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The transfiguration of existence and sovereign life: Sloterdijk and Nietzsche on posthuman and superhuman futures

Keith Ansell-Pearson
Department of Philosophy, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, England
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Abstract. This essay provides a close reading of Sloterdijk's book *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism* (1989, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN). Sloterdijk's book is itself a discussion of Nietzsche's book *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the account offered here is a critical appreciation of both texts, focusing on the question of individual and collective existence. The essay looks at the question of the future of the human, raising the question of the superhuman alongside that of the posthuman. In doing so, it brings in other texts from Sloterdijk—especially "Rules for the human zoo"—and offers an account of Nietzsche's work on these themes as a whole. The essay criticises some aspects of Sloterdijk's appropriation, but more positively makes the case for retrieving the uniqueness of Nietzsche's answers. Human existence cannot be corrected, but it can be transfigured.

> "I am still waiting for a philosophical *physician* in the exceptional sense of the word—one who has to pursue the problem of the total health of a people, time, race or of humanity—to muster the courage to push my suspicion to its limits and to risk the proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all 'truth' but something else—let us say, health, future, growth, power, life."
>
> Nietzsche (1974, preface)

> "I have presented such terrible images to knowledge that any 'Epicurean delight' is out of the question. Only Dionysian joy is sufficient."
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> Nietzsche (1968, section 1029)

Introduction

Although I have drawn on Peter Sloterdijk's writings in my own work, and have long admired them, until now the opportunity has not presented itself for me to conduct a critical engagement with them.[1] Much of his thinking—in terms of its fundamental orientation, its focus on specific problems, its polemical aspects, and so on—comes from his having worked through Friedrich Nietzsche. Without an appreciation of this, I suspect that a great deal of what he says about existence and society will seem abstract to many readers. I hope to bring this out in my appreciation. What I am claiming here does not, of course, apply to everything he has written, but it does apply to some core aspects of his thinking. Unlike other seminal neo or post-Nietzscheans—such as Foucault, for example—I do not read Sloterdijk as holding to the view that there is no single core Nietzscheanism but that everything depends on the use to which Nietzsche is put. I share Sloterdijk's view that this is wrong. The basic thesis of Nietzsche's project from first to last can, I think and without too much injustice to its complex character, be stated as follows: existence cannot be *corrected*, and it is a delusion to think it can, but it can be *transfigured*. Now, precisely what this means, why

[1] This essay was written on the occasion of a visit by Peter Sloterdijk to the Centre for Social Theory at the University of Warwick in May 2008, during which time a workshop was held on his work. My task was to contribute to the session devoted to 'Nietzsche'. At the time I was able to give only a short fragment of what is presented here.

it should make us pause to think, and how Sloterdijk puts it to novel use is what I wish to explore in this appreciation.

I shall focus on two moments in his reading of Nietzsche: first, the key insights he advances in his book on Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1999); secondly, and most recently, his ideas on breeding and the 'human' future in "Rules for the human zoo" (2009), which in part take their cue from Nietzsche, even though the piece is framed through a reply to Martin Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* (1998). I shall advance two main critical points: first, that in spite of the original and thought-provoking character of his interpretation and appropriation of Nietzsche, he is mistaken in his belief that Nietzsche is not a strong thinker of sovereignty and autonomy; secondly, that in "Rules for the human zoo" he has missed an opportunity to present a strong Nietzschean account of the future of intelligent life, and I shall argue that for Nietzsche the future of intelligence *is* a question of sovereignty ('who shall be the masters of the earth'?).

Putting the thinker on stage

> "A philosopher who has traversed many kinds of health, and keeps traversing them, has passed through an equal number of philosophies; he simply *cannot* keep transposing his states every time into the most spiritual form and distance: this art of transfiguration *is* philosophy."
>
> Nietzsche (1974, preface, emphasis in original)

In Sloterdijk's body of work Nietzsche's texts and ideas have come to play a formative and delicate role. Nietzsche has been crucial to his intellectual work, but so, too, has Heidegger, and it is perhaps this Heideggerean aspect that gives Sloterdijk's work its 'post-Nietzschean' quality, especially in the announcement he repeatedly makes of a break with subjectivity (with the will to power, with autonomy, with the power of positing and promising) (see, for example, Sloterdijk, 1989a). This break with subjectivity and autonomy is announced in his pathbreaking study of Nietzsche's first published text *The Birth of Tragedy* (1999), provocatively entitled *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism* (1989b). This text contains the seeds of much of his recent thinking and merits returning to, along with "Eurotaoism", where he continued his unsettling reading of Nietzsche by arguing that we need to break with motivational analyses of human pathologies such as nihilism: "It is no longer possible to treat nihilism as if it were only a matter of motivations and the positing of values" (1989a, page 101).[(2)]

Thinker on Stage is an extraordinary text which in beautiful prose powerfully articulates a set of philosophical theses deeply felt and adhered to by Sloterdijk (I say this as someone who regards the book as both flawed and misguided). The project was originally planned as a postface to a new German edition of Nietzsche's book, but the excessive character of the commentary necessitated and merited publication as an independent text. What Sloterdijk does is daring and novel: he accepts neither the 'aestheticism' charge frequently levelled at the book nor the Marxian denunciation of it. Rather, he locates in it a new voice and a new practice for philosophy which is to think the concept of enlightenment in conjunction with that of drama, in which enlightenment takes place not through a dictatorship of lucidity but as the dramatic self-illumination of existence (we might describe this as making a move from straightforward *Aufklärung* [enlightenment], to the more complex *Verklärung* [transfiguration]). The search is for a mode of thinking beyond the reign of *doxa*, one that will operate as a universal concept and pedagogy of philosophy. Philosophy becomes worthy of its name,

[(2)] I am not able to include a treatment of this remarkable piece of writing in my essay but I would wish to subject it to a similar kind of criticism as the one I conduct here with respect to the book on *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*; the same goes for the book version of his speech on the 100th anniversary of Nietzsche's death in Weimar (Sloterdijk, 2001).

he says, when it signifies the cocreation of universal poetry and a passionate involvement in the adventure that is called 'knowledge': in short, the gay science but located in *The Birth of Tragedy* (Sloterdijk, 1989b, page 7).

Sloterdijk is surely right when he claims that it is Nietzsche we need and choose to return to whenever we want to come to terms with our deepest self-doubts and make sense of the most difficult ambiguities of the present. In an era of socialist–liberal and born-again moralism, he says, we clamour for harder truths. Great texts have this curious history, he thinks: "Just when everyone has stopped believing in them, they begin to speak to us in a new voice" (1989b, page 4). *Thinker on Stage* offers a striking thesis about modernity: there is a longing for a Dionysian exoneration of life in the sense of an 'algodicy'—that is, God is dead, and politics cannot be an adequate substitute for religion because the problem of existence (which for Sloterdijk is centred firmly on the pain of life—is one that politics cannot resolve (it proves fatal if it attempts to). We know that an ethos of technological improvement, political participation, and economic enrichment cannot serve to exonerate life: hence the "epochal basis of Nietzsche's currency today". It remains a religious question, one that survives the end of religions. We need, therefore, an "aesthetic exoneration of life" (1989b, page 77).

In support of Sloterdijk's reading, I would venture the claim that the core objection running throughout Nietzsche's writings is towards any attempt, from Socrates to socialism, to correct existence through the resources of either intellectual rationalism or political rationality. These offer human beings a false promise of happiness, be it in the form of an intellectual practice which believes that the irrational character of existence can be corrected or that of a political practice which aims to realise a complete satisfaction of the (human) animal by creating an earthly paradise or the kingdom of heaven on earth. In Nietzsche's later writings the focus is on taking issue with the Christian-moral idea and its secular successors. As he writes in a note of 1881:

> "The political delusion (*Wahn*) at which I smile in just the same way that my contemporaries smile at the religious delusion of earlier ages, is principally *secularization*, belief in the *world* and a deliberate ignoring of the 'beyond' and the 'afterworld'. Its goal is the well-being of the **fleeting** individual: which is why its fruit is socialism, ie *fleeting* **individuals** want to conquer their happiness through socialization—they have no reason to *wait*, as do human beings with eternal souls and eternal becoming and future improvement" (Nietzsche, 1987, volume 9, 11 [163], emphasis in original).

I will take issue with Sloterdijk's reading on one key point: for Nietzsche, as I read him, the problem of existence that confronts human beings is not so much a physical or material one (pain) as an intellectual or spiritual one (absurdity). This is where our respective readings depart, with Sloterdijk keen to push Nietzsche in the direction of 'materialism', whereas I would follow him in the direction he actually takes, which is one of 'idealism'. This idealism has to be properly understood and is not incongruent with a Nietzschean naturalism. I will make this point absolutely clear at the end of the essay.

Let me bring out the courageous character of Sloterdijk's text on Nietzsche. What is interesting about it is that it seeks to show Nietzsche's importance for philosophy through an appropriation of his first published text of 1872. This was a brave and unorthodox move to make. First of all, one would have to consider the reception of Nietzsche in the postwar German context in which Thomas Mann's 1947 essay *Nietzsche in the Light of Contemporary Events* exerted an understandable influence, centring its disquiet over Nietzsche's so-called 'aestheticism' and nowhere more expressed, so it would seem, than in the most famous statement we encounter in Nietzsche's text: "only as an aesthetic phenomenon are the world and existence eternally justified"

(Nietzsche, 1999, section 5). For Mann, writing in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and the horrors of the Holocaust, this seemed—although Nietzsche was advocating no such thing—like an invitation to abandon all responsible ethical action and political conduct. In fact, from this insight into how the character of existence can be most deeply appreciated, no ethical maxims actually follow: morality is simply bracketed out so as to allow for true tragic insight (for further insight see Came, 2006). The disquiet over Nietzsche's statement goes further back and informs the Marxian critique of him. I am thinking here not so much of Georg Lukács's denunciation of Nietzsche but more of the criticism Walter Benjamin makes in his *Origin of German Tragic Drama*:

> "Where art so firmly occupies the centre of existence as to make man one of its manifestations instead of recognizing him above all as its basis, to see man's existence as the eternal subject of its own creations instead of recognizing him as its own creator, then all sane reflection is at an end" (1977, page 103).

What Benjamin's criticism overlooks is that for Nietzsche the tremendous achievement of Greek tragedy is that it allows for the human being to end its alienation from life: it is now able to create with nature, to participate in it 'beyond good and evil', and thus to experience a 'superhuman' joy (existence is not corrected but transfigured). Nevertheless, the idea that Nietzsche's limit is supposedly one of aestheticism is the prejudice against him that has been adopted by almost every thinker in Germany in the period after the Second World War, perhaps most famously Jürgen Habermas (1987). It is Sloterdijk's immense and lasting achievement in my view to show this view to be superficial. He locates in Nietzsche's text an untimely and unfashionable 'truth', which provides him with the title of his book: 'Dionysian' *materialism*. What a curious and thought-provoking conjunction!

The Birth of Tragedy (Nietzsche, 1999) is a curious choice as the text to select from the corpus on which to base a new Nietzscheanism, and for a number of reasons. First, it is, seemingly, Nietzsche's most reactionary text. The depth of insight Sloterdijk brings into his appreciation of the book in an attempt not to refute but to challenge this judgment is exemplary in my view. Secondly, it is Nietzche's first published text and one that he himself found embarrassing (an 'impossible book' he later said of it in his 1886 *Selbstkritik*, being 'image crazed' and 'image mazed'). It is Sloterdijk's achievement to show that the text's significance for intellectual modernity goes beyond its youthful style and Nietzsche's intellectual immaturity. Thirdly, it is Nietzsche's most melancholic text.[3] For Sloterdijk this melancholia may be what constitutes the integrity of the project Nietzsche undertakes in the book. For Nietzsche, Greek tragedy is a prophylactic against the debilitating effects of an unmediated encounter with the horror and terror of human existence, but it is also a vehicle of transcendence vis-à-vis the alienating effects of complete socialisation into secular life and atomistic forms of life of the phenomenal realm. Nietzsche favours an orderly social order which encourages and nurtures individual openness to the noumenal, conceived at this point in his writings as the Dionysian condition in which the alienation between human and human as well as human and nature is overcome. Nietzsche's worry is over a turbulent secular society composed of oversocialised bourgeoisie and undersocialised, but equally secular, deviant revolutionaries (see McGinn, 1975). This antipathy towards the modern political is a recurring theme in Nietzsche's writings and not peculiar to

[3] At the time Nietzsche was writing *The Birth of Tragedy*, which begins as early as 1870, he gives in person, and made a point in doing so, an engraving of Dürer's *Melancholie* to Wagner as a birthday present, whilst, in the text itself, Schopenhauer is depicted as Dürer's knight (Nietzsche, 1999, section 20). See also the tremendous opening line of Sloterdijk (1989a) "Since Nietzsche, European thinking has discovered the connection between evolution and melancholy." What an opening shot!

The Birth of Tragedy. In *The Birth of Tragedy* the view is advanced that it is an illusion to think we can have phenomenally what we enjoy noumenally through the medium of art, a kind of Dionysian communism where human is no longer alienated from human and humans are no longer alienated from nature. Hence the famous motto and creed of the book: only as an *aesthetic* phenomenon are the world and existence eternally 'justified' (*rechtfertigt*).

Let me add a correction to Sloterdijk here: the book is not antipolitical and Nietzsche is never antipolitics; rather, what Nietzsche seeks to counter in all his work is the idea that politics can *solve* the problem of existence by correcting it. It is thus political radicalism and utopianism that he is against, with their false promise of happiness. Nietzsche's commitment to a new *paideia* of the human being in his later writings recognises the need for (great) politics and political education.

Nietzsche is important, Sloterdijk argues, because he cuts through the moral knots of modernity by naturalistically reversing the relationship between morality and life, so that instead of finding fault with life from the perspective of an eternally dissatisfied morality we observe morality from the perspective of an eternally unimprovable life. Sloterdijk maintains that this is not a cynical aestheticism because there is an ethical pedagogy to the Dionysian message of the book: we can fashion joyful (and superhuman) means to endure the unendurable. More importantly, there is the concept of 'illusion' (for Nietzsche this is part of the domain of the tragic, the need *to will* illusion), and this bridges the contradiction between the ethical and the aesthetic as well between the therapeutic and the political. How Sloterdijk negotiates this is too complex and subtle for me to examine in detail here. Basically, it concerns how we conceive the relation between the normative sphere of law, mores, conventions, and institutions (the Apollonian)—including fictions of autonomy—and the (Dionysian) tragic insight that ultimately gives us the compulsion towards creativity. "After Nietzsche", he writes, "there can no longer be a theory of culture that is not informed by fundamental ironies" (1989b, page 80). On the one hand, there is the naturalism (viz our understanding of the nature of culture); on the other hand, there is the breaking open of this naturalism through the aesthetic and through illusion: we see through our own fictions and we create. We take cultural forms to their natural basis; at the same time we understand the necessity of cultural forms and value systems from the appreciation that they have their basis in life. This is not simply a position of irony since we are to take our complex nature terribly seriously. In what is ultimately a necessity (the need to create in order to endure life) we find a freedom of sorts.

Sloterdijk, then, is advancing an ethics built on the foundation of tragic irony. This much may sound familiar; what is not familiar is to then credit Nietzsche with an understanding of the 'cybernetics of social beings'. This is because the moral illusion belongs to the self-composition of life and once we have the naturalistic awareness we cannot retain the old attachment to the moral.[4] Ethics is cybernetics in that it is a question not of pursuing objectives but of processing breakdowns: ethics does not exist to change the world or to guarantee a natural right to an endurable life. Ethics is homeostasis, the self-regulation of living processes. If you express yourself like this, Sloterdijk says, you do not sit at your desk and draw up plans for a better world, pulling apart the moral vocabulary of your nation, and then take yourself for a philosopher. Rather, you cast your gaze into the ecology of suffering. Perhaps he had not yet heard of a philosopher such as Richard Rorty, who at around the same time had come up with the imaginative but implausible mixture of private irony and public liberalism (Rorty, 1989).

[4] See Nietzsche (1986, section 103) for the ways in which morality can be 'denied'—and continued to be practised.

If we have this cybernetic conception of justice we challenge, according to Sloterdijk, the central philosophical massif of modernity: the moral autonomy of the subject and the superstition of free will. Once we open up intellectual inquiry to a Dionysian cosmology, we enter the epoch of the decentring of the subject and bid a respectful adieu to the fiction of autonomy. This is an 'adventurous enrichment' since the subject is only giving up something it never possessed. It is this enlightenment of the subject about itself that the title of the book refers to, moving from a moral–legal centre to a cybernetic and medial phenomenon (a Dionysian materialism) (1989b, pp 82–83). Paradoxically, perhaps, the book ends with an appeal to a 'Dionysian autonomy', which is "far removed from the autonomy of the subject of idealistic modernity" (page 90).[5]

Sloterdijk's reading of Nietzsche's first published text, then, is an example of the many attempts he has made in his writings to challenge humanism and its pretensions. After Nietzsche's text, he maintains, it is no longer possible to see Greek antiquity as providing a mirror for humanistic self-stylisation or a guarantee for bourgeois serenity: "In one strike the autonomy of the classical subject was done away with" (1989b, page 14). Instead, we are now to acknowledge the end of the humanistic cult of personality since what we are dealing with in life are not *persons* on the stage of life but *impersonal powers* and *anonymous universal forces* of which persons are merely the instruments. Thus, the most sacred tenet of modernity, "the moral dogma of the autonomy of the subject", is destroyed (1989b, page 16). Our focus, instead, should be on the ecology of suffering and tending to it.

I take issue with Sloterdijk's reading of *The Birth of Tragedy* and of Nietzsche on a number of grounds. Let me first say something about Nietzsche's book and then deal with the claims made by Sloterdijk about autonomy and the subject.

Although my aim in this essay is not to provide an exegesis of Nietzsche, let me say something on two key questions, ones readers may be asking themselves. First, why is human existence to be considered absurd? Secondly, why is freedom so close to necessity? Existence is to be taken as absurd because human beings are neither the ground of their own existence nor the aim of existence. Although Nietzsche at this time, under the influence of his great mentor Arthur Schopenhauer, calls this the 'will' (as in 'will to life'), we can, of course, give the reality it designates other names that are more in line with the insights of 'English' naturalism and biology and thus perhaps more satisfying to our Anglo-Saxon tastes. But even when we do this, and make the matter less continental, the fundamental insight remains. There remains an even more problematic aspect in Nietzsche's thinking which is when he wishes to personify, and ultimately deify, this nonhuman source and power of existence: "In the Greeks the will wanted to see itself transfigured in a work of art" (Nietzsche, 1983, page 9; see also 1968, section 1005). Leaving this aside, however, the next core claim comes into view and concerns our second point: in order to be worthy of this transfiguration of the will in nature, the Greeks had to conceive of *themselves* as worthy of self-transfiguration and glorification and it is here that we can locate the impetus to creativity which characterises their culture. In a sense the freedom is real—not every culture responds to existence in this way (Buddhist culture or Roman culture, for example). However, it remains an illusion to think that human beings can conquer nature to the point where they would become the sources of their own existence: that is, become gods. If they had this power they could change existence and fundamentally correct it (by redesigning it, for example).

[5] Sloterdijk's appeal to a 'Dionysian autonomy' has, in fact, an antecedent. In his 1959 text, *Life Against Death*, Norman O'Brown made the case for the construction of a 'Dionysian ego' (1968, pages 158–159).

Human freedom is a specific and peculiar kind of freedom: it is not godly but human because it is limited and must accept the need for a limit. There is the need to endure life in the face of its tragic limitations; of course, for Nietzsche there is ultimately more than mere coping at work here, a point sometimes lost on Sloterdijk I think. As we shall see, this actually becomes a serious oversight in his appropriation of Nietzsche. I would also add this to Sloterdijk's appreciation: although God is dead and human beings now face a new sea, and that there may never have been such an open sea, this sea of freedom is not without horizon, and the 'new infinite' Nietzsche speaks of seeks to remain 'true to the earth'—that is, true to a limit. As he neatly puts it in *The Gay Science*, "Long live physics!" (1974, section 335). Elsewhere, he writes of our 'dancing in chains'. The achievement of the Greeks for Nietzsche is twofold: (a) to have acquired insight into the nonhuman character of nature and its terrible drive to be, including the inevitable decay and death of all that comes into existence, and yet not to be deflated by such a cursed insight; (b) to have made their gods human! In other words, for the Greeks the gods are extensions and projections of themselves with thoroughly human-like limitations (including stupidities and follies); they are not superhuman figures in the sense that they would be of a higher and completely different order of power to human beings (that is, they are not gods that can defeat and conquer nature). For Nietzsche neither humans nor gods have free will conceived as a *causa sui*. He notes that theodicy was never, in fact, a Hellenic problem. In short, we have a culture in which human beings gain insight into the real character of nature, which is captured in the words of the forest god and companion of Dionysus, Silenus.[6] Although these words are focused on the absurdity of being human, the Greeks do not respond to this truth with world-denying pessimism, Stoic resignation, or Christian martyrdom. They both know the reality of nature and conceal it (Nietzsche says they do this through art practices that are centred on the sublime and the ridiculous). In addition, they do not allow themselves to be intoxicated by this 'Dionysian' insight but develop an attitude of *play* in relation to the world.

I take issue with Sloterdijk's attempt to claim Nietzsche for cybernetics. The terms in which he wants us to appropriate Nietzsche are, in my view, quite wrong. First, Nietzsche wants us to appreciate that the Greeks develop a fixation not on the pain of life but, rather, on its transfiguration, and, moreover, this transfiguration is of such a nature that it even leads them, in his eyes, to viewing pain as the experience where they are *separated* from existence in the mode of it held to be worthy of striving for in itself; in short, there is an absence of the death-drive here. The Greeks wanted life and long lives! Secondly, it is not 'materialism' that the Greeks invent, and are to be celebrated for, but rather *idealism* (see Nietzsche, 1983, page 5). What the Greeks achieve for Nietzsche is a more exalted possibility of human existence, one that never ceases to be human, and it is these 'possibilities' that continue to interest him in his later work. If we keep these insights in mind we have a very good basis, I think, on which to understand Nietzsche's later vision of a future *human* superhuman, which I shall attend to later.

My second major criticism of Sloterdijk is to suggest that he has fundamentally misconstrued Nietzsche's position on autonomy. Whilst it is true that the emphasis is to be placed on impersonal and anonymous forces, this does not in Nietzsche lead to an abandonment of the need to care for human beings and to argue for the cultivation of autonomy. The contrary is, in fact, the case: human beings are to be trained and educated so as to be agents of autonomy, independence, personality, and sovereignty.

[6] The best thing is not to be born at all; the second best thing is to die as soon as possible.

I would even declare that this is the main point of Nietzsche's entire project after *The Birth of Tragedy* understood as a philosophy of education or *paideia* and not simply *therapeia* (we are not to be cured of the ills or misfortunes of existence but trained in the hard school of life so we learn how to be equal to the events that befall us: *amor fati*). The Greeks were subjects—that is, agents and not patients of life—but they were not 'individuals' in the modern sense of autonomy. But it is modern subjects that Nietzsche focuses his attention on immediately after *The Birth of Tragedy* with the *Untimely Meditations* (1997) written between 1873 and 1875. This is especially the case in the second meditation on history with its prescient criticism of the 'weak personality' (1997, II, section 5). What Nietzsche is in search of, both within the history of culture and as a task for the future, is strong or sovereign individuals who can be equal to life's realities and attain, *as individuals*, the transfiguration of existence.(7) If we think that Nietzsche's philosophy of the future heralds the birth of the monstrously new—the creation of completely new individual life-forms (what he himself calls "exotic plants and fruits")—we are right to do so. In short, it is not necessary to oppose, as Sloterdijk does, impersonal forces and human personalities and agents. Nietzsche shows us in his writings, and from first to last, that there is no opposition here to be made. For him nihilism, taken in its pejorative sense, constitutes a failure of insight and a betrayal of the human animal precisely on this point: "The sight of the human being now makes us tired—what is nihilism today if it is not *that*?: "... We are tired of the human being ..." (Nietzsche, 2006, I, section 12, emphasis added).(8)

For Nietzsche human beings are neither the source nor the end of life (how terrible!); but for him we are human and we live in a world populated by human beings and informed by human concerns all the time; the aim of education is thus to cultivate confident human individuals who are able to fashion lives in which the impersonal forces are transfigured by them, and images by which life can be endured and affirmed are created. Nietzsche holds to this view for two reasons: (a) because philosophy has a responsibility to care for human beings; and (b) because we have a judgment of taste in which we aesthetically value greatness (the transfiguration of the forces or energies of life in their most singular, rarest, and heterodox forms) (how beautiful! How sublime!). It simply does not follow from a reading of *The Birth of Tragedy* that ethics is cybernetics. For Nietzsche the route to take is to an ethics, and ultimately a 'great politics', focused on the autonomy and sovereignty of new individuals. After *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche goes in a different direction to the one Sloterdijk himself recommends, and it appears to be one, in fact, that he has taken up in his reflections in "Rules for the human zoo" (2009). Before looking at this, let me examine another piece of writing by him as a way of bringing to the fore the kind of challenge he is keen to present to humanism, a challenge which may, in fact, and at least in part, stem from his Heideggereanism. In spite of the tremendous challenge Heidegger poses to humanism, which I am not blind to and which has so deeply influenced Sloterdijk, I regard it as misguided, and largely because it presents us with a false opposition between humanism (taken as indicating a concern with the human and a care for it) and antihumanism (taken as an attempt to undermine human pretensions to sovereignty or lordship).

(7) I will not deal with the issue of freedom of the will in Nietzsche simply because it is too complex to be handled here, except to alert readers to passages in his corpus where it is reconstituted in positive terms such as Nietzsche (1974, section 47; 1984, preface; 1998, section 208).

(8) For Sloterdijk's own reading of this statement see Sloterdijk (1989a).

Sloterdijk on the future of intelligent life

> "It is not the first time that human beings find themselves faced with the fact that to use intelligence is inevitably to make decisions."
>
> Sloterdijk (no date)

In his essay "Operable man: on the ethical state of gene technology" (no date) Sloterdijk depicts the emergence of a posthuman world that, as he sees it, challenges the human and all forms of humanism at a deep level. This is a posthuman world in which the human cannot, in any shape or guise, feel at home in the world.

One way of reading the history of the human is in terms of a Promethean (grand) narrative in which through an ever-increasing technological knowledge and ability man reveals himself to himself "as the maker of suns and maker of life", reaching a point where he forces "himself into a position in which he must address the question, whether that which he does and can is actually himself and whether in this activity he is together-with-himself." This conception of the history of man echoes the closing words of Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1977) when Bergson conceives the universe as a machine for the making of gods and enigmatically poses the question (page 317): do human beings now wish to go on living or not?: that is, do they wish to continue with their driven existence or do they wish to put on the brakes and decide on their mode of existence for the first time? To the extent that this history can be read as a success story, Sloterdijk notes, it can be read as a history of truth and its mastery by man. Although he nowhere notes it in his reflections, this echoes Nietzsche's eerie question in *The Gay Science* concerning truth: "to what extent can truth stand incorporation? That is now the experiment" (1974, section 110). For Sloterdijk however, this history is only partially one of truth. Always keen to undermine pretensions to human subjectivity and authenticity, to humanism in any shape or form, he observes: "When over the desert of New Mexico the atomic explosion flashes, there is no coming-to-oneself involved." This lack of identity of man with himself is for Sloterdijk, in fact, our real history. On one level it has a history, and the extermination camps would be part of this. On another level, however, and much less well understood, is the extent to which our cherished notions of the human are being threatened by posthuman developments in the domain of cybernetic technologies, resulting in a new state of language and writing that has virtually nothing in common with traditional conceptions of them by religion, metaphysics, and humanism.

Sloterdijk acknowledges the importance of Heidegger's 'destruction' of metaphysics, but even here he locates a philosophical grammar whose ontology and logic are deficient in the face of new posthuman challenges. On the one hand, the challenge of the question of technology is nothing new; on the other hand, it is being realised more and more, made more and more actual or real. Thus, for example, Sloterdijk notes that our traditional philosophical grammar finds it hard to conceptualise in an ontologically adequate manner phenomena such as tools, signs, artworks, machines, laws, customs, books, and myriad artefacts and artifices—in short, the nonhuman domain of the artificial or what we cosily call 'artificial life' without reflecting on the kind of 'life' at work here.[9] On the other hand, the rise of cybernetic machines and the Internet has made the immaterial—information—the materiality, the stuff, of our present and future reality. The challenge is simply this: our monovalent ontology (being is, not being is not) and our bivalent logic (what is true is not false, what is false is not true) are put to the test when thought finds itself compelled to think the nonhuman and the posthuman. The categories of soul and thing, of spirit and matter, of subject and object, of freedom and mechanism, are shown to be deficient when dealing with

[9] For a highly interesting attempt to do this see Thompson (1996). More generally on Nietzsche and life, see Ansell-Pearson (1997) and Richardson (2004).

entities that are, in fact, 'hybrids'. Sloterdijk makes the provocative claim that, when read in terms of cybernetics and the principle of information, Hegel's conception of 'objective spirit' comes close to doing the job needed here: "The statement 'there is information' implies there are systems; there are memories; there are cultures; there is artificial intelligence. Even the sentence 'there are genes' can only be understood as the product of the new situation—it shows how the principle of information is successfully transferred into the sphere of nature." The recognition of self-organising systems withers the metaphysical distinction between nature and culture. Moreover, the distinction between the human and inhuman, between the soul and the machine, is also severely tested and found wanting. As Nietzsche recognized in his *On the Genealogy of Morality* man's anthropogenesis as the promise-bearing animal is also a technogenesis (2006, II, section 3). Sloterdijk wants to go further than this and to recognise that information and hybrid entities are forms of intelligent life, only it is an intelligence that the human logic of mastery and domination is unable to recognise.

This, then, is the pressing ontological challenge Sloterdijk identifies, and it is difficult not to recognise it and appreciate the extent to which our fundamental humanist ontologies are, indeed, being challenged by these developments in 'life'. But, we can ask, what of the future of the actual human animal—what of the ethical and political tasks of culture and breeding before us? Is the human challenged by these developments in such a way that all aspirations to and dreams of the 'superhuman' become otiose fantasies of control, manipulation, and mastery? Only the human, so far as we know, experiences the *existential* compulsion. This is perhaps what is missing from the transhumanist worldview, which is largely focused on the appetite of the last man for eternal happiness in the form of perpetual contentment (in which the conquest of death will bring an end to human anxiety). More challenging to our anthropocentrism perhaps is Bergson's question at the close of *The Two Sources* (1977) since this dramatically calls into question the human compulsion to infinite mechanical expansion in favour of a new asceticism (represented in a turn to 'mysticism') centred on quietening, even dampening, the excesses of an aphrodisiac culture—that is, an oversexualised culture addicted to the satisfaction of pleasure. It is interesting to note that Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's *Übermensch* precisely in these Bergsonian terms: "Superman is qualitatively, not quantitatively, different from existing man .... The Superman is poorer, simpler, tenderer and tougher, quieter and more self-sacrificing and slower of decision, and more economical of speech" (Heidegger, 1968, page 69).

For Sloterdijk there has to be a link between the ontological challenge and the ethical one. He maintains that we are witnessing a deconstruction of the self and humanist (and superhumanist) subjectivity on the level of the real (the material) and not just on that of the symbol. Although this has been a fact of human history for a long time, since the invention of psychotropic substances, it is now assuming a more invasive and palpable form of alien intervention into mind and body—namely, genetic technologies which "draw a broad expanse of physical preconditions of the self into the span of artificial manipulations". The situation is perceived as fraught with an anxious and terrible ambiguity: is it the scene where the human fully realizes its superhuman fantasies—as in the transhumanist fantasy—or is it where the human is obliterated and its soul lost to the machine? Is the world to become the spirit's home through these developments, or is it to be lost in the material world where it sinks into the no-man's land of hybrid life?

Sloterdijk, in fact, refuses the terms of the contrast since it does not present a real challenge. Rather than a hysterical reaction or last man glee, he prefers a more sober response:

> "Man as a reflecting and constructing power is not in a position where he would have to choose between completely being-together with itself-itself and completely-being-outside-oneself. He can just as little decide between a total grasp of the self and a total loss of the self as between total distraction and collection. He is a regional possibility of clearing and a local possibility of collection. Man is a relatively intense port for the collection of power and truth, but he doesn't collect all" (no date).

Sloterdijk finds wisdom in Heidegger's idea that metaphysics might be overcome when we make the descent into poverty of the ek-sistence of *homo humanus* since this provides us with a point of departure for understanding human existence as a noble weakness and a local poetic power. This means that 'being-there' is best understood for we postmoderns as a 'passion of the monstrous' to which we are, in a history yet to be fully written, perpetually exposed. For Sloterdijk this is an insight that brings Heidegger closer to the likes of Augustine and Pascal, rather than to, say, Hegel and Husserl, and that can also be expressed, he contends, in a Nietzschean language: "we might say that man is a power-vector or a concentration or a chance for composition." What this glosses over is the fact that for Nietzsche the human is this power-vector on account of the *tragic* character of its existence, not its posthuman character.

Sloterdijk, then, is endeavouring to lay down an essential ontological challenge. The antitechnological hysteria that holds large parts of the Western world in its grip is a product of the decomposition of metaphysics. It clings to spurious classifications of being and is reactionary in the essential meaning of the word, expressing little more than the *ressentiment* of an outdated bivalent logic in the midst of a polyvalence it refuses to comprehend. For Sloterdijk this is not without political effect or consequence: it signals the end of mastery because where there is information and where there are systems (everywhere) there is no longer a master to stand up against. Does not the master live on, along with phantoms of conflict, only as the postulate of a slave fixated rebellion? For Sloterdijk a historicised Left, along with humanism, belongs to the museum of a defunct history. We need creative dissidence and poetic resistance against all metaphysical reflexes of humanolatry. He is especially critical of Antonio Negri's fascination with the 'multitude'.

Sloterdijk takes up Heidegger's notion of the clearing in which man poetically dwells: the difference is that instead of a pastoral image this clearing cannot be thought without a technological origin. When man stands in the clearing his hands are not empty, but, rather, he is holding stones and their technological successors. Our relationship to technology is, then, on the order of a deep and hidden genesis: "If there is man, then that is because technology has made him evolve out of the pre-human." Moreover, "humans encounter nothing strange when they expose themselves to further creation and manipulation, and they do nothing perverse when they change themselves autotechnologically." I shall argue shortly that there is, in fact, a challenge that comes from Nietzsche to be presented here and which Sloterdijk appears to be deaf to. Nietzsche was sending out a warning to the future and it needs 'ears' to receive the signal. In so uncritically affirming the tendency toward the autotechnological transformation of the human, Sloterdijk, it might be claimed, does not have Nietzsche's ears, or, rather, the kinds of ears Nietzsche wanted his readers to have. Or perhaps he has found a way out of the kind of anxieties I have and I have failed to understand him.

We are now able to make the transition in Sloterdijk's account to the core question, which centres on the need for decision. In short, the question remains: how does one *now* in our present and future become what one is? That is, in Sloterdijk's words, "effective as authentic, intelligent and successful co-productions with evolutionary potential".

We are back on human territory—the territory of conscious decision, of culture and calculation, of risk management, and so on—because we are focused on the future of intelligent life, which is an 'ethical' issue. Sloterdijk argues that it is a valid human desire to be an operable human agent, and cites Christian and Jesuit authors in support of the legitimacy of self-manipulation and self-shaping. In this respect, human history is the story of human plasticity, as Nietzsche recognised in his untimely meditation on history. The human has the 'gift' of a plastic power, which means that its adaptation is not simply natural or mechanical. However, it is too quick to then say it is 'artificial' and opposed to the 'natural' since much depends on what we mean by nature and which nature it is we are deferring to. The task in Nietzsche's eyes is an existential one—that is, one of self-cultivation and self-creation and in the face of the terrible secret of nature which, in fact, provides me with the impetus to create in the first place (but not to become God).

Sloterdijk is keen to apply his ontological challenge to the domain of ethics, including the ethics of the transhuman. For him it follows that we cannot construe the transhuman in accordance with the hylomorphic schema of a subjective mastery over objective and inert matter. This may have been valid in the epoch of classical metaphysics with its bivalent politics and technologies but it is no longer so. We now have a new respect for the intelligence of nature and of matter (they have their own stubbornness, for example; and they can be manipulated successfully only with tremendous care). Our speculation on the future of intelligent life needs to begin with the recognition of this crucial development: "On the level of the statement 'there is information', the old image of technology as heteronomy and the enslavement of matter and persons loses its plausibility." There is no longer raw material that is being manipulated by raw subjects. The path of the future no longer takes place through a rape of raw matter or nature: "it acquires intelligence intelligently, thus creating new states of intelligence .... It must rely on co-intelligent, co-informative strategies, even where it is applied egoistically and regionally as every conventional technology is .... Outstanding scientists of the present express similar ideas with the metaphor of a dialogue with nature." With future technologies we are dealing with embodied, material intelligences that merit our respect. We would be stupid in terms of our egoistic last man designs not to recognise this alien intelligence and we will not be able to profitably work with it if we do not.

Finally, we can renew the problem of evil, which presents itself to us no longer as the will to enslave things and humans, but as a "will to disadvantage the other in cognitive competition". If we recognise this, we may enter a new promised land beyond paranoia, a "postparanoid culture of reason". This should be on the evolutionary agenda of technologically advanced civilizations seeking to free themselves from the inertia of the bivalent age and its custom of rape in dealing with things and persons. The reactionary mind sees one single line of antinatural evolutionary regression from Hiroshima to gene technology, failing to appreciate what has changed in this technological development. The science of complexity that focuses its attention on hybrid forms of life, however, has the potential to unleash an ethics of relationships stripped of enmity and domination.[10] The world of the net offers a way forward here since it does not require a master input. Indeed, as a system of complexity it is contra the master principle.

We feel that we are on the threshold of a new decision, and this decision centres on the question of intelligence. For Sloterdijk, the decision can no longer suppose the

[10] A good recent example of a complexity theorist making the case for a new ethics of relationships along the lines suggested by Sloterdijk is Brian Goodwin (2007).

validity of a bivalent logic. There is no choice of life to be made in a world where the antithesis of life and death, of organic and nonorganic life, has been deconstructed. There is a need, therefore, for a new covenant under the new conditions of complexity and emergence of complex life. Sloterdijk is insistent that our thought can beget no new ethics so long as its logic and ontology remain obscure to us. The future of intelligent life for Sloterdijk centres on the need for a new 'ecology of intelligence' which will see the triumph of good over evil. In a refinement of Plato's view that "all that is is good, evil is merely the absence of the good", he writes: "that which is mainly evil eliminates itself; that which is mainly good spreads itself and continues itself; that which is mainly neutral creates enough redundancy to secure continuity" (Sloterdijk, no date).

Is Nietzsche not also challenged by this account and essentially so? I think not. Much depends on what we mean by 'mastery' and 'dominion'. If the suggestion is that any and all kinds of 'mastery' are now rendered historically redundant and ontologically moribund on account of the emergence of new technological systems and modes of artificial being that function in terms of a new and different intelligence to what we have been used to, this strikes me as being naïve. With regard to a project of breeding different human types, Nietzsche's 'mastery of the earth' is not focused on a mastery of nature but, rather, centres on a battle over the future of the human: last man or superman? I am about to argue that Nietzsche is in favour of *both* forms of life and that he does not envisage the defeat on the last man by the superman. His argument is that there cannot be only the last man, for then life, in its human representation, which is obviously valid only as long as the human is around—does not attain its transfiguration and human beings fail to bring into existence their noblest capacities and potentialities. This is obviously a concern to (some) human beings, and clearly of no concern to the planet itself. As for the health of the planet in and for itself, Nietzsche has little notion: he is an existential naturalist, not an ecologist.[11] For that we may have to turn to a thinker such as Henri Bergson and his rendition of the superhuman in which the human voluntarily renounces its will to power conceived as will to master nature for the ends of (human) animal satisfaction. When Nietzsche reflects on the future he is reflecting only on the *human* future—where the human animal is conceived as the tragic animal par excellence—and what is at stake for him is the future of intelligent life where 'intelligence' is a response to the insight into the fundamentally tragic character of existence. So long as we have a concern for the human that is more than a care for animal preservation (not that this should not be of concern too), so long as we value human life and the *quality of life*, then our ultimate care needs to be focused on the cultivation and promotion of the superior forms of human existence. Even if it is granted that the tragic character of human existence is merely a contingent fact (the fact that we are mortal), which it clearly is, Nietzsche would argue that the *moral* task, so long as we are human, is to transform this contingency into necessity, and this gives us ethics or morality as aesthetic freedom or creativity.

Nietzsche and the future of sovereign life

A full treatment of Nietzsche's conception of the future of sovereign life is beyond the scope of this essay. His notion of the *Übermensch* is a troubling concept, but it is essential to remember that for Nietzsche there are good and bad conceptions of it. The 'bad' model of the superhuman is one where it signals a desire not to be human, not to be of the earth; the 'good' superhuman signals a continual spiritual deepening and intensification of the human animal, an affirmation of our condition of being

[11] On Nietzsche's existential naturalism see Lawrence Hatab (2005, page 7).

human and from the earth. His conception has little in common with transhumanist concerns and visions of the future since for him it is a question not of correcting (redesigning) existence but of transfiguring it. The figure of the *Übermensch* has tended to polarise critical commentaries, too, with some (especially in the Anglo-American context) avoiding it, and others (especially Heidegger and postwar French thought) trying to work it through in different ways. Whatever intellectual merits these different conceptions of Nietzsche's vision and riddle of a future human mode of being may have, and they may be considerable in their own ways, they are far removed from the concerns that animate his thinking on the topic. In fact, with respect to Nietzsche's own concerns they are fanciful and evasive at best and a betrayal at worst.

Nietzsche's thought on the *Übermensch* is not confined to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but is found throughout his career. It is a sublime exercise and operation in that it entails elevating individuals to greatness and nobility and creating a people, even a humanity, equal to this concept. Nietzsche's vision of the future, then, revolves around a desire for a specific evolution of the human being. His most essential recommendation is that we allow for two divergent lines to take place, one in the direction of gregariousness, the other in the direction of solitariness. The latter path is required so as to help make possible genuine individuality and personality. Nietzsche takes seriously the struggle for existence on the level of biological evolution and on the level of our human history, but his thinking on the future of the human is not Darwinian and he is opposed to Darwinism as much as he is to socialism when he posits his 'radical aristocratism'.

Nietzsche's philosophy of the future is centred, then, on a conception of the future of intelligent life in which two quite different modes of human being and intelligence will evolve in accordance with different desires (1968, section 866). He sees education as the primary means by which this can come about: "Until now, education has had in view the needs of society, not the possible needs of the future" (section 898). It is not simply that he is contra democracy, but, rather, that he thinks we moderns have forgotten that politics exists to serve and protect the noble ends of culture as opposed to being utilised as the means by which the merely human, all too human, stakes out its imperial claim to being the sole justification of existence and evolution. Instead of democracy being seen as a platform or base upon which to build a new aristocracy of the future, democracy is being developed as a way of making it virtually impossible for superior modes of being to exist and flourish. He writes against Comte:

> "Main consideration: not to see the task of the higher species in leading the lower (as, eg, Comte does), but the lower as a base upon which the higher species performs its *own* tasks—upon which it alone can stand" (Nietzsche, 1968, section 901, emphasis in original).

Nietzsche accepts that there is an existence of the majority and one of minorities. His philosophy of the future centres on a concern for the latter and can thus be described as 'minoritarian'. The two modes of existence are radically different and, to date, evolution has worked to favour the triumph of the former and at the expense of the latter. This is, of course, Nietzsche's great lament.

Far from deconstructing autonomy, as Sloterdijk contends in *Thinker on Stage* (1989b), Nietzsche is the advocate of hyperautonomous life. References to support this view can be found running throughout his corpus, including *The Gay Science* (1974, section 335) and many of the discourses that make up *Zarathustra* ("Of the way of the creator" and "On old and new law tablets", for example). For Nietzsche there are two fundamental moralities of life corresponding to the two orders of intelligence: the herd-animal morality and new legislative moralities. Morality as we moderns have come to understand it is the danger of dangers because it makes the

present live at the expense of the future (Nietzsche, 2006, preface). This morality wants to fix the animal called 'human', which up to now has been the 'unfixed animal' (1998, section 62). The philosopher of the future, by contrast, does not want the human animal to be something comfortable and mediocre, but aims to breed "future masters of the earth" (1968, section 957), conceived as human beings of the highest spirituality and strength of will. For Nietzsche, it is the free spirit, not the free thinker, who thinks about this problem and makes it his or her chief concern (1998, section 44).

If I was writing this as a mental being from a future in which the human animal no longer existed, I would claim this: although the human race was destined to perish and was nothing more than an accident of nature, it was through the realization of the superior forms and modes of being human that it attained greatness in its short duration on the planet and truly elevated and ennobled itself. It found eternity not in immortality but in the supreme, sovereign moments of existence. Viewed through a Nietzschean lens this would, in fact, be the goal of any form of intelligent life which had its grounds in tragic conditions of existence.

Conclusion: posthuman and superhuman futures?

In his "Rules for the human zoo", Sloterdijk (2009) provoked controversy by returning to Nietzsche's project as one of a new discipline and breeding of the human. In my view, the way he neglects to deal with the details of what Nietzsche had in mind in his conception has had the unfortunate effect of provoking eminent commentators such as Habermas to respond by thinking that little more than 'wild speculation' is being put on the table:

> "A handful of freaked-out intellectuals is busy reading the tea leaves of a naturalistic version of posthumanism, only to give, at what they suppose to be a time-wall, one more spin—'hypermodernity' against 'hypermorality'—to the all-too familiar motives of a very German ideology" (Habermas, 2003, page 22).

Of course, what this overlooks is (a) the fact that Nietzsche might be engaged upon a very serious philosophical project that is profoundly sensitive to all things human; (b) that a figure like Nietzsche might, in fact, be remarkably close to the concerns Habermas expresses over the 'wild speculations' of transhumanist and posthumanist thinking. Consider, for example, Habermas's concern over whether we wish "to live in a society which is ready to swap sensitivity regarding the normative and natural foundations of its existence for the narcissistic indulgence of our own preferences" (2003, page 20). Although he may be unaware of it, Habermas is reinstating Nietzsche's questioning of the hegemony of the last man who when asked about the why and wherefore of existence blinks because he has discovered 'happiness'. Habermas expresses the concern of his inquiry into the future of human nature in terms of whether the genetic self-transformation and self-optimisation of the species will be a way of increasing the autonomy of the individual or whether it will undermine our normative self-understanding as persons leading our own lives and showing each other equal respect. Although this expresses a typical self-righteous liberal Enlightenment view, it is not as alien to Nietzsche as we might suppose. The difference is between the free thinker and the free spirit, in which the free spirit shares some of the hard-earned values and principles of the free thinker but holds that the free thinker is, ultimately, 'superficial' (Nietzsche, 1998, section 44). Nietzsche's concern, I think, would be expressed slightly differently to the way Habermas puts it. I think he would voice the concern as to whether the transhuman future undermines the tragic ground of existence and so (a) will endanger the impulse to human creativity, and (b) will cancel out the promise of the superhuman conceived as the fashioning of the superior forms of human existence. I suspect he would also possibly regard the transhumanist agenda

either as an extension of the Christian fantasy or as little more than the perpetuation of the concern with animal self-preservation and thus a form of superior or enhanced adaptation. In short, transhuman life would not for Nietzsche be *sovereign* life. Moreover, we, as Nietzscheans, could edge our bets on the transhuman only if we supposed that human beings were incapable of self-transfiguration and not equal to the *event* of their tragic conditions of existence. Nietzsche's great hope, of course, was that the future would be different to the present and future human beings would be capable of leading and fashioning such lives (he also thought that 'great politics' and a new education were needed to bring this future about). And, although he does on occasion appeal to humans to become God-like (1968, section 958), this it *not* because he invites them to transcend their nature and correct it, but rather, because, as future 'masters of the earth', they have an obligation to recognise what they are responsible for and the tremendous weight of this responsibility: it is, indeed, "the *greatest* weight" (Nietzsche 1974, section 341, emphasis in original). The appeal to 'gods' in Nietzsche, and even to man becoming 'God', is, therefore, an appeal to the superhuman *within* the human and *as it concerns* the human.

My view, as I have already indicated, is that Nietzsche is a poor resource to draw upon for transhumanist thinking since for him the challenge of living that confronts human beings is not a 'technological' one but an 'existential' one. This is why I must take issue with what Sloterdijk does with Nietzsche in "Rules for the human zoo" (2009). It is, as he states, a question of 'breeding' and this 'breeding' (or cultivation) is centred on the need for an order of rank (what is to be valued, and what is the method of valuation?). However, it is wrong to suppose that for Nietzsche we need to choose between different forms of life; for Nietzsche the future challenge we need to attempt to be equal to on the political or ideological level is one of genuine pluralism. Moreover, Sloterdijk confuses the issue by introducing into the debate the issue of 'anthropotechnology' or biotechnological intervention such as genetic manipulation. This gives us the wrong kind of technology for what is required for the emergence of Nietzsche's superhuman (the better kind is *paideia* or education as in the spiritually cultivating thought of eternal recurrence). Nietzsche's focus is on 'education' and here the aim is not to attempt to correct existence but rather to instruct the human animal in the art of transfiguration. I think it misguided, therefore, to introduce into the picture, as Sloterdijk does, the idea that what will be needed in the future is a "codex of anthropotechnology" in which it is recognized that "humanity is not just the friendship of man with man, but that man has become the higher power for man" (2009, page 24). Now, whilst this may or may not be a correct account of the future that is to come—and ultimately it is a question of *will* and *what kind of will* we wish to will (Nietzsche, 1968, section 208)—as far as Nietzsche is concerned it is irrelevant since for him speculations on the future breeding of the human need to centre on something much closer to hand: what is to be our care for the human in the face of the appreciation of the tragic nature of existence and our knowledge that there are *possibilities* of life? Can human beings who prove worthy of life and confident of the future be helped to come into existence and allowed to flourish? Nietzsche's conception of the human future has no other concern or focus. The fact that Sloterdijk diminishes the value of autonomy and sovereign life to the extent that he does results, I think, in him being almost completely blind to this.

Let me bring this appreciation to a close by disclosing the truth of nature for Nietzsche, which is twofold and the source of his naturalism. On the one hand, nature contains a terrible secret which human beings must both reveal *and* conceal, and the intelligent way to do this is through being artistic and creative. On the other hand, it is imperative that, in the face of metaphysical bird-catchers who swoop down on

the human being in an effort to teach it that it is of a higher and different origin to the rest of nature, we translate the human *back into nature* (Nietzsche, 1998, section 230). We do this not so as to simply diminish its significance, although we do this in part, but more so as to secure insight into what actually makes the character of its existence intelligible *and as the creative animal that it is* (in effect, we *both* deflate and inflate the human animal). Moreover, only such a translation can demonstrate to us two important things: first, why the human is the animal concerned with 'possibilities of life' and, second, precisely what it means to value the superhuman neither as the fantasy not to be human and wish to transcend it nor as some kind of dreamy utopian vision. Over the course of several decades, with many seminal and beautifully executed texts to his name, Sloterdijk has had a remarkable intellectual career that has involved him carrying out an extraordinary inquiry into what it means to be human.

Let us remember, recall, and ruminate over Nietzsche's exhortation: "Long live physics!" (1974, section 335). In it he is also exhorting, of course, long live creativity! To this we can add: 'long live the human!' For Nietzsche the human animal has become in the course of its evolution the valuating and reverent animal par excellence. Writing in the 1880s, Nietzsche considered humanity to be on the verge of a terrifying Either/Or account of the fact that it could no longer feel at home in its old values and ideals (God is dead and with it humanity's previous reverences): either it abolishes itself or it abolishes its reverences, and either would amount to nihilism (Nietzsche, 1974, section 346). In response to this nihilism Nietzsche thought that humanity needed a new goal and aim (the superhuman) that entreated it to remain 'true to the earth'. The challenge today is to show that thinking about the future, be it superhuman or posthuman, involves thinking about our reverences, indeed, about the future of reverence. When we think about the matter in this way we can discern that even a posthuman existence will be, like a piece of fate, eminently 'human'.

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