Toward a Real Sexual Encounter: Irigaray on the Female Divine and Spiritual Embraces

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Abstract

In an earlier paper I have already explicated that ethics, to Irigaray, refers to “the study and practice of that which constitute one’s habitat, or as the problematic of the constitution of one’s habitat, or as the problematic of the constitution of one’s embodied place in the world” (cf.: http://benz.nchu.edu.tw/ ~intergrams/intergrams/032/032.chu.htm). Also, according to Margaret Whitford in her book on Irigaray, that once woman gains access to her own space-time, it will open up a new horizon of fertility and creation. For Whitford, Irigaray is looking forward to a fecund amorous exchange. Yet in order to achieve this vision, woman needs to learn to love herself first. For in the traditional symbolic order, woman is not allocated to a position of self-loving, but rather one of self-debasement. Yet following Whitford, we must recognize that “each sex has its own interests, needs, and desires, and therefore represents limits to the interests, needs, and desires of the other sex.” If we agree with Whitford that “women’s needs for autonomy, freedom of movement, sexual self-determination, contraception, and abortion clash with male desire for their containment, enclosure, or control,” then we would also agree with Irigaray’s statement in her Elemental Passions that (here I paraphrase) we all need to be opened up again (18). Her ethics is therefore a material practice, an opening of one’s embodied ethos toward other possibilities.

But what are the other possibilities? I would argue in this paper that Irigaray actually

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supplies ample and fresh insights into this issue in her *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (originally delivered as a series of lectures at Erasmus University in 1982). And in this paper I would focus on the second section of that book. In the three chapters that comprise this section, Irigaray first points out the importance of self-love for woman. Traditionally, woman has been expected to perform altruism, self-sacrifice, and feminine virtuousness, at the expense of her own freedom, self-development, even self-esteem. That is to say, woman loves herself through others such as her father, husband, or children, and thus has always “served the self-love of man.” Yet according to Irigaray, woman should no longer love herself through them. She has to learn the culturally difficult task of loving herself. And after this task is accomplished, man and woman should learn to “wonder” at each other, as defined by Descartes as the “first passion without an opposite.” Thus lovers can finally get rid of patriarchy’s obsession with procreation, and woman will not be cherished only for her role as mother. Hence wonder would no longer be reserved for God. It may also be an experience of carnal wonder. Only by a “return to the bodily-fleshly values” and sensual pleasure can woman have her own envelope, a place for her own, not for men and babies. Then a woman who is properly loved would find in herself a place to go.

Thus the metaphor of the envelope Irigaray adopts (from Spinoza’s *Ethics*) is actually central and profoundly fecund in her *An Ethics*. It is true that Irigaray provides a utopian vision of sexual difference in which woman wishes her lover could do for her what she does for him. Yet I do not agree with a previous book review on New York Times (12/12/1993) that this is in fact “an ethics of sexual solipsism.” Hopefully from this ethical point of view, I can provide a new approach to and shed new light on the interpretations of Irigaray’s new sexual ethics.

**Key words:** Irigaray, love of self, the female divine, wonder, envelope, creation of new culture.

But what am I for you, other than that place from which you subsist? Your subsistence. Or substance. Irigaray1

Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. Irigaray2

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When love is seen as creation and potentially divine, then the lover in loving is creating a path between the condition of the mortal and that of the immortal.

For Irigaray, subjectivity must be premised on a felt encounter with our own corporeal limits and an acknowledgment of the difference of the other who allows us to experience our limits.

In our contemporary world which seems to provide unlimited sex opportunities, to discuss sexual encounters may seem at the first sight out of place and out of date. Yet what I would like to stress here is the attribute of “real.” Sexual encounter does not involve physical intimacy only; rather, it is also concerned with spiritual and discursive encounters.

Hence in this paper I shall endeavor to elucidate Irigaray’s points in terms of her vision of a real sexual encounter. For her, it is still to come, and is possible only after the creation of a new culture. Consequently, this paper will focus on various aspects of her envisioning scattered across her writings and lectures, with an emphasis on the second section of her *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.

**Toward An Alternative Feminine Subjectivity**

In *Speculum*, Irigaray already provides a scathing critique of Freud’s characterization of human subjectivity. Her reading of Freud’s “Femininity” exposes how his blind spot leads him to valorize and perpetuate an economy that

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4 Ibid., 220.
privileges masculine subjectivity, or Oedipal subjectivity, which is too reductive. To Freud, a coherent subject is possible only through the effacement of a broader range of forces with other possibilities cut off. And the metaphysical implications of such a theory are also present throughout the key texts in the history of Western philosophy, as Irigaray’s readings of them in the middle section of the book demonstrate. For Irigaray, subjectivity is necessarily ethical, and sexually differentiated. According to her the current ethical framework is flawed, for it does not take into consideration sexual difference, and does not allow the dimension of the female divine in women’s becoming.

When we realize that masculine subjectivity has a blind spot for feminine specificity, and this blind spot is detrimental to feminine subjects, we should try to symbolize the feminine other that has not been allowed to speak, so that she will both challenge masculine specularity and engage in a project of creating another economy that could also sustain an alternative and viable form of subjectivity.

Full cultural (i.e. not merely visual) recognition of the body would entail symbolization of the body in relation to masculine as well as feminine subjects. Only when women are not relegated to the position of primary guardians of the corporeal in our cultural representations, could masculine as well as feminine subjects incorporate their corporeality into their sublimations. Such a project of recognition and symbolization would entail undoing the sexual division of labor which allows masculine subjects to displace their corporeality onto feminine others and excludes the latter from the transcendental functions of culture. Hence Irigaray invents the term sensible transcendental to refer to all (including visual, tactile, etc.) the conditions of women’s collective access to subjectivity. Through the open exchange of embodied communication in discourse, the symbolic can be transformed into a concrete space, and women can create a different place for themselves in the social order.

By pointing out the existence of the female divine, Irigaray refers to a
possibility which avoids the danger of a god created in the image of woman. For her, “Women can no longer love or desire the other man if they cannot love themselves. Women are no longer willing to be the guardians of love, especially when it is an improbable or even pathological love. Women want to find themselves, discover themselves and their own identity. Which is why they are seeking each other out, loving each other, associating with each other” (An Ethics, 66). Therefore, she conceives of the divine as a multiple becoming incarnated in sensuous bodies. It is a loving relationship, which does not take place in the One. Here Irigaray offers a scathing critique of the kind of one “built on a division of labor, of goods, of discourse, a one which is merely an enslaving complementarity” (Ibid., 66-7). This kind of one is incarnated only in the child—thus trapping the three terms in an alliance which is no alliance. Hence before the one of love is ever to be achieved, we have to discover the two.

Before this is done, Irigaray mentions several tasks which should be successfully tackled. First, the absolution of hierarchy of maternal and paternal functions. It means the division of labor between the reproduction of the child and the work force, on the one hand, and the reproduction of society and of symbolic and cultural capital, on the other, should no longer exist.

Second, there should be no more dissociation of love and eroticism, which is closely related with the division and hierarchy of parental functions. Love should not be reduced to technocratic sexuality, always hunting for new techniques or targets, ending up bored and expecting happiness only in the world beyond.

Third, women should form a social group, and have access to society and culture. If not, there is danger of women being abandoned to a state of neither knowing each other nor loving each other, or themselves. Hence they will have no way to mediate the operations of sublimation, and love remains impossible for them. It does not mean that women should conform to men’s system of power, but rather that women should establish new values that correspond to their own
capacities.

Last, the existence of the female divine. Traditionally, mother-daughter or daughter-mother relationship is totally ignored. This way woman is not capable of respecting herself in her childhood and in her maternal creative function. For in the Christian culture, as evident in the virgin mother story, the maternal function serves only to mediate the generation of the son. Yet it sets up no genealogy of the divine among women, and in particular between mother and daughter. For in the male version of love of self, it often takes the form or sounds the note of nostalgia for a maternal-feminine that has been forever lost. In other words, man’s self-affect depends on the woman who has given him being and birth, who has born/e him, enveloped him, warmed him, fed him. Therefore, love of self takes the form of a long return to and through the other. That is, a unique female (m)other, who is forever lost and must be sought in many others, an infinite number of others.

In this regard, love of self, for man, is a closed circuit, which either looks backwards to the past (for the (m)other), or forwards to the future (for the same other man), but never open to the present, or to here and now. With faith set upon the transcendence of God, the distance of the return can always be conquered. Yet woman does not play a role in this scenario. In order to give woman a place in man’s self-affect, man has to strike a balance between openness and closedness. That is, open enough to be susceptible to the affect of the I. Yet closed and enveloped enough for affect to be possible. Otherwise, he is unable to establish any long-lasting love of self. On the other hand, the female often serves as an extension of man’s self, merely a tool, a medium, or a keeper, in the constitution of man’s love of self. Whereas the female divine should operate under a different principle, not simply a counterpart to a male God, but rather an immanent approach to the divine premised on communication which cuts across the traditional dichotomies of masculine/feminine, self/other, and mind/body.

Nevertheless, this dimension is covered over, swallowed up, or relegated to
the beyond, which places the female in an oblivion that entails the abyss, the abandonment and the dispersion of the other-man. That is to say, woman is meant to assimilate love to herself as her preserve, without any return for her, without any love of her which might offer her access to a space-time “of her own.” In other words, women need another One, an other God, who would serve as the bridge, or another transcendental made to their measure, which leaves them free to embrace the maternal while giving them back their childhood at the same time.

That is why Margaret Whitford, in her book on Irigaray, proclaims that woman’s access to her own space-time will open up a new horizon of fertility and creation (Whitford 165). For Whitford, Irigaray is looking forward to a fecund amorous exchange. Yet in order to achieve this vision, woman needs to learn to love herself first, to go in quest of “her own” love. For in the traditional symbolic order, woman is not allocated to a position of self-loving, but rather one of self-debasement. Yet following Whitford, we must recognize that “each sex has its own interests, needs, and desires, and therefore represents limits to the interests, needs, and desires of the other sex” (165). If we agree with Whitford that “women’s needs for autonomy, freedom of movement, sexual self-determination, contraception, and abortion clash with male desire for their containment, enclosure, or control” (166), then we would also agree with Irigaray’s statement in her *Elemental Passions* that (here I paraphrase) we all need to be opened up again (18). Her ethics is therefore a material practice, an opening of one’s embodied ethos toward other possibilities.

But what are the other possibilities? Irigaray offers ample suggestions; according to her, sexual difference is the most radical and the most necessary to the life and culture of the human species. Therefore, new models of sexual identity must be established, which would enable woman to be loved in her own line, not subordinated to the values of a masculine identity. In other words, “She needs to be situated and valued, to be *she* in relation to her self” (*Elemental Passions* 3). That
is to say, that woman must establish a relation between I and she. She must be able to love herself, or rather her self. If this sounds easy, consider the facts of the lacks of a feminine transcendence and a non-hierarchical relationship between the sexes.

I agree with Irigaray that woman should embark on a voyage in search of her identity in love (4), which is different from man’s quest for “his Grail, his God, his path, his identity through the vicissitudes of his life’s journey” (4). Irigaray elaborates:

Between nature and culture, between night and day, between sun and stars, between vegetable and mineral, amongst men, amongst women, amongst gods, she seeks her humanity and transcendency. Such a journey is not without its trials. But these do not discourage her from her quest, as she attempts again and again to discover how I-woman can enter into a joyous nuptial union with you-man. She finds that this cannot occur unless you relates to he and He, and I relates to she and She. . . . Because we are not God(s), individually or together, love has become sorrow, degradation or enslavement. A love between the sexes, in which natures and gods are united and fertile, is essential to the discovery of an individual and collective happiness, one which is both empirical and transcendental (Elemental Passions 4-5)

Thus the primary task is to establish self-love for women, which is the focus of the first chapter in the second section of An Ethics. According to Irigaray, it thus requires

--detachment from what is, from the situation in which woman has traditionally been placed;
--love for the child that she once was, that she still is, and a shared
enveloping of the child by the mother and of the mother by the child;--an openness, in addition to that mutual love, which allows access to difference (An Ethics 69).

Hence Irigaray encourages woman to adopt a stance of refusal to the cultural fixation, to the narrow cultural imaginary which allots few innovative roles to woman. She also urges woman to forsake the practice of self-denial, as it will prevent her from an adequate assessment of self. (Here allow me to cite a literary example: in Margaret Atwood’s novel Surfacing, the nameless protagonist-narrator constantly provides her reader distorted versions of her previous life, and fails to escape from such predicament till she faces herself honestly and realizes that she should refuse to be a victim.)

Moreover, Irigaray emphasizes the act of enveloping which still allows openness, or porousness. It is a form of innerness that can open to the other without loss of self or of the other in the bottomlessness of an abyss. Thus she herself does not love herself as object. Though she cannot see herself, she may try to love herself as innerness. As is made clear in her following chapters, Irigaray regards this state of openness a necessity for the mobility of the subject, to generate a particular passion of wonder.

To sum up, traditionally woman has been expected to perform altruism, self-sacrifice, and feminine virtuousness, at the cost of her own freedom, self-development, even self-esteem. Though Irigaray is neither principally concerned with defining and/or defending an ethics of care, nor with an ethics of justice and rights, but rather with women’s dwelling, as “the study and practice of that which constitute one’s habitat, or as the problematic of the constitution of one’s habitat, or as the problematic of the constitution of one’s embodied place in
The Importance of Female Divinity for Infinite Becoming

I have already expounded in the previous section the main concern of the first chapter of the second section of *An Ethics*, in which Irigaray discusses the difficulty of self-love for woman. In a later article “Divine Women,” she elaborates on the essentiality of female divinity. Assessing her previous project of investigating human relations to the four elements, Irigaray points out a persistent driving need to elaborate the opacity of the subject, particularly woman and God. That is, she wants women to ask ourselves why we have been held back from becoming *divine women*. According to her, man is able to exist because God helps him to define his gender (*genre*), helps him orient his finiteness by reference to infinity. If he has no existence in his gender, he lacks his relation to the infinite, as well as to finiteness. Thus in order to avoid that finiteness, man has sought out a unique *male* God. In other words, God has been created out of man’s gender. As Irigaray emphasizes, “Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine” (*Sexes* 62).

As Irigaray then acknowledges: if we have no will, we are not able to go on living. Thus it is the condition of our *becoming* that we have to will for our life. Here to become means fulfilling the wholeness of what we are capable of being. If women have no God, they are unable either to communicate or commune with one another. Without an infinite God as mediator, sharing implies only fusion-confusion, division, and dislocation within themselves, among themselves. If I am unable to

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form a relationship with some horizon of accomplishment for my gender, I am unable to share while protecting my becoming.

Thus in order to become, it is essential to have a gender or an essence (consequently a sexuate essence) as horizon. Otherwise, becoming remains partial and subject to the subject. Irigaray warns us of its danger: “When we become parts or multiples without a future of our own this means simply that we are leaving it up to other, or the Other of the other, to put us together” (Sexes 61).

Obviously, this road never ends. And Irigaray is fully aware that the western theological tradition presents some difficulty as far as God in the feminine gender is concerned. There exists no woman God, no female trinity: mother, daughter, spirit, which paralyzes the infinite of becoming a woman since she is fixed in the role of mother through whom the son of God is made flesh.

As long as woman lacks a divine made in her image, she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own. According to Irigaray, “she lacks an ideal that would be her goal or path in becoming. Woman scatters and becomes an agent of destruction and annihilation because she has no other of her own that she can become” (Sexes 63-4).

On the other hand, the (male) ideal other (i.e. God) has been imposed upon women by men. Man is supposedly woman’s more perfect other, her model, her essence. Traditionally, the most human and the most divine goal woman can conceive is to become man. Hence if she is to become woman, if she is to accomplish her female subjectivity, woman needs a god who is a figure for the perfection of her own subjectivity.

Irigaray points out:

The impotence, the formlessness, the deformity associated with women, the way they are equated with something other than the human and split between the human and the inhuman (half-woman,
half-animal), their duty to be adorned, masked, and made up, etc., rather than being allowed their own physical, bodily beauty, their own skin, their own form(s), all this is symptomatic of the fact that women lack a female god who can open up the perspective in which their flesh can be transfigured (Sexes 64).

Women’s beauty is hence regarded by Irigaray as misused:

Women have rarely used their beauty as a weapon for themselves, even more rarely as spiritual weapon. The body’s splendor has rarely been used as a lever to advance self-love, self-fulfillment.  

Maternal beauty has been glorified in our religious and social traditions, but womanly beauty for centuries has been seen merely as a trap for the other. The transfiguration of a female body by beauty, the active share that the woman can have in that transfiguration, are today often misunderstood. . . . Yet it is not impossible to imagine that a body can be, can above all become, intelligent or stupid, that our relation to corporal love can be actively aesthetic or passively abject, reduced: for example, to a pseudoanimality . . . or to motherhood, . . . (Sexes 64-5).

In other words, female beauty is always considered a garment ultimately designed to attract the other into the self. It is almost never perceived as a manifestation of love, thought, or flesh. Women look at ourselves in the mirror in order to please someone, but rarely to interrogate the state of our body or our spirit, rarely for ourselves and in search of our own becoming. Thus the mirror almost always serves to reduce us to a pure exteriority, and is a frozen—and polemical—weapon to keep us women apart. Though necessary at times as a
separating tool, the mirror—and the gaze when it acts as a mirror—ought to remain a means and not an end that enforces my obedience. According to Irigaray, the mirror, whose cutting edge all too often threatens to turn against me, undermines rather than support my incarnation. It thus signifies the constitution of a fabricated (female) other that I shall put forward as an instrument of seduction in my place. Hence I seek to be seductive and to be content with images of which I theoretically remain the artisan, the artist. That is, the mirror freezes our becoming breath, our becoming space, and perhaps also our becoming bird. More often, the setting of a space, an enclave of air, rather than the interpositions of mirrors and glasses, protects us from the other and allows us to move toward him and her.

Once we have left the waters of the womb, how to construct and inhabit our airy space becomes essential. For Irigaray, this is “the space of bodily autonomy, of free breath, free speech and song, of performing on the stage of life” (Sexes 66). In this place, women no longer need to be guardians of the phylogenesis of the human race, and to be devoted to the task of assisting man in his incarnation. Thus the vocation for collaborating in the redemption of the world through suffering and chastity ought not to remain women’s only destiny, or only horizon, and should not constitute the only means or path to our fulfillment as women.

A female god is still to come, to be imagined. This god is not a personalized one, but rather an objective-subjective place or path whereby the self could be coalesced in space and time: unity of instinct, heart, and knowledge, unity of nature and spirit, condition for the abode and for saintliness. God alone can save us, keep us safe. The feeling or experience of a positive, objective, glorious existence, the feeling of subjectivity, is essential for us. A god would help us and lead us in the path of becoming, keep track of our limits and our infinite possibilities—as women, and inspire our projects. Traditionally, our goal has always come to us women from outside: from man, child, city. We have failed to place our goal inside as well as outside ourselves, failed to love, failed to will ourselves and one another. Thus we
women have become weak, formless, insecure, aggressive, devoted to the other because unaware of ourselves, submissive to the other because we were unable to establish our own order. If we are not to obey the other, we have to set a goal of our own, make our own law or laws. If we are to escape slavery it is not enough to destroy the master. Only the divine offers us freedom—enjoins it upon us.

Irigaray explicitly points out: “Love of other without love of self, without love of God, implies the submission of the female one, the other, and of the whole of the social body” (Sexes 68). Yet love of God has nothing moral in and of itself; it is rather the incentive for a more perfect becoming. That is, God forces us to do nothing except become: to become divine men and women, to become perfectly, to refuse to allow parts of ourselves to shrivel and die that have the potential for growth and fulfillment.

“Women” as indeterminate plural, as obscure part of the human race, amount to a kind of chaotic, amorphous, archaic multiple, which, if it is ever to achieve a form, needs some representation of unity to be imposed upon it. If there is ever to be a consciousness of self in the female camp, each woman will have to situate herself freely in relation to herself, not just in relation to the community, the couple, or the family. Women, sexed according to our gender, lack a God to share, a word to share and to become. Defined as the often dark, even occult mother-substance of the word of men, or the term of the other, we are in need of our subject, our substantive, our word, our predicates: our generic incarnation, our genealogy.

Women’s not becoming God is a loss for herself and for the community, perhaps also for God. Certainly for the fulfillment of the universe, which she brings into being through her female sex according to certain traditions. Thus it is essential that we be God for ourselves so that we can be divine for the other, not idols, fetishes, symbols that have already been outlined or determined. It is equally essential that we should be daughter-gods in the relationship with our mothers, and that we cease to hate our mothers in order to enter into submissiveness to the father-husband.
We cannot love if we have no memory of a native passiveness in relation to our mothers, of our primitive attachment to her, and hers to us. We should incarnate God within us and in our sex: daughter-woman-mother. Without the possibility that God might be made flesh as a woman, through the mother and the daughter, and in their relationships, no real constructive help can be offered to a woman. When women get bogged down in their search for freedom, for liberation, the symptoms show: the absence of a God of their own and inadequate management of the symbolic. Yet God and the symbolic are linked and necessary to the constitution of an identity and a community. God is the name and the place that holds the promise of a new chapter in history and that also denies this can happen. A God in the feminine gender can define the margin of freedom and keep it for us.

The lack of a female god is also related to woman’s difficulty of self-love. Self-love is difficult for woman because the female has always “served the self-love of man.” Irigaray thinks that “Innerness, self-intimacy, for a woman, can be established or re-established only through the mother-daughter, daughter-mother relationship which woman re-plays for herself. Herself with herself, in advance of any procreation” (An Ethics 68). If this statement sounds too vague and philosophical, I’ll here cite other feminists’ views to make things clearer. According to Jean Grimshaw, ethics of caring, or the politics of caring, concerns women very much in the sense that women are commonly accused of failure of care if they want to have a little time for themselves, or if they do not make enough “sacrifices.” They are supposed to take care of their children, sometimes 24 hours a day for the first five years of their lives. They are also expected to care for their husbands, parents, parents-in-laws, even grandkids.

It can be generally agreed that women have often been trapped by the burden of mothering. They play roles as mothers or nurturers at the expense of their own personal development and self-realization. Yet I agree with Grimshaw that maternal thinking is not an entirely bad thing. Conversely, it is not only mothers who can
think maternally. Besides, maternal thinking may have the potential to inform relationships other than those with children, and even transform them. Yet this kind of thinking needs to be transformed before it can inform other relationships (Grimshaw, 250-51). It is true that women give priority in their lives to the maintaining of relationships with others, and to attention to and care for others, yet such capacities should not be seen just as “maternal” (Grimshaw 252). It should be a trait men also learn to acquire.

However, exactly what perspectives should we adopt on women’s relationships with others, especially mother-child relationships? For Irigaray, it has to be considered along with the consequence of the female’s (lack of) love of self. Because of men’s (or patriarchy’s) obsession with procreation, they are always in a “state of narcissistic insecurity in sexual relations. Thus man projects insecurity onto others, like a master who loads his problems onto the shoulders of his slave or his ‘thing.’ Valuing woman insofar as he values himself—in her role as mother, correlative to his fatherhood, proof of his potency” (An Ethics 63).

Following the above statement, Irigaray makes an enigmatic proclamation: “Love of self, for a man, is not self-evident.” («L’amour de soi, pour un homme, ne va pas de soi.») (An Ethics 63; Ethique 66). What she means by this is that man is always dependent upon something external, or some kind of exhibitionism to assert himself. According to Irigaray, man is easier to accept an infinite number of substitutes. (That is, one lover after another.) Whereas woman, either according to their “nature,” or “culture,” is more “faithful.”

According to Irigaray, “The male version of love of self often takes the form or sounds the note of nostalgia for a maternal-feminine that has been forever lost. Insofar as man or men are concerned, it seems that auto-affection is possible only through a search for the first home” (An Ethics 60). What she refers to is the mother’s womb, the first fleshly dwelling. Therefore, man’s relationship with his mother is rather essential. In other words, through the help of a woman, (and her
subsequent substitutes afterwards), man constructs his self-integrity. Thus while man has a spiritual and natural reference as he becomes a man, woman no longer belongs except biologically, and the world of man has made that biology its own. That means “men exchange virgin daughters in order to establish tribes or families or states, they marry women to found their dynasties, they impregnate them to become fathers and have a posterity” (Elemental Passions 2). According to Irigaray, “Such traditions as these do not encourage love between women and men. Lovers fall back into a mother-son relationship, and the man secretly continues to feed off the woman who is still fertile earth for him” (Ibid.).

As to woman, “she never accedes to her identity as a woman. She remains at the disposal of man—the lover, the citizen, the father—having already been a currency of exchange between the fathers, uncles or brothers of her family and those of her future husband’s line” (Elemental Passions 2). Irigaray continues:

Because of this dependency, woman is submitted to all kinds of trials: she undergoes multiple and contradictory identifications, she suffers transformations of which she is not aware, since she has no identity, especially no divine identity, which could be perfected in love. Quite apart from any explicit violence on the part of men (incest, rape, prostitution, assault, enslavement) woman is subjected to a loss of identity which turns love into a duty, a pathology, an alienation for her (2; emphases mine)

Certainly, in Ovid’s ancient anthology The Metamorphoses, self-love in the story of Narcissus is presented as morbid, even destructive. Later, human self, in the Christian tradition, is usually treated with debasement and denigration. Often condemned, yet at the same time central to the western culture, self-love nevertheless represents a powerful longing for inward autonomy.
However, Irigaray’s instruction to love us ourselves is not like Narcissus’ obsession which refuses to love anyone but himself, and thereby loved himself to death. It would rather serve as a starting point to improve one’s relation to others as spatio-temporal beings-in-the-world. It would reestablish a vertical relationship, a genealogy, among women.

Taking Corporeality into Consideration

If we are not satisfied with the current situation that philosophy promotes an artificial relationship to reality, concerned only with conceptual logics, then we would look for a down-to-earth alternative which takes corporeality into consideration. For Irigaray, it starts with rereading of classic philosophical texts. That is why in her *An Ethics*, reading seminars on philosophical texts always follow her lecture.

A. Wonder

Irigaray then spends the entire second chapter of the second section of *An Ethics* on a single kind of passion—wonder. Based on her reading of Descartes’ *The Passions of the Soul*, it may surprise the reader at first, but eventually proves very insightful. However, her discussion of wonder is generally ignored by her commentators. For instance, in Tina Chanter’s book *Ethics of Eros*, there is no elaboration on this section. Though Cartesianism seems to be one of her chief targets, Irigaray here is not dealing with Descartes’ mind-body dualism. According to her reading, wonder provides the momentum between the subject and object. It precedes or inaugurates love and art. As the motivating force behind mobility in all its dimensions, it proffers a vital speed, a growth speed that is compatible with all his senses and meanings, which would allow him to stop in order to rest, to leave an interval between himself and the other, to look forward, to contemplate—to
Thus the function of wonder is both active and passive, both accelerating and braking. Wonder is useful in the encounter between two sexes, which ensures the everlasting sense of novelty between the two. Though there still remains a distinction between subject and object, wonder is to Descartes only the predicate of the subject. Usually, the object becomes no more than the result of the alchemy of the subject’s passions, with its own attractive nature taken away.

Serving as a necessary medium between the subject and the world, wonder starts with a sudden surprise of the soul which causes it to apply itself to consider with attention the objects which seem to it rare and extraordinary. And for Descartes, something rare and extraordinary means at the same time something different. Yet he does not include sexual difference, which is what Irigaray endeavors to compensate in this chapter.

Wonder, as the bridge, the stasis, the moment of *in-stance*, where I am no longer in the past and not yet in the future, is the point of passage between two closed worlds, two definite universes, two space-times or two others determined by their identities, or two epochs. In other words, it is a separation without a wound, awaiting or remembering, without despair or closing in on the self. It breaks the closed circuit of the self as an autarchic entity, awaits the advent or the event of the other, and marks the beginning of a new story.

As the first passion, wonder is indispensable not only to life but also to the creation of an ethics of sexual difference. The other, male or female, should *surprise* us again and again, appear to us as *new, very different* from what we knew or what we thought he or she should be. This passion will be the antidote to the unhealthy state the subject immerse in all forms of passively experienced passions, in which he is enclosed, constrained, deprived of its roots, with no sap circulating between the beginning and the end of its incarnation. As the ground or inner secret of genesis and creation, wonder will also be the place of the union or the alliance of
power and act, without the subject turning back on himself. In other words, it braces us up to the real encounter with the other.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out here that wonder goes beyond that which is or is not suitable for us, for the other never suits us simply. If he or she suited us completely, it means we have in some way reduced the other to ourselves. Yet there exists an excess: because the other has his/her own existence and will fulfill his/her own becoming, wonder would be a place that permits union and resists assimilation or reduction to sameness. Therefore it exists before and after appropriation, which is set apart from rejection. Yet even when the object is no longer altogether unknown, it should not be esteemed according to its size, its quantity. We should not allow the object to enter into the world of opposites, of contraries. The object should rather lead us to the opening of a new space-time, not energy tied to the dimension of the other.

Yet wonder is not an enveloping. It corresponds to time, to space-time before and after that which can delimit, go round, encircle. It constitutes an opening prior to and following that which surrounds, enlaces. According to Irigaray, it is the passion of that which is already born and not yet reenveloped in love. It is a passion that is touched (by the object’s charm) and moves toward and within the attraction, without nostalgia for the first dwelling, and outside of repetition. As the passion of the first encounter, as well as of perpetual rebirth, it is an affect that would subsist among all forms of others irreducible each to the other. It is also the place of man’s and woman’s second birth, that is a birth into a transcendence, which is still in the world of the senses (“sensible”), still physical and carnal, and already spiritual.

As the place of incidence and junction of body and spirit, which used to be covered over again and again, hardened through repetitions that hamper growth and flourishing, wonder, according to Irigaray, would be possible only when we are faithful to the perpetual newness of the self, the other, the world. In other words, we should be faithful to becoming, to its virginity, its power of impulsion, without
letting go the support of bodily inscription. Eventually, wonder would be the passion of the encounter between the most material and the most metaphysical, of their possible conception and fecundation or an intermediary, which is neither the one nor the other. Yet it is never neutral or neuter.

However, to wonder remains easier said than done. Irigaray seems not have taken into account that we may grow tired of the other.

**B. The Envelope**

Irigaray later turns to Spinoza, who, in his *Ethics*, proposes an account to describe the relations between God (cause of itself) and humans, or between causes and effects. Most people would agree with Genevieve Lloyd that “Out of [Spinoza’s] treatment of substance and its modes emerge new ways of thinking about self-consciousness, freedom, gender difference, the passions, and time.” Thus we may raise this question first: **how is Spinoza’s conception of God related to Irigaray’s conception of a female Divine?** Irigaray regards the relations of containment or causality as a metaphorical notion of enveloping, which she adopts in her rereading of Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Distrusting the dualism that has dominated modern philosophy since Descartes, in which man’s existence is ascertained only through the operation of his mind, Spinoza, on the other hand, acknowledges that man and woman are both body and thought. Consciously revolting against the Cartesian philosophy from which it sprang, Spinozism differs from it in that the Cartesian mind is completely knowable to itself regardless of the existence of body, whereas Spinoza’s self-knowledge is mediated through bodily awareness and must share its inadequacy. If not, then an evil infinite may occur.

In Irigaray’s reading of Spinoza, entitled “The Envelope,” she provides an idiosyncratic interpretation of human (sexual) relationship as she sees it. According
to Spinoza, only God is infinite and unlimited, which is understood by Irigaray as the “envelope” for everything. The importance of envelope depends on its function of providing a dwelling place. And the importance of God lies in the contrast between God’s infiniteness and unlimitedness and man’s finiteness and limitedness. Also, since woman provides man with his envelope (for his necessary fetal existence and later for his role as lover), the maternal-feminine exists necessarily as the cause of the self-cause of man, but not for herself. In other words, she has to exist but as an a priori condition for the space-time of the masculine subject.

Thus the relationship between man and woman is rather the protected and the protector, also one within sexual difference, in which we would find the necessary elements of finiteness, limit, and progression. As it requires two bodies, two thoughts, it forms a relation between the two and the conception of a wider perspective. And since for Spinoza, a body is not limited by a thought or a thought by a body, Irigaray demands a rethinking of sexual difference through a reconsideration of the split between body and thought. For her, a body may be limited by a thought and a thought by a body. The two do not remain “parallel” and never intersect. Yet the whole historic or historical analysis of philosophy shows that being has yet to be referred to in terms of body or flesh. Thought and body have remained separate, and this leads, on the social and cultural level, to important empirical and transcendental effects: discourse and thought become the privileges of a male producer, which remains the “norm.” Even to this day, bodily tasks remain the obligation or the duty of a female subject.

Yet for Irigaray, the act of love presupposes that thinking about the body receives an infusion of flesh. For her, to take may be to give, and this will be a way out of parallelism, which prevents the maternal-feminine from being inscribed in duration as causes and effects. This parallelism in fact leaves the masculine lost in the chain of causalities as far as the male body, the male flesh, is concerned, as well as their relations to conception, the cause of self, except by means of the absolute
causality that is God.

Whereas the ignorance of the feminine’s causes and effects in the chain of causalities leads to a long-held notion since Aristotle that woman is engendered as if by *accident*. This lack of knowledge reflects in the myth of God giving birth to the woman out of the body of the man in the *Genesis*. Moreover, the female is conceived as pure disposable “matter,” a threatening primitive chaos which even God should never approach. In other words, she could merely be the *accidental* cause of man.

Irigaray further exposes the fallacy of one of Spinoza’s axioms that “The knowledge [cognitio] of an effect depends upon and involves knowledge of the cause” (*Ethics* 355). For her, knowledge of the effect *envelops* that of the cause; that is, the former, by enveloping, hides the latter, and rather gives birth to it by a round-about or return route to generation. When this happens, it would evoke the maternal-feminine, even in its most physical effects of generation, as it doubles back on the “masculine” and its thought, and overwhelms it. Though the maternal-feminine is not thought of as a cause, it may mask cause “with a veil.” As usual, we need to decipher, work through, interpret the knowledge of *effects* in order to achieve knowledge of *causes*. Therefore, the latter is rather a reverse knowledge. Yet Irigaray asks: “Why is it that the data are not already thought of as effects? Why is *cause* already *caused*? Because it comes from God?” (*An Ethics* 91). It is indeed true that to the genealogy of causes corresponds a hierarchy of effects. As two parallel chains which do not always cross and yet mutually determine each other, they roll and unroll reciprocally. As a double movement in “theology,” the effect overwhelms the cause from the point of view of knowledge. In other words, we can conceive that essence envelops existence if there is *cause of self*, yet knowledge of the effect envelops that of the cause if there is no cause of self.

Traditionally, the feminine, insofar as it has access to mind, remains in
perception, while the conception is the privilege of the masculine. As conception means taking hold of, perceiving, and conceiving an available matter or power, it is more active than perception. More exactly, we can say that conception designates the active pole of the mind, and perception the more passive pole. Even when Irigaray emphasizes the existence of sexual difference, she does not mean that man and woman hold nothing in common. Though in traditional thinking, the child is still thought of as an effect of man’s, it is, in fact, a shared effect, because woman does not remain in the domain of perception, or even at times of the perceived. Man and woman, indeed, have both conception and perception, and without any hierarchy between the two. That means: both would have the capacity to perceive and conceive. In other words: to suffer and to be active. To suffer the self and to understand the self. To receive the self and to envelop the self. Thus male and female would become more open because of the freedom of each, with each giving the other necessity and freedom. The concept of the masculine would have to cease to envelop that of the feminine, since the feminine has no necessity if it is solely an effect of and for the masculine.

Thus according to Irigaray, “Between man and woman, whatever the differences may be and despite the fact that the concept of the one, male or female, cannot envelop that of the other, certain bridges can be built, through two approaches:

--) that of generation,

--) that of God” (An Ethics 93).

The openings in the envelopes between men and women should always be mediated by God. Otherwise, man, faithless to God, lays down the law for woman, imprisons her in his conception(s), or at least in accordance with his conceptions instead of converting her only for God, while awaiting God. Woman, who enveloped man before birth, until he could live outside her, finds herself encircled by a language, by places that she cannot conceive of, and from which she cannot
escape. Thus language turns out to be an inescapable envelope.

Indeed, according to Irigaray, “It’s nothing new for man to want to be both man and woman: he has always had pretensions of turning the envelope insideout. But by willing to be master of everything, he becomes the slave both of discourse and of mother nature” (An Ethics 94). Therefore, to change language becomes an imperative. Irigaray has conducted a project of working on gender in discourse. In her project, she is interested in: 1) gender as index and mark of the subjectivity and the ethical responsibility of the speaker. For her, gender is not just a question of biology and physiology, a matter of private life, of animal habits or vegetal fertility. Rather, it constitutes the irreducible differentiation that occurs on the inside of “the human race.” Gender stands for the unsubstitutable position of the I and the you and of their modes of expression. Once the difference between I and you is gone, then asking, thanking, appealing, questioning . . . also disappear. 2) Is there some other agent than I that is supposedly more worthy to articulate our truth? In other words, is there really a universal and neuter way of speaking? The neuter seems a matter of nature in the first instance. Expressions like “it is raining,” “it is snowing,” “it is windy” refer to powers that resist human power and its formulation. This is an animate nature that is spoken of rather whimsically and that is today translated by the neuter. It can also be used when we become aware of nature’s movements, manifestations, rhythms: “that smells good,” “that is so beautiful,” “there goes the thunder.” It also indicates the order of laws in “it is necessary,” “it is true,” “this is how it is,” which intends to be neuter but carries the brand of the man who produced it.

It is true that most of the time, language serves as a vehicle for meaning, for content. Yet how has discourse authorized this content, this meaning, this culture? How can it set up others? As Irigaray observes, these aspects of the message are

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6 Her findings can be found in Luce Irigaray, Sexes and Genres Through Languages: Elements of Sexual Communication, London: Routledge, 2002.
rarely questioned. Hence she decides to investigate the structure of discourse, the language instrument, in order to interpret sexualization and seek to shift its order.

In order to get close to the sex dimension of discourse, it is not enough to shift its rules. We also need to analyze very rigorously the forms that authorize that content. Concerning the unconscious translation of gender into discourse, it is not limited to the gender markers (masculine, feminine, neuter). Yet they show how one sex, how the world, has been forced to submit to the other. The masculine sex has in fact taken over the most highly valued truths: God, sun, moon (in those countries where it is important). Man gives his name to his children and his possessions. Whereas the feminine is a marker of secondariness, of subordination to the principal gender. The neuter is reserved for specific and variable areas in different languages. According to analysis of the origins of the neuter, it arises after sexual difference has been eradicated. For instance, the cosmic phenomena, the duty or the order that becomes law, (which has been made by men alone). Our social organizations and the discourse that arises out of them are thus regulated by a neuter that is controlled by the masculine gender. Serving as neutral ground for the wars and quarrels among men, this neuter does not solve the problem of the hierarchy observed by the male and female genders, of the injustices this hierarchy perpetuates or the pathogenic neutralization of languages and values that results. The theoretical prestige enjoyed by the neuter has its comic side, as well as a tragic side which is associated with some violence. There is a comic collision of duty with duty when the female gender makes a demand based upon a claim for equal rights and it risks ending in the destruction of gender. According to Irigaray, anything that carries us away from the duty to manage the order of the universe and of our flesh, or uproots us into neuterness annihilates the life in our bodies and in the body of the world, putting in their place empty and abstract mechanisms of feeling, of the content of thought, of art, of ethics (Sexes 119).

As a result, for Irigaray, the separation between the genders leads to a lack of a
point of intersection between two basic laws. Hence a true universal should replace
the neuter as mediation, because the latter is only pseudo-neutrality.

Because of this taboo on a truly sexualized morphology of and in culture,
there are repressions, compensations, and pathologies. The sexualized structure of
discourse can also be found in areas that have not been defined as pathological in
any way. On the male side, the *I* is affirmed in different ways and is significantly
more stressed than the *you* and the *world*. On the female side, the *I* tends to leave
some space for the *you* and the *world*, for the objectivity of words and things. From
this point of view, women seem to be better listeners, more able to discover and
manage the other and the world, more open to *objective* invention and creation, as
long as they are also able to say *I*.

In conclusion, I agree with Irigaray that sex is a *primary and elementary
dimension of subjective structure* (Sexes 176). Therefore she embarks on locating
the expression of gender in a style. Her ultimate aim is the creation of a new style,
for to Irigaray a style remains irreducible. It is not susceptible of reduction to a grill
that may be transposed or imposed elsewhere; it resists coding, summary, counting,
cataloguing, or programming into different machines. A style cannot be reduced to
bipolar alternatives. It may open up a dialogue between the text and its reader.

Then what would this new style be like? In fact, what Irigaray looks forward
is akin to what another contemporary French feminist Hélène Cixous promotes in
her essays “The Laugh of the Medusa” and “Sorties.” Yet whereas Cixous seems to
locate sexual difference at the level of jouissance, and therefore urges women to
develop a specific feminine writing (*écriture feminine*), for Irigaray the difference
in discourse and writing is already there.
The Future: Creation of a New Culture

In the past, sexual difference existed only for and by the child, and within the hierarchy. Sexual ethics is so neglected that it has not played a part in the *creation of culture*, except in a division of roles and functions that does not allow both sexes to be subjects. Sexual difference is reduced to the superstructure of a restricted economy. Language is considered as an ideal that is alien to the body producing it. Though man holds a strong conviction that language is intangible, neuter, and universal, it is not so. The conviction is set up as truth *by one side only*.

The human spirit seems now subjugated to the imperatives of technology to the point of believing it possible to deny the difference of the sexes. Since the 1980s androgyny has been propped up as an ethical solution to the division of the genders. Though it is intended as a generous solution, Irigaray has reservations concerning its applicability and idealism. She asks: How are we to identify with another gender if we have no definition of this gender as gender? Is it all just a question of imitating a role? A division of functions? Or what? (Sexes, 123). Sex should not be considered as pathological, a flaw, a residue of animality, to be got rid of, but should be given a human cultural status.

In fact, what Irigaray purports contradicts with a lot other contemporary philosophers in maintaining the usefulness of subjectivity. In the past, man have attributed subjectivity to themselves and have reduced women to the status of objects, or to nothing. There is no sexed couple to create and structure the world. Men are surrounded by tools of feminine gender and by women-objects. Yet men don’t manage the world with women as sexed subjects having equivalent rights. The framework for women’s existence is exclusively maternal. Indeed, according to Marx, the most basic human exploitation lies in the division of labor between man and woman.

In an essay “Introducing: Love Between Us,” Irigaray traces the discussion of
love in philosophy. In it she points out that before Marx, Hegel discusses the failing—the lack of ethical relations between the sexes—that has marred the western culture. Moreover, Hegel reflects on the question of love between the sexes as labor. According to his method, man and woman are thus defined in opposition to one another in the labor of love. And this labor is analyzed within the family they form as a couple (of opposites). Beyond the family context, Hegel shows little concern for granting each gender its own identity, particularly a legal one, even though he states that the status of the human person depends upon his or her recognition by civil law.

For Hegel, then, relations between woman and man organized within the family are restricted to the woman’s role as wife and mother, though for her this role is a function of an abstract duty. Yet she should not be reduced to this woman, wife of this man, or this mother of this child or these children. She is only attributed that singularity from the perspective of the man. As far as she is concerned, she is a wife and mother inasmuch as these roles represent a task vis-à-vis the universal which she discharges by renouncing her singular desires.

Thus for Hegel, love is not possible on the part of the woman, because it is a labor of the universal, in the sense that she has to love man and child without loving this man or this child. She must love man and child as generic representatives of the human species, dominated by the male gender, as those who are able to realize the infinity of human kind, at the expense of her own gender and her own relationship to infinity. In other words, a woman’s love is defined as familial and civil duty. She has no right to singular love but is to be subjugated to love and reproduction. She has to be disappearing as this or that woman who is alive at the present time, and as desire, too, unless it is the abstract desire to be wife and mother. This self-effacement in a family-related role is her task. For the man, on the other hand, a woman’s love represents the repose a citizen needs in the singularity of the home.
For woman, therefore, the universal comes down to practical labor within the horizon of the universal delimited by man. Deprived of a relationship to the singularity of love, woman is also deprived of the possibility of a universal for herself. Love, for her, amounts to a duty—not a right. As for man, he yields to the singularity of love as a regression to natural immediacy. Love for the man is thus a permissible lapse into natural immediacy. The ultimate aim of love for the couple is, basically, the accumulation of family capital. For this reason, the family appears to be a privileged locus for constituting property.

In other words, real marriages do not exist to the extent that two legally-defined sexed persons do not exist. Both are enslaved to the State, to religion, to the accumulation of property. Moreover, death intervenes as the rallying place of sensible desires, which enforces the real or symbolic dissolution of the citizen in the community, and enslavement to property or capital.

The division of tasks between the private and the public realms is sustained by depriving woman of a relationship to the singular in love as well as of the singularity necessary for her relationship to the universal. Nevertheless, the order of cultural identity, in addition to natural identity, must exist within the couple, the family, and the State. Without a cultural identity suited to the natural identity of each sex, nature and the universal are parted, like heaven and earth.

Each woman and man acquires immortality by respecting life and its spiritualization. The universal should consist in the fulfillment of life and not in submission to death as Hegel would have it. The body should be cultivated as the body, not solely in the muscular-sportive, competitive-aggressive dimension well-known in Western culture. It should be cultivated to become both more spiritual and more carnal at the same time. The body will be reborn little by little, carnally and spiritually, each day at each instant. The body is therefore no longer a body engendered by parents, it is also the one I give back to myself. In the same way, immortality is no longer restricted to the beyond, and its condition is no
longer determined by someone other than me. The gathering of the multiple, and
the remedy for the dispersion linked to singularity, for the distraction by desire of
all that is perceived, encountered, produced, are found in the training of the
sensible toward concentration. It is thus a question not of renouncing the sensible,
of sacrificing it to the universal, but rather of cultivating it until it becomes spiritual
energy.

Between us (self and other), we can train ourselves to be at once
contemplative gaze and beauty adequate to our matter, the spiritual and carnal
flourishing of the forms of our bodies. Certainly we have been told that we are
spirit. But what is spirit if not the means by which matter flourishes in its proper
form, its proper forms. If the spirit bends the body to an abstract model that does
not suit it, this spirit is already dead, already death, which aims at illusory ecstasy
in the beyond. We no longer desire capitalization of life in the hands of a few who
demand the sacrifice of the many. The dialectic between the sexes is actually a
dialectic of master and slave, one that compels the woman to mother her children in
order to submit them to the condition of citizens abstracted from their singularity,
cut off from their unique identity by their conception and birth, and finally as
adolescents or adults exposed either to real death for the city or to spiritual death
for culture.

The woman then becomes an agent of ambivalence in love, contrary to her
singular desire. Educated for love, familiar with this intersubjective dimension by
being born daughter of a woman, the woman finds herself obligated to sacrifice this
love, except as abstract labor of jouissance, of engendering, of mothering. Whereas
the man remains able to move on to another woman, another singularity, to
accumulate goods for the family or the community, nothing remains for the woman
except the duty to be available for coupling, to suffer childbirth, to mother her
children and her husband.

Love between mother and daughter, on the other hand, is even forbidden,
because it recalls to the daughter, to the woman, the singularity of the feminine gender that she must renounce. Hence the daughter should have no other motive for being than to become wife and mother. Her mother represents for her this abstract function, just as she does for her mother. In other words, the daughter becomes the child of the universal in her mother.

This relation between mother and daughter is the consequence of the most radical loss of human singularity. Then how to emerge from this abstract duty, from this sacrifice of sexed/gendered identity toward a universal defined by the man whose master is death, for lack of having known how to open out life as universal? It must proceed through the evolution, the revolution of the relations between the man and the woman, and first and foremost in the couple, before any family. And the changes to be brought about in the relations between mothers and daughters should be linked to a mutation of the relationships between the two genders of the human species that necessitates the passage to another culture irreducible to a single gender, and also irreducible to a sexed/gendered dimension that is simply genealogical, in other words, to a patriarchy or matriarchy.

And this requires every man and woman aware of his/her ethical responsibilities. Concretely, each woman should no longer love her lover as man in general, and each man should no longer love his lover as one woman (who can be substituted by another). In other words, the task of each person in his or her unique singularity remains the task of the passage from the singular to the universal, also the task of each sexed/gendered person in the at once singular and universal relationship that he or she maintains to him- or herself and to the person of the other sex. Each woman will therefore be for herself the woman in becoming, model for herself as woman and for the man whom she needs, just as he needs her in order to ensure the passage from nature to culture. She must not submit herself to a model of identity imposed by anyone else: not by her parents, her lover, her child, the State, or religion, nor by culture in general. This does not mean that she may
fall into caprice, dispersion, the multiplicity of her desires, and the loss of identity. On the contrary, she must gather herself within herself in order to achieve the perfection of her gender for herself, for the man she loves, for her children, but also equally for civil society, the world of culture, and a definition of the universal corresponding to reality. With regard to this task, to desire to be equal to the man is a serious ethical error, for the woman then contributes to the effacement of natural and spiritual reality in an abstract universal at the service of death. In so doing, she also deprives the man of the possibility of defining himself naturally and spiritually as man, that is, as a sexed/gendered person.

Nowadays reproduction does not use all the drives of the desire between the sexes. It appears as the sole sexual value, the drives corresponding to this attraction are therefore neutralized and diverted towards the service of the family, the community, and the State, without being sublimated as desire between the sexes. Yet sexed/gendered desire, sexual desire, must not have its end, its effectivity, in the family, the State or religion as such. It must have an effectivity appropriate to its matter and its nature. Therefore it must keep its privileged place in the body proper and in the couple that the man forms with the other sex—woman. The attraction between the sexes should not be left without a for itself, this having become (in Hegel’s perspective, for example) the child, the family goods, or the service of a masculine community and culture dominated by death as the guarantor of the universal. Moreover, it should not be left uncultivated and impulsive, to make the couple a place of debauchery, but rather to achieve the perfection of the genders.

Love then should not remain a natural unhappiness without possible redemption other than the authoritarian spiritual element of a community dominated by a father patriarch. Love should bring the individual and collective salvation. Reproduction, on the other hand, should be the fruit of love cultivated between woman and man. Otherwise it would be the lapse of humanity from its
spiritual task, and in particular the enslavement of the woman to her neutral destiny in order to assure a partial, unjust, and abstract culture of humankind dominated by a masculine that does not know itself as a singular gender.

In effect, sexual desire is not satisfied by labor in general, it has a particular labor to perform. It must cultivate itself for its own becoming. And it is not to be sacrificed to the labor of the community, becoming impoverished as the personal good of one or the other sex. Sublimating one’s amorous energy is a much more subtle and sublime task.

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邁向一個真實的兩性相交：
伊莉葛來論女性神聖與靈性相合

朱崇儀 *

摘要

在之前的一篇文章中，我已解釋過：對伊莉葛來而言，倫理指的是“對個人在世界安身立命的方法與實踐之研究” (參見該文網址 http://benz.nchu.edu.tw/~intergrams/intergrams/032/032~chu.htm)。再者，根據惠特佛對伊莉葛來的專書所言，一旦女性能夠擁有自己的時間空間，充滿新豐富與創造力的新視界即將開啟。對於惠氏而言，伊莉葛來期盼豐饒的兩性相交。但若想達到此一視界，女性必須學會先愛自己。因為在傳統的象徵次第中，女性被安置的位置並非自愛，而是自我貶抑。但依循惠氏的說法，我們必須承認“每一性皆有自己的興趣，需要，與慾望，因此也代表對另一性興趣，需要，與慾望的限制。”若我們同意惠氏，認為“女性對自主性，自由活動，性自主，節育與墮胎的需要，正與男性欲求包圍與控制相衝突，”則我們亦會同意伊莉葛來在基要熱情書中所言——我們需要重行開放自我(18)。因此她的倫理是一種物質上的實踐，將自我具體的安身立命對其他可能性重新開放。

但何為其他可能呢?我在本文中將論證伊莉葛來其實已在她的專書性別差異的倫理(原為在 1982 年於鹿特丹伊拉斯謨斯大學發表之一系列演講)中對此議題提出豐富且清新的洞見。而在本文中我將集中討論第二部分。在此三章中，伊氏首先指出愛自己對女性的重要。傳統上女人被期許實踐利他主義，自我犧牲，以及婦德，而犧牲自己的自由，自我發展，乃至自我尊重。換言之，女人須透過愛他人，如父親，丈夫，或子女，來愛自己，因此總是先替男性的自愛服務。但伊氏認為女人不應繼續如此;她必須學會愛自己這項困難的工作。再者，男人與女人必須學會對彼此產生驚奇感，如笛卡兒所界定的“無有相反項之第一熱情。”如此情人才能擺脫父權系統對繁衍的執迷，而女性也不再單因她的母親角色而被看重。驚奇不再只對上帝保留，而亦可能是對肉身經歷的驚奇。而藉此女性也才能有屬於自己的包覆，屬於自己的地方，而不是為男性或小孩存在。如此一來，

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女性才得享真正的安身立命。

準此，伊氏所引用之包覆隱喻(借自史賓諾沙)，在她的性別差異的倫理中，實佔有重要核心地位。誠然伊氏提出的性別差異視界充滿烏托邦色彩，但我並不同意書評所言，認為此書只呈現性別的唯我倫理。希望藉本文提出新的取向，來審視伊氏的新兩性倫理，及創造新文化的可能。

關鍵詞：伊莉葛來 自愛 女性神聖 驚奇 包覆 創造新文化
Toward a theological ethics of sexual difference: Luce Irigaray and Søren Kierkegaard on mediation and intersubjectivity between man and woman. Article. Jan 2010. Roland James De Vries. Through engagement with the later writings of Luce Irigaray, and with select writings of Søren Kierkegaard, we develop a Kierkegaardian ethics of sexual difference—an account of intersubjectivity between man and woman that is indebted to the thought of each. Basing her vision of the good society on the differentiated, culturally plural network of contemporary urban life, she argues for a principle of group representation in democratic publics and for group-differentiated policies. This is a superb book which opens up many new vistas for theorists of justice. Irigaray’s rejection of the male symbolic order in order to highlight difference has been regarded a the “radical feminist” phase of the feminist movement. (I) The speculum is the curved mirror (one turned hack on itself) of feminine self-examination. This is opposed to the flat mirror, which privileges the relation of man with other men but excludes the feminine. Irigaray seeks to uncover a feminine order of meaning so that the sexual identity of the woman may be constructed. (2) She therefore argues against the “logic of sameness” operating within all discourse. Irigaray notes: “Female sexuality has always been conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters.” (3) Irigaray traces the logic of sameness right back to Plato.