin, New York 1990, 31–8).

**5** Mullin, "Pregnant Bodies, Pregnant Minds," 40n3. Mullin claims this elides the otherness of what one is pregnant with, but in my view, this does not allow for Nietzsche's criticisms of traditional concepts of a unified self. If a self is given birth to in a Nietzschean practice of self-cultivation it will incorporate multiplicity and otherness, which is precisely why the appeal to pregnancy adds to our understanding of self-cultivation. As a metaphorical usage the comparison will inevitably have its limits.

deployment of pregnancy. Nietzsche criticises Plato's "estrangement from sensory perception" and identification of the good person with the "desensualized" person (D 44). He claims that Plato was wrong to assert that dialectics would "get behind the veil of appearance" because this "does not *exist* at all" (D 474), and depicts Plato as someone who "fled from reality and wanted to intuit things only in the pallid images of ideas" (D 448).[6] In contrast, Nietzsche places great emphasis on our bodily drives in his own philosophy.

The various associations that Nietzsche makes with pregnancy, including the unknown, selfishness, strangeness, and solitude, allow us to elucidate his method of self-cultivation. We will see it is a method rooted in attentiveness to bodily drives. Given the context of Nietzsche's rejection of the idea of transparent motives or a unified self or agent, a task of deliberate self-cultivation faces the challenge of explaining how such a project can be directed or shaped. I will show how Nietzsche's appeal to pregnancy, which complicates the idea of a single subject, and in which we do not control what we give birth to, both expresses and helps us explore the problem of what, if the self is made up of and directed by many competing drives, self-cultivation could involve.

## II Thematic Context of *Dawn*

Before turning to how the metaphor of pregnancy plays out in *Dawn*, I want to outline some of the key themes of this text. As Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford have stressed, Nietzsche's critique of customary morality is central to *Dawn*.[7] Nietzsche hopes

**6** In *Dawn*, Nietzsche asks: "*How many forces must now come together in the thinker.* – To estrange oneself from sensory perception, to exalt oneself to abstractions" (D 43). While he does not immediately reference Plato from the start of this aphorism the allusions to Plato, and the legacy of Platonic thinking are clear. The passage continues: "To revel in the palest images of words and things, to play with such invisible, inaudible, intangible beings felt, from out of the depths of disdain for the physically palpable, misleading and evil earth, like living in another *higher* world. 'These abstractions can lead us, and we need no longer be misled!'" Here Nietzsche's language is suggestive of Plato's account of Socrates' metaphor of the cave as a parable of "the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm" (*Republic* 517b), in which we are led upwards toward the higher world of the forms. Those capable of making this journey stand in contrast to "[t]he lovers of sights and sounds" criticised by Plato earlier in the *Republic* (476b). Continuing in D 448, Nietzsche explicitly calls the object of Plato's contemplation "pallid." Thus, in *Dawn* Nietzsche subverts Plato's portrayal of the sensual and physical world as inferior to the higher world of forms by instead describing the alleged higher world as the "palest images" and "pallid images." In D 43, Nietzsche confirms the allusion to Plato when he continues part way through the aphorism: "Hence Plato's admiration for the dialectic and his inspired belief in its necessary relation to the good, desensualized person." Translations referred to: *Dawn*, trans. Brittain Smith, Stanford, CA 2011, and Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve, Indianapolis, IN 1997, 971–1223. Plato references give the standard Stephanus margin numbers.

**7** Keith Ansell-Pearson / Rebecca Bamford, *Nietzsche's "Dawn": Philosophy, Ethics, and the Passion of Knowledge*, Hoboken, NJ 2021, 2.

to profoundly shift our perspective on morality and "just as science has taught, and continues to teach us to experience the earth as small and the solar system even as a mere dot," he aims in *Dawn* to lead us to a new way of seeing our moral world (D 7). Ultimately, Nietzsche offers a new perspective on our contemporary European morality, suggesting we have followed moral commands out of obedience to tradition (D 9), and that we have done so at the cost of great suffering. Nietzsche explores how Christianity seeks the intoxication of intense emotions in "*torments of the* soul" in both the notion of hell and the morality of compassion, the most "oppressively weighty pity [*Erbarmen*]" being reserved for the damned (D 77). Our understanding of ourselves as moral agents involves ignorance regarding our own motives which are far more complex than we acknowledge: "Subjugation to morality can be slavish or vain or self-serving or resigned or stiflingly rapturous or without thought or an act of despair" (D 97). Nietzsche explicitly links a lack of self-knowledge with a lack of knowledge regarding our actions, titling an aphorism *The Unknown World of the "Subject"* in which he claims we are ignorant of ourselves and suffer from a delusion that we know "*how human action comes about*," when in fact "actions are *never* what they appear to us to be!" (D 116) This lack of self-knowledge also connects to Nietzsche's contention that the self is made up many drives. "No matter how hard a person struggles for self-knowledge, nothing can be more incomplete than the image of all the *drives* taken together that constitute his being" (D 119).

So, for Nietzsche, we lack self-knowledge, and rectifying this will both do important critical work in challenging the authority and benefit of adhering to a morality of custom and help to provide an alternative ethical path. To rectify our lack of knowledge demands an experimental approach. Nietzsche declares "There is no one and only scientific method that leads to knowledge [*Wissenschaft*]! We must proceed experimentally [*versuchsweise*] with things" (D 432). As Ansell-Pearson and Bamford have noted, this includes experiments in how we live.[8] But it also requires experimenting with who we are: "We are experiments [*Experimente*]: let us also want to be such!" (D 453) "We may experiment [*experimentiren*] with ourselves!" (D 501) Being an experiment is possible because who we are is something that has been shaped in both our individual and social histories, and it can thus be re-shaped through self-cultivation.

Self-cultivation is a theme that runs throughout *Dawn*. Nietzsche is explicit that the self is something we can work on:

> perhaps what is most beautiful walks along in darkness and sinks, barely born into eternal night – namely the spectacle of that energy that a genius expends *not on works*, but *on himself as a work*, that is on his own mastery, on the purification of his fantasy, on the ordering and selection of the onrushing stream of tasks and sudden insights (D 548).

**8** Ansell-Pearson / Bamford, *Nietzsche's "Dawn"*, 89. Bamford has also previously explored Nietzsche's "experimentalism" as she terms it in relation to the practice of a new ethics, in which experimentalism is itself a virtue (Rebecca Bamford, "The Ethos of Inquiry: Nietzsche on Experience, Naturalism, and Experimentalism," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 47 (2016), 9–29).

Various aphorisms suggest the practice of working on the self through small acts of self-cultivation, including Nietzsche's discussion of *Slow Cures* in which he suggests that "anyone who wants to heal his soul should reflect on changing the smallest of his habits" (D 462). The idea of cultivation also occurs in the metaphor of gardening, where Nietzsche suggests one can "handle one's drives like a gardener" (D 560). Bamford has noted that this aphorism connects self-cultivation and the cultivation of drives, linking self-cultivation to Nietzsche's discussion of various different ways in which drives can be modified in their intensity, discussed earlier in D 109.[9] Given Nietzsche has also described the self as constituted by drives, these various means of cultivating or modifying drives are means of self-cultivation.

Following his discussion of the modification of drives, however, Nietzsche writes: "*that* one *wants* to combat the vehemence of a drive in the first place is not in our control at all, no matter which method one falls back on, no matter whether one is successful or not. On the contrary, in this whole process our intellect is manifestly only the blind tool of *another drive*" (D 109).

This raises the question of how, if modification of the drives which constitute us depends on drive activity which we are largely ignorant of, can we have any directed self-cultivation? This is a problem widely acknowledged in Nietzsche scholarship, to which there are different dimensions.[10] First, the idea that there is any stable central agency in charge of a project of cultivating our drives is clearly rejected by Nietzsche. Second, we do not fully know our drives and how they influence our emotions, thoughts and actions. And finally, there is the issue of whether conscious thoughts and choices can influence our drives or are simply the effect of them.

Regarding the lack of stable agency, Nietzsche suggests that *The So-Called "Ego"* is a simplification obscuring the complexity of our drives (D 115).[11] But why assume that a project of self-cultivation requires a stable "ego" to act as a centralised control-cen-

**9** Rebecca Bamford, "Health and Self-Cultivation in *Dawn*," in Rebecca Bamford (ed.), *Nietzsche's Free Spirit Philosophy*, London 2015, 85–109: 101. In this chapter, Bamford gives a brief summary of discussions of potential influences on Nietzsche's metaphors of gardening in the secondary literature, which collectively point to Epicurus, Montaigne, Voltaire and La Mettrie's "man as plant analogy" as possible sources, and she offers further exploration of the significance of the latter for reading *Dawn* (92).

**10** See, for example, Christa Davis Acampora, "Being Unattached," in Bamford (ed.), *Nietzsche's Free Spirit Philosophy*, 199–206: 202; Bamford, "Health and Self-Cultivation," 98; Paul Katsafanas, *The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious*, Oxford 2016, 78; and Carl B. Sachs, "Nietzsche's *Daybreak*: Towards a Naturalized Theory of Autonomy," *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13/1 (2008), 81–100: 83.

**11** This aphorism equivocates between the so-called "ego" as a simplification and distortion in which we "misread ourselves" as individuals, forming a false sense of our characters, and the idea of the ego itself as a simplification, but in fact these two levels interact – we simplify what it is to be a self in general and what is occurring within us as individuals in particular – and it is through a better awareness of the latter that we come to challenge the former and recognise the fundamental contingency and fluidity of all selves.

tre? The motivational force to develop aspects of the self in a particular direction, for example to "avoid opportunities for gratification of the drive" does not need to be singular, static or stable in order to be efficacious (D 109). Different drives can push us to take up various practices, but pursuing a given practice will affect the interactions and relations between these drives which Nietzsche understands as the self. In fact, not only can we conceive of self-cultivation without a stable ego, but challenging the idea of a stable ego opens up the radical potential to reshape the self. And as Carl B. Sachs notes, it is the illusion that we are "completed, fully *grown* facts" that, along with the evaluation that egoism is bad, holds us back from engaging in self-cultivation (D 560).[12] If we view our character as fixed and unchangeable then we fail to see the possibility that we can change it. It is when we recognise that the self is unstable, formed in a continuous process of interpretative activity and shifting drive interactions, rather than given, that we become aware of the possibilities of self-cultivation.[13] If the self is a contingent formation, then perhaps it can be radically reformed. The possibility of engaging in activities which may enhance or subdue a drive, or shift the relationship between them, emerges as a possibility of reshaping the self. Combined with liberation from censor for focusing our energy on ourselves, insight into our own contingency and mutability thus invites us to turn to activities of cultivating the self.

Thus, self-cultivation begins with addressing the second of our problems, our lack of self-knowledge.[14] This is key firstly in terms of achieving the general recognition that the self is constituted by shifting drives, rather than assuming a given, stable ego. But self-knowledge also matters in terms of getting to know our own strengths, weaknesses and needs by becoming more aware of the particular drive activity that

**12** Sachs, "Nietzsche's *Daybreak*," 91.

**13** Sachs makes the important point that it is through engaging in self-cultivation and experiencing change that we reveal and recognise for ourselves the potential of self-cultivation (Sachs, "Nietzsche's *Daybreak*," 94).

**14** This connection between self-cultivation and knowledge places Nietzsche in a tradition of what Pierre Hadot terms philosophy as a way of life, in which philosophy must be practiced actively and is transformative of who we are. Hadot suggests that we should understand ancient philosophy in this way but also singles out some later philosophers as reconnecting with this tradition, including Spinoza and Nietzsche (Pierre Hadot, "Philosophy as a Way of Life," in Arnold I. Davidson (ed.), *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Malden, MA 1995, 264–76: 272). Foucault takes up Hadot's analysis of ancient philosophers as concerned with self-transformation and turns to their practices of caring for the self, in order to explore alternatives to our contemporary "technologies of the self" which, he argued, served to produce subjugated selves (Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8/4 (1982), 777–95: 785, and "Technologies of the Self," in Huck Gutman / Patrick H. Hutton / Luther H. Martin (eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, Amherst, MA 1988, 16–49: 18). More recently, Peter Sloterdijk has extended this analysis to explore the multifarious ways in which humans have continually cultivated and shaped themselves in his concept of Anthropotechnics, taking in the tradition of ascetic practices that Hadot highlights in ancient thought and the effects of contemporary developments in biology and AI (Patrick Roney / Andrea Rossi, "Editorial Introduction: Sloterdijk's Anthropotechnics," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 26 (2021), 3–8).

constitutes us as an individual. That most of our drive activity is unknown to us is a challenge to engaging in their cultivation but not an insurmountable one. Much of Nietzsche's writings and the method he develops are aimed precisely at addressing this challenge by deepening our awareness of our drive activity. We do not need complete self-knowledge to be able to engage in self-cultivation and neither do we need complete control. Turning to the third aspect of the problem, increasing self-knowledge is in fact an example of how conscious practices of self-reflection can influence our drives and the self that is constituted by them. So, our conscious activity does have an effect on the unconscious aspects of the self. As Paul Katsafanas observes: "conscious thoughts are parts of the whole and so have their effects," effects which may be "gradual and incremental."[15]

That self-cultivation must occur without total knowledge of what motivates us, or what effects our actions have, and without total conscious control is explicit in *Dawn*. Bamford has picked up on Nietzsche's mention of "seeds sown" with a "blind hand devoid of any knowledge as to who hungers and already has abundance" in the context of the "*alimentation*" of the drives (D 119). But despite this blindness she also notes that in the metaphor of gardening Nietzsche is suggesting there are ways that we can cultivate more fruitful and healthier plants.[16] We shall see how this tension also plays out in Nietzsche's employment of the metaphor of pregnancy and what this metaphor can add to our understanding of navigating self-cultivation in the context of Nietzsche's understanding of the self.

## III Pregnancy and Self-Cultivation

We have already seen that the theme of self-cultivation runs throughout *Dawn*, and it is clearly present in Book Five in which Nietzsche's most extensive discussion of pregnancy occurs. D 552 (*Ideal Selfishness*) is followed directly by an aphorism which explores philosophy as a translation into reason of what "tastes best to me and me alone," and a search for "my own type of health" (D 553). This discussion of philosophy "with all its detours" is suggestive of a practice of caring for or cultivating the self that involves paying attention to one's particularity. And before long comes the important discussion of handling one's drives like a gardener (D 560). If we read the metaphor of pregnancy in D 552 as relating to the theme of self-cultivation, then we can under-

**15** Katsafanas, *The Nietzschean Self*, 155–6. Katsafanas argues that the motivational tendencies of drives are influenced by conscious thought because "the particular behavior that a given motive characteristically causes is dependent on the associated interpretation" (148–55). I think this is an important observation on how consciousness can influence without totally controlling our behaviour; I would add that given drives are not static this can affect the character of the drive itself.

**16** Bamford, "Health and Self-Cultivation in *Dawn*," 101.

stand the following aphorisms as an expansion on the particularities of the practice of self-cultivation that Nietzsche is developing. And the connection to self-cultivation is indeed indicated in the language of D 552 itself, where Nietzsche begins the aphorism by asking: "Is there a more consecrated condition than that of pregnancy?" and continues: "This is proper *ideal* selfishness: always to care for the soul, to guard over it and keep it in repose, so that our fructification *comes to a beautiful conclusion!*"

This language of caring for the soul specifically echoes Plato's use of the metaphor of pregnancy. In Diotima's lesson to Socrates – as Plato has him report it in the *Symposium* at the party in honour of Agathon – she speaks of those who are pregnant in soul rather than in the body and claims "these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth. And what is fitting? Wisdom and the rest of virtue" (*Symposium* 209a).[17] In his detailed analysis of Plato's metaphors of pregnancy, David Leitao argues that to give birth to virtue is to have achieved a state of the soul and that "the virtue he [the philosopher] gives birth to within his own soul is a matter of self-cultivation."[18] This need to care for the soul is, as Michel Foucault notes, a theme that occurs in other Platonic dialogues – Foucault notes *Cratylus, Apology*, *Phaedo* and *Alicibiades*.[19] Nietzsche's placing of the metaphor in *Dawn* resonates with the whole of Diotima's speech, being directly preceded by the aphorism *Of Future Virtues* (D 551), and prior to that by *Knowledge and Beauty* (D 550). In the *Symposium*, there is a movement that starts by positing ideas as the product of pregnancy both when we love beauty in a particular individual (*Symposium* 210a, 210c), and when we move through loving knowledge "to the great sea of beauty, and, gazing on this, he gives birth to many gloriously beautiful ideas and theories, in unstinting love of wisdom" (*Symposium* 210d). Giving birth to ideas then progresses to giving birth to virtue:

> [W]hen he looks at Beauty in the only way that Beauty can be seen – only then will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue (because he is in touch with true Beauty). The love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it, and if any human being could become immortal, it would be he (*Symposium* 212a–b).

In Book Five of *Dawn*, there is a similar movement to that in the *Symposium* from the beauty of knowledge to the promise of virtues and finally, with the metaphor of pregnancy, to the care of the soul. The following sections will explore how the metaphor of pregnancy as Nietzsche uses it, and the practices and characteristics Nietzsche connects to pregnancy, elucidate an alternative to Plato's care of the soul.

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**17** Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, Indianapolis, IN 1997, 457–505.

**18** David Leitao, *The Pregnant Male as Myth and Metaphor in Classical Greek Literature*, Cambridge 2012, 215.

**19** Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982*, ed. Frédérick Gros, trans. Graham Burchell, New York 2005, 53.

## IV Knowledge and the Metaphor of Pregnancy

Pregnancy as a metaphor in which we are pregnant with "ourself as a work" underscores the challenges involved in cultivating a self that is constituted and shaped by drives (D 448). Namely, to what extent do we know and can we control the material that is being worked on? I will turn first to the theme of knowledge, and lack of knowledge, which Nietzsche associates with pregnancy. In Nietzsche's metaphor pregnancy is clearly connected to something unknown: "Everything is veiled, full of presentiment, one has no idea how it will go" (D 552). This is in keeping with the reality of pregnancy in the nineteenth century. Even now, in an age of ultrasounds and genetic tests, there is uncertainty and anxiety around the success of pregnancy and the health of the child that will be born. Historically there was often uncertainty around whether a woman was even with child, and both 'false' pregnancies and coming to term unexpectedly, could occur. For example, surveying the language used around pregnancy in England in the previous century, Joanne Begiato emphasises how "narratives of pregnancy emphasise the state's sheer uncertainty."[20] Begiato's examples include the poet Anna Barbauld's reference to a part of herself "unknown," and frequent uses of the term "stranger" to refer to the unborn child.[21] Going back further in history, Cathy McClive chronicles the uncertainty around pregnancy across early modern Europe. McClive notes that women "were not always believed because the female body conceals 'truths'", and experts were not always accurate in determining whether or not the women was genuinely pregnant or carrying "false fruit."[22] This lack of trust in women's testimony regarding their own bodies was most dramatically exposed when women were denied the exemption from the death penalty that pregnancy would have conferred, only to be found on dissection to be pregnant.[23] Nietzsche simultaneously captures this uncertainty and makes reference to this judicial practice at the end of D 552: "And even if this turns out to be bad and dangerous, let us not, in our reverence for what is coming to be, lag behind worldly justice, which allows neither judge nor executioner to lay a hand on one who is pregnant."

So a metaphor of pregnancy as a metaphor for self-cultivation connects with the idea of sowing seeds for cultivation blindly which Nietzsche expresses in D 119, and to the drives as blind tools of other drives in D 109. I noted above that, in *Dawn*, Nietzsche addresses the challenge of our lack of self-knowledge and develops a method aimed at deepening our awareness of our drives and needs. It is a problem for self-cultivation

**20** Joanne Begiato, "'Breeding' a 'Little Stranger': Managing Uncertainty in Pregnancy in Later Georgian England", in Jennifer Evans / Ciara Meehan (eds.), *Perceptions of Pregnancy from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century: Genders and Sexualities in History*, Cham 2017, 13–34: 18.

**21** Begiato, "'Breeding' a 'Little Stranger'", 19 and 25–6.

**22** Cathy McClive, "The Hidden Truths of the Belly: The Uncertainties of Pregnancy in Early Modern Europe," *Social History of Medicine* 15/2 (2002), 209–22: 211.

**23** McClive, "The Hidden Truths of the Belly," 209.

which he acknowledges but also addresses in his philosophical method. The reader who is convinced by Nietzsche's descriptions of the various ways in which our drives colour and interpret our experience will become alert to the activity of their own drives. Nietzsche advocates practices which will help us turn our attention to the activity of our drives. For example, as I will expand on below, he advocates a practice of truth that includes solitude so that we are better able to hear the different voices of our drives. He also aims to draw attention to the presence of different perspectives and to the activity of the drives shaping them through his own writing. The stylistic techniques he employs in *Dawn* include dialogue within a given aphorism as a way of exploring opposing perspectives and shifts between different perspectives across aphorisms. His use of poetic language, and the ebbs and flows of the rhythm of the text, aim to induce affective responses and bring attention to the interpretation of our drives which shape these responses.[24] Better knowing ourselves, which means for Nietzsche being aware of our drives, and thus getting beyond the "phantom ego," is a pre-condition of self-cultivation (D 105).[25]

In Nietzsche's invocation of pregnancy, however, there is also a serene acceptance of the limits of this knowledge. We cannot know what will result from our work on ourselves. This is in keeping with the theme of experiment and the idea of letting ourselves be experiments (D 453, D 501). That what is coming is unknown contains the possibility of a new dawn. In addition to the anxiety of the unknown that surrounded real pregnancies, Nietzsche evokes the reverence that the mystery of pregnancy can inspire in his language around pregnancy: "Is there a more consecrated condition than that of pregnancy? To do everything one does in the unspoken belief that it must be for the good of the one who is coming to be in us! This has to *enhance* its mysterious value upon which we think with delight!" (D 552) Nietzsche ends the aphorism by describing the pregnant as *wunderlich* which is generally translated in Nietzsche's texts as "strange," as in the Brittain Smith translation of *Dawn*, but can also mean whimsical or fantastical, and has the root *Wunder*, meaning marvel, wonder or miracle (D 552; Nachlass 1882/83, 4[215], KSA 10.171), in contrast to *seltsam*, which Nietzsche also uses in other contexts in his writings.

These connotations of marvel and wonder perhaps connect to a notion of sublimity mentioned in the next aphorism. In suggesting there are "many other and certainly

**24** Bamford has argued that *Dawn* has a performative structure that employs mood against the morality of custom (which itself has been supported by manipulation of mood). For example, through the use of self-interruption engendering fellow-feeling (Rebecca Bamford, "Mood and Aphorism in Nietzsche's Campaign against Morality," *Pli* 25 (2014), 55–77: 56–7). I extend this to the idea that Nietzsche is aiming to directly engage our drives through his style.

**25** Ruth Abbey makes the point that: "Self-knowledge is obviously a precondition of a proper care of the self, for an understanding of the self in its specificity is essential if it is to be cared for in a proper individualized way. However, as the Nietzschean self is protean, both in its desires and drives and its transformation through self-overcoming, the quest for self-knowledge must be continuous. Thus it is probably more accurate to conceive of the two processes of knowing and caring for the self as concurrent, complementary projects" (Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period*, New York 2000, 101).

many loftier sublimities of philosophy than mine and not just those that are more gloomy and more ambitious," Nietzsche is also presenting his own method of philosophy as a type of sublimity, if a more modest, and potentially more cheerful, one. The search for his "own type of health" through diet, climate "solitary living" and other habits forms part of an alternative form of sublimity which contrasts with the more ambitious philosophies of the sublime (D 553). Ansell-Pearson has argued that in *Dawn*, Nietzsche is interested in fashioning new sublimities which offer a distinct path to the pursuit of a sublime associated with a higher, imaginary world.[26] He suggests that Nietzsche is "keen to militate against the sublime of dread and terror and to configure the sublime in a more modest, even humbling manner."[27] The sublime is still connected to a form of greatness or elevation and, Ansell-Pearson argues, is connected to the idea of overcoming, but it will be an overcoming of the very moral and metaphysical frameworks in which previous configurations of the sublime operated.[28] Nietzsche's employment of pregnancy takes up the idea of mystery, and reverence that we might associate with the sublime. If Nietzsche is connecting the philosopher's pregnancy with the sublime, he is also bringing the metaphor of pregnancy back to the corporeality of real pregnancy and thus suggesting a philosophical practice that connects to a grounded, earthly sublimity. As Ansell-Pearson argues, the sublime in *Dawn* is "implicated in the disclosure of reality: what has hitherto struck humankind as ugly is acknowledged and rendered a new source of beauty."[29] Hence, Nietzsche suggests that "knowledge even of the ugliest reality is itself beautiful" (D 550).

Nietzsche's metaphor of pregnancy hints at the sublime but links most explicitly with the related theme of beauty, given that he describes our "fructification" as coming "*to a beautiful conclusion*!" (D 552) That Nietzsche connects knowledge and beauty in D 550, thus in the run up to introducing the metaphor of pregnancy, is significant in that it clearly echoes Plato's account of Diotima's speech. Diotima's discussion of spiritual pregnancy comes in the context of her account of Eros as told via Socrates in the *Symposium*. Diotima suggests that love "is in love with what is beautiful, and wisdom is extremely beautiful. It follows that Love *must* be a lover of wisdom" (*Symposium* 204b). Diotima moves from talking about the figure of Eros or Love to the lover who is pregnant in soul with "[w]isdom and the rest of virtue" (*Symposium* 209a). In encountering a beautiful young man, the lover will "instantly teem with ideas and arguments about virtue" (*Symposium* 209c). Seeking to "love and care for" the object of desire the lover will "seek to give birth to such ideas as will make young men better," and this concern for caring for the soul of the loved, leads the lover to contemplate general laws and customs. From here the lover moves to contemplate: "various kinds of knowledge. The

**26** Keith Ansell-Pearson, "Nietzsche, the Sublime, and the Sublimities of Philosophy: An Interpretation of *Dawn*," *Nietzsche-Studien* 39 (2010), 201–32: 202.

**27** Ansell-Pearson, "Nietzsche, the Sublime, and the Sublimities of Philosophy," 205.

**28** Ansell-Pearson, "Nietzsche, the Sublime, and the Sublimities of Philosophy," 208.

**29** Ansell-Pearson, "Nietzsche, the Sublime, and the Sublimities of Philosophy," 205.

result is that he will see the beauty of knowledge" (*Symposium* 209c–d). This in turns leads the lover, who is the philosopher, to the contemplation of the form of beauty:

> This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning of this very Beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful (*Symposium* 211c–d).

And if "someone got to see the Beautiful itself, absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of morality" (*Symposium* 211e), it is then and only then that they might give birth to true virtue (*Symposium* 212a). Plato thus suggests that knowledge is beautiful and the virtue the philosopher should give birth to is dedication to the pursuit of knowledge. Further, the pursuit of knowledge involves recognising that knowledge aims at the forms which are presented as higher than the world of flesh and mortals. This distinction between the forms as the object of knowledge and the sensual world is underscored in the *Republic* where Socrates tells Glaucon:

> The lovers of sights and sounds like beautiful sounds, colors, shapes and everything fashioned out of them, but their thought is unable to see and embrace the nature of the beautiful itself [...]. What about someone who believes in beautiful things, but doesn't believe in the beautiful itself and isn't able to follow anyone who could lead him to the knowledge of it? Don't you think he is living in a dream rather than a wakened state? Isn't this dreaming: whether asleep or awake [...]? (*Republic* 476 b–c)

In *Dawn*, we follow a similar trajectory from knowledge and beauty (D 550) to *Future Virtues* (D 551) and giving birth (D 552). That Nietzsche knew Plato's works extremely well, both as a lecturer at Basel and as a student attending courses, including one specifically focused on the *Symposium*, supports reading the trajectory in *Dawn* as a knowing reference, which sets out a revaluation of Plato's use of the metaphor.[30]

The revaluation of Plato's concept of spiritual pregnancy that this set of aphorisms suggests is presented more explicitly in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85). *On Immaculate Perception* (Z II, KSA 4.156–9) connects the Platonic metaphor of birth with the Platonic critique of the pure perceivers. Immaculate perception (*unbefleckte Erkenntnis*) plays with immaculate conception (*unbefleckte Empfängnis*), linking Plato's rejection of the sight and sound lovers as on a false path that cannot lead to knowledge, to Christianity, with its uptake of the valuation of a higher realm and concept of immaculate conception. But according to Zarathustra, it is the pure perceivers who are impure, describing them as "lechers," and infertile; it "shall be your curse, you immaculate ones, you

**30** Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography*, Urbana, IL 2008, 45.

pure perceivers, that you shall never give birth" (KSA 4.157–8).[31] Like Plato's lover / philosopher, who teems with ideas, or as Leitao renders the Greek is "full" with them,[32] the moon is described by Zarathustra as broad and heavy with young (*breit und trächtig*),[33] but a liar unable to give birth, suggesting a false pregnancy (KSA 4.156). Zarathustra's attack on the lack of fertility in "pure perception" attacks Plato's rejection of the senses as a means to knowledge, as well as the valuation of objectivity, understood as denying one's own perspective, that we find in modern science.[34] The infertility of the pure perceivers is then contrasted by Zarathustra with a female procreative power: "she comes already, and glowing – *her* love for the earth is coming!" (KSA 4.158) Plato too moves from a male begetting to a specifically female metaphor of birth, but Nietzsche presents Platonic pregnancy as a false pregnancy providing an alternative account of a female spiritual pregnancy.[35] Interpreting *On Immaculate Perception* as a response to Plato, and in particular the *Symposium*, is supported by probable references in succeeding passages to Aristophanes who is present at the *Symposium* and speaks before Socrates recounts Diotima's speech. In the following two sections of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we find the names of two of Aristophanes plays, *The Frogs* and *The Clouds*: "their wisdom often smells as if came from the swamp; and verily, I have even heard a frog croaking in it!" "Verily we are drawn ever upward – but simply to the realm of the clouds" (Z II, On Scholars, On Poets; KSA 4.164). While I would not want to equate Nietzsche's positions in *Dawn* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the clear references to Plato, and specifically to the *Symposium*, in the employment of metaphors of pregnancy in the latter, support my contention that its use in *Dawn* also involves a knowing reference to and critique of Plato.

Returning to *Dawn*, there are various points which we can take as an attempt to subvert and thus develop an alternative to Plato's use of metaphors of birth and more broadly Plato's account of caring for the soul. In *Knowledge and Beauty*, Nietzsche references Plato directly regarding his agreement with a thinker as different from him as Aristotle that the "*highest happiness*" was to be found "*in knowledge*" (D 550). The rela-

**31** *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes, New York 2005.

**32** Leitao, *The Pregnant Male as Myth and Metaphor*, 202.

**33** *Trächtig* can be translated as "pregnant" but also as "heavy with young" or "in calf," and this choice of word is thus part of Nietzsche's mocking connection of those who claim purity from physical desires and sensual distractions with animality and corporeality. When he reverts to the term *Schwangerschaft*, used in his positive metaphors of pregnancy, it is to call the Moon's pregnancy a lie: "*Lügner war er mir mit seiner Schwangerschaft*" (Z II, On Immaculate Perception, KSA 4.156).

**34** Laurence Lampert emphasises that Zarathustra is rejecting contemporary *Wissenschaft* (Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of "Thus Spoke Zarathustra"*, New Haven, CT 1986, 124). In *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), Nietzsche draws a lineage from Plato, through Christianity to modern science (TI, Fable). I think this passage in *Zarathustra* can be read as a critique of both Plato and contemporary science.

**35** Leitao highlights this movement from male begetting to female birth (Leitao, *The Pregnant Male as Myth and Metaphor*, 187 and 226).

tionship to Plato here is complex. Nietzsche is agreeing with Plato regarding the value of knowledge, and furthermore of knowledge as "*understanding*" rather than "intuition." Nietzsche might also be seen to be echoing Plato's rejection of imitation and the production of artistic images, whether through painting or poetry, as a source of knowledge (*Republic* 602a), when he criticises those who "save up their veneration and their feeling of happiness for works of imagination and dissemblance" (D 550). But ultimately the realm of the forms is for Nietzsche an imaginative construction of a higher world and we can read Nietzsche as rejecting a Platonic notion of beauty when he asks: "Is there after all anything "beautiful in itself?" and suggests instead that "knowledge places its beauty not merely around things but, in the long run, into things" (D 550). This then seems to oppose Diotima's claim that we aim at "the divine Beauty itself in its one form" (*Symposium* 212a). Earlier in Book Five of *Dawn*, Nietzsche had already claimed that we have been too narrow in our view of beauty and "*The realm of beauty is bigger.* – [...] [U]p until now it was only permitted to search for beauty in the *morally good* – reason enough that one found so little and had to look around for so many imaginary things of beauty without bones!" (D 468) Which in turns seems to reject Plato's association of beauty and the good (*Symposium* 201c), and dissociation of beauty and flesh (*Symposium* 211e), though this passage is clearly also part of Nietzsche's wider critique of contemporary customary morality. In writing of the fatigue of old age, in which great men including Plato lose the desire to be immortalized in books for "rare souls" and the capacity "to become one's own adversary," and instead seek the deification found in temples and with disciples, Nietzsche employs language that he will also associate with pregnancy (D 542). Old age allows the philosopher "to ripen" and "become still and to take repose in the resplendent idolatry of a woman." The references to a fruit which becomes "milder and sweeter" evokes the gentleness Diotima associates with procreation in the *Symposium* (296d). Yet I think the stillness of old age should be understood as a false pregnancy, like the pregnancy of the moon and immaculate perceivers in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This old age is an end of experimentation and self-cultivation in which the thinker has fixed himself and "*may* not develop further" (D 542). It is thus an age of infertility.

That the aphorism in which Nietzsche employs his own metaphor of pregnancy, and its possibility of coming "*to a beautiful conclusion*," is immediately followed by one which speaks of our drives, and of diet, climate and health, suggests that Nietzsche brings the interconnection between seeking knowledge, finding things beautiful and caring for the self so as to give birth to virtue back to a bodily level of drive cultivation (D 552, D 553). While in the *Symposium*, Eryimachus' medical analogy, distinguishing between healthy and diseased love, and cautioning that we should regulate our appetite, is surpassed by Socrates' account of his lesson from Diotima, Nietzsche's metaphor of pregnancy is followed by a positive reference to the importance of health and diet, rooting us back in the need to pay attention to the body (D 553). Finally, a crucial point is that while, in Nietzsche's view, Plato's passion for knowledge is an example of a passion for nothing (D 474), for Nietzsche knowledge itself is a bodily passion or drive (D 429). That we have a drive to knowledge again tethers the pursuit of knowledge, as

an integral part of caring for the soul, to corporeality. Thus, Nietzsche shares with Plato an emphasis on the importance of knowledge for self-cultivation but fundamentally opposes Plato's understanding of what knowledge is and how we acquire it.

## V Presumptuous Talk of "Willing" and "Creating"

We have seen that Nietzsche addresses the challenge of acquiring self-knowledge as a prerequisite to self-cultivation, but also that if we read the metaphor of pregnancy as a metaphor for a form of self-cultivation it implies accepting uncertainty regarding what is coming to be in us. The metaphor also underscores that we must accept a lack of control regarding what emerges from this work.[36] That we cannot determine the character of what our work on ourselves will produce is a clear implication of the metaphorical appeal to pregnancy. We cannot determine the character of our children. That not only the product but the process of pregnancy cannot be controlled has been stressed by various philosophers of pregnancy.[37]

Nietzsche explicitly draws attention to this in his use of the metaphor:

> [T]here reigns in us a pure and purifying feeling of profound irresponsibility, rather like a spectator has before the closed curtain – *it* is growing, *it* is coming to the light of day: *we* have in our hands nothing to determine, either its value or its hour. We are thrown back solely on that mediate influence of protecting. "It is something greater than we are that is growing here" is our innermost hope […] if what is expected is a thought, a deed – toward all that we bring forth we have essentially no other relationship than that of pregnancy and ought to let blow in the wind all presumptuous talk of "willing" and "creating"! (D 552)

Nietzsche's first reference to pregnancy in *Dawn*, before the longer discussion of D 552, also emphasises the lack of control that we have: "the profound speechlessness of pregnancy never comes to you! The event of the day propels you here and there like chaff, while you fancy yourselves to be propelling the event – poor devils!" (D 177) Nietzsche's contention here that in self-cultivation we must let go of the idea of "willing" and accept what is coming to be in us connects to the idea we find subsequently in *The Gay Science* (1882–87) that human beings who "create themselves" are those who "want to *become*

**36** That this is a key implication of Nietzsche's use of the metaphor is noted by Ansell-Pearson / Bamford, *Nietzsche's "Dawn"*, 62; Katrina Mitcheson, "On Nietzsche and Pregnancy: The Beginning of the Genesis of a New Human Being," in Luce Irigaray / Mahon O'Brien / Christos Hadjioannou (eds.), *Towards a New Human Being*, Cham 2019, 199–220: 206; and Melanie Shepherd, "'Let us Return to Herr Nietzsche': On Health and Revaluation," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 50 (2019), 125–48: 131.

**37** Mullin, "Pregnant Bodies, Pregnant Minds," 39; Alice Pugliese, "Phenomenology of Drives: Between Biological and Personal Life," in Jonna Bornemark / Nicholas Smith (eds.), *Phenomenology of Pregnancy*, Stockholm 2016, 71–90: 72; and Iris Marion Young, "Pregnancy Embodiment," in *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, Bloomington, IN 1990, 160–76: 167.

*who we are*" (GS 335),[38] and later to his notion of "something that will not learn, a brick wall of spiritual fatum" (BGE 231).[39] It also picks up the refrain from Book Two of *Dawn* where Nietzsche discusses will and purpose and the opposing idea of destiny.[40] Here Nietzsche suggests we often misunderstand our motives, lacking self-knowledge regarding the activity of our drives and the significance of "somatic factors" (D 129). And we dichotomise between "the realm of *purposes* and *will* and the realm of *chance events*" (D 130). This latter: "The Greeks called this realm of the incalculable and of sublime everlasting philistinism Moira and placed it around their gods as the horizon beyond which they could neither see nor exert any control" (D 130). Moira, which Nietzsche refers to here as a realm, can be understood simply as our "allotted portion" or "fate" but can also refer to the Goddess Moira as a personification of fate, who is also sometimes considered a birth Goddess.[41] We again have a connection to the *Symposium* as Diotima tells Socrates "the goddess who resides at childbirth – she's called Moira or Eilithia – is really Beauty" (*Symposium* 206d). If cultivating the self is a form of pregnancy, then we are not the authors of ourselves but must accept that what comes to be in us is subject to an element of underlying fate.

Yet the metaphor of pregnancy, reclaimed from Plato, also helps us avoid falling into a dichotomy of a directing agent in complete control versus a passive vessel. In her analysis of the phenomenological experience of pregnancy, Iris Marion Young describes how "[t]he pregnant women experiences herself as a source and participant in a creative process. Though she does not plan and direct it, neither does it merely wash over her; rather she *is* this process, this change."[42] Mullin suggests

> wanted pregnancies lead to experiences whereby the body can be seen to function both independently of conscious direction, and in accordance with a woman's deliberately undertaken projects and plans [...], the power of the body to act, without needing direction from a women's conscious plans, is made dramatically manifest during pregnancy.[43]

In its application to self-cultivation this allows us to recognise that we can consciously take up practices directed at cultivating the self in a particular direction, but we must at the same time accept that not only does the product exceed our control but so does the process. The implications of, for example, spending time in solitude or experiencing revelations regarding ourselves will have ripples that we cannot foresee. For Nietz-

**38** *The Gay Science*, trans. Josephine Nauckhoff, Cambridge 2001.

**39** *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge 2002.

**40** Matthew Meyer emphasises that this is a key theme developed in Book Two of *Dawn* which with the use of the concept of Moira also connects to *Assorted Opinions* and *The Wanderer* (Matthew Meyer, *Nietzsche's Free Spirit Works: A Dialectical Reading*, Cambridge 2019, 164).

**41** "Moira is known mainly as a Fate, but she was also a birth goddess (*Illiad* xxiv.209)" (Plato, *Symposium*, 489n42).

**42** Young, "Pregnancy Embodiment," 67.

**43** Mullin, "Pregnant Bodies, Pregnant Minds," 39.

sche, there is no *higher* realm of fate, rather there is the reality of our drives which are the material and the motivating force of any self-cultivation. Thus, in the context of Nietzsche's understanding of the self, there is no one agency limiting and directing this process from beginning to end, the practices that we decide to take up consciously will impact different bodily drives and drives hierarchies in ways that we are unconscious of and cannot limit or predict. There is no centralised single agency that controls these drives but as the gardening metaphor indicates, that we do not determine our drives does not mean they cannot be cultivated: "One can handle one's drives like a gardener and, though few know it, cultivate the shoots of one's anger, pity, musing, vanity as fruitfully and advantageously as beautiful fruit on espaliers" (D 560). And this suggests that while we cannot control what is coming, we can *care* for it.

## VI Caring for What is Coming to Be

Pregnancy as a metaphor of self-cultivation suggests a relationship of care rather than control toward our future self, and its deeds and thoughts. We cannot determine the self that emerges from a practice of self-cultivation, but we can endeavour to provide the right conditions to facilitate its health. Using the recurring metaphor of gardening, this time in relation to thoughts, Nietzsche warns us against taking a purely passive role: "Woe to the thinker who is not the gardener but only the earth for the plants that grow in him" (D 382). Instead, we can take a role of cultivating or caring for our potential by being attentive to the conditions of growth. As Nietzsche says, the state of pregnancy is one in which one does "everything one does in the unspoken belief that it must be for the good of that which is coming to be in us!" and "the child must emerge from the mildest and best of conditions" (D 552). The wrong conditions on the other hand can destroy potential greatness:

> *Do not be unwittingly destroyed.* – Our greatness and ability crumble away not all at once but constantly; the little vegetation that grows in between everything and understands how to cling to everywhere, this is what ruins what is great in us – the quotidian, hourly pitifulness of our environment that goes overlooked, the thousand tiny tendrils of this or that small and small-minded feeling growing out of our neighbourhood, our job, the company we keep, the division of our day. If we allow these small weeds to grow unwittingly, then unwittingly they will destroy us! (D 435)[44]

What then are the "best of conditions" and what practices of care can we take up?

Given Nietzsche's emphasis in *Dawn* on drives, affects and the body, we can expect the practices and conditions of care to be very different from Plato's account of how to

**44** Crucially Nietzsche allows that we might want to be destroyed, but then we should let this destruction happen suddenly and become "sublime ruins," this perhaps connects to his later notion of *Untergehen*, in which Nietzsche emphasises that creativity will require a willingness to perish.

care for the soul. Nietzsche emphasises an engagement with the body and its drives and thus with our particularity. As he writes earlier in *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* (1879)*:*

> In regard to youthful talents one must act strictly in accordance with Goethe's maxim that it is often necessary to refrain from attacking error so as not to attack truth. Their condition resembles the sicknesses of pregnancy and is attended by strange [*seltsame*] appetites: these one must satisfy and look after as far as one can for the sake of the fruit one hopes they will produce. As sick-nurse to these curious invalids one must, to be sure, understand the difficult art of self-abasement (HH II, VM 285).[45]

The theme of strangeness is picked up again in D 552. And while I suggested above that here it carries connotations of the fantastic and thus sublimity, it can also be understood as a strangeness that sets the pregnant apart from the crowd and suggests they do not follow customs that do not suit their specific needs. The sublimity explored in the next aphorism concerns finding our own particular path in tune with our own particular appetites. The aim is to discover and give expression to our "instinct for a personal diet" even if that marks us out as strange in relation to cultural expectations (D 553). The "ideal selfishness" of pregnancy suggests a healthy form of egoism rooted in knowing one's own needs, as a corporeal being with drives, that contrasts to the "pseudo egotism" based on a "bloodless abstraction" that Nietzsche criticises earlier in D 105. As Patton suggests of the metaphor of pregnancy in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, what one gives birth to is particular, one's *own* child, as opposed to universal and is "essentially a corporeal event."[46] This connects with a suggestion in *Dawn* offered by one of Nietzsche's dialogue characters that "I would have to be a fool to denigrate the fruits I find most delicious because they happen to grow on *my* tree!" (D 493) Our fructification requires care toward ourselves as particular corporeal beings and will produce particular, corporeal fruit.

Crucially, the personal philosophical diet that Nietzsche describes his inclination taking him toward includes the taste for "little speaking" and "solitary living" (D 553), and speechlessness and solitude are both connected by Nietzsche to the condition of pregnancy. Nietzsche links pregnancy and solitude in a note of 1880 (5[42], KSA 10.190–1) and in Book Three of *Dawn*:

> *Learning solitude.* – Oh, you poor devils in the great cities of world politics, you talented young men tormented by ambition who consider it your duty to remark on everything that happens […]. Who, because you are always listening in, always watching for the moment when you can throw in your two cents' worth, miss out on any genuine productivity. No matter how greedily you long to do great deeds, the profound speechlessness of pregnancy never comes to you! (D 177)

Along with connected themes such as the desert and the wanderer, the importance of solitude is a recurring theme in Nietzsche's work,[47] and occurs at several points in

**45** *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1996.
**46** Patton, "Nietzsche and the Body of the Philosopher," 50–1.
**47** For example: UM III, SE 5; HH I, Preface 3; HH I 625; GS 50; GS 182; BGE 44; and GM II 24.

*Dawn*.[48] He associates the capacity for solitude with the free spirits and comments that, in contrast, "the herd animals and apostles of equality wrongly called 'free spirits'" would not "*be able to endure loneliness*" (Nachlass 1886, 3[13], KSA 12.173).

In *Dawn*, Nietzsche suggests that the greatest "deficiency in our type of education and upbringing" is that "no one learns, no one strives toward, no one teaches – *to learn to endure solitude*" (D 443). One reason it is so important we practice solitude and cultivate a capacity to be solitary is that it required for self-knowledge, which we have seen is a pre-condition for, and part of the process of, self-cultivation. It is also required for us to feel free to experiment in ways of living, which we have seen is a crucial part of Nietzsche's method of self-knowledge, and to let ourselves be experiments, a key aspect of our practice of caring for and working on the self more generally.

Firstly, the connection Nietzsche draws between pregnancy and solitude highlights that key to solitude as a practice of self-cultivation is that it enables us to listen to and pay attention to our body. We need the quiet of solitude in order to be able to reflect on ourselves and pay proper attention to our drives. Back in his third *Untimely Meditation* (1874), Nietzsche writes: "We are afraid that when we are alone and quiet something will be whispered into our ear, and so we hate quietness and deafen ourselves with sociability" (UM III, SE 5).[49] As Graham Parkes puts it, lack of intercourse with other people will "allow the persons of the psyche to present themselves all the more clearly."[50] Thus, as in pregnancy, in which we are never entirely alone and self-contained but experience an other within us, and as Young puts it, are "decentered, split or doubled in several ways,"[51] solitude for Nietzsche still involves interaction with something other, in this case dialogue with the different perspectives within us. As Young suggests, pregnancy is a "paradigm of bodily experience in which the transparent unity of self dissolves and the body attends positively to itself at the same time as it enacts its projects."[52] It thus teaches us to question the unitary subject as Jonna Bornemark and Nicholas Smith claim the experience of pregnancy does.[53] This can be a challenging experience in which we cannot hide from ourselves and our own complexity in the crowd.

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**48** D 177, 249, 443, 485, 499, and 531. The importance of solitude to Nietzsche has been noted and explored by: Horst Hutter, *Shaping the Future: Nietzsche's Regime of the Soul and its Ascetic Practices*, Lanham, MD 2006; Michael Ure, *Nietzsche's Therapy: Self-Cultivation in the Middle Works*, Lanham, MD 2008, 209–17; Katrina Mitcheson, "Translating Man Back into Nature: Nietzsche's Method," *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18 (2013), 107–28; Katrina Mitcheson, "Techniques of Self-Knowledge in Nietzsche and Freud," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 46/3 (2015), 328–48; and more recently Mark Alfano, *Nietzsche's Moral Psychology*, Cambridge 2019, 233–51.

**49** *Untimely Mediations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1997.

**50** Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology*, Chicago 1994, 287.

**51** Young, "Pregnancy Embodiment," 160.

**52** Young, "Pregnancy Embodiment," 160.

**53** Jonna Bornemark / Nicholas Smith, "Introduction," in Bornemark / Smith (eds.), *Phenomenology of Pregnancy*, 7–14: 7.

As well as getting away from the noise of society, letting us better hear the activity of our drives, and the perspectives within us, we are getting away from, and getting distance on, the customs and prejudices that we have grown up with and been surrounded by. In *Dawn*, Nietzsche is deeply concerned with the way that society can rob us of the capacity to think and behave as individuals. In one of the little dialogues that occur in *Dawn*, titled *Another Reason for Solitude*, he writes: "Amid the many I live like the many and don't think as I; after some time I always feel then as if they wanted to ban me from myself and rob my soul" (D 491). Solitude allows us to free ourselves from our prejudices and break our habits in thinking. The experience of solitude and the distance it gives us on our social context makes possible the new way of looking at things, particularly ourselves and our understanding of our motives and behaviors, that Nietzsche is seeking in *Dawn*.

But practicing solitude, stepping out of social situations and taking time alone, also gradually makes us more capable of being solitary, more able to endure loneliness, and this removes a barrier to uncomfortable insights, and crucially a barrier to experimenting with new ways of living. A capacity for solitude allows us to endure the distance that difficult insights or experiments that make us appear strange to others could put between ourselves and our community. It also gives us the freedom to be an experiment and thus become someone else. Nietzsche observes that there is a sense in which those who break free of an existing way of thinking or living leave others behind:

> Odysseus's mother died of grief and longing for her child! One is driven from place to place and the other, the *settled* and tender one receives a broken heart as a result: it is always so! Sorrow breaks the heart of those who live to see the very person they love most turn their back on their opinion, their faith – this belongs to the tragedy that the free spirts *create* – of which they sometimes are also *aware*! (D 562)

Crucially the solitude that Nietzsche advocates is not born of an inability to engage with others or a fear of society. Nietzsche specifically advocates the solitude of the pregnant because it is a solitude that will be fruitful in contrast to one of renunciation: "To relinquish the world without knowing it, like a *nun* – that leads to an infertile, perhaps melancholic solitude" (D 440).

Nietzsche also connects the solitude of the pregnant to patience, silence and a willingness to be still. Society is not only full of the noise of others but also encourages us to jump in too quickly in order to feel part of events. Nietzsche suggests in *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* that a lack of productivity is connected with a lack of patience: "*Ground of unfruitfulness.* – There are highly gifted spirits who are always unfruitful simply because, from a weakness in their temperament, they are too impatient to wait out the term of their pregnancy" (HH II, VM 216). The notion of patience connects to the idea that caring for the self is something that may be gradual and achieved in "*small doses*" (D 534) operating as "*slow cures*" (D 462). "If you want to effect the most profound transformation possible, then administer the means in the smallest doses, but unremittingly and over long periods of time!" (D 534) One must wait out the period of gesta-

tion. Productivity requires an ability to be silent, to observe and wait. Nietzsche praises the "profound speechlessness" of pregnancy and contrasts it to the need "to remark on everything that happens" (D 177). To produce something great, to be "the figure of the hero here on the stage, you mustn't think about being the chorus, indeed you mustn't even know how to be the chorus."

In the state of pregnancy in which we "care for the soul," we "guard over it and keep it in repose." We may not be able to control what is coming but in being "thrown back solely on that mediate influence of protecting" we can care for what is coming and create the conditions that allow us to be fruitful (D 552). Nietzsche would have us learn from the silence and the solitude of the pregnant in order to pay attention to the multiplicity and particularly of our drives. Solitude is the condition in which we will discover the needs and forms of care appropriate to our specificity rather than dictated by the customs that we have been brought up with. Solitude, through cultivating better self-awareness and allowing us to experiment, will open up other more personal avenues of caring for ourselves and what is coming to be in us.

We might be concerned that Nietzsche's account lacks an awareness of the importance of interactions with others for caring for the self.[54] If, however, we place the emphasis on a capacity for solitude, and on the practice of solitude as part of a broader practice of caring for the self, this allows that there is scope to incorporate the benefits of getting distance on a society with the benefits of interactions. This would be in keeping with Nietzsche's warning against the solitude of the nun who renounces the world before experiencing it.

At times, Nietzsche appears to suggest that solitude is not for all. That solitude will only suit some of us seems to be the implication when Nietzsche writes: "if in solitude you feel great and fruitful, then the company of others will diminish you and make you barren: and *vice versa*" (D 473). Perhaps, as Nietzsche puts it in D 553, "solitary living" is simply what "tastes best to me and me alone" and is not for everyone. D 473 at least seems to suggest that the conditions of productivity will vary between us and solitude might not be the predominate condition in all cases. But he also argues powerfully for the damaging effects of being absorbed by society and claims that if we do not learn solitude then the speechlessness of pregnancy will not come to us, suggesting that experiencing at least periods of solitude and learning some capacity for it is a pre-condition of any spiritual pregnancy. There is an equivocation regarding the capacity for solitude as to whether it concerns our underlying type, the material of drives that we must work with, or whether it is something that we can acquire. But, if Nietzsche bemoans education as not preparing us for solitude (D 443), it seems that he does at least believe it is a skill that can be acquired by some who currently lack it. And taking time away from

**54** For a more extensive discussion of the problem of whether Nietzsche's emphasis on solitude neglects the importance of dialogue and interaction with other individuals see Mitcheson, "Techniques of Self-Knowledge in Nietzsche and Freud."

society is a possible technique explored in *Dawn* that can help us better know ourselves and be productive even if we what we discover we need to flourish as an individual is not, as Nietzsche seems to claim it was for him, prolonged solitude.

## VII Conclusion

This question of whether we can all benefit from solitude connects to a broader ambiguity and tension regarding the limits and possibilities of self-cultivation in Nietzsche's thought. The metaphors of both gardening and pregnancy capture just this tension. We can take up certain practices to cultivate ourselves, we can seek to create the right conditions for growth, and care for what is coming to be, but we must work with the materials, the drives, that we have. Not all gardens will flourish and perhaps for Nietzsche not all individuals are fertile. Melanie Shepherd draws attention to Nietzsche describing pregnancy as a kind of illness in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887, GM II 19), a description he also gives in *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* where he refers to the "sickness of pregnancy" (HH II, VM 285). But if pregnancy is an illness, Shepherd suggests it is one that both contains potential and which also requires an initial health.[55]

However, it is not just underlying health or strength but taste that might lead us to follow new and potentially productive paths. Nietzsche claims at the end of his productive life that he was able to move from sickness to health because he "always instinctively chose the *right* means: while the *décadent* as such always chooses the means harmful to him" (EH, Wise 2).[56] In her exploration of the conditions of health and sickness in relation to Nietzsche's project of revaluation, Shepherd suggests that "the alienation of sickness becomes the potential to create new forms of life."[57] Nietzsche identifies individuals who can break out of customary morality and forge new paths with those labelled as outlaws "decried as criminals, freethinkers, immoralists, villains, as depraved and depraving" (D 164). It is perhaps those already pregnant with possibilities to move beyond the habits and expectations of society and cultivate themselves in new experimental directions who already feel alienated from society and thus drawn to solitude. And it is perhaps those who have an underlying strength or health that allows them to endure this solitude who can benefit most from it, being fruitful in their endeavors to cultivate themselves.

But Nietzsche's complaint that the young cannot endure solitude is in the context of his critique of culture and education, suggesting that this lack can be worsened or ameliorated by shared as well an individual practices and thus addressed at a cultural level. The health of individuals and of culture are interconnected. Ultimately, Nietzsche does

**55** Shepherd, "On Health and Revaluation," 130–1.
**56** *Ecce Homo*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, London 2004.
**57** Shepherd, "On Health and Revaluation," 137–8.

have tendencies toward an elitism in which only some may prove to be strong enough for a radical transformation, but he also recognises the effect that broader social and cultural conditions have on us. *Dawn* contains both criticisms that operate at the cultural level and practices that can be taken up by individuals. These practices include simple gradual changes which can offset the damaging effects Nietzsche alleges our culture has had on us. To cure ourselves can require "countless little offsetting exercises and to cultivate unwittingly different habits" (D 462). And while, as in pregnancy, we cannot control the effects of these changes, we can choose to care for our health, and the suggestions for change that Nietzsche offers in *Dawn* are open to anybody try. Further, it is open to us to adapt the practices to suit our own particularity, taking the "detours" we need to find our "own type of health" (D 553). It is only in experimenting that any of us can learn what we are capable of enduring and of giving birth to. If we "want to be experiments," we will have to engage in self-cultivation and discover our own possibility to give birth. What is clear is that Nietzsche thinks if our pursuit of knowledge and practices of caring for the self are to be fruitful, they must include an emancipation from our customary and habitual ways of thinking and behaving. We must be able to get away from social expectations to find our own conditions of health, and this can be facilitated by following the example of the pregnant who according to Nietzsche practice solitude and are strange. In the idea of the pregnant caring for the soul, Nietzsche echoes Plato's account of spiritual pregnancy in which the pursuit of philosophy will give birth to virtue. But Nietzsche also emphasises the need to find our own philosophy, which in contrast to Plato's is rooted in our corporeality and pays attention to our drives and particular needs.

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