



Luce Irigaray's Philosophy of the Child and Philosophical Thinking for a New Era

Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir¹

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Abstract

In her book *To be Born* (2017), Luce Irigaray offers a novel philosophy of the child. Instead of viewing the child as a bearer of rights and in need of adequate care as is common in contemporary philosophies of childhood, Irigaray presents the child as a metaphor of a new human being which represents natural belonging. The rearticulation of the human has been ongoing in Irigaray's philosophy from its beginnings with its efforts to give voice to the excluded, silenced, repressed feminine. Irigaray's phenomenological restructuring of subjectivity in her philosophy of sexual difference is taken to a new level with her philosophy of the child. Her conception of the child is interpreted here in light of the experiential and affective turn within phenomenology and cognitive sciences about philosophical thinking as embodied and embedded thinking for a new era. Irigaray sheds light on the silencing and repressing of the child within us in an effort to enable us as adult beings to think from and with it. Philosophical thinking needs to be more consciously connected with the embodied sources of thought that are already present in early infancy and continue to be present in adult thinking as neglected or repressed experiential and affective layers of thought. Irigaray's philosophy of the child is a basis for a methodology of embodied philosophical thinking such as has been developed within Claire Petitmengin's microphenomenology and within Eugene Gendlin's methodology of philosophical thinking from the felt sense.

Keywords Philosophy of embodied thinking · Philosophy of the child · The experiential and affective turn · Touch

Children have in recent years become important voices in current global, political debates, perhaps most notably regarding issues of climate change and education for girls with Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai as the best known poster children for such interventions. These interventions are very much in the spirit of The United Nations

✉ Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir
sigrthor@hi.is

¹ Department of Philosophy, Gimli, University of Iceland, IS-101 Reykjavik, Iceland

Convention on the Rights of the Child, setting out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of every child, and emphasizing the rights of children to express their opinions and be listened to. The child is in times of the UN Declaration primarily seen as a bearer of human rights that protect childhood as a means to grow and mature regardless of a child's gender, race, ability, or other variables. In the current debates, children like Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg have been viewed as speaking truth to power, raising awareness, and mobilizing protest, rather than as being directly politically involved. There is a reason for protecting children from direct involvement in politics against the history of examples of the abuse of children for political purposes such as in totalitarian states where children are mobilized in political youth movements or in the atrocious cases of child soldiers and war-related sexual abuse of children. Without being directly engaged in politics, children should nevertheless be able to express themselves publicly and be listened to because their perspective is essential to many political issues. Greta Thunberg has compared her own activism with the child in H.C. Anderson's tale of the emperor's new clothes where the little boy speaks out loud the obvious truth that the adults do not want to see or admit. This idea echoes Christian ideas about innocent children who speak truth because they are not politically strategic in their thinking and they do not speak out of a position of power. Political efforts therefore aim to enable children to be such voices that speak up and to educate them in ways that will allow them to become active and responsible citizens who will ultimately contribute to a better world. In that sense children are from a human rights perspective primarily seen as beings that need to be fostered, schooled, and cared for in ways that protect them as children and prepare them for adulthood.

Even if we consider ourselves to be enlightened about children and their needs, childhood is still under massive assault. Greta Thunberg began the school strike for climate so that present day children can have a future rather than disasters or an ecological collapse. Malala Yousafzai has been fighting against the repression of girls in parts of the world where they are not allowed to or able to be educated. The global sexual abuse of children and youth is becoming more apparent and visible in times of #MeToo. Social media platforms are causing harm to kids, like former Facebook employee Frances Haugen testified before a U.S. Senate committee. 'Facebook knows that they are leading young users to anorexia content,' Haugen said, and added that despite the company's claims that Instagram can help connect kids who may feel isolated, the rates of suicide and depression among teenagers are on the rise.¹

I would like to argue that Irigaray's philosophy of childhood offers a different approach to only listening to the voices of children that speak out on behalf of children, although it is vital to take them seriously. She enters the discussion about children and childhood at a different level. If we really want to be able to hear what children are experiencing, one vital precondition is that we are able to listen to the child within us. The child within us has a philosophical-epistemological meaning for Irigaray that is to be distinguished from an everyday psychological understanding of the term of the 'inner child.'

¹ Becky Upham, "Facebook comes under fire after whistleblower and leaked documents reveal negative impact on girls", *Everyday Health*, October 9, 2021. <https://www.everydayhealth.com/public-health/facebook-comes-under-fire-after-whistleblower-and-leaked-documents-reveal-negative-impact-on-young-girls/>

A richer understanding of how infants and young children sense and relate to others and the world, allows to enable them better to flourish. What is needed to improve the lives of children globally (in addition to socio-economic justices that secure safety, health, and flourishing) is a better understanding of how children 'tick' and how they sense and think. A richer understanding of the child as a relational, embodied, vulnerable, and dependent person offers better preconditions for upbringing and education, like many of the contributors to the collection of articles on topics of Irigaray's book *To be Born* (Irigaray 2017, TBB) discuss (Irigaray et al., 2019, *Towards a New Human Being* (TNHB).) If children are better taken care of and better understood as a special kind at home, in families, and in society at large, the possibility of having more content adults in the future is greater.

The focus of my reading of Irigaray's philosophy of the child goes however in a different direction, as I will argue that attending to the child within is not only about protecting childhood from damage. Attending to the child within is for us, as philosophically thinking beings, about connecting with levels of thought that are developed in infancy and childhood and that have been neglected in our epistemological understanding of philosophical thinking and knowing. This aspect needs to be understood much more precisely than merely as childlike wonder and spontaneity which often have a ring of naivety to it. It is also not about cultivating childlike innocence of children dating back to Jesus' praising of it. Like I will argue, children's innocence in this epistemological context means for Irigaray an opening of space for embodied thinking, and as such Irigaray's idea is a reformulation of the phenomenological epoché, or bracketing, as a process of setting aside assumptions and beliefs:

For it to be achieved, a place must be set, a sort of clearing of innocence where the not yet happened can be welcomed, heard, and in which it can germinate from a virgin space continuously won back. In this way, our flesh, our being, become revived and fertilized towards a new blossoming. (TBB 96)

We ourselves as adult thinkers have to take the first steps in this direction by opening ourselves up to our lived experience. For this reason, the body is for Irigaray the bridge 'from past humanity to a new humanity' (TBB 85). In *To Be Born* Irigaray widens the traditional epistemological framework by incorporating childlike knowing and relating into it. Childlike forms of knowing and understanding open several new horizons at the same time within epistemology and phenomenology. The political implications of this approach are vast, among others the overcoming of one-sided mental hierarchies and exclusions that have made Western conceptions of cognition narrow and disconnected from being in touch with sensitive environments and embodied experience.

A Continuity Interrupted

By introducing the child as a metaphor for a new method of philosophical thinking may at first sound like offering a conception of philosophy leading to regression and some form of neo-naivety. We become thinking beings precisely by being able

to learn to articulate, verbalize, differentiate, distinguish, and reflect the sense certainty that characterizes infant perception according to Hegel's phenomenology of the itinerary of human consciousness from infancy to maturity as a journey towards the concept and abstract philosophical reflection. On this journey it is necessary in Hegel's view to break 'the child's self-will and thereby eradicate his purely natural and sensuous self' (*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §174 of the "Ethical Life"). Even though we judge this statement now as representative of an authoritarian pedagogical style of the early 18th century, there would for Irigaray still be truth to it in a broader sense than that of a mere tyrannical rearing style of the past. There is a disconnection from our natural belonging that Irigaray views as a core feature of our contemporary predicament in our relationship to ourselves as human beings, to others and to the earth. We are born into the world, into such relations, but between 'our original experience of being in relations and its so-called cultural working-out, a continuity has been interrupted so that the modes of meeting which are proposed to us, and even imposed on us, do not ensure the cultivation of the first physical emotions and excitement' (TBB 66).

In *To be Born* Irigaray proceeds to uncover this continuity and the legacy of dualistic, metaphysical thinking in abstract and representational modes of thought that interrupt or obstruct it. Her philosophy of the child is hence not political in terms of human rights and social justice in a narrow sense. Her philosophy of the child is an examination of how we violate and repress rather than allow and cultivate the connection to our natural belonging that we have immediate access to in infancy and a close connection with in childhood. This level of our relation to others and the world is not a stage that we outgrow as we develop in our perception and thinking, but a sensory and embodied level of thought that remains within us, ready to be reconnected with in our adult ways of thinking. From that perspective, the reason for our disconnection in our relations to ourselves, others, and the world is a disconnection to what is 'closest to us: our own lived experience' (Petitmengin, 2021, 172). Like the micro-phenomenologist Claire Petitmengin argues, our current way of life and the ecological disaster it is bringing about has in a very basic sense to do with this disconnection. She describes it further as being a mode in which we are 'cut off from ourselves, from what vibrates and lives within us, and this disconnection has catastrophic consequences in all areas of human existence' (Petitmengin, 2021, 172). Retrieving contact with our experience 'is the precondition that would allow us to regain our lucidity, our dignity, and the courage to change our model of society' (Petitmengin, 2021, 172).

Irigaray discusses how we are born as sensuous selves but learn to repress our natural belonging in a culture that is still permeated by an outdated dualistic metaphysics of body and mind. *To be Born* is therefore about the child within us, the child that was born into a culture that represses their natural belonging, and the possible rebirth or reawakening of that part of the inner child in ourselves. Her philosophy of the child is therefore no less about adults, and in a more specific sense about philosophically thinking adults and in that sense it is about the birth of a philosophy that is attuned to *phusis*, to our natural belonging, out of the body of the child that is within us. This idea of philosophical thinking is by no means restricted to academic philosophy. Philosophical thinking holds a prime place for Irigaray as a discourse of

discourses. But in the context of her philosophy of the child, it becomes evident that she introduces a new method of embodied thinking that signals a new era of being human, and in that sense it is a way of thinking that is a possibility for all of us.

Connecting Back to Nietzsche

Irigaray explicitly states that her philosophy of the child carries forward Nietzsche's philosophy of the child as a new beginning for culture as presented in his book *Thus spoke Zarathustra*.² For both Nietzsche and Irigaray, our culture calls for a new type of human being and a new way of thinking that replaces the old man of the West (Irigaray et al., 2019). Traditional concepts of the human being have in recent decades been much under attack for being anthropocentric, sexist, racist, ableist, excluding groups in positions of 'others', categorizing attributes associated with them as non-human or less than human. The rethinking of the human that Irigaray undertakes with her philosophy of the child does neither entail a return to any traditional version of humanism nor does it imply a total abandonment of it. Like Judith Butler writes, 'the category of the "human" retains within itself' the workings of powers that have conditioned our understanding of the human 'as part of its historicity' but 'the history of the category is not over, and the "human" is not captured once and for all' (Butler, 2004, 12). For critics of traditional, exclusive notions of the human, its rearticulation begins 'at the point where the excluded speak to and from such a category' (Butler, 2004, 13).

A rearticulation of the human has been ongoing in Irigaray's philosophy from its beginnings with its efforts to give voice to the excluded, silenced, repressed feminine, rooted in a denial of our maternal origin in predominant strands of Western philosophy.³ With her philosophy of the child, Irigaray sheds light on the silencing and repressing of the child within us in an effort to enable us as adult beings to think from and with it. Her approach is not psychological or therapeutic in the sense of connecting with the individual inner child to help us heal a trauma the child may have suffered in infancy, childhood, and adolescence. In spite of her training in psychoanalysis, Irigaray's approach in TBB does not consist in addressing the psychological needs of the child that have not or insufficiently been met.

For Irigaray, the point of connection with Nietzsche's call for a new human being (which he, according to Irigaray, wrongly named the *Übermensch*) is that he understood how traditional conceptions of thinking and knowing are cut off from the real, leading us to practice thinking that disconnects it from sensible perception (TBB 10). For Nietzsche the child is a metaphor or symbol for a human

² For a comparative analysis of Nietzsche's and Irigaray's understanding of a new human being see Mitcheson, Katrina, "On Nietzsche and pregnancy: The beginning of the genesis of a new human being", in L. Irigaray, M. O'Brien, & C. Hadjioannou (Eds.), *Towards a New Human Being*, Cham, 2019, 199-220.

³ In *To be Born* Irigaray also discusses embodied thinking from the perspective of sexual difference, especially in the last chapters on love and giving birth to each other. As I focus on the philosophy of the child in my interpretation here, there is not space to discuss the sexual aspects of it.

being that is body and soul, implying that cognition is embodied and connected to lived experience. The metaphor of the child is meant to be inspirational for reenchanting sterile, abstract philosophical thinking that has become disembodied and disconnected. The child symbolizes for Nietzsche how we need to liberate us from moralistic views that condemn the body and do not acknowledge it as part of philosophical thinking. In that sense the child stands for how we need to learn to become beginners again in philosophy, to think freshly as embodied and embedded beings rather than being disembodied in our thinking and thus lost in abstraction. With her carrying forward of Nietzsche's philosophy of the child, Irigaray opens a new perspective on the figure of the child in Nietzsche's philosophy. The embodied child not only interacts in perception and in movement with the world and is a figure for criticizing disembodied, dualistic epistemological notions of cognitive neutrality and objectivity. Moreover, Irigaray takes Nietzsche's conception of the child as a symbol for embodied thinking further by accentuating more explicitly embedded thinking as part of it. As embedded beings we are of the earth and intertwined with all living things. We are also interactive with the environments we are situated in be it a house or an online meeting room, although Irigaray does not address that directly. Her understanding of the new human being is nevertheless critical of a transhumanistic understanding of the human as embedded in a technological, cybernetic environment because her philosophy of the child contains an appeal to cultivate embodied knowing that is needed to protect us from being overly dominated by artificial intelligence. Touch, how the infant touches its way through the world is therefore central to the conception of the child in *To be Born*. The concepts of touch as touching and being touched as well as the concept of self-affection are key to this philosophy of the child as metaphor for philosophical thinking that is attuned to the real. With her philosophy of thinking that touches, Irigaray develops Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of touch further in her efforts to modify and complement the traditional vision-orientation of philosophical thinking, which, as Elizabeth Grosz has discussed, is less embodied than touch as a base of thinking and knowing (Grosz, 1994).

The Affective and Experiential Turn in Phenomenology: the Touch and Being Touched

The phenomenology of touch is central to the experiential and affective turn within philosophical epistemology. As part of this turn, Irigaray's philosophy of the child is a basis for a methodology of embodied philosophical thinking. Irigaray has not elaborated a concise methodology of embodied thinking such as the micro-phenomenological interview-method of accessing lived experience as a source for philosophical and scientific thinking. There is nevertheless a great affinity between Irigaray's descriptions of accessing experience with basic assumptions of micro-phenomenology. Her descriptions of self-affective embodied thinking invite further more to be read in light of Eugene Gendlin's

philosophy of the felt sense and his focusing-based methodology of connecting with the 'felt sense' as a felt meaning of an issue or a thought⁴:

Focusing is not an invitation to drop thinking and just feel. That would leave our feelings unchanged. Focusing begins with that odd and little known 'felt sense,' and then we think verbally, logically, or with image forms—but in such a way that the felt sense shifts. When there is a body shift, we sense that our usual kind of thinking has come together with body-mind, and has succeeded in letting body-mind move a step. (Gendlin, 1982, 57)⁵

The goal of my interpretation is to think Irigaray's philosophy of the child as a theory of embodied philosophical thinking further by examining and discussing how her descriptions of embodied thinking can be made more explicit by viewing them in light of basic assumptions of Petitmengin's and Gendlin's methodologies (Gendlin, 2004), but both these pioneering methodologies have roots in phenomenology like Irigaray's philosophy does.

With her idea of the touch, Irigaray's philosophy of embodied thinking can be situated within new phenomenology. If Husserl, as a major founder of phenomenology, defined its task with his call for going 'back to the things themselves' (Husserl, 2001, 168), his focus was not so much on the experience of the phenomenon itself as the transcendental conditions for the experience of it. Later phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty, Herman Schmitz, and Luce Irigaray have elaborated further what it means that phenomenology is a project and a methodology to discover or rediscover things and phenomena of real life. The basic assumption of phenomenology from Husserl to later phenomenologists is that we have lost sight of phenomena because of how we have been conditioned to perceive things in certain ways by objectifying ways of knowing and technological forms of life. The phenomenological method is therefore a kind of excavation or an accessing of experience of beings that as embodied and embedded sense and feel things and are affected and touched by them. It is primarily Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of touch that is a point of Irigaray's departure for her conception of the child as a self-affective being that interacts through touch with others and the world. Merleau-Ponty's famous description in his *Phenomenology of Perception* of the hand that touches the other hand illustrates how the knowing subject and the known object are to be seen as intertwined rather than as separate.

Irigaray's widening of Merleau-Ponty's conception of touch is partly based on a critique of what she views as his mechanical idea of sensory perception by a 'Sentient in general before a sensible in general.' In her view, he neglects the specificity of what happens in the perception in addition to 'the mediation of the sensory

⁴ I thank Steinunn Hreinsdottir, a fellow researcher in the international research project Embodied Critical Thinking (www.ect.hi.is and www.trainingect.com), for pointing out to me the affinity of self-affective embodied thinking with Gendlin's conception of the felt sense.

⁵ Gendlin developed with Mary Hendricks a methodology of embodied philosophical thinking on the basis of focusing that they called Thinking at the Edge. Thinking at the Edge is a methodology to be used in philosophy and scientific and scholarly research. See E.T. Gendlin, "Introduction to 'Thinking at the Edge'" *The Folio*, 19(1), 1-8, http://previous.focusing.org/gendlin/docs/gol_2160.html

perceptions' (TBB 26). With her own metaphors of the lips that touch each other, Irigaray extends Merleau-Ponty's phenomenon of the hands that touch each other by emphasizing introceptive perception of the inner and the outer (Irigaray, 1980). The lips represent a cognitive eroticism that is 'more or less internal and porous in relation to the outside world, to the other.' The lips are a metaphor for a morphology which can 'close while remaining open,' requiring 'open structures and meanings which can conform to a living growth' (Irigaray, 2020, 32; Fuchs & de Jaegher, 2009).⁶

Touch in the context of an embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended cognition (Clark & Chalmers, 1998) is much wider than mere haptic touch which is also that aspect of touch that has most to do with control and possible abuse. In times of the COVID-19 pandemic, touch is for example associated with contagion, infection, and disease. In line with a wider idea of touch within the embodied conception of knowing discussed here, we are touched in thinking when some thought resonates within something in us. We can touch others with our words, in a way that can hurt them, console them, soothe them, or enlighten them. Thoughts have a meaning for us when they strike a chord in us. Touch is an embodied sense (in addition to the five senses) that Ratcliffe describes as background touch or a background sense of belonging to the world (Ratcliffe, 2013). The concept of touch refers therefore to our sense of being situated in a world in a subjective way. Finding oneself touched is a kind of first wave of an inner dialogue with oneself, of being 'two in one' like Hannah Arendt describes philosophical thinking (Arendt, 1981). Irigaray therefore wants to draw attention to the 'relation between our two different beings' which is largely neglected in our culture (TBB 84). We are moved by something that motivates us to think about it. Coming to oneself in thinking is also a precondition for entering into a philosophical dialogue with another subject. Embodied philosophical thinking implies a way of dialoging philosophically in a different way. In her book *Conversations* Irigaray states that '[e]ntering into dialogue requires us to use a language which touches, which involves sensibility, which preserves the role of the other in the constitution of meaning' (Irigaray, 2008, 33; Irigaray et al., 2019).

The infant is important for the notion of touch because babies learn about the world through touching and later putting things in the mouth, and therefore the senses of touch and hearing are developed earlier than vision. Cognitive sciences findings on embodied cognition have indeed shown the limits of a vision-centric approach to knowledge in our philosophical tradition (Damasio, 2021; Varela et al., 1991). The emphasis on vision in traditional ideas about cognition and thinking has contributed to upholding a strict distinction between perception that is directed outwards to an object and an internally directed perception of the body, like Matthew Ratcliffe argues (Ratcliffe, 2008). Irigaray is aware of that when she writes that 'the parameters which rule over our traditional logic –visibility, face to face or representation– are no longer really helpful, and it is the way of getting in touch itself which remains inconceivable' (TBB 84). Embodied philosophical thinking is a path that is 'more inspired and paved by listening and touch than by watchful eyes' (TBB 83). As an inner dialogue, embodied philosophical

⁶ Irigaray's philosophy of interactive knowing could be developed further in the direction of recent research into enactive intersubjectivity. See Fuchs, Thomas, and Hanne de Jaegher, "Enactive Intersubjectivity: Participatory Sense-making and Mutual Incorporation." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 2009, 8:4, 465-86.i

thinking is hence an inner listening to a felt sense for an issue. Gendlin describes how this approach can be worked out methodologically as a way of mediating between a felt meaning and a verbal articulation of it:

There is a new method here, not only for personal concerns but also for theory and science. Logical thinking stays within whatever 'conceptual boxes' it starts with. It has only the different, competing interpretations, assumptions, viewpoints—and one must stay within one of these. When felt sense is the touchstone, one can try out all kinds of different concepts without being locked into any one set. This is what scientists (now rarely) do when they come up with something new after living with a problem for a long time. Rather than using concepts only, one can return to one's un-split felt sense of whatever one is working on. (Gendlin, 1982, 57)

Connecting with the Child Within

Discussing philosophical thinking from the affective-experiential perspective of infancy and childhood means presenting a different way of connecting and orientating oneself in thinking in-with-about the world. Irigaray's notion of the child is informed by early childhood theories of how the infant acquires a sense of self in relation with itself, others, and the world. That does not entail disqualifying adult ways of thinking and philosophizing or proposing that maturity and wisdom are not useful ingredients of philosophical thinking. They obviously are and always will be. Nor does this mean that abstract, logical, representational thinking is redundant. We will continue to think philosophically in patterns, structures and in line with logical rules, and the goal of philosophy will continue to be to offer comprehensive, conceptual clarification.

The experiential affective turn should also not be understood as a return to some precultural, natural origin but Irigaray's use of the term of 'origin' may invite misunderstanding it in such a way. Like Gendlin rightly points out, the human individual as an embodied being is not conceivable 'apart from culture' because man's 'animal functions are culturally patterned. The individual self develops out of an interpersonal, linguistic and social matrix. The individual is cultural, social and interpersonal before he is an individual' (Gendlin, 1967, 141; Thorgeirsdottir & Karlsdottir, 2020). Yet, like Gendlin and Irigaray both argue, the felt, embodied, experienced, affective, tacit, dimensions of knowing get lost due to traditional notions about the split between the 'subjective' and the 'objective.' The subjective and the objective are intertwined layers of cognition that are rooted in a situated and embodied context of living in today's world (Schoeller & Thorgeirsdottir, 2019). Connecting with embodied layers of thinking takes us out of an auto-pilot mode of thinking that Irigaray claims exhausts our vitality for 'want of language which tells and cultivates life' (TBB 11, 52). Life, so Irigaray, can 'exist and develop only from an unrepresented,' and hence authentic thinking comes from a felt place of meaning within ourselves, our embodied situatedness that allows us to articulate something in a fresh way (TBB 92).

The cognitive developmental stages we go through in childhood on our way to adulthood cannot be understood as stages that dissolve when a stage is surpassed and a new stage is entered, like some theories of cognitive and psychological development have it. (Gheaus et al., 2019) It is rather so that each stage remains operative as an integrated level in our thinking. In light of that, the training of philosophical thinking as abstract, logical, and representational thinking lacks cultivating a connection with lived experience. Any original, fresh thinking has some direct reference to lived experience of its creator. It would for example be hard to claim, if not counter-intuitive, that this particular and novel philosophy of the child has nothing to do with Irigaray's own childhood experiences. Yet we have come to pretend and even assume that this source of thinking, the thinker's intuition and deep rooted sense for a topic, is more or less irrelevant. With her conception of the child, Irigaray portrays a way of thinking that is different from mainstream notions of the detached, disembodied, and disconnected way of abstract and representational thinking. Philosophical thinking needs to be invigorated by being connected more consciously with the embodied sources of thought that are already present in early infancy and continue to be present in adult thinking as neglected or repressed experiential and affective layers of our thinking. This does not only entail a return to sensory modalities of thought. Being conscious is not the same as sensing like Damasio has argued based on his neuroscientific research into the interworkings of feeling and knowing (Damasio, 2021). The nervous systems are basic to the development of feelings, and feelings, like Damasio argues, open the way to consciousness. Such findings of neurosciences about how the mind is embodied and embedded display the need to develop better methodologies of training thinking on the basis of such findings. We need no less than to 'restructure human subjectivity' like Irigaray claims (TNHB, xviii).

To Come to Ourselves in Thinking

Irigaray's phenomenological rehabilitation and restructuring of subjectivity in her philosophy of sexuate difference is taken to a new level with her philosophy of the child, by pluralizing and individualizing difference. Although the individual is socially and culturally formed, there is a particular core to every individual that becomes apparent right at birth. This core is not only the uniqueness of every being in terms of situatedness but also a will to live and a capacity for self-determination. This feature is the condition that makes every new individual born capable of adding a fresh and a unique perspective to the world. For that reason, Irigaray points out how the newborn child is an autonomous being. This may strike odd because we are used to view autonomy as something mature and a result of proper education and upbringing. Yet Irigaray opens her book *To be Born* with a notion of autonomy that is more primal as a kind of life force and a kind of wonder:

Whatever the unknown factors of our conception, we have wanted to be born. Our existence cannot be the outcome of a mere chance, and our will to live clearly manifested itself at the time of our birth. We were the ones who determined its moment. We were also the ones who gave birth to ourselves through

our first breathing. In spite of the long dependence of the little human on others for its survival, it gave life to itself to come into the world, and it gave life to itself alone. Even if it has been conceived by two and it began its human existence in the body of an other, it is the one who, alone, decided to come into the universe of the living. (TBB 1)

Obviously, the precise time of birth is mystery that no science has been able to predict. A normal birth usually happens in the 38th to 42nd week of pregnancy, but no midwife or doctor has the means to predict precisely when a child will be born. Irigaray thus presents a speculative hypothesis about a scientific enigma by claiming that it is the child alone that decides when it enters the world. She also claims that the child's first breathing outside the maternal body is the first sign of its autonomous human potential.

Irigaray points out something novel here, namely how the newborn has to decide when they will embark on a dangerous journey to be born. Education and upbringing should therefore center on enabling this individual freedom to be oneself, in addition to fulfilling the needs of the child for nurture and care. Irigaray's conception of the child as a desiring and autonomous living being is crucial to her philosophy of the child as a model of embodied transformative thinking. If Hegel—to refer to his philosophy again as a contrast—illustrated the human driving force for freedom and social progress with his model of the battle of the master and the slave, Irigaray poses the child which is born as the 'young hero' taking a risk and fighting for life and freedom (TBB 8). Giving birth has for the most part of human history been high risk for birthing women as well although thinkers of risk and battles of life and death like Hegel were blind to it.

Irigaray takes this idea of risk that child takes at birth into philosophy because it is about thinking for oneself, to become oneself in thinking, and becoming 'oneself requires as much heroism as being born' (TBB 42). If we do not only want to repeat what others have said, combine positions that others have come up with but really think our own thoughts, we need to connect with experiential and affective sources of our thought for they are the knowledge and wisdom we have gathered from early on and make us who we are. We are a living process, a continuous becoming. Every person has a unique perspective on the world, and therefore any newborn, like Hannah Arendt also pointed out with her philosophy of natality, may be someone who comes up with something new and important for the world (Arendt, 1958, 8-9). Philosophers, like everybody else, must attempt to be and become themselves in order to connect with the source of their own thoughts. For Irigaray, self-affection is the royal road to accessing one's own thought. The term self-affection has nothing to do with narcissism or auto-eroticism in a narrow sense but be described as the 'felt sense' as defined by Eugene Gendlin:

A felt sense is not a mental experience but a physical one. Physical. A bodily awareness of a situation or person or event. An internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time—encompasses it and communicates it to you all at once rather than detail by detail. Think of it as a taste, if you like, or a great musical chord that makes you feel a powerful impact, a big round unclear feeling. A felt

sense doesn't come to you in the form of thoughts or words or other separate units, but as a single (though often puzzling and very complex) bodily feeling. (Gendlin, 1982, 15)

This kind of sensing into as a form of deeper thinking begins with a meditative step that Irigaray defines as re-touching. She refers to the morphology of the body, of the two lips that touch each other, and imagery of Buddhist meditation of fingers touching each other, eyelids closing and touching each other. Silence is also a precondition for this form of being with the neglected layers of our thoughts. In *To Be Born* we find this description which explains what she means by self-affection:

Contemplating Buddha in meditation can lead us to glimpse what it is about. The matter consists of calmly staying in oneself, being silent, preferably with one's eyes closed, trying to perceive and concentrate in this way one's own inner energy. To succeed in this, I suggest focussing, at least in the first instance, one's attention on the perception of one's lips, one's hands and one's eyelids touching one another. Such a gesture—that I call 're-touch'—contributes to realizing what our limits are and the thresholds between the inside and the outside of the space that is ours, something which favors a repose in ourselves. It is possible to teach children how to practice self-affection in order to help them to develop, while remaining themselves, from their own energy and will so that they can ensure in this way an inner centring. (TBB, 17)

Situated and Felt Knowing

The meditative state Irigaray describes is more than just a mindfulness exercise in breathing and calming the mind. For Irigaray this is an entry point for inventing a path in our thinking, 'a path in the opening of a "not that", "not there", "not yet", "not knowable," "not appropriable" While advancing, we must continuously make room ... not only for imagining or representing what appears – as our tradition has taught us – but also within ourselves – what our logic did not teach us. We have thus to invent the path' (TBB 81). Embarking on this path is like an opening of a door to a room where one is free to think and make sense for oneself, and where we allow thoughts to arise, and welcome them like a child, as something that is part of oneself but yet different and other. One approaches the thought with a friendly, non-judgemental attitude that allows it to form and show itself, like Gendlin describes it:

A felt sense is usually not just there, it must form. You have to know how to let it form by attending inside your body. When it comes, it is at first unclear, fuzzy. By certain steps it can come into focus and also change. A felt sense is the body's sense of a particular problem or situation. A felt sense is not an emotion. We recognize emotions. We know when we are angry, or sad, or glad. A felt sense is something you do not at first recognize— it is vague and murky. It feels meaningful, but not known. It is a bodysense of meaning. When

you learn how to focus, you will discover that the body finding its own way provides its own answers to many of your problems. (Gendlin, 1982, 7)

We as contemporary philosophers need to emancipate ourselves in thinking. We belong to a malecentric tradition and culture of philosophy that determine our academic profession, its institutional styles as well as the content and basic concepts of philosophy (Thorgeirsdottir, 2020). Irigaray therefore rightly asks: 'Why does our culture constrain us to hold a discourse about a presumed objectivity of the world without taking into account our own objectivity, including at the level of moods, feelings, sensitive life' (TBNH, 251).

Feminist epistemologists like Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway have discussed for decades the need for extended objectivity (Haraway, 1988). Such objectivity is about acknowledging how one's own cognitive perspective is situated and positioned. Social context and tradition are part and parcel of how knowledge emerges and is produced. We are situated beings because we are embodied beings born in a place and a time. Yet the kind of situated knowledge I propose here with the help of Irigaray, Nietzsche, Gendlin, Petitmengin, developmental psychology and cognitive sciences takes the situatedness and the perspectival nature of knowledge from social situatedness of gender, class, and other sociological norms and variables deeper into the embodied layers of human beings, into feelings, moods, and sensitive life. Haraway characterizes this as a thinking and making with, as sym-poiesis (Haraway, 2016).

We are socially constructed by norms, values, ideas, social structures, conditions, and goals and at the same time we are subjective, experiential beings with a unique perspective on the world because we are all differentially located, situated, and conditioned. This felt situatedness is what gives us our individuality and allows us to come closer to ourselves, not as a narcissistic move, but as a move that increases plurality and deepens universality in the world. The more self we are in thinking, the better we are understood by others. And the closer we come to our own thinking, the better we can understand others' thinking. Irigaray describes this as a closeness to oneself which can be perceived 'thanks to a distance from oneself and a distance from the other, two distances which cannot be mistaken for one another' (TBB 69).

But how to connect with oneself? Let me illustrate it again with the example of the conscious act of breathing which is for Irigaray crucial to the kind of beings we are. For Irigaray, transcendence, as the basic movement of philosophical thinking, is initiated by touching ground with oneself in a self-affective gesture of breathing. Breathing also expands the conception of the self because there is no clear demarcation between us as bodies and the wider environment we are located in. Air enters our bodies, and it exits our bodies through the nostrils showing how the body-environment is one as a continuum.

There is an affective attunement in the type of an inner or intersubjective dialogue that harnesses and nurtures a felt level. The notion of affective attunement comes from research into early infant development that shows how infants learn and adapt through affective attunement between them and their mothers or primary caretakers (Stern, 1985). This happens on a pre-reflective level where mother and child attune

their internal rhythms through gestures, sounds, and caressing. ‘This rhythmic synchronization, which enables the resonance or tuning of two interior universes, is the basis of affective intersubjectivity’ (Petitmengin, 2007, 66). Being touched is not a one-way street of how society and culture influence and form us as thinkers. Being touched is at least a two-way street because there is always something within us that resonates with what touches us; otherwise, we would not be touched if there were not something within us that makes us receptive towards it. Interaction always comes first. The moment of interactive resonating that Hartmut Rosa has discussed in his philosophy of resonance is a basic way of connecting with any phenomena (Rosa, 2019).

Concluding Remarks

In the context of the philosophy of child as a model of philosophical thinking, childlike wonder is traditionally emphasized. The child is seen as prefiguring the philosophical wonder that has since ancient times been seen as what ignites philosophical thinking. The philosophy of embodied philosophical thinking that I introduce with this interpretation of Irigaray’s philosophy of the child is situated earlier than in the moment when our philosophical eyes get wide open with wonder at something that puzzles us, amazes, or appalls us. It is the level of thinking that precedes problematizing thinking of puzzlement and the value judgements involved in being amazed or feeling appalled. That type of feelings of wonder are more cognitive than being moved or stirred by something. There is less value judgement in emotion than in feeling which is a more reflective and cognitive level of being touched. Embodied thinking has also as its source a level prior to feelings and emotions, and that is the level of affect. Affects are prepersonal and precognitive intensities. Irigaray describes the internal or the intersubjective dialogue with her linguistic concept of the middle voice as a way of articulating affects as kind of natural rhythms:

The middle voice ... allows us to be in harmony, or to part from an immediate communion, with natural rhythms, and even with the other. It builds a sort of place in which we can dwell, which does not amount to a confinement into the ‘house of language’ of Heidegger, but is an opportunity for us to inhabit ourselves—our body, our heart, our soul or spirit, being the elements supplying matter and form(s) to such dwelling that the middle voice tries to express with words. In this way, it removes our affects from a mere instinctive or impulsive economy, and makes our body speak, which then affects itself, is moved, unites with itself, before any separation between subjectivity and objectivity. (TBB 49-50)

With my interpretation I have argued that a politics that strives for creating a better world for children calls for more than adults listening to and responding responsibly and with appropriate measures and actions to children who voice their concerns and needs. In order to be able to resonate with what children say and express, adults need to access their own felt layers of subjective experience.

The reason is not because that allows us to think like a child for that is not the goal with this theory of embodied philosophical knowing presented here. Embodied ways of thinking are always part and parcel of our thinking and understanding but an explicit and conscious accessing of lived experience has been neglected in predominant ways of thinking, and it is being threatened increasingly with disembodied forms knowing that culminate in artificial intelligence. The reason that Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg have been heard is not only because of what they say about what they sense and experience. It is no less because what they say resonates with something in those that are listening. Resonating does not always imply that one thinks in unison with what is being said, but it always means that one is moved, challenged, and even disturbed by it, prompting one to listen further into the issue at hand, within oneself and by informing oneself. Such a form of inner listening while listening to the other is characterized by a deferral of judgement in an effort to understand where the other is thinking from, out of what situation and from what kind of a felt sense.

The political implications of embodied thinking and embodied listening are vast, although they have not been spelled out here in any detail. That would also not be in line with Irigaray's conception of the new human being because it cannot be a prescriptive category for how the new human being should think and act politically. Her philosophical conception of the child rather uncovers conditions to connect more deeply with oneself, others, and the environment, and that can, in the long run, change how we discuss and behave in the sphere of the political.

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