



**TO BE
BORN
LUCE
IRIGARAY**



To Be Born

Luce Irigaray

To Be Born

Genesis of a New Human Being

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Prologue: An Elusive Origin

Unveiling the mystery of our origin is probably the thing that most motivates our quests and plans. This question so much worries us that, perhaps, we have not yet begun to live, in ourselves and in the world. We would like to know from where we come, from what or from whom we exist in order to dwell there and grow in continuation with that from what or from whom we are. Our most secret dream may consist in being a tree, the existence of which is determined by the place where it took root. Hence our ceaseless search for roots: in our genealogy, in the place where we were born, in our culture, our religion or our language, and also in what we project onto the most distant future but which, in reality, corresponds to the quest of the most indiscernible closeness. Who could maintain that they are not in search of their origin in their dreams regarding the future, their amorous desires, their longings for the beyond? Who has sufficiently thought about the nature of their origin so as to place themselves in relation to what or who they are here and now and be capable of making a decision only by themselves? In other words, who is able not to make up their mind according to a secret nostalgia for at least understanding in what their origin consists?

Now such grasping proves to be impossible. We become existent by cutting ourselves off—by ec-sisting—from our origin. Indeed, we were born as one from a union between two. We are the fruit of a copulative link between two different beings. Our own being is the incarnation

which lives on of the conjunction between two human beings. Our existence is an actualization of the elusive event of a meeting between two humans—one masculine being and one feminine being—which gave birth to a boy or to a girl. We are for ever deprived of an origin of our own—we are neither a plant nor God. We will always remain torn between the existence and the world that a vegetal being is capable of procuring for itself and the self-sufficiency, without beginning or end, of God. We are the ec-stasis from a union, the unpredictable advent of a not appropriable event.

The origin of our being is in suspense in a connection between two terms which escapes any prediction and predication. And yet we are there—presence of an ‘is’ without any ‘to be’ originally identifiable. We are in charge of being—not to say of Being. We must take being into our care by preserving the power to be of the copulative link between two different humans, the place of a transcendence in relation to any personal existence.

We have not yet assumed such a destiny. We have not yet corresponded to our human fate. We imagine our lot in comparison with animality or divinity, but not as humans, the ones whose destiny is to take charge of their existence from a non-appropriable essence.

Heidegger is not mistaken in saying that what we have imagined as humanism has not placed high enough the meaning of the humanity of man (cf. ‘Letter on Humanism’, in *Basic Writings*). Human destiny requires us to exist from an ec-sisting, that is, to ensure our being as ecstatic. Human being cannot develop from roots as a tree, or from an environment as an animal. Human being must take responsibility for existence beyond any continuity with regard to roots and background. And it is understandable that Heidegger wants Being to compensate for this lack of origin, when others resort to God, a mere natural immanence or a world built by man in various modes. However, human being only exists by taking on the not-being of a continuum—a break, a void, a nothing—with regard to its provenance and its environment. A human must give itself a being with faithfulness to the living that it is. In a way it must create its human being through relating to the world and the other(s)—be they plants, animals or humans—thus a being in relation which requires us not to be what they are while being able to be in relation

to and with what they are, that is, capable of taking on the negative that the difference represents.

The way we become explains the interest that we take in our environment and our attempt to define the elements which have a share in it. But such a gesture is generally inspired by a desire to appropriate them and integrate them into a whole, rather than by an aptitude for not appropriating that the respect for the other as other involves. We have thus transformed the copulative process, from which we were born and are for ever exiled, into the general use of a copula—it is, there is—which decides on the existence of the real. We try to attribute to ourselves an origin by assigning an origin, a being, to everything and everyone that we approach, at a material or a spiritual level. But we do not correspond in this way to our human lot, a lot that requires us to be ecstatic in relation to our origin and our environment. Instead of endeavouring to perceive in everything and everyone their own being, we impose on them the not-being of a difference that we refuse to assume. We run the world in a sort of gallery of our projective embodiments, the only master of which is death.

If we assume our destiny as ecstatic regarding our origin, we have no longer to project something of it onto the real. We can then be in a one-to-one relationship with any living being without reducing it to an object either of our judgement or of our desire or our love. No doubt that it is with humans who are different from us that such a way of being in relation is at once the most accomplished and the most risky. The ec-stasis with respect to our origin leads us to wander outside ourselves and go stray from what allows a meeting between us to occur. We search for a possible mediation in a common world already existing, and yet it is the one which prevents us from discovering our own 'to be' and the path towards a possible conjunction with the other as other. Rather we must listen to the desire of the other which attracts us beyond a horizon defined by sameness and the already common, a desire which remembers the ec-stasis from which we exist and calls us back to the question of our human being. And that for two reasons: it reminds us of our transcendence with regard to our origin and it indicates to us the transcendence of the other with regard to us. Only the consideration for these two transcendences, irreducible to one another, can give back to us a correct

perception of the real, or of the being, of everyone and everything that we meet, especially of any being living by itself. And we will have to take into account too the transcendence of the world that we will form with the other. Assuming our human destiny will grant us aptitude for respecting the destiny of the other(s) and an enrichment due to their own being and existing.

Such a task seems superhuman; nevertheless, it corresponds to taking on our destiny. Is it not the one which allows us to leave behind the old man of the West for another conception of human being—towards finally attaining our humanity? How can we succeed in such an undertaking? First by cultivating our breathing, a resource that we too passively left to the transcendence of a God extraneous to our terrestrial existence, whereas breathing is what permits us not only to live by ourselves but also to transcend a mere survival, to overcome the stage of a mere vitality so that we become able to achieve a human existence. Assuming and incarnating our sexuate belonging is the second element that renders us capable of fulfilling our natural existence while transcending it. This occurs thanks to a determination which provides us with a dynamism at once autonomous and relational able to transform our ecstatic fate into a personal incarnation that longs for sharing our ecstasies with the different other. Which converts the abandonment of our birth into a solitude which gives us back to our being, but also to an original relation of desire and love with the other different from us by nature. It is through the rebirth, that this fundamental link grants us, that we can overcome the ecstatic character of our genealogical fate by consenting to the ecstasy of a union with a living being representing the other participant in our conception. In this deliberate ecstasy, we can take into our care what a donation of being, but also a withdrawal of being, means in order to safeguard our specificity towards the achievement of our existence and its possible sharing. Thanks to what it grants us of life and access to transcendence, a cultivation of breathing allows us to assume the solitude of our singularity while venturing to share with another ontological destiny.

This requires courage, respect and care, but also the sunshine that love brings. According to the words of Phaedrus in the *Symposium* of Plato, Love, sometimes named Eros, has no parents, no age, no history, and its

origin remains unknown to anyone. Love, whose destiny is said to be unique amongst the gods and humans, perhaps embodies the desire for a conjunction always in search of its happening. Love would represent a dynamism longing for the copula incarnating the transcendence of our being. As such, Love would remain the everlasting yearning for the accomplishment of the ecstatic destiny of humanity.

However, we forget what a human destiny means, as we neglect how we can incarnate it. Hence, we wander in quest for a truth which could compensate for our lack of being. We attempt to justify and ensure this truth by the mastery of a copulative junction—now a logical one—which would guarantee the correctness of our judgements and predicative assertions. Through such a gesture, the most constant and somewhat authoritative in our cultural tradition, we inextricably cut ourselves off from the real, including that of our natural belonging, in the ec-stasis of a discourse, of a logos. We create a being which could prove to be only smoke — to quote a word of Nietzsche — and that would be already too much because we create above all nothingness. And it will be for ever so as long as we do not consider the two ec-stasies from which we can exist as humans: the ec-stasis with regard to our origin, and the ec-stasis to which our desire calls us. These two different ec-stasies, in a way these two not-being, must be taken on in order that we can discover what our being as human means and endeavour to incarnate our own destiny.

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