Chapter Five: Irigarayan Ethics: A Global Ethic of Love

1. Introduction

In this final chapter I propose that Irigaray’s texts offer a substantial theoretical framework that can aid us to think through creatively a span of ethical and socio-political issues. In chapter one I argued that the scope of Irigaray’s sexual difference is universal and as such, I contend in chapter two that her claim has implications for how we constitute psychosexual identities, particularly in relation to the realms of the imaginary and the symbolic. In chapter three I also suggested that her universal claim of sexual difference elongates Heidegger’s phenomenological critique of metaphysics and offers a way to ethically “approach” other individuals based upon respect for difference. In chapter four I developed her claim within and therefore, her work isn’t “feminist” in the limited sense that it is work that only pertains to women’s realities. It is “feminist” in the broader sense that it seeks to subvert a logic of domination from within our present culture, namely, 1) hierarchical thinking, 2) binary oppositions, and 3) subject-object relations. By subverting this logic of domination, Irigaray’s work refocuses the ethical and socio-political realities not only of women, but of all humans, and nonhumans categorized as “other” and figured within such conceptual models. According to Irigaray, socio-political constellations fail insomuch as they fail to think the connection of sexual specificity with the sustenance of civil society and rights. It is not simply that there are hierarchies, dichotomies, or subject-object relations within our universe that she protests, but it is the systemic domination and disappearance of the “other” that she notes and traces as a genealogical matricide of
the “otherness of woman” as a subject in her own right.\footnote{See Irigaray, “The Question of the Other,” DBT, 121-41.} This otherness is twofold: it is the other of man’s subjectivity (absolute transcendental religion, signification, and singular desire), and a neutered other, whose lack of sexuate indication makes the occlusion of the other less detectable and more palatable when thinking of civic life and responsibility.

I suggest her philosophic work makes a significant contribution in several diverse fields: 1) environmental ethics, 2) socio-political life, and 3) religious diversity in democratic society. I aim to delineate the beginnings of an Irigarayan ethic to demonstrate how “Irigarayan” concepts can have practical application and offer a consistent conceptual model to describe and prescribe how sexuate difference might inform and challenge our thinking about present ethical issues. I analyze her work within environmental ethics via two subfields: ecological feminism and animal liberation. I develop a generative account of how her theory goes beyond present environmental ethical theory and offers a unique perspective regarding the dilemmas associated with ecological thinking. In the introduction I referenced that Irigaray’s spiritual ethical relations offer important claims about how we can respect the differences of living in a multi-cultural and global religious and civic world. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of otherness in religion and the significance of her work to establish a new sense of rights and responsibility and expanding the force of difference beyond just a feminine elaboration, but a broader way of love, the focus of the third period of her work.

2. Sexuate Difference and Ecofeminism
Environmental ethicists often critique moral principles, actions, and policies according to various natural or organic memberships of species. They question how we justify certain moral behaviors that put other biotic members at risk in order to “preserve” certain members. Typically demarcation lines are drawn between the ideologies of anthropocentrism, sentient-based thinking, biotic individualism, and holism or deep ecology. Much of what is at stake between the groups are varying viewpoints of how to approach the problem of environmental degradation. Do we conserve and manage natural resources, or do we preserve them according to some pristine state and for whom do we conserve, manage, or preserve? Most critics understand that ethical reasoning often presupposes human agency and thus the critical species of our ethical concern (anthropocentrism). Others ask that we question that assumption. Peter Singer\textsuperscript{2} and Tom Regan\textsuperscript{3} argue, and ask for animals to have “moral interest” since they can also experience pain and pleasure and may have inherent or nondemand market value versus instrumental or demand value. Biocentric individualists will argue for specific organisms, suggesting that we may need to give trees moral standing, or allow a river to be awarded damages,\textsuperscript{4} and that philosophically assessing an organism’s “life project,”\textsuperscript{5} may be more helpful than assessing an entire species. Finally holistic ecology, often attributed to Aldo

Leopold’s famous essay, “The Land Ethic,” poignantly appeals to ecosystems as a biotic pyramid of a whole land system whose many parts can only be understood as a holistic ethical concern. Ecological feminists have become a growing area of specialization in the field of environmental ethics as they argue that the patriarchal domination of women and other social groups are parallel to man’s exploitation of “nonhuman nature.” Some feminists have argued that the views of feminism and environmentalism are mutually reinforcing in that they both involve the development of worldviews and practices which are not based on models of domination.

I suggest that Irigaray’s work aligns with and departs from the concerns and social and political aims of environmental ethics, particularly ecological feminism (ecofeminism) in important ways. I see in Irigaray’s work a uniquely Continental philosophical approach that can help reinforce the values and practices ecofeminists desire. But I also observe that her work advances ecofeminism, asking feminists to “think the difference,” ecologically, a critique she directs toward various groups concerned with women’s liberation. I suggest that thinking the difference may be an important theoretical model to advance their aims and principles. Particularly she critiques liberal claims of equality as a utopian strategy that cannot liberate

---

8 In an interview with Christine Lasagni Irigaray explains that she has regularly worked with women or groups of women who belong to liberation movements and has observed problems or impasses that can’t be resolved except through the establishment of an equitable legal system for both sexes. In the absence of such social structures groups settle for a “pseudo-order” where aid given to a country in crisis can create a “generous alibis” for the masters who control the situation. See Irigaray, JTN, 81-82,
women since she argues their exploitation is based upon sexual difference, and thus, their solution can only come through sexual difference. But her criticism is not to dissuade the important work of both feminist and environmentalists. Rather, her critique is meant to bolster thinking regarding human and nonhuman beings that intersect with the natural/cultural construct of “woman.” First, in order to explain their shared aims, I note Karen Warren’s framework of how ecofeminists posit the historical and intellectual tradition of patriarchy as the following:

\[ \text{... argument A ... :} (A1) \text{ Humans do and plant and rocks do not have a capacity to consciously and radically change the community in which they live.} \]
\[ (A2) \text{ Whatever has the capacity to consciously and radically change the community in which it lives is morally superior to whatever lacks this capacity.} \]
\[ (A3) \text{ Thus, human are morally superior to plants and rocks.} \]
\[ (A4) \text{ For any } X \text{ and } Y, \text{ if } X \text{ is morally superior to } Y, \text{ then } X \text{ is morally justified in subordinating } Y. \]
\[ (A5) \text{ Thus, humans are morally justified in subordinating plants and rocks... argument B:} \]
\[ (B1) \text{ Women are identified with nature and the realm of the physical: men are identified with the “human” and the realm of the mental.} \]
\[ (B2) \text{ Whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to (“below”) whatever is identified with the “human” and the realm of the mental, or, conversely, the latter is superior to (“above”) the former.} \]
\[ (B3) \text{ Thus, women are inferior to (“below”) men; or, conversely, men are superior to (“above”) women.} \]

\[ (B4) \text{ For any } X \text{ and} \]

\[ \text{Ibid., 12.} \]
Y, if X is superior to Y, then X is justified in subordinating Y. (B5) Thus, men are justified in subordinating women.\(^\text{10}\)

I suggest Irigaray’s work is capable uniquely to deconstruct the relation between “nature” and “woman.” First, her work aligns with ecofeminists in that she dismantles how differences have been used to identify “a lack” that women supposedly suffer, a “lack” that could also be in varying degrees said of animals, plants, and rocks. Typically, the lack pertains to cultural abilities that men have historically and philosophically championed in the Western world: rationality, language, physical dominance, technological prowess, the preservation of private property, and the protection of a free market for exchange. By identifying the “male subject” as the only “supposed subject,” with the capacity for subjectivity, all ways of knowing and being in the world have been orchestrated toward and for this absolute male ontology, economy, and ethical system.

Irigaray’s contribution to this ongoing debate is to reveal that environmental anthropocentrism is really another variant of phallogocentrism, or that woman’s disproportionate oppression is connected to a cultural construction of language, sexuality, and rationality. Ecofeminists have already recorded how historically, little of the resources, security, and opportunity of animals, plants, water, and rocks, which men have sought to reap and extract, provide support and long-term sustenance for the flourishing of women and those understood as the “other” of the European rational, propertied, male subject. The “other” may include the religious other, the foreigner, the immigrant, the child, the racial-ethnic other, the economic

other, aged other, abled-other, and sexuate other. Globally, environmental degradation affects to a greater extent the lives of women, children, and people of color more, as they bear the larger share of the cost of environmental consumption.\textsuperscript{11} Women's bodies and reproduction have even been targeted as a site to control and resolve the alarming spikes in population.\textsuperscript{12} Few women, globally, have any political control or say about these things, even though their occupations and livelihood may be more intricately connected to resources formerly understood as “common,” such as water\textsuperscript{13} or air quality.

But Irigaray’s work does more than just challenge patriarchy; she unfolds with precision the philosophical associations with nature and why sex/gender distinctions prevail, and why they matter. In articulating an active ontology of two sexuate subjects, she also creates a theoretical framework of relations between nature and culture where both are mutually valued and active in their asymmetrical relation, shaped by sexuate humans, and actively shaping sexuate humans. Just as women within Irigaray’s scheme are neither passive, nor the other of the man, neither is nature a passive object of culture’s activity. She demonstrates why sex, particularly sexuate ontology, is an irreducible construct for any theorization of


\textsuperscript{13} “Globally women produce approximately 80 percent of the world food supplies, and for this reason women are most severely affected by food and fuel shortages and the pollution of water sources.” See Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen, “Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health,” \textit{Society and Nature} 2 (1993): 14.
environmentalism that urges a preservation, conservation or inherent respect for nature.

2.1. Continuum Between Nature and Culture

While never prescribing to equate women with nature as B1 supposes in the quote by Karen Warren, Irigaray would describe the historical way B2 and even B1 has been constituted as a construct “feminine,” thus radically shaping women’s identities and lives, and will continue to do so, tacitly and explicitly in damaging ways, if their sexuate ontology remains unthought. Without dismantling the power and pervasive historical and intellectual theorization of B1 and B2, the conclusion will necessarily follow, as will A2 and A3 remain oppressed as all expressions of “otherness” connected to the female constituted ontology. Rather than arguing how alike these men/culture, women/nature (including animals, plants, rocks) are, she challenges the patriarchal intellectual tradition that creates such a hierarchy of values and a logic of domination that fails to respect, affirm, and even safeguard these differences by examining language as a phallic discourse (language), oedipal consciousness (sexuality) as a developmental tool for patriarchal socialization, and dialectical reasoning (rationality) as a site to sublate and synthesize the ethical “other.”

Both Irigaray and ecofeminists can agree that hierarchical thinking and a logic of domination have been historically and intellectually sustained to justify a twin domination of woman and nature. What Irigaray offers is a philosophical underpinning to ecological feminism, by arguing the priority of ontology as a necessary condition for our ability to think ethically. In this latter respect, I read her
as offering a distinctive philosophical and phenomenological perspective to the environmental debate, questioning an unthought andro-centric transcendentalism that creates binary opposition. Without dislocating “transcendental” man and the necessary binary opposition that is correlative to this sexuate ontology, there is no true difference or fecundity that makes all kinds of reproductions possible (outside of sexual reproduction). If overconsumption and scarcity is a looming environmental threat, then Irigaray’s work uncovers the logic that destroys truly generative thinking between sexes, among differences, and ways that different ontologies may actually have relations of exchange without exchanging the “other.” In Thinking the Difference she writes of overconsumption as tied to an ideology of man without “limit” or “men amongst themselves.” Yet, the limit isn’t an idea or an abstract principle; it is grounded in lived beings, an absolute alterity of another subjectivity, and she writes, “Only women can play this role. Women are not genuinely responsible subjects in the patriarchal community. That is why it may be possible for them to interpret this culture in which they have less involvement and fewer interests than do men, and of which they are not themselves products to the point where they have been blinded by it.”14 And yet women, while objects within patriarchy also in another sense, “accomplish” patriarchy in that they comply with its terms. Thus the task becomes one that requires men and women to think in terms of an ethics of sexual difference. She includes the differences between the ontology of man and woman, and the differences within ontologies, thus rethinking new conceptualization of woman to nature, rocks, plants, and animals, as a possible

14 Irigaray, TD, 6.
path of alternative ethical living and believing. Culture, therefore, isn’t nature’s enemy; it is its unthought partner, and nature isn’t culture’s unthought adversary as well. As humans come together with “limited” genders we fail to think about environmentalism as a cultivation of how nature and culture must be thought as distinct and co-extensive active partners together. Specifically, people’s sexuate identities have historical and social lived perspectives, and our language and discursive symbols can already narrate what we can say and how we depict alterity. For humans to cease privileging culture and excluding nature, we need a culture infused with the nondiscursive as important symbolic and imaginary horizons. This is why religion, politics and social communities must think the difference together, for nature to cease to be human culture’s “object” and dismantle phallocratic orders from within the very language and symbolic cultures which ignore the most violent representations, and thus evade responsibility.

Irigaray offers a continuum between valuing nature and culture, by not dismissing the important differences of these two realities (one is not subservient to the other), but also, she refuses to see them as separate, unrelated, or antonyms. By targeting dichotomous thinking that dominates as inherently “masculinist,” she rethinks the orientation with which we approach the two. For Irigaray, nature typically intersects with sex/gender distinctions because we are part of nature because we are embodied. Traditionally, Irigaray understands culture to signify unembodied notions of technology, institutions, academic or intellectual achievements, or human activities of commerce, industry, law, and language. Sexual difference is on the brink of nature and culture because it is a natural phenomenon
that relates to social-cultural differences. Irigaray does not so much aim at reconsidering nature, as she does to rethink the relationship between them. She appeals to the human body as a site of knowing that nature and culture must be thought together, and it is the denial of the body, the cultural maternal body, that sustains a denial of what our bodily senses tell us. She writes,

The body has much more of a relationship with perception than with pathos. A body breathes, smells, tastes, sees, hears, and touches, or is touched. These bodily attributes are endangered. But how can we live without bodies? What does this extinction mean? It means that men’s culture has polluted our air, food, sight, hearing, and touch to such an extent that our senses are on the verge of destruction. Yet we can neither live or nor think without the mediation of our senses.\textsuperscript{15}

A significant metaphor for Irigaray is often the sensuous touching of two bodies, or flesh, as separate notions that come together and apart for their mutual joy. Without bodies, there is no culture, and culture can only be experienced through bodies. Irigaray writes toward an understanding of how our values that we cultivate touch our air, our water, our soil, and our bodies, and how our bodies, soil, water, and air, can cultivate our culture. Less privileged senses, such as hearing,\textsuperscript{16} tasting, and touching are important ways of knowing truth, as sight has often been the privileged way male economies conceive of the world. Sight permits a distance between others, privileging a certain kind of visibility, tending toward, she suggests,

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{16} She records doctors’ testimonies that we are losing our hearing as we are assaulted by machinery, aircrafts noise, and perpetual noise without rest. Ibid.
domination, distance, and totalization. Sight\textsuperscript{17} or the visible hides things like air quality and noise pollution, which may be undetectable to the naked eye. When we rely upon the few senses to give us knowledge of our world, we lose our other bodily senses, and we lose our ability to communicate with each other in multisensory ways. Our sense of taste is also bombarded with food that is chemically fertilized, genetically modified, and hormonally injected. We are in peril of sustaining a masculine culture in which domination of nature is central and the cost is loss of life itself.

An interesting note that Irigaray observes, of which Ramachandra Guha\textsuperscript{18} critiques Northern or European environmentalists for eliding, is the growing and obvious threat of nuclear armament and the increasing global militarization of consumer elites. How can we speak of conserving and preserving nature when the greater threat is an unchecked culture of militarized security that can destroy within seconds? As Irigaray’s essay in \textit{Thinking the Difference} is contextualized in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, Irigaray, perhaps before others, understood the connection of what we cultivate as a culture and our values that gird our institutions, laws, and public policy as a necessary correlative to how we conceive nature. Her conception of nature, like woman, is a fluid and active construct, and it constitutes our understanding of culture. Often we personify “nature” as a female archetype that is out to destroy, ruthless, and leveling. Is this perhaps a reflection of the brutality of the culture and nature we have created coextensive to one another?

\textsuperscript{17} She also references how our sight is even at risk with the glare of harsh and widespread public lighting and the penetration of ultra-violent lighting exposure to our eyes. Irigaray, TD, 23.

If nature, like an ill-tempered woman, can be caricatured as the source of global change, we can evade the material reality of institutions, policies, and economic practices that continue to overburden natural resources, manipulate them as commodities to be exchanged, and conserve and consume them for global elites.

2.2. Voice: Multiplying Language

Irigaray, like ecological feminists, theorizes language as a site of sexual oppression, but she goes on to also warn against the danger of false liberation via the language of equality or accepting rights without interrogating the language that orders how we represent rights—what I signaled earlier as her critique of a new ideological “opiate” of the masses. She shares with many ecofeminists an emphasis of alternative voices or narratives with which to compete against the discourse of domination that presently prevails. Yet, she does more than include; she asks how we listen to the other, and she is wary of allowing inclusion to substitute for subjectivity amongst women.

In an essay on speech titled “From the Multiple to the Two,” Irigaray suggests that while we listen to others we must also be attentive to how we build relations of what is “between” these voices, attentive to how our bodies may presuppose words as closure or “unfolding.”\(^\text{19}\) She draws attention to the symbolic language of the Father where words close and are not meant to draw another nearer, where “... proximity is then defined through an object and not by a movement of approximation between subjects.”\(^\text{20}\) Instead, she affirms Heidegger’s appeal to the poet, or saying other than words where everything that cannot be thus expressed,

\(^{19}\) Irigaray, WL, 24.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 26.
passes to song. She suggests that tone, intonation and awareness of meaning shift from information passing to sharing communication. Therefore, a saying cannot belong to one; it must belong to two, the unfolding of language will require subjects committed to a sharing between communicators. The way Western philosophy already shapes women’s participation in the language means multiple voices may speak with no communication between or among them.

Part of the task of ecofeminists has been to validate and recognize the voices and narratives of women who are working against the triple threat of poverty, gender, and degradation of natural resources. In order for their voices to be heard, we need to cultivate a culture that listens and affirms other “voices” and ways of “knowing” or “being.” Irigaray’s work has been to constitute a way for our phallogocentric language to “listen” and “hear” otherwise. Her discursive critique of language as codified within a logic of domination of male subjects reveals a strategy for escape. By conceiving of language “with” or “to” others, rather than “at” them, Irigaray argues for spaces of silence and legitimacy for women’s “hysteria” as a site of political and social lament. Her discursive strategy slows dialectical speeches down, permitting spaces of poetic language to interrupt and dislocate arguments that claim “neutrality” or “rationality alone.” Her theory gives an account as to why personal narratives of women’s lives in relations to their bodies may also be conceived as a source of knowledge that informs us about vital truth claims in our world, and the negative, or limit of each of our personal account.

---

21 For a further articulation of narrative voice as a method for ecofeminists see Warren, “The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism,” 125-46.
It also moves language away from an upward trajectory of absolute meaning or power of the father, and bases universality in the experience of being born of a woman in a body, a connection as argued that becomes the groundwork for mutual kinship and respect for difference. Her work shifts the language away from objects and instead asks humans to understand language success based upon physical spaces like “proximity” or “nearness.” By emphasizing distance or space between relations to others as a measure of good ethics, she situates people in the world, and relations to others as an orienting conception of self and the self with the gendered other of the same gender and the different gender. She examines fissure and fusion as ways to understand ethical relations that defy consumption or indifference toward the other. Additionally, ecological feminists’ exclusion from mainstream Western environmentalist debates\textsuperscript{22} may be a symptom of the greater problem Irigaray has supposed: we do not have a culture where there is a possible place for exchange between different sexuate ontologies and economies.

Second, Irigaray’s work shifts values away from hierarchical thinking toward an inclusive multiplicity of values by revealing how present language of inclusion and equality as “neutral” actually services male-values. By revealing the actual conditions of possibility for inclusion, she creates the theoretical paradigm necessary for multi-cultural values to be expressed. By exposing how binary

\textsuperscript{22} I note that most discourse on contemporary environmentalism, particularly in North America tends to highlight conservation of resources, preservation of wilderness, or economic concerns of global climate change for its largely Western consumers and government agencies. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s analysis remains mostly locked within a cost-benefit analysis model that equates important human values with a parity of economic values. For further discussion, see Dale Jamieson, “Ethics, Public Policy and Global Warming,” \textit{Science, Technology, and Human Values} 17, no. 2 (1992): 139-53; Martha Nussbaum, “The Costs of Tragedy: Some Moral Limits of Cost-Benefit Analysis,” \textit{Journal of Legal Studies} 29 (2000): 1005-36.
thinking is not really a twoness of subjects, but a logic of domination where male bias controls a selfsame other, including the female other, the natural other, the animal other, foreign other, religious other, and so on, she disrupts this monologic of domination with an ethical mandate to create an ontology where actual twoness exists and flourishes, abandoning “artificial” homosexualism as the logic du jour. She suggests that the condition of not dominating an “other” is the condition of multicultural, multi-value thinking for our world and diverse beings in our world. Her refusal to reduce diversity to monosexuate hierarchies contingent upon male identity, being, and patriarchal religions is her groundwork for promoting a theory free of male bias.

2.3. Maternal-Feminine: A Critique of Artificial Life

Additionally, Irigaray’s theorization of the maternal-feminine as a repressed metaphysical underpinning of our culture offers ecofeminists a unique consideration of how to talk about “life” apart from the cultural expectation that reproduction is an essential feature of being a woman and that being a mother is necessary to become a woman fully. Irigaray’s maternal-feminine is a mimetic critique of how the language of mother and the feminine are connected. Her mimetic style deliberately acquiesces to the expected artifice of the maternal as the sole signification of what it is to be feminine. By disrupting key accounts, such as Freud’s essay on the feminine, she exposes an exiled agency within the maternal and dislodges the “truth” of the maternal in order to “...recover the place of her

\[^{23}\text{In her dialogue with Spinoza she refers to the envelope in which woman is contained as a woman for man and as a mother for a child/nature, thus, doubly removed from herself. See Irigaray, E, 83-94.}\]
exploitation by discourse.”24 Her work challenges the way natural birth has been assigned to women (maternity) and cultural birth to men (paternity), with preference given to the symbolic process of becoming civilized (male), and relegating human flesh as something feminine or animal. To become part of the body politic is a male process of human subjectivity. Similarly, phrases like “mother nature” may draw upon the same cultural inscription of a woman as the maternal body, relying upon a sexed motif to explain organic systems and their reproduction and force. This sexed division raises the difficulty of politicizing a force that is maternal, where the civilized male will ultimately determine what is best for mute nature.

According to Irigaray, nature and a woman’s gender share a similar ideological relationship to man (a relation of subordination to dominant male identity)—they are both perceived to surround and nourish him like an environment.25 As stated,26 gender for Irigaray is more than the female sex, it is a term which encompasses life or the ability to “engender” to develop life in others. It is not merely reproductive life she attributes, although maternal and natal are prominent tropes of bodily experience and knowing in her work that she seeks to legitimate in a new way apart from their phallic appropriation. Rather, I understand her using gender as a way to question philosophically what gives “authenticity,” “flourishing,” or “felicity” to existence. What are the idioms, values, or paths that

---

24 Irigaray, TS, 76.
25 See Irigaray, IB, loc. 1093 of 2057.
26 See chapter one, section 3.2 “Sex, Gender, and Sexuate Identity.”
unfold life positively beyond the masculine logic of framing life and existence? A philosophy of male engendering gives a life toward death, or what I have described as a “being-towards-death.” Commonly cited, Socrates’ famous quotation is that philosophy is preparation for death. She explains this connection between a sexuate ontology of logos as one towards death in the following: “The logos will lead towards him, a logos that mimics the living but does not know death. Exiled from sensory, and even emotional, experiences, man tries to find it again through excess—exploits, heroism, fame. The sage then rebels against passion: he searches for himself in withdrawal, reflection, self-knowledge. The injunction ‘Know thyself’ is prepared, as is the taste of the philosopher for death.”

Woman, as a dissymmetrical being to man, must resist appropriation for his sex, and her resistance to this appropriation is the greatest chance for a being-towards-life. As she states, “Truth can be engendered only by the two genders.” She critiques that a culture in the masculine has mimicked the natural world, but without the engendering of two genders, what has been achieved is only artificial replication, such as cloning, as man attempts to transcend nature, and cloning is a sign of man’s singular gendered way to find growth and movement with life. A proliferation of replicas of life now mask or conceal the truth of life. If as Socrates

---

27 This is why my examination of her work in comparison to Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and de Beauvoir’s work was included in chapter three, I seek to delineate that Irigaray’s account of existentialism has a vital sexuately specific component of what constitutes an ethical life. She makes this sexual difference key in order to formulate a robust and universal account of ethical humanism.
29 Irigaray, IB, loc. 1087-1090.
30 Ibid., loc. 1099-1100.
31 Contrast this “artificial life” of the masculine to my account I rendered in chapter four of Irigaray’s spiritual ethical intersubjectivity of the self and the safeguarding of the self in relation to the other through the physical and spiritual markers of life, breath, and spirit. See chapter four, section 4 “Multiplicity of Affection.”
declared, “Unexamined life is not worth living,” Irigaray might quip, man’s philosophy has kept him far from life and close to an examination of death, artificial life, and the concealment of life. Her insistence for two genders is more than a call for political equity; it is a demand for the conditions of ontological reality (difference) that give us the ability to examine life and offer truth statements about it. Her argument for gender is, I suggest, an argument for life and expansion of life in all its forms—natural and spiritual, individual and collective.

2.4. Being Towards Life—Birth and Living

Most environmentalists, economists, and social scientists agree that human population growth continues to surface as a rising threat, or that we have an impending “population problem.” Ecofeminist Gita Sen writes on the complexities of adjudicating scarce global resources and the sexed experience that birth and population control commonly falls to poor women to control, or that governments and activists may seek to control poor women’s bodies as they attempt to manage birth rates. I suggest that a theory of birth or natality seems a location where ecofeminist activism and Irigarayan scholarship can collude well to affirm women’s health and reproductive rights in coordination with ecological sustainability. In chapter two, “The Death of Mother,” I have already referenced the importance of the maternal figure as vital for thinking difference positively, particularly as we consider women’s reproductive health and abortion rights. In this section I argue

33 In this passage Irigaray describes difference as the motor of the dialectic’s becoming and mean we are able to renounce death as sovereign master and give our care toward the expansion of life. Irigaray, ILTY, 62.
that population policies, like the ones Sen critiques, tend to be “top down” in their orientation and largely unconcerned with violating the basic human rights and needs of a target population (typically poor women). I suggest that population policies can mirror the same pitfalls of racism, classism, and gender bias of larger global concern, and that the impetus toward population control may reflect more a fear of death, than a philosophy of life.

Grace Janzten has identified a theory of “natality” as a way to elaborate Irigaray's discussion of a philosophy toward life, or how it is possible to find an ordering of life and reproduction that also has the theoretical capacity for people to critique the phallic representation of the maternal-feminine. Jantzen utilizes Hannah Arendt’s notion of natality, a second birth, which ultimately links members in a community of responsibility, with Irigaray’s notion of the maternal-feminine genealogy that everyone who is born, was born of a woman. Borrowing from Arendt’s work on natality, Jantzen underscores how birth functions as a central political and philosophical category, figuring philosophy less as meditation upon death, as Plato maintained, and instead a meditation on birth which is a fact of our being. Jantzen quotes Bhikhu Parekh’s explanation of Arendt’s work on birth as that which “...dignifies uniqueness, human plurality, joy, appearance, new beginning, hope, creativity, and unpredictability.” While Arendt’s version of natality functioned to signal an originary position of beginning, and thus an originary

---

35 I recognize that a larger discussion around Arendt’s work as feminist is debated. For the purposes of this thesis I am mainly deploying her notion of “natality” as a way to concentrate on birth as a political or social category of investigation.

relationship between human beginning and freedom, Jantzen notes the possibility of natality to signal a possible shift in the imaginary, the theoretical focus of Irigaray’s work, writing, “It affirms the concreteness and embodied nature of human lives and experience, the material and discursive conditions within which subjects are formed. . . .” 37 Reconceiving the notion of birth also focuses philosophy away from thinking about “other worlds,” and instead centers the imagination on a continuum of connection with all others who have been born, emphasizing kinship over the abstract idea. These remarks are congruent with Irigaray’s appeal for an ethics of sexual specificity (the maternal-feminine) and why this specificity is necessary to rethink the nature/culture divide in order to laud life and its expansion. It is worth quoting Jantzen at length:

> It is a respect of this connection with all other human beings that an imaginary of natality would be at fundamental variance with misogyny. This is not a matter of romantic exaltation of women as mothers; still less is it a reduction of ‘woman’ to the function of mothering. Rather, it is the shift of Gestalt that recognizes that the weaving of the web of life which each person enters in virtue of our natality means that we are connected with all other persons, female and male. Our sexuate selves, born of women, are the basis both of our similarity to and our difference from other sexuate selves, the foundation both of empathy and of respect for alterity. . . . Another result of focusing on natality rather than death is the recognition that our interconnection in the

---

web of life includes not only other people but also animals and ultimately the whole physical world. Western thought, much abetted in this by the philosophy of religion, has not been anxious to acknowledge our deep dependence on the ecosystem or our close connection with other animals, taking instead an attitude of mastery or dominance and ultimately escape. . . . A whole different perspective opens up from an imaginary of natality.38

I suggest Irigaray’s sexual difference opens up the imaginary of “natality” or a marked embodied beginning of a life that has as an ‘earthly’ or ‘natural’ potential to be infinite. But whereas Arendt’s persons are infinite as they live in the memories or stories of other humans,39 Irigaray’s persons are infinite as they relate to the structural limit between the genders and this endless becoming of one’s own sex and self-representation with one’s gender and the other gender.40 Natality thus disrupts existence as merely “mortal” or as Arendt identifies it, “rectilinear” movement of humans, which is at odds with a cyclical natural order.41 I suggest Irigaray also disrupts the rectilinear conception of the human and instead offers a sensible transcendental infinite that is structural (feminine genre) and has its own self-representation (female genre), but, the limit and its potential becoming or “natal” moment, depend on an elaboration of such a culture.

38 Jantzen, Becoming Divine, 150-1.a
39 Arendt uses the term remembrance to signify a condition of being in history and of being remembered by those in time and space. See The Human Condition, 9, 95.
40 See particularly Irigaray, “Fulfilling our Humanity,” KW, 186-94.
41 Arendt, The Human Condition, 19.
According to Alison Martin, Nietzsche infamously questioned philosophy’s exaltation of death (particularly Plato’s record of Socrates’ trial), answering instead with life. He memorably questioned the Christian message of Jesus of Nazareth’s death as a necessary sacrifice, and instead claimed it is rather, “... a consequence of the ressentiment of a human culture that has to establish a life-denying orthodoxy to be human at all.”

Martin continues that the concept of natality, and thinking surrounding it, challenges the necessary conception of life as, “... a temporal and earthly fall from grace with various promises of a return in the eternal ... the attempt to marry heaven and reason.”

Contrastingly, natality exposes the “horror of the non-existence of a promised land.”

Irigaray’s work contributes to this discourse in that she not only critiques the significance attributed to death in Western philosophy, but she resituates birth and becoming in human culture. As Martin interprets Irigaray,

The feminine has always been where men house what they are not, or more psychoanalytically, what they fear as a threat to their unified selves (difference, becoming, and ultimately, death). The limit of death has been the issue of consideration of being, then, whether that is in the apparent nonchalance of classical metaphysics in its definition of real being as beyond death, or in the heroism of Hegel’s sublation of death, or finally in Heidegger’s endurance of death as the own most possibility of being there.

---

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
For Irigaray, rather than death as the limit, the sexuate other is the limit, or negative, to this universal enclosure of structural sameness (masculine *genre*) and its self-representation (male *genre*). Again as Martin says well, “The limit of being is henceforth an end, but not in the sense of a dissolution. It is rather an end to which being is directed as a movement towards, or becoming, that is endless.”

I understand Irigaray’s work on sexuate gender as an important way to elaborate a possible imaginary of natality, exemplifying the fruitfulness of her claims. When applied to the question of overpopulation, Irigaray’s work redirects the way we conceptualize poor women as perpetuators of the “population problem,” and that respecting sexual difference means respecting the women themselves, that the right to their existence becomes the focus. Sexual difference is a necessary limit to the human aspiration for the infinite, rather than the finite bodies of poor women. Rather than perpetuate an “othering” of women as mothers, natality confronts us with the universal experience of being born of a woman, and the loss of right whereby to demand a mastery over the same women or over others. It also accords us a way to work with women toward reproductive health and sustainability—that the economic imperative for poor women to have children in order to survive must be addressed as a distinctive category for analysis in population policies. The desire to live securely apart from an imperative to bear children should be answered for all people as a vital condition of civic life.

What the problem of population reveals is the locus of phallic power, a phallic power Irigaray has worked tenaciously to reveal, whereby women have little economic and physical security, a condition exacerbated in the poor world.
Women's reproductive power remains ensconced within a symbolic order or their ability to reproduce for the order itself, to ensure male survival and patriarchal control of resources. Overpopulation is not a problem women perpetuate; it is the exposure of women's domination within a system whereby their reproductive capacity is commoditized as the ideal in order to secure their own livelihoods in this precarious world of economic injustice. Rather than a source of nourishment, the maternal body is the problem, denying mothers their subjectivity within and beyond their maternal role.

Spiritually, one could say that natality highlights the mother's body as vital when considering the worth and dignity of all peoples. Natality reminds us of the flesh of the woman and her divine, a spiritual becoming that reminds us of our ancestry, our connection to women. To be born of a woman could symbolize (like Mary) our need for spiritual interiority, to temper the religious regimes that call for obedience to words, dogmas, and rituals that seek to define women and their worth.

2.5. Critique of Other Differences

Arguably, the greatest distance between French feminist theorizers, like Irigaray, and ecofeminists may be her questioned ability to address issues of poverty and class, age, ability, and other sexual affections with her robust theory of a gendered sexuate ontology. If her theory focuses so much on sexuate ontology, does she preclude and exclude issues connected, but different than sexual oppression, such as issues of race and ethnic oppression, class, and imperial oppression, ageism, ableism, or homophobia? What about women whose relationship with nature is complicated by living with the triple threat of gender,
poverty, and race? Can Irigaray listen to these women, whose gender may be the same as hers, but whose experiences may lead them to understand economic issues of equity to outweigh other concerns philosophical and environmental?

It is my claim that Irigaray’s theory provides the groundwork for such dialogue to occur. I suggest that she sets up a dialogical framework of the body where she notes people are not only talking and listening, but two bodies are doing both simultaneously, that we, with all our senses engaged, not privileging a singular location where we risk appropriation, can keep the divide of difference open, welcome, and not hostage to our own desires. Her ethics of sexual difference is a socio-ethico-political commitment to end hostile narcissism (self-same subjectivity) and it asks us to take into account that we are all part of a gendered community, which is to say, a commitment to irreducible alterity of difference as difference. Grounding difference in the sexuate body honors the bodies of those who make such a commitment possible, and reminds us of the ethical ground upon which we can recognize our own limits, and upon which we can respect our differences. To recognize the limit we have to respect the natural, and her argument values nature without reducing civil life to the natural. Instead, she asks us to rethink the transition between nature and civil life in order to make a fuller democracy of difference possible.45

---

45 See specifically chapter two, section 3.2 “Irigarayan Rhythm and Nature” where I detail the relation between nature, difference, and limit. In this same chapter I explore the tensions between the poles of nature and culture and how Irigaray relates to this binary opposition.
Some feminists, even those committed to her work and scholarship, charge that Irigaray rarely or explicitly elaborates on these secondary differences.\textsuperscript{46} It has caused critics to see her framing these as secondary differences, thus hierarchically inferior in value or importance.\textsuperscript{47} It is easy to read her statement on secondary differences, such as race, economic, or cultural difference, as conferring greater priority to the problem of sexism and less to problems of racism, ageism, ableism, colonialism, or other cultural differences. If this is so, then Irigaray may fail to theorize ecofeminist’s concern for the particular threat of women in poor countries where ecological resources are often unjustly distributed, and the brunt of ecological degradation is disproportionately experienced.

Yet, I suggest she doesn’t center her argument on sexism as the primary point of women’s oppression, but rather, offers a critique of the universal itself. As argued, sexual difference offers a “living universal”\textsuperscript{48} based upon persons’ real needs, desire, abilities. While sexism is a symptom of sexual indifference, sexual difference is greater than an overcoming of antagonism between the sexes—it is a

\textsuperscript{46} Morny Joy provides an excellent concluding chapter to her book where she surveys how Irigaray’s work has influenced other women philosophers and critical analyses and creative experiments with her work. See Morny Joy, “Conclusion: A World of Difference,” \textit{Divine Love: Luce Irigaray Women, Gender and Religion} (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006) 142-160. Penelope Deutscher also notes Irigaray’s later comments that racism, cultural exclusion, and the marginalization of other oppressed groups may be linked to an impoverished relation to gender identity that diverse people experience. Deutscher observes that in \textit{Between East and West} she suggests that a philosophy of sexual difference is depicted as already a philosophy of multiculturalism. But Deutscher also suggests that philosophy of race or cultural difference is not given similar status as is her work on sexual difference. Therefore, a reader can conclude that Irigaray’s methodology allows us to expand toward race and cultural differences as genres in which diverse bodies can participate in without defining these categories as static and fixed, but Irigaray does not give this direction priority in her own work. See Deutscher, \textit{A Politics of Impossible Difference}, 192-3.

\textsuperscript{47} Irigaray writes in \textit{I Love to You} that the sexual difference is without a doubt the most appropriate content for the universal and “The problem of race is, in face, a secondary problem . . . and the same goes for other cultural diversities—religious, economic, and political ones.” Irigaray, ILTY, 47.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 50.
positive affirmation of embodied human identities apart from the mono-sexuate identity of only essential or simple nature, or only culture (sexual neutrality).

Human identities of race, age, and sex offer embodied complexities that challenge the nature/culture split, and she believes sexual difference clarifies why these abuses of power are unjustified. She seeks a resolution without abandoning the specificity of various body morphologies, phenotypes, temporal age, or the perception of being a cultural minority. Despite her initial rejection of secondary differences, she later clarifies that sexual difference cannot be reduced to a simple critique of sexism and writes that racism and sexism are "... forms of power which, in fact, share the same roots: a flaw in the relation between the state of nature and civil identity which makes civil coexistence impossible." She contends, "The question of women is not, then, in this respect, any different from the question of racism..."

Her focus isn’t on sexism as the exemplar of what ails civil life, but how to pass from nature to civil life without abandoning the relation with nature, and thus, sexism, racism, and other forms of abusive power are symptoms of this failed transition. She diagnoses within European civil society a regression into a simple state of nature—"on belonging to a particular age-group, sex or race." She suggests that dividing into these simple “natural” groups halts communication between people and increases aggression. She addresses these “natural” categories of

49 See note 47.
50 Irigaray, DBT, 46.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 53.
belonging—race, sex, and age—and criticizes what she deems ineffective steps to understand their influence and potential for increased aggression in civil life, such as covering them up as “economic and cultural constructions,” or neutralizing these differences at the expense of human identity.  

Many political theorists in Western democracies have favored overcoming the state of nature with ethical principles based upon neutered or abstract law, such as perhaps, a social contract, universal moral law, or the free market. Irigaray contends, “. . . forcing races, sexes, and generations to conform to a single model of identity, culture and civilization means subjecting them to an order which does not respect their differences.” She compares this “single model” to new forms of colonialism and evangelism, or “benevolent paternalism” of a wealthy patriarch where not only money, but civil society now conform to this supposed compassion. She agrees with Hegel’s statement that nothing is worse than paternalistic pity—compassion in politics—it implies that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing. She explains, “The enlarged community would then develop on the basis of the compassion felt by the richer members. . . . But I am not sure that the poorest will accept such aid, nor that aid of this sort actually contributes towards safeguarding them and their growth. . . . Even if the well-intentioned amongst our politicians are unaware of it, this gesture risks maintaining a vertical hierarchy in the civil community.”

---

54 She writes, “Faced with such a development, either we return to a natural form of coexistence whether familial, tribal, or ethnic and in another mode, religious, cultural or state-related, or we mould this state of nature according to abstract norms which deny it and fail to dissolve its potential for violence.” Ibid., 54.

55 Ibid., 54.

56 Ibid., 54, 58.
She is especially critical of a purely economic market approach to maintain civil life arguing that the economic sphere attempts to conceal the importance of people’s natural identities, where “…the quality of goods seem to mask those of individuals, and ownership seems to take the place of desire to exist, and of care for life itself.”\textsuperscript{57} But she observes that the presence of groups like immigrants, women, and adolescents in the labor force exposes the inadequacy of the job market and revised wage and labor laws to answer these larger social dilemmas of how citizens should relate to one another as citizens, or how to achieve “natural or private coexistence.”\textsuperscript{58} She notes a worker protest in France where women were on strike to achieve recognition of their social status, rather than an increase in wages.\textsuperscript{59} And yet she submits that while we lack civil codes that take into account the safeguarding of unique human singularity, within the economic sphere we have developed detailed, concrete, and prolific laws protecting individual property rights. While property is a part of a healthy civil life, and some goods undeniably protect life, she argues, “But the goods necessary to life have multiplied to such an extent that they have ended up taking the place of life itself.”\textsuperscript{60}

She lists how we have clumped the “other” into a group, which includes the primitive, the child, the mad person, the disabled person, the worker, and the woman.\textsuperscript{61} Such a generalized approach to “the other” conceals the rights of each of these individuals and instead, allows dominant groups to ameliorate inadequate

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
relations via the avenue of pity-compassion toward the “others” and this supposed compassion, she injects, is the first to be abandoned for the sake of the economy. Securing rights for individuals, she argues, is an issue of life, which has been historically relegated to the private or natural sphere of the family. Following Hegel’s explanation of the ethical life as bound to the private family sphere, she contends that an ethic of life has been reduced to procreation of children, maternal sacrifice, and paternal desire. But an ethic of life ought to include the natural law (not to be confused with natural instinct or desire), or a “cultivation” of nature, and offer citizens ways to understand themselves as natural citizens, in order to protect the rights of individuals.

She urges that a democracy should offer a way for citizens to relate to one another and understand their politico-ethical relations in addition to tradition, family, or religious culture—she asks for a natural law and civil rights for individuals which averts vertical hierarchies of benevolence or private relegation. Natural law ought to be the domain of the state:

For me, the way to overcome such a hierarchy is through recourse to the rights to civil identity: a positive, affirmative right enjoyed by every person irrespective of sex, race or age. To enjoy the right to exist, to be oneself, male or female, in a sovereign manner, outside a master-slave relationship, could be protected by a civil code which placed the emphasis on the individual’s right to identity.62

62 Ibid., 58.
She details the need to develop duties and obligations we have to ourselves, given our unique human singularities, and to our community. She had already detailed such rights specific to women in *I Love to You* as four rights including: physical and moral inviolability, right to voluntary motherhood, right to a culture appropriate to female identity, and a preferential and reciprocal right for mother and child(ren), particularly a guarantee against violence and economic poverty and inter-cultural marriages. She expands these specific rights to a broader framework explaining, “A civil right like this entrusts women, for example, but also other races and young people, with the obligations to behave as adults capable of rationality and of coexistence.” She includes duties such as education and our subduing sensibility and unmediated instinct—moving beyond natural norms. She believes such a civic code offers a passageway from a state nature to civil life that ultimately develops more than Europe’s economic growth and development, but the growth of the individual, the family, and cities, a point of relation between citizens.

She understands a civil identity to be paramount as people are between various identities, such as natural, economic, social, political and cultural. And importantly, she believes a civil identity, rather than an identity based upon a relation to goods, is a way citizens can recognize democratically the unemployed, those who own no property, the marginalized, adolescents, and the aged.

My own approach to Irigaray’s work on these secondary differences is to read her as a philosopher, critic, thinker and activist of difference, a project which

---

63 Irigaray, ILTY, 132; DBT, 60.
64 Irigaray, DBT 59.
65 Ibid., 58, 59.
interrogates the ontological nature of Being as sexed or sexuate. It is difficult to locate specific groups as supposedly “secondary” categories of difference because her task has been to theorize an ethico-political “between two” so differences could emerge without a rudimentary natural determinism or cultural neutrality. To answer the question of why people deserve rights when they culturally identify with a “natural” particularity of lived experiences (such as color, age, or sex), is rooted in the sexual—they were born from a woman’s body and began to breathe. Birth is not abstract, it is actual, sexual, and guarantees status as citizens and our right to become.

Penelope Deutscher suggests her work is an oscillation between possible and impossible politics.66 She suggests that sexual difference is a possible and impossible task; it has never existed because of the overwhelming metaphysical oppression of unity, oneness, sameness, and closure. But sexual difference can exist as a hypothetical possibility whose horizon we can imagine and whose possibilities of multiplicity our diffuse bodies represent. It is not that Irigaray’s work wants to assert natural law and therefore rectify the status of the law, but the gesture itself reveals the lack of sexual difference we cultivate, her appeal to actual and the impossible creates a political oscillation (Deutscher), and I would submit her work is an ellipse between the possible and impossible. I think the ellipse is particularly congruent with Irigaray’s work on intersubjectivity given that an ellipse returns to the sender. I read Irigaray as permitting people a way to offer their individual

---

66 Deutscher writes, “I take one of the most useful aspects of Irigarayan philosophy to be her theorization of sexual difference in terms of a constant swinging movement between impossibility and possibility.” Deutscher, A Politics of Impossible Difference, 190.
differences and ask for political expression of these natural particularities, but it is not the political which is the end or horizon of justice. It is the moment of return to the people to then inhabit and shape law to cultivate constantly the shifting and active natural particularities of citizenship. Law does not finalize, but law permits natural particularity to find cultural expression and herald new formulations of the natural; civil flourishing is an active amorous exchange between nature and culture.

As Lacanian difference has been defined as a lack, atrophy, negative of a metaphysical whole male, she reconceives difference\textsuperscript{67} as something each individual can recognize positively within his/her own body, and then work toward new collectives or communities where these difference can be affirmed, developed, and safeguarded (rather than conceived as opposite, complementary, of alike another body). To be sexually constituted is an embodied and specific way to argue for philosophical political twoness,\textsuperscript{68} or for difference as a structural and political reality that respects natural evolutions, a respect between nature and culture necessary for a democracy. For Irigaray, it is a philosophical structural twoness that makes possible a critique of abuses of power like sexism, racism, and ageism. She offers a civil law in touch with nature, but not reducible to how we have conceived of natural norms or instincts. Her deconstruction of language itself is meant to point subjects back to alterity and to alert subjects to their finite position within space and time, thus the need for the other and his/her conception of other positions. Her

\textsuperscript{67} For Derrida this difference is excess, for Irigaray it is an excess with a sexual specificity which is fluid, deferring, and calls for others.

\textsuperscript{68} While Derrida resists twoness for multiplicity, I read Irigaray as transgressing the order of the two away from any sedimentation of the two, rethinking the couple within phallogocentrism. She ostensibly redeploy the two in service of sexual difference, a constant deferring and opening of human becoming.
project was to make such a limit possible and for relations to be formed to allow humans to work collaboratively on such a project safeguarding individual rights within a multinational, multicultural, and multiracial society like Europe.  

It is the recognition of the limit in ourselves and the recognition of a sexually specific other, a vulnerable other in need of juridical and civil protection, which democracy relies upon for full civic engagement and life. She writes, “If we take respect for the individual as such, with his/her qualities and differences, as our starting point, it is possible to define a form of citizenship appropriate to the necessities of our age: coexistence of the sexes, of generations, races, and traditions. . . . Solving the problem of civil coexistence between the sexes and the genders seems the most complex way of organizing coexistence between different identities within the horizon of an equality of rights.”

Additionally, she underscores our own self-determination and community determination, the ability for men and women of different backgrounds and cultural differences to narrate and define communally their own experiences. She offers the philosophical wherewithal to respect and theorize such experiences for a life-engendering community, where life unfolding is the universal ethic that her version of humanism offers, humans-toward-life. I suggest she is not after universal sexuate identity; instead, she envisions a living quasi-transcendental universal which secures human difference. She writes, “In this way, universal values lose their rigid and normative character. All that exists is a framework protecting relations between

---

69 Irigaray, DBT, 67.
70 Ibid., 9.
71 See chapter two, footnote 120.
individuals, within which specific qualities play a part so long as civil coexistence is guaranteed. The relationship is primordial, and training in citizenship is concerned with relationship rather than ownership.” What is missing isn’t a politics of pure recognition (do you see me/I see you), or a politics of property (what goods can I/we secure?), but it is a politics of relations between citizens, a labor of the negative how they can mediate difference without closing the other within our own subjectivity and making the other co-extensive with my goods to be secured. Therefore, as I participate in my genre, I do not adhere to a fixed identity or position, but I contribute to a spectrum of differences within difference. She explains, “Working on European citizenship, I can see that the demand for women’s rights is part of a vaster whole where the right to difference has become incontrovertible.”

Her philosophy offers ecofeminists a valuable way to communicate how relations within an economic sphere alone are inadequate to address human dignity and secure human flourishing of people poor in relations to goods. This kind of alternate economic ethic, which refuses to see the issues of poverty, immigration, and age as “natural” and thus private affairs, offers ecofeminists a powerful ally in the fight for recognition outside the economic game. Rather than analyzing goods and services as an indicator of human flourishing, she asks us to consider an ethic of life itself. She offers a valuable limit on the quantity and quality of goods we offer and asks us to interrogate the question of life.

---

72 Ibid., 10.
73 The term Irigaray uses in I Love to You and in Democracy Begins Between Two, to describe the positions of individuals who inhabit differences but must relate to one another in civic and ethical life. She writes, “A training in citizenship is thus a priority if we are to make this new historical horizon a reality; a training in respect for oneself but also in respect for the environment, for the other and for the others, both alike, and different from us.” Ibid., 8.
74 Ibid., 14.
Her philosophy also offers us a pragmatic way to approach differences within a democratic dialogue, where identity is specific, but not fixed or hierarchically determined. Her negative, thus becomes the dialectic model where the relational space is elliptical, rather than circular, meaning there is space for impulse, resistance, withdrawal and restraint. Individual rights and liberties cease to be the sole rubric with which we assess or measure the fullness of life. Sacrificing the mother’s desire (or nature) for the sake of others ceases to be the defining ethic. Instead, life lived in examination with others becomes a more complex, rich, and dialogical praxis. We now engage in a non-sublating dialectical process of considering, engendering, or sustaining life principles and practices.

Irigaray’s privileged point of sexual difference has been to secure a “between two” which democracy, she insists, must secure before votes can be tallied. Without a security between the presumed majority power and a pathway for a difference to be developed, all differences will be subsumed. While democracy has been a humanist project and is assumed as such within Irigaray’s work, I suggest her notion of difference is radical enough to consider beyond the scope of just human liberation.

In this section I have returned to themes I developed previously in this thesis, particularly the divide between nature and culture and the elaboration of a sexuately specific existentialism that suggests a spiritual-ethical theory of life and breath as guiding principles. I have applied them toward the advancement of

---

75 Irigaray, WL, 100.
ecofeminist aims and have underscored Irigaray’s ability to also include other
diverse differences. I expand now these differences to the animal realm.

3. **Sexuate Difference and Animality**

   In her later work Irigaray devotes more of her writing toward ways we can
think and cultivate the difference ethically and spiritually for a new kind of
intersubjectivity that engenders difference. Irigaray has written only a brief essay
on the non-human animal, titled, “Animal Compassion,” and this section is meant to
broaden Irigaray’s theory beyond even her own seemingly anemic development of
this kind of relation. In this section I suggest that given Irigaray's critique of pity-
compassion and the substitution of the economic sphere for ethical relations, one
can read her own animal compassion as a renewed consideration of political
sentiment, towards a safeguarding of non-human animals from human domination
and exploitation. While I believe it would be a misreading to understand her claims
regarding women’s sexuate rights as directly transferrable to non-human animals,
do suggest that her orientation toward alterity and the limit offers important ethical
principles which may be applied toward the question of animal liberation and
welfare.

   I understand Irigaray's work, along with other feminists, to be a most helpful
untangling of the way we have used language to signify animal welfare, such
speciesism,^76 anthropocentrism, rights, and suffering, terms which have their

---

^76 A term Richard Ryder first coined in the 1970s and Singer and Regan popularized in their book
*Animal Liberation*. Speciesism draws attention to the way human understand their species as
superior to nonhuman animals, and thus, justify cruel and oppressive behaviors towards non-human
animals, analogous to unjustified racism or sexism. See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York:
meaning rooted firmly within the paradigmatic human condition. The prevailing
discourse remains bound to a logic of equal rights, or the self-same, whereby the
dominant group becomes the standard for equality of rights for the other. An
Irigarayan theory gives us an added impetus to “dehumanize” animals and consider
a relation between animals and humans each in their otherness working towards a
partnership of mutual respect. Irigaray’s work can be understood as a continued
effort of cultural feminists to critique patriarchy, domination, and sexism within the
animal welfare debate. I outline their contribution and her unique input to the
debate.

3.1. The Critique of Cultural Feminism

Josephine Donovan criticizes both the natural rights and utilitarian
approaches to animal treatment as biased toward masculinist moral rationalism and
calculation, arguing that cultural feminism may have a more viable theoretical
basis for animal treatment than is presently available. She contends that Tom
Regan sought to overcome Kant’s assumption of rationality as a uniquely
constitutive feature of man. Instead, the natural rights perspective favors rights for
animals which are “inalienable.” Animal ethics is not a matter of sentimentalism or

77 I am thinking of the work on animal rights in the Western tradition which continues to develop
rights within the framework of the rational tradition (for example, Mary Anne Warren’s discussion of
animal rights as weak/strong based upon constitutive features of autonomy, reason, communication)
and the social contract which individuals like Martha Nussbaum critique as a kind of political
arrangement which has favored property rights of European men over and against capabilities of
diverse groups. See Mary Anne Warren, “Difficulties with the Strong Animal Rights Position,” Between
the Species 2, no. 4 (Fall 1987): 433–441; Martha Nussbaum, Frontiers of Justice: Disability,
Nationality, Species Membership: The Tanner Lectures on Human Values (Belknap Press: 2007)
78 Donovan cites Mary Midgley as such an exemplar who notes animal’s rich social and emotional
complexity. She notes that historically woman have been less guilty of active abuse, they have at the
same been complicit in the in that abuse, mainly through their consumption of luxury items. See
Ethics: A Reader eds. Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams (New York, Columbia University Press,
2007) 58-86.
“womanish emotion,” but justice, a principle of individual rights based upon rational Enlightenment principles. Donovan ultimately concludes both natural rights and utilitarianism rely on a Cartesian/Newtonian mechanistic calculation of life which is an order of how to be dominated. Instead she offers exemplars of feminist counter-hegemonic resistance and alternative epistemological and ontological modes to replace the patriarchal/scientific domination mode which natural law and utilitarian position reinforce.

Additionally, Rosi Braidotti suggests that Peter Singer’s utilitarian demand for animal equality is a self-contradictory assertion, as it consists in anthropomorphizing animals, as humans would extend to them equality or equal rights. She insists on a biocentric egalitarianism, and argues that Singer’s attempt to “humanize” animals confirms the binary distinction human/animal whereby the human covers the animal other and denies the animal its specificity. Braidotti cites Italian feminist and animal activist Luisella Battaglia who cautions that non-human animals need to be dehumanized. She suggests that humans have given them wrong identities rather than accepting their differences and specificity.

3.2. Irigarayan Intersubjectivity with Animals

I read Irigaray’s work as a theoretical position capable of “dehumanizing” animals away from paradigmatic human equality, and thus advocating for fuller liberation. Irigarayan ethics relies upon difference that refuses to diminish the other, decentering the male subject and his relation to objects. Instead she conceives of a dimorphic elliptical relation “between” where air fills the chasm between

---

potential subjectivities, both of whom are naturally particular, individual, and their particularity is a limit which calls for the alterity of the other. As elaborated in chapter one, section 4.3 “Nature and Culture: The Double Dialectic,” nature is dimorphic\(^80\) and sexual difference is for Irigaray a primal difference, a natural structure. Therefore, natural beings can teach Western cultures the truth of this other difference outside of the mono-sexuate. And natural beings, such as animals, are vital guides and messengers in Irigaray’s work to the “truth” of sexual difference so buried and repressed in Western language and philosophy. Irigarayan difference also reveals the asymmetrical natural differences of body, morphology, and existence. Her theory of difference offers a 1) vital critique of hierarchical relations with animals, where all things are measured with the same scale, and 2) she promotes an inclusion based on the “animality” or “non-humanness” of the other. The specificity of the other challenges concepts like the collective name “animal other,” which takes the immense range of animal differences and classifies them all under the name “animal.” Difference, strangeness, or foreignness offers humans a path of relations between these vulnerable or fragile others, and she outlines an ethic beyond ingestion, hospitality, or human exchange. Irigaray’s work is a unique phenomenological contribution toward animal welfare and offers an ethical rethinking of virtues like compassion, hospitality, and grace from the purview of one committed to a culture of sexuate difference.

3.2.1. The Animal Guide

\(^{80}\) Again, Irigaray writes that the natural is at least two. Irigaray, ILTY, 37.
To date, much of animal ethics relies upon subjects (humans) speaking about/or the seemingly “non-languaged” animal objects. Irigaray warns of this appropriation and domestication of animals at the level of language and experience and the assumed mono-sexuate subject’s mastery/sublation/penetration of the animal world. She writes,

Has he not, in fact, exhausted the earth, prevailed by his cunning over the wild animal, over the birds and the fishes, subjected to his work the horse and the ox, invested the all-comprehending through speech, and also the government of cities and the victory over the cosmic storms? Has he not domesticated all, or almost all, by his cleverness, only to arrive at nothing? And, surveying from on high the world, his world, does he not already find himself excluded from it?81

Her own posture toward animals has been to assume a vegetarian practice, “a silent non-aggression pact between us”82 and she dislikes domestication of animals.83 In a brief essay, “Animal Compassion,” she offers autobiographical narrations of relations with actual animals she has encountered: a butterfly, sparrow, rabbit, cat, and hornet. It is important to her that she does not speak of animals in the abstract as imaginary, allegorical, or symbolic,84 but writes of actual encounters with animals, thus bearing witness or offering partial testimony, to the truth of the animal. She queries with wonder, “How can we talk about them? How

---

81 Irigaray, BEW, 1-2.
82 Irigaray, AC, 198.
83 She writes that her least favorite way of relating with animals is domestication and attempted to very briefly have animals in her home, preferring to relate to animals in their home, “living in their territory.” Ibid., 198.
84 She distinguishes her approach from Nietzsche, but her animals were there, physically present. Ibid., 200.
can we talk to them? These familiars of our existence inhabit another world, a world that I do not know."\textsuperscript{85} Instead she offers a narration meant, "to bear witness through relating,"\textsuperscript{86} a kind of relation with the animal body she speaks of as "fragile," and vulnerable. In continuance with her work on human subjectivity and the dimorphic structure between human subjectivities, one could extend that between the human and the nonhuman there is a chasm or interspace filled with air between these worlds, but animals can be our guides to the signals of difference.

It is the ‘other-worldly’ difference of animals, their negative in the dialectic to the human that offers a point of important inclusion and knowledge, an elliptical return to humans if we choose not to master, subdue, or appropriate them. Her first narration for this point is a butterfly. She recounts one such relating experience she had, a childish delight at viewing a flowering bush covered in butterflies. She writes of the related pleasure when, after she spent a patient season of waiting, a butterfly chose her, and it was her immobility, her stillness, which ushered the return. She later discovered the Greek word for butterfly means “soul,” and she notes the activity of these souls as they fly and rest in a terrestrial paradise. The butterfly manifests Irigaray’s spiritual accent on the carnal spiritual, and after eating well the nectar of the flower, they flap their wing in what she receives as a beatitude. The fleeting joy of their momentary presence (by a window, on a sill) is their generosity, a thankfulness for the fragility of the relation, a gratefulness for the given, which animal capture destroys.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 195.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
For Irigaray birds offer her particular spiritual guidance toward sexuate difference as a structural possibility. It is the myth of Melusine, the fish-bird, which heralds the possibility of the transmutational and transfigurational states which erode sexual indifference. In *Between East and West* she signals the song of the bird, as opposed to music, as “... singing in harmony with the state of the universe, of celebrating nature such as it is in the moment.” Her exemplar of the bird locates a present, fleeting relation with nature, rather than against or over. Winged creatures, perhaps because of their relation to the element of air, are uniquely situated guides that alert humans to the signals of sexuate difference: the natural, the pre-discursive, the physical, the maternal, and the elemental.

She narrates about her experience with a sparrow perched on her sill in Paris while a storm raged, whose presence invoked in her a sign of life and comfort lavished. Irigaray develops a thesis that animals may be spiritual guides to other kinds of material knowledge and ways of dialogue to which Western philosophy leaves us wanting in our human becoming; their difference orients us within our own world anew. She writes that birds lead one’s becoming: “The bird’s song heals many a useless word, it makes the breath virginal again and helps it rise. The birds’ song restores silence, delivers silence. The bird consoles, gives back to life, but not to inertia. The bird animates breath while safeguarding its materiality, ... the pathway to restore but also transubstantiate the body, the flesh.”

---

87 Irigaray, SG, 58.
88 Irigaray, BEW, 57.
89 Irigaray, AC, 197.
“rehumanized” in our material becoming. It is birds’ tonal range which offers new mental musings, their observance of the cycles, such as the rising of the sun, the joy of spring, which communicate an understanding of being in the world when words fail. The bird is a guide from a disassociated mind, back to the body, to breath. She writes, the bird animates breath and it is “. . . more than overly logical speech,” and that their vocalizings lead our breath from,“. . . elementary vitality to the most ethereal of the mental, beyond.”90 The bird signifies her spirituality, a spiritual assistant and master in many traditions, whose tonal range is like the mantra, “. . . raising the breath without ever cutting it from its corporeal site, from the intimacy of the flesh.”91 Given birds’ abilities to emulate spiritual breath, she observes that birds seem advanced in amorous dialogue, and could serve as guides in the kind of dialogues she has described in her work—one reliant upon breath, song, and the poetic.92

Irigaray offers affectionate memories of rabbits and speaks of her demand, punctuated with a hunger strike, to return to her garden and tend it, after news that a rescued rabbit had died. I understand her to advocate for a knowing beyond mere argument. Instead, she observes the value that animal guides can offer, but our system of rationality often precludes us from noticing. From the motif of the garden to the city, she observes within this “adult society,” the pain of work, and a greater suffering from the human community where compassion is rare. It was in the painful recounting of the reception of her first book, when illness took her, and that

90 Ibid., 197-8.
91 Ibid., 198.
92 Ibid.
caring for a rabbit’s life brought her out of the “phantasm of death” and its perpetual survival, became for her “a sign of welcome.”

3.2.2. Animal Hospitality: Outside Exchange

Yet, all of Irigaray’s animal exemplars aren’t easily cherished animal companions, and she notes the demanding squirrels and her night with the hornet, the uninvited guest. After an uneasy sleep she confronts her fear and her bias of thinking the species prone to systemic harm. It is the butterfly, the sparrow, the rabbit and the hornet that offer her help, help to overcome the arrogance of human hospitality. The uninvited guest destabilizes the practice of hospitality in service of the master and calls attention to the human assertion for possession, property, and mastery of our own domain. The various animal relations signal a moment where the guests become the patrons of the stay and the looming threat of appropriation.

For Irigaray, animals are the messengers who send themselves, and she credits the animal as having a superior perception of certain phenomena that humans, with their mental powers, are incapable of noticing because of our repression of the senses. She explains,

> Capable of perceiving a call where human beings hear nothing, and of providing a comforting presence where more rational arguments would have neither appeased nor healed the suffering or distress. When a human body of affectionate gesture would not have been able to have the simplicity of an animal presence. As pure as that of an

---

93 Ibid., 196-7.
angel... Who feels, also the danger or the trail that the other is going through.\textsuperscript{94}

It is this knowledge outside of discursive argument that the animal can perceive, possibility, a human contempt of emotion and the ignorance of our arrogance that our sexually dysfunctional culture dismisses as “womanish” or “irrational.” She retells a moment of vertigo in a tall building and a cat who mediates between her and the window. The cat offered her a gesture of presence rather than words of comfort, a sage choice. For Irigaray animal presence awakens us to our suffering and the animal alongside, mute to us but speaking wisely, offers humans the compassion and insight of what their sense tells them, a reversal of the compassion that animal welfare groups often attempt to argue humans need to offer to animals. Irigaray’s point is that they are our guides to a renewed understanding of the virtue of compassion, a compassion without paternalistic pity, a benevolence without the possibility of market exchange, or relations without domination.\textsuperscript{95} As we have enshrined and ensconced compassion in human language, we believe human understanding can capture it, but animal presence awakens us to the ways we can learn compassion anew in the wild of nature, beyond the moral constraints of human obligation or exchange.

For Irigaray, respecting the wholly other animal isn’t for the benevolence of the human, as Immanuel Kant portrays, but the animal gives to the humans a sense

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 199.

\textsuperscript{95} Irigaray addresses briefly the brutal violence animals can exhibit toward one another, but rebuts that if left in their habitat and territory, they are generally inoffensive there. She does cite human domestication as an increase in aggression and possibly this could also be applied to encroachment of their territory as a source of fear. She believes that with less fear they have less aggression. Ibid.. Her statement is one of conjecture but is also a way of attempting to decipher the role of human violence, rather than conceive of animals as merely normatively violent.
of limit, boundary, and, with that boundary, a sense of relationship with. To be clear, sexuate difference cannot be applied to animals, substituting the animal other for the female other. Rather, sexuate difference awakens us to the ways we have thought of animals only as an addendum to human flourishing and have denied necessary limits or boundaries with animals. The female other and the animal other are not the same, and that is the point.

Irigarayan ethics asks us to examine our own blind spots of symmetry and appropriation with the animal other (which are not analogous to the female other) and the way we establish boundaries based upon only our own needs, desires, or aims. Instead, we can turn to the animal as a source of knowledge, of our physical senses, the rhythms of nature, and gestures without words. She laments the way we have appropriated the animal body in our pursuit of domination and invokes a hope for universal hospitality, such as the Buddha suggests. When animals brush against us, enter our homes, our human habitats, we may protest the “invasion” and may revert to our sense of property ownership and absolute possession of certain spaces. But the animal teaches us hospitality without possession. It is the being-there in which the animal body reorients all in the world who share this world with the animal other, and she speaks of a reanimation when we reject our economy of debt for an economy of gratitude and compassion.

This way of love requires space, a respect for nearness, and the need for distance; only with such ethical proximity may we approach, meet, and welcome the animal other in their difference. Faithful to ourselves and to them, this friendship, she says, is the accomplishment of our humanity. Proximity, such as the sharing of
breath, rather than liberal rationality, becomes the basis for continued welfare. We must consider the limit of our human territories, safety, economies, and consumption of ecological resources. We must think the limit in order to think the difference ethically. We cannot engage in the question of proper relations because we are a species/subject which refuses to acknowledge our ethical limit.

In this section I have argued that respecting the difference allows us to particularize different beings beyond the collective term “animal” and that the particularities of these creatures should cause us to “dehumanize” the animal. It is vital that animals be thought without the human exemplar as paradigmatic, for such thinking has aided or justified our ability to dominate, commodify, and exploit animal suffering. Irigaray’s work is unique in animal welfare philosophy in that she also understands animals as guides that can “rehumanize” people. Analogous to the way connecting in the interval with another human allows a human to become more him or herself, Irigaray is suggesting that connecting with animal others will also help us in our own becoming. Namely, the animal can be a guide to bring us back to our own bodies, to spiritual breathing, and to a greater basis for animal compassion outside of human pity or benevolence.

4. Why Religion Matters

In this final section I outline how a diverse democracy, which secures its citizens via the language of rights, can consider a place for religion that respects difference. Irigaray writes that we are “. . . unable to eliminate or suppress the social phenomena of religion,” and rather than seek to dismiss it, we ought to “. . . rethink religion, and especially religious structures, categories, initiations, rules, and
utopias, all of which have been masculine for centuries." These religious structures deserve our attention, as her later work explores, because religion may be a vital force to shape a democratic culture that respects alterity and difference. This section relates specifically to her third phase and her emphasis on love, resistance to domination, and insistence on self-limit and mutual flourishing.

According to Irigaray, the question of religion is all the more paramount in an era of globalization, and we must be able to “. . . situate ourselves in our tradition in order to create possible bridges with other traditions.” She suggests that as we shift ourselves within our own traditions, we form a limit in correlation with our sexed bodies, and this integration of belief and body will become the basis for her investigation of religion. Namely, I suggest that her thesis of the negative, or self-limit, defined naturally and culturally, is the safeguard and borderland that ensures that individuals and communities can live and worship in difference. Religion, rethought via difference, offers a reverence for a diffuse, non-dominating intersubjective religious life that exists apart from the overwhelming Self-Same male religious structures of God or Being. This means that the various religions don’t merely “tolerate” each other or wage war against each other—both practices still regrettably too active in our day—but that they actively cultivate a partnership together in which each religion grows and deepens in its own identity in encountering different faiths.

---

96 Irigaray, SG, 75.
97 By later work I wish to highlight her work after I Love to You (1996), where I believe she makes a turn away from simply critiquing androcentric thinking and begins to formulate positive representations of feminine gendered or sexuate identity.
98 Irigaray, KW, 145.
99 Irigaray explains “It is movement and transformation that limit the empire of my ego.” See Idem, 9.
100 See Chapter 1, section 4.1 “Irigaray’s Strategy: The Negative.”
She suggests that religious structures commemorated by rituals of sacrifice, scapegoating, and substitution fail to think the difference. In contrast, she points toward a religious universal horizon she calls a “cosmic temporality and rhythm,” or a sacred regard for natural shifts in time, growth, and cyclical life, the conditions of life itself where finite and infinite are brought together. As argued in chapter four, she is careful to clarify that this shift toward nature is not an “unmediated naturalness,” or an obligation for women to have children and regress into animality, signs of what she calls “a failure to respect nature.” Rather she is seeking an “art of the sexual, or sexual culture,” where civil law safeguards and corresponds with a respect for nature and sexed bodies.

Moreover, Irigaray’s version of religion is also uniquely feminist in that she is attempting to formulate an understanding of religion that moves beyond the trap of phallocentrism. She opens the door for religious communities to reflect on how Western patriarchal notions of transcendence, truth ideals, and Being may overdetermine religions whose practitioners may desire to move away from Western identity and practice. She also raises our awareness of the dangers of assimilating alterity. Her case in point is the woman as “other,” and in order to be an irreducible other, we must abandon attempts to speculate or “gaze” in order to interrogate or assimilate the other into an economy of the Self-Same. Specifically, she offers a spiritual humanism with democratic political rights for particular

---

101 Irigaray, SG, 75
102 Ibid., 3.
103 The phallus signifies the ultimate symbol of subjectivity, normativity, and the central point of reference. Female pleasure or jouissance is posited as a way to refuse the sexuate of objectivity of male desire and subjectivity. See Irigaray, TS, 39, 60-2, 67, 183, 188.
individuals, such as ethnic and religious minorities seeking basic rights of existence. Since her philosophical structure is one of a natural dimorphic structure of human experience, she offers a way for citizens to relate to diverse others without constricting those relations, but offering a practical guide of being-toward-life. Therefore, people can eschew religious practices which cull, threaten, or violate lives of diverse people, calling into question the reliance of religious language as a legitimate basis to overcome primal rights of existence. Her hope, especially in *Democracy Begins Between Two*, was to offer a way multinational and multicultural people could secure political protection apart from an absolutist point of sexual indifference, particularly in securing the protection of woman as subjects in their own right to demarcate this co-civil society.

4.1. *The Religious Other*

Rather than citing religion as the problem, it is a culture of sexuate indifference that continues to plague religious discourse and other discourses or languages where male domination occurs. Rather than reducing religion to violence, she identifies violence as posited within a logic of the Self-Same subject, or intolerance for irreducible alterity. In teasing apart the logic of sameness from the discourse of religion, she posits religion anew as an interior relation to one's own "natural" or living giving temporal rhythm, as well as a location for collective ethical relations with others. I want to draw three formative suggestions that I think Irigaray's work helps point us toward as we rethink democratic civil life.

First, we can extend the domination, oppression, and repression of the female "other" to the religious other who exceeds the logic of the Self-Same history
of Western metaphysics. Recall, Irigaray cited a repression of the origin of life, as man abandoned Plato’s cave for the immaterial realm of the forms. Her retelling warns of the blindness of the womb that gives birth and offers the passageway between the material and the immaterial. We can similarly ask, how do our cultures deny different cultural and religious practices that give life to people in favor of an ultimate ideality, and how have we failed to think the passageway between the material and immaterial? Irigaray’s work might situate us toward spiritually revaluing practices that nourish, like a womb, and perpetuate life, such as food preparation, water purification, and the rights of those who grow and produce food, such as the bronze laborers Plato easily glosses in favor of the philosopher-king. I am specifically thinking of Vandana Shiva’s insistence that culturally perceived poverty or lack of Western “enlightenment” creates a paradigm where the practices and livelihood of women and children who produce food globally are now at risk.104

Second, Irigaray’s work also warns against the Western privileging of the ocular scientific gaze. With so much trust in what we can see and interrogate, have we created a culture that is intolerant of what cannot be seen? In religious practice I am thinking of rites or beliefs where things are left deliberately hidden, or veiled, such as obvious cultural artifacts like the hijab,105 or the sweat lodge, where we begin to develop an intolerance for such symbols in our democratic societies.

105 I am hesitant to mention these culture artifacts because they are not my own and I am aware of the diverse debates that occurs amongst those who practice the veil, hijab, burqa, and niqab. My point isn’t to imperialize or Orientalize the conversation between Westerners and Muslims, but merely to interrogate a Western response of intolerance toward symbols that veil or keep hidden from the assumed enlightenment of the Western gaze. I want to be careful not to culturally essentialize people whose relation to the veil is complex, diffuse, and whose interests and values can
Third, Irigaray’s analysis of woman’s consciousness, assimilated into the universal consciousness, warns us against developing a Self-Same universal citizen over and against the singularity of the individual, the family, and cultural practices that shape and give value to citizens. Her work also warns us from sacrificing, scapegoating, or substituting certain religions on the altar of democratic peace. The move to obliterate religion in favor of secularism is, in many ways, a perpetuation of a culture of scapegoating in favor of universal Self-Same. No religion is a monolith and even within the most absolute religious discourses, there are pockets of dissent, subversion, reformation, and reorientation within faith communities where sacred and ethical align.

While Irigaray’s reflections apply most aptly to those who mirror her own religious journey, of post-Catholic to spiritual humanist, those from other spiritual traditions may find her religious claims less compelling. It is also somewhat true that her use of the word “gender” or sexuate loses traction and legitimacy with global feminists and postcolonial, critical race feminists who hear the word “gender” as referring only to one’s physiological sexuality, rather than a culture of multiple desire, which is where I think Irigaray’s work is meant to signal a category that is diffuse as the bodies that philosophize.

Yet, these drawbacks do not in any way diminish the importance of her work in the struggle for democratic life that materially and immaterially substantiates human flourishing in body, mind, and spirit. I think her offering of a non-sacrificial
logic that pertains to embodied persons and their legal and cultural recognition offers people who wish to remain religious a possible avenue for exploring what practices, rites, and beliefs already offer such divergent divine modes, and she has given philosophers and theologians the wherewithal to receive such gifts of practice and life that many already offer our world, and which may be our best means to democratic peace.

5. Conclusion: The Way of Love

In this final chapter I have examined Irigaray’s socio-politico-ethical claims and have applied her theory toward contemporary moral problems, such as environmental ethics and animal liberation, noting how sexuate difference is a theory that can “think the difference” of our most assumed behaviors which appropriate natural resources and the animal other for our own interests, desires, and aims. I have also argued that Irigarayan ethics asks us to define our own limits (as our bodies inform us that we have such limits) and then to consider proper relations with ecological and animal others with such limits as a safeguard for ourselves and the other. Sexuate difference has been expanded beyond the case of women’s liberation, and has been used to break down a metaphysics of sameness or logic of the Self-Same in order to create a conceptual “twoness” which allows for the rupture of multiplicity, rather than restatement of one plus one plus one, a false multiplicity.

I have argued that Irigaray’s work in religion also offers democracy a way to think ethically and spiritually without necessarily assuming religion must be complicit with the oppression of diverse others and resorting to a hegemony of
secularism alone. Indeed, it is her work on disrupting absolute Being that makes possible diverse modes of spiritual expression that are compatible with flourishing and becoming of diverse others, an infinite which is in touch with nature and culture.

Irigaray’s structures, I have suggested, offer us robust and practical ways to engage and reformulate the question of the citizen, how we conceive of ourselves individually, and how we safeguard ourselves collectively. While profoundly theoretical, her work is also ordinary and political, while it is attentive to all the conditions that are necessary for a free and equal state—namely, difference as difference and the protection of being-toward-life.

Finally, I read this difference as a celebration of wonder in its full exquisite array, a wonder that resists the urge to domesticate and assimilate into the Self-Same. To connect in wonder with, or the be-tween, is the way of love she offers us culturally and personally. In her own words, philosophy is again “the wisdom of love,” or to know love, not simply the privileged location of mental wisdom (mind) which western philosophy claimed to be the way of love. But this reorientation to a way of love makes sense of her political insistence for the impossible—a striving towards a bodily wisdom (body) in which be(com)ing woman and be(com)ing man can be(come) together in the divine of Love. To close with love is the opening of life.

---

106 Irigaray, WL, 2.