

On Nietzsche and Pregnancy; The Beginning of the Genesis of a New Human Being

Introduction

Luce Irigaray's recent book *To Be Born: Genesis of New a Human Being* can be seen as a response to Friedrich Nietzsche's well-known call for us to overcome humanity in its current form. Irigaray shares with Nietzsche the belief that to overcome the dissonance that runs through our culture and our being we cannot attend only to cultural and social problems but must bring about the emergence of a new kind of human being. Unlike Nietzsche, however, she develops an understanding of who we are and what we could be that begins with birth and thus roots the potential for this transformation in the concreteness of our infancy and the context of our upbringing. Nietzsche employs the idea of pregnancy in his discussions of the genesis of a new being, but the exclusion of conception and birth shed light on the limitations of his approach.

In this chapter, therefore, I want to draw out both what Nietzsche can contribute to the question of generating a new kind of human being through his positive insights, and what we can learn from his failures, by considering Nietzsche's use of the idea of pregnancy in relation to the transformation of the human. I will primarily focus on two passages, one from *Dawn or Daybreak (Morgenröthe)*, published in 1880, and the other from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, published in stages between 1883 and 1885. It is in this text that the figure of the *Übermensch* or overhuman is introduced. Zarathustra calls for a yearning for the overhuman to be the "will to marriage", and for a women's hope to be "May I give birth to the Overhuman!" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 62, p. 54).

Before I turn to discussion of these passages and what they tell us about Nietzsche's understanding of the emergence of a being beyond the modern human, it is first necessary to recognise the importance of transformation as a response to critique in the work of both Nietzsche and Irigaray. I will then clarify what Nietzsche understands by the human being, before discussing his use of the idea of pregnancy and how it develops between these two texts. This will facilitate a discussion of Nietzsche's method of transformation. His use of pregnancy highlights the importance of an awareness of the body to overcoming the failings of modern man, but in Nietzsche's configuration of pregnancy we also see the theme of solitude as necessary to the flowering of this new bodily awareness. In considering how Nietzsche misappropriates or misunderstands the ideas of pregnancy and birth, however, we begin a criticism of his method of transformation as a method of the genesis of a new human being. The distortion of the concept of pregnancy can help us perceive the limitations in the path of transformation that Nietzsche sets out. I will argue that Nietzsche's insights into how dependency can limit critical insights and transformation demonstrate the importance of solitude, but he neglects the positive role of care we can find in a proper understanding of a child's dependency on its parents. I will end by considering how Irigaray may offer a route to addressing these limitations.

Critique and Transformation

Nietzsche is known for his vociferous criticisms of religion, morality, contemporary society and the modern human, the 'herd animal' (*Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 89), whom he believes is produced and required by modern society. He diagnoses modern humanity as suffering from dependence on an 'ascetic

ideal', which he identifies as running through Plato's forms, the Christian notion of God and the sciences' faith in truth. This ideal remains nihilistically beyond our reach and cruelly denies the particularity of our bodies.

Nietzsche's philosophy is not entirely negative however. His critical philosophy demands an active response, otherwise it would be simply a form of the very nihilism he attacks. Nietzsche is, therefore, a philosopher who hopes for a transformation of modern humanity. The figure of the overhuman (*Übermensch*) conjured up by Zarathustra represents this hope. The overhuman is the possibility of a being beyond morality, regret and nihilism, capable of affirming life.

Luce Irigaray suggests that:

If Nietzsche has rightly intuited that we have to make a fresh beginning, especially by starting from our physical belonging again in order to pass from the old man of the West to a new humanity, he lacked the time to clear the path or build the bridge to achieve this aim. (*To Be Born*, p. 87)

While Irigaray is right to suggest that Nietzsche's "teaching is above all a critical one" (*To be Born*, p. 87), it is important not to overlook the aspects in his method and thought that suggest a way of responding to the failures he identifies. Nietzsche does explore methods of transformation and offer important insights that can be employed in an attempt to overcome modern man and bring about a new kind of human being. Indeed Nietzsche's critical methodology is itself a method of transformation when its bodily nature is recognised. As Irigaray observes, criticism forces us to enter into a new framework (*To Be Born*, p. 85). Nietzsche's critical insights operate as a crucial component in a project of transformation of the human in so far as they attack the framework of our current existence. But more than this, the way in which he conducts this criticism

contains the seeds of finding a new way of living by bringing about a new engagement with the body. While Nietzsche may not succeed in providing a bridge that can take us all the way to a new form of human being, I will argue that he can still set us on the first tottering steps of this journey.

Irigaray too criticises the form of humanity that contemporary society produces, suggesting that the

human being becomes a kind of manufactured product, whose accomplishment will be subject to an idea—an *eidos*—of the human element which results from a culture instead of being a flowering of its natural belonging. (*To Be Born*, p. 16)

If we accept that the mutually dependent modern society and modern human need to be in some sense overcome, we must ultimately find our own path, or our own way of flowering. But in this search we can learn both from Nietzsche's insights into the process of overcoming who we are and how we might begin this journey as well as from his blind spots and omissions. Understanding why Nietzsche fails to build the bridge to a new human being can help us in our own attempts to overcome what we have become, and "become who we are" (*The Gay Science*, p. 189).

The animal with no fixed horizons

So first we need to understand how, for Nietzsche, humanity is something that can take a new form. When Nietzsche criticises modern man he is criticising a being that has been produced to be a certain way. He claims that "a herd animal, something full of good will, sickly and mediocre has been bred" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 89). Nietzsche's term *Erziehung*, can be translated as 'breeding' but could also be understood as upbringing or education. For Nietzsche, breeding is

not reducible to sexual reproduction and should not be confused with selective sexual breeding. Rather *Erziehung* concerns upbringing and a cultural process of spiritualisation or intellectualisation that occurs across generations. Nietzsche's audience is the product of its ancestral history, particularly its Judaeo Christian heritage, but also of its immediate culture and environment. Nietzsche thus asks the question what "*could be cultivated out of man*" under different conditions (*Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 127).

But how have we been "bred"? At various points Nietzsche makes clear that when we act, we evaluate: "All actions may be traced back to evaluations" (*Dawn*, p. 71), and "to live man must evaluate" (*Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, Volume 11, p. 181). Hence, we cannot live and act without the horizons of our measurements or evaluations. According to Nietzsche "A living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only within a horizon." (*Untimely Meditations*, p. 63)ⁱ It is the demarcation of these horizons or perspectives then, which breed a particular form of life. But crucially Nietzsche states that "for humans alone among the animals there are no eternal horizons and perspectives." (*The Gay Science*, p. 128) Our horizons, the beliefs and valuations that our actions depend upon and express, are open to change and thus the human animal, the way in which we live and act, is open to change. We can be bred differently.

Nietzsche develops his understanding of the forces which establish our horizons, at an individual and species level, in terms of many wills to power. In his unpublished notes he describes "*man as a multiplicity of 'wills to power': each one with a multiplicity of means of expression and forms*" (*Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, Volume 12, p. 25). These wills to power develop both across generations and across a lifetime, within society and within individuals.

They form shifting interactive alliances. Nietzsche characterises our various drives, practices and concepts in terms of will to power because he takes the expanding, assertive, incorporating character of life to be found everywhere: “life as such is will to power” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 44), and “I consider life itself instinct for growth for continuation, for accumulation of forces, for power” (*Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, p. 129). For Nietzsche, the explanatory principle of the will to power applies whether we are considering the expanding pseudopods of amoeba seeking nutrition,ⁱⁱ or the expanding dominance of Paul’s version of Christianity. Will to power explains the need to procreate and eat, the emergence of morality and bad conscience, and the adaption of the metaphysical ideas of Christianity such that they operate within the very sciences that question religion (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, pp. 50-51; *On the Genealogy of Morality*, pp. 110-113). Further, it explains the *new forms* that life takes. In a criticism of Herbert Spencer, Nietzsche suggests that to advocate a theory of adaptation to the environment in order to explain the development of different species “is to misunderstand the essence of life, its *will to power*; we overlook the prime importance that the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, re-interpreting, re-directing and formative forces, which ‘adaptation’ follows only when they have had their effect.” (*On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 52)

Changes in these wills to power, and the way they interact, lead to a change in the unity that they form. Thus, a change in drives, beliefs or behaviours (wills to powers) can change who we are (a hierarchy of interacting wills to power). A change in the particular wills to power within us, or the way these

different wills to power interact is a change in the perspectives that we take on the world and thus the horizons that circumscribe our actions and being.

For Nietzsche, the horizons that define modern man in particular are man's belief in the metaphysical, suprasensible ideals which we take to be immutable. It is the idea that our horizons cannot change that we first have to overcome before any radical transformation is possible. What it would be like to have mutable horizons, to accept that our truths and our values are not absolute, is something that as modern human beings we cannot grasp. What Nietzsche is best known for is his critical attack on our existing horizons in the form of an attack on the 'ascetic ideal', a belief in the beyond or absolute that cruelly denigrates the immediacy of life and physicality, which he sees as running through our entire belief system and accompanying way of life. This critical element of Nietzsche's philosophy is a crucial element of any possible transformation in humanity.

Further, more than just a criticism of particular beliefs and practices is required. Nietzsche is clear that a form of scepticism is needed (*Beyond Good and Evil*, p.138; *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, p. 184). Central to overcoming the ascetic ideal, and humanity's depends on it, is a rejection of the idea of fixed and certain beliefs. This is a rejection that must be actively practiced, overcoming the deeply entrenched need for this certainty.

Nietzsche also, however, calls for the need to experiment with alternative beliefs and ways of living. Given we cannot act without evaluating, a sceptical attack on our existing values, and the possibility of any absolute and eternal values, will have to involve "a scepticism of experiments" (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, Volume 9, p.287), which explores

alternative values, rather than a scepticism which takes the form of a suspension of judgement.ⁱⁱⁱ

For Nietzsche then, the human animal has been bred to be a certain way, circumscribed by particular horizons, and thus can take a different form. The form that the human currently takes is tied both to its beliefs, as preconditions of the actions and practices that constitute a way of life, and the form of belief as something absolute and universal, which falsely sees our horizons as immutable. A sceptical practice that is able to detach from such absolute belief is therefore key to overcoming the human as we know it. Before setting out Nietzsche's method of transformation, and its limitations, I want to consider how he employs the idea of pregnancy in the context of transformation to draw out what this contributes to his method. I will show how the idea of pregnancy emphasises the importance of an engagement with the body. Additionally I want to demonstrate that the way Nietzsche frames the idea of pregnancy also highlights the role of solitude as a necessary aspect of his critical and sceptical practice. Engaging with our own drives, and turning these insights against universal values, will lead to us following a distinctive path which may alienate us from society. This approach comes to the fore in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* but we can see it foreshadowed in *Dawn*.

Pregnancy in *Dawn*

Dawn is the third of Nietzsche's so-called free spirit trilogy and is a text in which Nietzsche's rejection of metaphysics and interest in 19th century materialism, psychology and naturalistic explanations of morality, all strong themes in the earlier *Human all too Human*, continue to occupy Nietzsche. It is also one in which he deepens his 'drive psychology', that is his contention that actions and

interpretations are shaped by unconscious drives, and its critical application to our existing morality and understanding of the self and our motivations. In this drive psychology we can see the beginnings of Nietzsche's theory of the will to power. But in *Dawn* Nietzsche's understanding of the self as made up of many drives is not restricted to a means of criticism. Here he also advocates an ethics of self-cultivation, proposing a modesty regarding the extent of our knowledge, self-mastery, a capacity for solitude and a self-examination and a self-awareness that involves finding the right conditions, diet, climate, friendships etc. for our own personal flourishing.^{iv} Ultimately, this self-awareness requires that we get in touch with and are able to express our drives.

The main passage in which Nietzsche talks about pregnancy, is entitled *Ideal Selfishness*:

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 that which is coming to be in us!^v

[...] In which time there 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'! This is the 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!* [*Dawn*, p. 274]

Nietzsche's use of the idea of pregnancy here stands in contrast to the figure of the creator or the author. The pregnant person cannot determine the character of what she or he will give birth to. What they can do is "care for the soul" to allow something new and ultimately separate from them to come into the world.

While this passage talks of being pregnant with a thought or deed, in the context of a book in which self-cultivation is a major theme, it links the possibility of the emergence of something novel with caring for the self. For Nietzsche, the potential to create something beyond ourselves starts with working on ourselves. Pregnancy is here described as selfishness, and already in *Dawn* we can see that for Nietzsche turning to, and paying attention to the particularities of the self, and its needs, as well as of the needs of what develops within and seeks to come forth from us, is a prerequisite to the emergence of something worthwhile. This is underscored by a frequent analogy that Nietzsche employs in *Dawn*, namely that of gardening, suggesting near the end of *Dawn* that “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.” (*Dawn*, p. 277).^{vi} We have to tend to ourselves, cultivate ourselves, as one would cultivate a garden, though this aims to bring forth flowers that will ultimately have a life of their own and cannot be determined by us.

What else can we learn from Nietzsche’s discussions of pregnancy in *Dawn* in relation to his understanding of the means of self-cultivation? The pregnant, Nietzsche says at the end of this long aphorism, are “strange” and he asks that we, “therefore be strange as well and not be annoyed with others if they need to be so!” (*Dawn*, p. 275) Instead of following the norms of the herd we should allow ourselves to take different and strange paths, to be the free thinkers who are not concerned with what others think. This connects with the notion of experiment. Nietzsche suggests “We must proceed experimentally with things, be sometimes angry, sometimes affectionate toward them and allow justice,

passion, and coldness toward them to follow one upon the other.” (*Dawn*, pp. 224-225) In rediscovering the body, and engaging our many different drives, in living in and trying out new perspectives we begin to experiment with, and open the way to new ways of being.

Elsewhere in *Dawn*, Nietzsche contrasts pregnancy with the inability for solitude and silence in contemporary political society:

Learning solitude.—Oh, you poor devils in the great cities of contemporary politics, you talented young men tormented by ambition who consider it your duty to remark on everything that happens—and something is always happening! Who, having drummed up noise and dust in this fashion, believe you are the very chariot of history! Who, because you are always listening in, always watching for the moment when you can throw in your 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! (*Dawn*, pp. 128-9)

This suggests that these would-be heroes lack the capacity for solitude, stillness and silence,^e and do not have the patience to get distance from the culture of their time and really reflect on what would be required for the emergence of something great. They hence lack the capacity to give birth to anything great.

Nietzsche believes that contemporary humanity in general lacks the capacity for solitude, and suggests of “the herd animals and apostles of equality wrongly called ‘free spirits’” that “not a single one (...) *would be able to endure loneliness.*” (*Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, Volume 12, p. 173) Periods of solitude, and learning to endure solitude, are thus part of Nietzsche’s method for a therapeutic self-cultivation in *Dawn* and continue to be central to Nietzsche’s method of transformation in his later work. In *Dawn*, self-cultivation is focused on the idea of individuals becoming emancipated from metaphysical and ascetic ideals, allowing them to become experimental and creative. In one of

the short dialogues we find in *Dawn*, the second speaker says “For this reason I enter into solitude—so as not to drink out of everyone’s cisterns. 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” (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Dawn*, p. 245). In Nietzsche’s later thought the project of overcoming the ascetic ideal is seen to be beyond any one individual’s lifetime. We can only hope to be the forbearers of a new way of being human. We can hope to clear the way to overcoming modern man through criticism, but also through experimentation. Both require a new engagement with the body. This is clear in Nietzsche’s discussions of pregnancy in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where it is explicitly linked to overcoming the human in its current form, which I will now turn to.

Pregnancy in *Zarathustra*

In *Zarathustra* pregnancy is associated with the idea of the overhuman. Zarathustra declares that: “The overhuman is the sense of the earth. May your will say. *Let the Overhuman be the sense of the earth!*” (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 12)”, and as such is the figure that could give us new meaning once the non-earthly meaning of the suprasensible or ascetic ideal (whether in the form of Platonism, Christianity or Science) is no longer a tenable belief for us.

The overhuman is a much contested concept in Nietzsche scholarship. Readings have varied from dismissing the overhuman as a trivial element of Nietzsche’s thought (Bernard Reginster. *The Affirmation of Life*, pp. 250-251), seeing it as a personal ideal of self-cultivation (Walter Kaufmann. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 312; Arthur Danto. *Nietzsche as*

Philosopher, pp. 8, 66, 118), as a state that can only be sensed or obtained momentarily (Jill Marsden. "Sensing the Overman"; Leslie Theile. *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul*), or as an earnest claim that we must go beyond the human as it is now if we are to overcome nihilism (Paul Loeb. "Finding the Übermensch in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*"). The explicit mentions of the overhuman in Zarathustra, combined with the clear allusions to the overhuman in subsequent texts,^{vii} and Nietzsche's general criticisms of the modern day human, imply that we should take in earnest that Nietzsche hopes that we will cultivate a being that is radically different from the one we currently are. For Nietzsche, the genesis of a new kind of human being is necessary to overcoming the damaging effects of our history of Christianity and the crisis of nihilism we now face.

The overhuman may operate as a goal for our own self-striving, as it is must come about through change at the level of particular selves, but is not something we can hope to achieve in our lifetime. Thus, we can hope to initiate the process that will lead to the overhuman, to allow ourselves to become pregnant with this potential and "become procreators and cultivators and sowers of the future" (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 176), but we cannot hope to become or to give birth to an overhuman ourselves.

The figure of the overhuman still connects with the concern for self-cultivation that we find in *Dawn*, and Nietzsche repeats the connection between a care of the self, and privileging our own particular needs, with the capacity to procreate, or bring about something new and worthwhile: claiming again in Zarathustra that "where there is great love of oneself, it is the true sign of pregnancy" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 139), and that "In your selfishness, you

creators, is the prudence and providence of those who are pregnant” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p.254). However, to want to be ancestors of the overhuman is both to be willing to go under [*Untergehen*], or be destroyed as individuals, to rub out the horizons that currently define us in order to let a different experimental self come into being as a preparation for the overhuman, and to be willing to let the human, as a moral herd animal, go under when the overhuman is eventually born. Thus, Zarathustra preaches: “What can be loved in the human is that it is a *going-over* and a *going-under*” (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p.13). Selfishness and self-love means caring for oneself in order to bring forth something else, not preserving oneself as one is now.

That this process involves overcoming the otherworldly ideals that run through Platonism, Christianity and into modern science, with their rejection of the body and desire, is clear in the passage *On the immaculate Perceivers*, the title of which is a clear play on the Christian idea of the immaculate conception (in German the passage is called *Unbefleckten Erkenntnis* and *Unbefleckten Empfängnis* is the immaculate conception). This passage is also full of allusions to Plato’s pure perceivers in Book Ten of the *Republic*. Nietzsche derides as impure and “crammed with coils of snakes” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 105-108), the pure perceivers, echoing Plato’s apparent rejection of the sense lovers. The metaphor of pregnancy itself can also be seen as another reference to Plato, given the importance of Diotima’s discussion of pregnancy in the *Symposium*. This crucial passage thus ties the idea of pregnancy, and thus the emergence of new life, to the need to overcome an approach to knowledge that is obsessed with objectivity. *Unbefleckten Erkenntnis* might be translated as immaculate knowledge, making clear that Nietzsche locates the roots of scientific objectivity

in Platonic and Christian thought. The genesis of a new human being, that could overcome the failings of modern man, requires the overcoming of the suprasensible/ ascetic ideal.

The passage begins with the idea of the false pregnancy of the moon. Subverting the idea of the moon as fertile and female, Nietzsche portrays the moon, with its cool light of observation, as barren and male. The moon represents the objective men of science whose mantra is:

‘And let this be for me the *immaculate* perception of all things; that I want nothing from things, except that I may lie there before them like a mirror with a hundred eyes.’-

To this Zarathustra says;

Oh, you sentimental hypocrites, you lechers! You lack innocence in your desire, so now you slander desiring itself!
Verily, not as creators, procreators, or enjoyers of becoming do you love the earth! (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 106)

Nietzsche portrays the pure perceivers as hypocritical and impure because they deny the presence of their bodily drives in their pursuit of truth and science. For Nietzsche, it is only by accepting that we can never be objective and by recognising the presence of perspectives, exploring the activity of our interpreting drives, or wills to power, and the particularity of our bodies and bodily desires, that is what we *must* will, that our investigations of the world show real love for the earth, and can be fruitful. For Nietzsche, this bodily understanding will mean both better understanding the world *and* transforming who we are, because such knowledge is in itself transformative. Zarathustra continues with the contrast he draws between the barren, objective moon and the longed for fertility:

Where is there innocence? Where there is the will to procreate. And whoever wants to create beyond himself, he has for me the purest will.'
Where is there beauty? Wherever I *must will* with all my will; where I want to love and go under, that an image might not remain mere image.
Loving and going-under: that has rhymed for eternities. Will to love: that means being willing to die too. Thus I talk to you cowards!
But now your emasculated leering wants to be called 'contemplation'!
And that which lets itself be touched by cowardly eyes shall be baptized 'beautiful'! Oh, you befoulers of noble names!
But this shall be your curse, you immaculate ones, you pure perceivers; that you shall never give birth, even though you lie large and pregnant on the horizon!' (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 106-107)

Here on the one hand Nietzsche contrasts the barren moon to a female, fertile sun speaking of *her* love, yet this barrenness is also characterised in terms of an 'emasculatation'. This is the emasculatation of an attempt at objectivity that cuts the seekers of knowledge off from their own desires/drives/wills to power. The objective men cut their pursuit of truth off from its roots in life's needs. Elsewhere, Nietzsche describes such objective men as "neuters" and "hollowed out" (*Untimely Meditations*, p.87), and writes of their "mirroring soul" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 134). Able only to reflect, the objective man is a "man without content" (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 134).

If we again remember that *The Symposium* uses a metaphor of pregnancy, we can see that even if for Nietzsche men, and not just women, can be pregnant, and that pregnancy can be 'spiritual' or 'intellectual' (bearing in mind the difficulty of translating the German *Geist* which encompasses both), it is nevertheless not a non-bodily pregnancy in the way that is apparently valorised by Plato who, through the voice of Diotima reported by Socrates, seemingly suggests:^{viii}

"Men who are pregnant in body," she said, "are drawn more towards women; they express their love in trying to obtain for themselves immortality and remembrance and what they take to be happiness forever

by producing children. Men who are pregnant in mind- there are some," she said, "who are even more pregnant in their minds than in their bodies; and are pregnant with what it is suitable for a mind to bear and bring to birth. So what is suitable? Wisdom and other kinds of virtue. (*The Symposium*, 209a-210a)

In contrast to the sentiment of this passage, for Nietzsche, spiritual and intellectual pregnancy is itself bodily, and arises out of bodily desires or drives. As the immaculate perceivers passage continues, it is only after we escape from the dishonesty of objectivity, and find the body again that we can believe instead that "her love for the earth is coming! Innocence and creator-desire is all solar love!" (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 107)

Nietzsche's method of transformation

Having seen how employing the idea of pregnancy highlights the bodily nature of transformation for Nietzsche I will now discuss Nietzsche's method of transformation. For Nietzsche, there is always an irreducibly bodily element to perspective even while certain perspectives are developed historically in a shared cultural and social context. As Irigaray says "physiology has a part in the projection of human being onto the world, as Nietzsche maintains." (*To Be Born*, p. 61) So to understand, and to discover the extent to which we can change and expand our perspective(s), and thus open up our horizon(s), we must first recognise the extent to which our perspectives are bodily.

This will require the intellectual honesty to look into ourselves to find the basis for our *own* imperatives in place of the idea of a universal imperative. In Irigaray's terms, "Becoming oneself means winning this unique being that we are but of which our culture and the milieu in which we live constantly deprive us."

(*To Be Born*, pp. 41-42) Nietzsche insists that “each one of us should devise his own virtue, his own categorical imperative.” (*Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*, p.134) So how can we successfully get in touch with the bodily imperatives within us as individuals and win this “unique being”?

Here it is helpful to turn to Nietzsche’s idea of solitude, which, as we have seen, he associates with pregnancy. The theme of solitude is key to understanding both what Nietzsche can offer a project of generating a new kind of being and the inherent limitations in his methodology of transformation.

For Nietzsche, solitude allows us to focus on the self and the many bodily drives within it. This new bodily awareness is what ultimately challenges the ascetic ideal that denies the body. Solitude facilitates this firstly by getting distance from the noise of society (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Untimely Meditations*, p. 159). It is the contemplation in the desert or in the mountains, that is Zarathustra’s removal from society, which allows him to pay attention to and hear his drives. Here we can see how the silence that Nietzsche connects with pregnancy is something that will enable the flowering of something new. The self-awareness that can be achieved in solitude, and is necessary for us to beget something new, connects with the need for “repose” and “gathering oneself together, of communing with oneself [...] calmly staying in oneself, being silent” which Irigaray discusses in relation to her practice of yoga (*To Be Born*, p. 17).

The experience of solitude also allows us to break with the habits of culture, and can free us from the dependency on others that could lead us to hold back from destroying the cultural norms that tie us to communal life. If we can learn to be alone, we will no longer be afraid of insights that may alienate us from our community. This capacity for solitude allows us to pursue the

implications of what we hear when we pay attention to our body and thus to reject the ascetic ideal, however lonely this makes us. Thus, Nietzsche's method of transformation employs solitude both to pay attention to and reengage the body and to distance us from the ties to our existing way of living and set of beliefs so that we can act on what we learn.

The new awareness of the drives and the body achieved in solitude is not only required to recognise the sensibility of the 'suprasensible', and thus help to clear the path for something new through criticism, it is also necessary if we are to be able to experiment with re-drawing our horizons. If we no longer accept the immutability and universality of the values we have previously operated with, we must discover or create an alternative basis for action, and for this we must turn to our own bodies and the particular imperatives within us.

Nietzsche's understanding of pregnancy as something bodily, strange and solitary reflects his method of transformation, in which critical insights and active practices are mutually reinforcing. His awareness of how our dependence on others can hold us back in criticising and becoming emancipated from our existing values and ways of being, and thus needs to be countered with a capacity for solitude, and his emphasis on the body both as part of his criticism of these values and as a basis for experimentation with new ways of being, offer valuable insights into how we can hope to move beyond the current state of humanity. Now however, I will consider how that which Nietzsche excludes from pregnancy and birth in his uptake of these concepts connects to the limitations in his method of transformation, and turn to Irigaray's thought as a potential for correcting these limitations.

Nietzsche's misuse of the idea of pregnancy

Firstly, Nietzsche lacks an understanding of the significance and nature of conception. But, to turn to one of the main themes of *To Be Born*, how can we understand the conception that leads to pregnancy and the genesis of a new human being, without recognizing that it comes from a union between two individuals? While Nietzsche does represent life as feminine, and the birth of a new being as involving a marriage between Zarathustra and life, and thus his unification with the female, Zarathustra's journey is still a solitary one. There is a union with an idealised other in Zarathustra's affirmation of life, but no dialogue or concrete engagement with an incarnate, different other in the process of bringing forth a new form of life. Nietzsche here seems to fall prey to the very thing he criticises the objective men of: gazing into mirrors. As Irigaray asked in her *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*: "isn't this a strange love you are preaching: love for a looking glass eternally set opposite to you?" (p. 33) In *To Be Born* Irigaray suggests that Nietzsche's philosophical concepts "remain in the horizon of our past logic" (p. 88). If we are to break free of our horizons and allow for a new kind of being to emerge, then solitude and silence, though they may be a crucial part of the process of transformation, are not enough. If the union between man and woman is to result in a new kind of human being, then we first need to return to Irigaray's earlier question to Nietzsche: "Why don't you give her leave to speak?" (*Marine Lover*, p. 32) We need silence not just to listen to the diversity of perspectives within us, but to listen to the voice of a different other and engage in the challenge they pose to us. A creative union cannot be a passive reflection of one in the other, but a creative dialogue between different embodied perspectives that leads to mutual discovery and change.

Nietzsche does recognise the importance of the encounter and conflict between different perspectives. Strife, for Nietzsche, is part of creation. The problem is whether his model of strife really allows him to actually hear or recognise the perspective of the other, rather than assigning them a scripted role in a mythological drama. For Nietzsche, we need to learn to listen to and hear our own drives, whereas Irigaray draws our attention to how in a true creative union we also need to learn to listen to and hear the different incarnate perspectives of the other. Irigaray suggests that to rebuild the world requires “starting from the clearing opened by a meeting of desires between two incarnate beings, respectful of their mutual difference(s)” (*To Be Born*, p.97). Nietzsche’s own insights into the multiplicity of perspectives and the creativity that emerges from their differences suggest a trajectory beyond his own employment of an ideal of femininity, which he does not himself pursue. As long as the conditions of the possibility of an incarnate pregnancy are forgotten this potential of a real dialogue within union is overlooked.

The second key distortion in Nietzsche’s application of ‘pregnancy’ is that, according to Nietzsche, for us to give birth to the overman we must first go under (*untergehen*) or be destroyed. We let go of the formation of wills to power that forms the self we are now and the human as it is now. But Nietzsche does not consider how this may transform us into the *parents* rather than the *ancestors* of the overman. The Nietzschean child appears as an orphan alone in the world. The child is celebrated as a figure of innocence and play but there is no concrete understanding of the infant human being’s dependency on another. Hence, in Nietzsche there is no account of how the child can *become* independent through a process of nurturing.

This is something that Irigaray begins to think through in *To Be Born*. Describing the child's early physical development she writes: "Gradually it must free itself from a centring that existed outside of itself, being in the one on whom it was dependent, in order to situate it in itself." (p. 14) Nietzsche offers an account of emancipation from herd morality, and helps us to understand how we can become the free spirits that might be capable of bringing forth the overman. However, what we can take from our experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, which Nietzsche ignores, is that, in addition to nurturing a successful pregnancy, we must nurture the child on its journey of emancipation once it is born. The child cannot break free on its own. It is already itself, a unique being, and must ultimately be the one to emancipate itself, but it is also dependent, and needs support in this emancipation.

Nietzsche is not without an understanding of the importance of our environment in our development: "With every moment of our lives some of the polyp-arms of our being grow and others dry up, depending on the nourishment that the moment does or does not supply." (*Dawn*, p. 89) If Irigaray is right that our upbringing is normalising us into metaphysical culture, then current parenting must be part of the context that we need to break free from in order to become who we are. The parental figure(s) has the initial responsibility to address the conditions, the environment and culture of the child's education and upbringing, and to provide it with the love and nurture that will enable it to become who it is.

The matter is thus not one of forcing the child to adapt itself to the world but, instead, of allowing itself to transform this world according to its potential and desire. Its presence must make a breach in the world as it already is; it has not to conform to it but to reopen its totality and its horizon—to spatialize it anew, one could say—to disclose it or let it take

form(s) according to its own dynamism. This requires that the natural dynamism of the living being is recognised and cultivated—in its growing, its way of unfolding and blooming. (Luce Irigaray. *To Be Born*, p. 28)

Further, this dependency of the child on its parent, while something to be overcome, should not be understood only in negative terms. Nietzsche's thought contains a notion of a self-sacrificing love for something that will come, a transcending desire to go beyond what we have been fabricated to be by coming back to the body. But there is no account of love as the intense bond and actual relating between parent and child. To facilitate the development of new ways of being we need to return to the role of parental love and its positive power:

Love watches out for the hardly born, which needs to be safeguarded and assisted in growing and blooming until it appears, dares to manifest itself, and so becomes sign. Love is what renders possible an unsheltering which does not amount to an exiling ecstasis outside of oneself, and it can also lead the awakening of the sensitiveness that desire arouses to a flowering that is likely to be shared. (Luce Irigaray. *To Be Born*, p. 76)

If we are to succeed in overcoming our current horizons and finding a new way to live, then the union between, and role in caring for the offspring of, parents needs to be included in our understanding of transformation. Nietzsche has shown us that solitude, and learning to be solitary, can play an important role in hearing, and following the critical implications of, our many bodily perspectives. If however, we are to successfully challenge the horizons of our existence, and undertake the experiments Nietzsche understood as necessary to develop a new way of being human, then it is also necessary that we learn new ways of relating to others. This project, as Irigaray recognises, is not one we can undertake in isolation. Hence, Nietzsche's approach to transformation must be augmented by

an understanding of the relationships, and their enabling as well as their limiting potential, between parents and between parents and children.

ⁱ Translation modified.

ⁱⁱ “The will to power can only express itself against *resistance*, it seeks what will resist it – this is the original tendency of protoplasm in sending out pseudopodia and feeling its way. Assimilation and incorporation is, above all, a willing to overwhelm.” (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, Volume 12, p.361), “protoplasm stretches out pseudopodia to seek something that resists it- not out of hunger but out of a will to power. Then it tries to overcome what it has found, to appropriate it, incorporate it” (Friedrich Nietzsche. *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, Volume 13, p.360).

ⁱⁱⁱ I discuss Nietzsche’s experimental scepticism in detail in “Scepticism and Self-Transformation in Nietzsche - On the Uses and Disadvantages of a Comparison to Pyrrhonian Scepticism”.

^{iv} This aspect of *Dawn* has been emphasised in recent scholarship (Keith Ansell-Pearson. ‘Beyond Compassion’, ‘Beyond Selfishness’, Rebecca Bamford. ‘Health and Self-Cultivation in Dawn’).

^v Translation modified.

^{vi} Rebecca Bamford provides a detailed discussion of Nietzsche’s references to gardening in *Dawn* (‘Health and Self-Cultivation in Dawn’).

^{vii} In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche describes the “man of the future” as “that stroke of midday” who “gives earth its purpose” (pp. 66-67), echoing the language of the *Übermensch* of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, who is “the word” of “the Humans-Midday” and designated as “the sense of the earth” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 193, 12).

^{viii} Nietzsche chooses to ignore the complexity of Plato’s views, if not his character, and represents him as the source of Platonism. It is thus a Plato whose theory of the forms is opposed to the bodily that Nietzsche parodies and attacks. In this context it is reasonable to take Diotima’s part in this dialogue, given the clear overtones of the theory of the forms, as Plato’s position, setting aside for the purposes of this chapter the significance of difference voices within Plato’s work.

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