



On Peaceful Political Relations Between Two in Luce Irigaray's Work

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Abstract

Practical political relations according to Luce Irigaray ground the possibilities for emerging to a new political epoch. She articulates that in order to move toward a more peaceful and emancipated politics, philosophers must focus more on subject-subject relations as opposed to subject-object relations. This in turn promotes the possibility of relating to a naturally and culturally different other. She also elaborates how an emancipated politics demands initially and primarily grounding subjectivity in the two, rather than in individuality or collectivity. This is in contrast to classical liberalism which conceives of a social contract between individual agents who relate through mediations of property. Her philosophy conceives of refounding politics not only in the sphere of public government, but also in the traditionally private domestic sphere, which must become politically awakened. She articulates ways of refounding the family and the couple mediated first by relations between two, and liberating the family from its primary role as the material ground of society. Irigaray suggests that political relations at all levels must be rooted in difference rather than sameness, starting with recognizing sexual difference. Establishing such conditions involves creating civil protections and rights, especially for women, and establishing contexts nurturing to desire, including cultivating sensitivity and attending to sensible differences. Liberating contemporary politics from competitiveness and violence, and providing favorable conditions for peace, demands first attending to cultivating difference and fostering relations between two.

Keywords Irigaray · Politics · Sexual difference · Family · Social contract theory · Couple

Luce Irigaray proposes alternative ways to understand and critique the legacy of political conflict in the west through analyzing the practical and theoretical basis

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for conflicts between two others, and through reconceiving the western philosophical approach to sexual difference. What is particular about Irigaray's account is her approaching not only the sources of political conflict on the social level, but also their connections to the metaphysical and intimate levels. She suggests that violence and conflict arise not only, or not even primarily through political structures, cultural norms, or aggressive drives, but through the presumptive masculinity and neutrality of western notions of selfhood and subjectivity, repressions of sensible difference, especially sexual difference, and their consequences for relations with the other. Irigaray demonstrates through her analyses of western patriarchal culture's philosophical legacy and logic that the unquestioned assumptions characterizing both individualism and collectivism in the west are symptomatic of culture(s) that do not recognize the specificity of the relation between culture and nature, and in particular lack a specific emphasis on relations in two. The west's ethos lacks a nuanced articulation of the natural belonging of human beings, especially of the importance of sexual difference and subject-to-subject relationships, and emphasizes instead subject-object relations. A western patriarchal culture that privileges a subjectivity that is 'one, singular, solitary and historically masculine, that of the adult Western male, rational, competent' (2000, p. 122) as Irigaray puts it, presupposes the naturally and culturally different other to be inferior, whether in terms of sex, sexuality, race, age, ability, etc., and is a culture that gives rise to a collective politics characterized by subjugation and hierarchy. Within such a social context, the presence and increasing recognition of other(s) and otherness present an intolerable disruption to the social order. The potential transformation toward horizontality as opposed to hierarchy that difference presents appears perilous to a subjectivity that has predicated itself on sovereignty and superiority, and thus, this potential triggers defensiveness and sometimes violent conflict.

Irigaray alternatively proposes that in order to peacefully coexist with the other, any other—whether the other nation, or the other person—demands not just toleration, but the cultivation of the bridge between natural difference and cultural difference. The values embodied in the origins of western political thinking, for instance, those emerging in Greek antiquity, in their emphasis on masculine virtues of courage and conquest as well as the privileging of reason above emotion and embodiment, prefigure attitudes about individualism and competition in modern political philosophy. Irigaray analyzes enduring ancient prejudices that assume hierarchy governs both political and intra-familial relationships, and form foundations for modern political theories that ground much of contemporary western and eastern state policy and institutions. Attending to the relation between natural difference and cultural difference, particularly in the domain of the formation of civil bodies and relationships, Irigaray offers remedies that primarily sociological approaches fail to provide, and alternatives for the widespread prejudice that political community is at its root violent. I claim, alongside Irigaray, that presumptions of violence stem in part from presuppositions of universal and homogeneous subjectivity. Working to cultivate natural and cultural difference as explicit values of politics could contribute to refounding civil institutions, reversing the assumption that human beings are inherently hierarchical and antagonistic, and forming the basis for creating better-suited political

institutions that are more hospitable to difference. Furthermore, cultivating difference, as opposed to focusing exclusively on identity, can transform everyday relations, both subject-to-subject, and smaller community relations with others in the here and now. The quality of micro-political relations, Irigaray argues, is intertwined with macro-political relations. Thus, transformations at each level affect the whole.

Thinking alongside Irigaray, I suggest that it is in part the foundational assumptions of natural hierarchy and singularity, as opposed to natural difference and duality/plurality, that lead to basing social and political institutions on the expectation of conflict and atomic individualism. These presumptions preclude the building of civil frameworks that provide room for horizontal relationships and mutual recognition. For instance, rather than building an educational system that, among other values, fosters self-understanding, and cultivates consciousness of relational attitudes toward the other, the west instead forms predominantly scientific, informational, and skills-focused education systems that do not attend to relations with the other, or to relationships between nature and culture. A lack of theoretical, or imaginative emphasis on difference at the foundations of western culture(s), which is repeated and reinforced in modern political theory, extends the foundational groundwork of war, patriarchy, colonialism, and domination. Classical social contract theory, which presents itself as a neutral theory with no pre-given normative ethics and/or appealing only to an implicit rational 'natural law,' fails at representing the human individual as comprehensively open to encountering the other in mutual difference, and at providing a framework for cultivating human relationships.

Twentieth-century and twenty-first-century political philosophies improve on the early contractarian theories; for instance, Rawls's (2001, 2005) frameworks of justice provide a better structure for political liberalism. But these do not revise the basic political divisiveness that arises from presuming an underlying neutrality and sameness among political agents. Nor do they do much to liberate subjects from subjection within the private and domestic spheres demanding the material reproduction of civic life within the home. Rawlsian contract theory better succeeds at attributing responsibility and producing a framework for the fair distribution of goods. It suggests ways of deliberatively negotiating political differences on a public level, for instance, through reflective equilibrium, but it does not provide adequate resources for understanding how political subjects might better live together, that is, on an ontological, perceptual, experiential, and metaphysical level, with others who are different. As some of the feminist critics of political liberalism and social contract theory have argued, for instance, Carol Pateman (1988), Charles Mills (1999), and Eva Kittay (1999), contractarian frameworks provide insufficient theoretical resources to organize civic relationships that can avoid systematically and intersectionally disadvantaging women, queer persons, people of color, people with disabilities, immigrants, indigenous groups, and others, where individuals and groups experience a multiplicity of political disadvantages and subjections that overlap and differ qualitatively. To some extent, each of these critiques highlights the relationships between natural and cultural differences, and expose the limitations of contract theories to address them.

Yet, I would also suggest, as Irigaray and some of these critics do, that the lack of recognition of these intersectional differences on the part of social contract theory can be traced back, in part, to conceptual structures which presume there is one subjective type, implicitly masculine, adult, capable, western, white, universal in form, characterized by activity as opposed to passivity, and that privileges rationality and mind over affect and embodiment. Social contract theories, which evolved from a broadly empiricist approach to moral psychology rooting morality in passions, nevertheless still tie passions primarily to property (objects) as opposed to subjects. In her recent work, *Sharing the Fire: Outline of a Dialectics of Sensitivity* (2019a), Irigaray writes of the importance of emphasizing mutual subjective relations over objective relations: ‘To overcome the subject–object predicative logic, a relationship between two naturally different subjects is crucial. Only in such a meeting and a union can a body and a soul unite with each other and the copula—to be—be of use not merely in the search for the absolute by a single subject through relating to object(s), but in the longing for the absolute that the conjunction between two naturally different subjects can arouse’ (2019a, p. 86). Emphasizing subject-to-subject relations is crucial for politics because, as Irigaray suggests, such emphasis is to approach what are arguably politics’ most crucial ends: true human becoming, and generative human relationships. In Irigaray’s view, this can only be achieved if natural difference, especially sexual difference, is made central to political thinking and practice. As she writes, ‘By acknowledging that the two parts of humanity have the same value in nature but are different as identities, without being for all that opposites that could be integrated into a higher unity, philosophy can open up the horizon of a new logic founded on a relationship between two different subjects, and not on the traditional subject–object relation’ (2019a, p. 84). Such a new logic, she articulates, could expand possibilities for humankind beyond techniques for survival, and create pathways to more fully achieved human lives and relationships. But how can such an ethic be brought about in a historical context steeped in the political traditions of individualism?

A History of Political Individualism

The tradition of western modern philosophy presupposes a concept of self-founding personhood and the primacy of the individual and its priority over that of the couple. This results in the paradigm of social contract theory characterizing the relationship between individuals by competitiveness. It is important to unpack the reasons for this. Irigaray attributes the preconceptions of primary individualism in part to a fundamental conceptual prejudice that privileges the one over the two. In Irigaray’s view, this arises from a culturally masculine denial of the role of the maternal subject as formative and generative to each human life. Irigaray writes in the essay, ‘There Can Be No Democracy Without a Culture of Difference,’ ‘In order to begin to individualize himself, man thus did not make use of the way of a relation to the other, in particular to the mother, but of a competitive conquest of the universe by and between those who are the same: men’ (Irigaray 2011, p. 195). In this context meeting the other without fearing subjection, unification, or annihilation, requires

insisting upon domination in order to protect the vulnerable unconscious secret of the subject's originary dependency and relatedness to the maternal subject. In an effort to evade unearthing this primary denial of dependency and relation to the mother on an individual and cultural level, and lacking a conceptual model of how to meet with this other, the possibility for meeting any other who is an ontological coequal (not an inferior or superior) is transformed into a looming danger. The solitary subject cannot meet the other horizontally since to do so would be to proclaim its vulnerability; thus, it is left with few resources, conceptual or energetic, for constructing a shared context with this other that can still leave intact its 'individuality.'

Moreover, since, as Irigaray articulates, in western patriarchal traditions, one's own world and the other's are assumed to be functionally identical, especially for the masculine subject, the two who encounter one another appear to be locked in a doubling that is unnatural and must be resolved. Hegel's dialectic of the master and slave elaborates the movement of this conflict: the master and slave meet one another in a relation of mutual violence because it is presumed that one must die in order for the existence of either to be affirmed (Hegel 1979, p. 111 ff.). This is because such a conflictual relation appears inevitable when the western philosophical understanding of the subject assumes that there is room for the existence of only one consciousness of the universal type. The ethos is not only that there is only one victor in a duel, but that there is only one single universal ego, and the other, any other, is a threat to its totality. This logic also becomes part of the ethos of monotheism.

The apprehensive approach to meeting with the other thus takes on a quality of inevitability, and is so structurally embedded in the western philosophical way of understanding politics, that even philosophies that emphasize the hope of fruitfully meeting the other often cannot avoid subscribing to its pessimism. For instance, Sartre envisions a meeting with the other primarily as objectifying and threatening. Irigaray observes that in Sartre's case that this is in part because of his characterization of desire. She clarifies: 'Desire that wants only the same cannot escape conflict in order to appropriate the other's transcendence' (Irigaray 2001, p. 18). Irigaray proposes in response to Sartre's inability to conceive of a mutually affirming relation with the other that if two can meet in a horizontal relation of mutual desire and difference, conflict is no longer experienced as inevitable. This, she points out, is because the '...conflict which arises from the appropriation of the freedom of the other no longer makes sense between those who love each other: desire grows from an irreducible alterity' (Irigaray 2001, p. 18). She thus suggests that modeling relating with the other upon desiring the difference of the other provides a richer basis for appreciating their transcendence, and for sharing and elaborating a dynamic dialectical relation with them.

Relatedly, Levinas conceives of the relation with the other as one of absolute alterity in which the Other (capital 'O') is either untouchably great, as a god, or suffering in abject need, so that one is left in dizzying vertical relation with them (Irigaray 1993, pp. 185—217; 2001, p. 27). For Levinas, the Other's difference, or alterity, is substantially comprised of their infinite transcendence relative to the one (see, for instance, Levinas 2007). Levinas's concept of the Other is of a relation of alterity that excludes the possibility of a sensible relation with a naturally different other who is in horizontal, not vertical, relation with them, and thus precludes

the possibility of fully achieved political community with the other (Irigaray 2001, pp. 17–29). Along similar lines, Derrida posits an unconditional hospitality, thus implying that for true hospitality to exist it must be beyond what ordinary hospitality would offer: ‘This “living together,” even where it is irreducible to the statutory or institutional (juridical, political, state-controlled) bond, opens another dimension to the same necessity—and that is why I have spoken of the other, of the stranger, of a hospitality to the wholly other who exceeds the statutory convention’ (Derrida 2013, p. 26; Bregazzi 2019). But the necessity for unconditional hospitality suggests, among other things, that ordinary hospitality could fail precisely because a meeting with the other threatens to bring an undercurrent of conflict, annihilation, or fusion. For Irigaray, in order to compose a politics of hospitality that could accommodate—and which is thankful for—an other who is radically different would demand generating hitherto-unelaborated frameworks for meeting the other in mutual difference, sharing, desire, and love, frameworks which the concept of hospitality alone does not fully specify. Thinking about hospitality, for Irigaray, must also include a careful elaboration of natural and cultural differences.

These philosophies just outlined attempt to conceive of an answer to the seeming potential for annihilation and violence in any encounter with the other, but do not appear to consider Irigaray’s point that two others can mutually co-relate if they are radically different—that there is no need for competition between two others who are not competing for the same universality, the same position as one another, and who can share in admiration for one another’s radical otherness. Rather, Irigaray theorizes that two can coexist peacefully if they are acknowledged by one another in mutual difference, a mode of relating in irreducible difference modeled in relations of sexual difference. Such a conception of radical difference is difficult in western philosophy, as Irigaray suggests, since, the subject of philosophy, which is presumptively masculine, lacks a genuine dialectical partner, a feminine other who is not merely a foil: ‘Man did not acquire an identity of his own by differing from a human individual other than himself—woman, beginning with woman in the mother—but by separating from her without any possible return thanks to a relation between those who were the same, whose difference was only quantitative, or, one could also say, competitive’ (2011, pp. 194–195). Thus, Irigaray’s conception of politics offers a stark contrast to the prevailing ethos of individualism and competitiveness, but also to predominating notions of communitarianism.

Beginning with Two to Approach Community

Furthermore, approaching the presuppositions attached to current and historical conceptions of politics necessitates not only questioning the practices and formation of institutions by critiquing their inequity and injustice, but also unearthing the metaphysical assumptions founding political philosophies that produce these institutions. A more peaceful, as well as just, politics demands rethinking the underlying preconceptions of homogeneity and neutrality of communities that ground liberal political philosophies, and underlie both right, and to some extent left, political institutions. Specifically, recognizing that two radically different

others can mutually co-relate because each one is altogether different from the other provokes a spark—a starting point to transform political relations that seem to offer no origin from which two isolated and neutral ones could build an elaborated relation. Irigaray writes, in *Sharing the Fire* (2019a), of masculine and feminine identities:

The difference between these identities is no longer merely constructed and dependent on some or other idea, ideal or ideology, it is also real—and as such it is qualitative and not only quantitative. It is not a more or less of this or that, for example of matter or form, which, then, defines difference; rather, it is a question of a material and ideal—or *idéel*—difference in the relation to the absolute. The difference between two differently sexuated subjects must be considered in this way as far as the becoming of each, but also the possibility of a union between the two, is concerned. The fact of having reduced this difference to a difference between two opposite polarities has prevented this union from happening both at a natural and a spiritual level, depriving the two subjectivities of their longing for the absolute in each other and through each other. (p. 85)

In a relation of genuine difference, there is no longer the need for competition because each one occupies their own place and sets up their own universal. Neither is required to, and neither can, amount to the whole, yet each one is 'let be' in themselves and by the other (Irigaray 2017, p. 49), complete on his or her own. Relations in difference may be challenging, but between two mutually different others, the potential for peace can exist because the need for hierarchy and competition is relieved by the possibility for encountering the other in wonder and desire. The other transcends me, and thus reveals a frame and a limit of my world, a negativity that respects a limit of my being. Because someone else exists beyond the one's horizon, the one is no longer isolated, and is allowed to acknowledge what one is precisely because one has limits, and must acknowledge what one is not. The one is free to desire to be in touch with the other who is different: 'Desire,' Irigaray writes,

more generally any relation between two naturally different humans, requires, in order to be shared, a deconstruction of the Hegelian dialectical process. It requires us to return to a specific personal experience, to an artlessness liberated from any universalizing elaboration. It needs us to recover the immediacy of a natural perception which still acknowledges difference(s). (Irigaray 2019a, p. 42)

However, this revision and scaling back to a more original openness to the other presents a radical challenge to the subject. To remain open to the other also carries the possibility of blurring the distinction between the self and other, and between the self and the multitude. As Irigaray writes, 'Such deconstruction, or negative ontology, runs the risk of falling back into a lack of differentiation too, which, then, is due to an attraction which abolishes the duality of subjectivities and identities through a fusion, a domination or a subjection, and even through

a communion which amounts to a blind immersion in an undifferentiated whole' (2019a, p. 42). If we soldier on in immediacy, and do not establish a grounding of singularity, we run the risk of being absorbed into a chaotic indistinction that is just as confusing as the background of sameness that we longed to escape. Either plurality or individuality, without the mediation of the two, can reproduce the need and impetus for conflict, rather than generating a different kind of energy that preserves itself for desiring the other.

To build a politics that supports the generation of not only the possibility of peaceful intersubjectivity, but correspondingly, the possibility of mutual desiring, the conception of collectivity needs to be seeded with an intermediary between the individual and the whole. Irigaray suggests that the individual is able to achieve their own solitude, that is, their own independence and self-relatedness, not through self-definition over and against objectivity. Rather a human being, in Irigaray's view, is able to define themselves and perceive their horizons by understanding their limit with respect to an ontologically different subjective other. In particular, being in touch with an other that is radically different from oneself, especially natural and cultural difference(s), such as sexual difference, offers a privileged occasion to relate to subjectivity, both of self and other. As Irigaray writes, a union between two is a necessary stage in being able to face a collective:

...such mediation is necessary at the level of a community, above all if this one is based on sameness, identity and equality regardless of the diversity which composes the natural order. Such variety can be really taken into account only by a subjectivity which is concerned with its difference in relation to another subjectivity. Otherwise, the natural diversity might fall again into a subject-object logic, whatever the autonomy and quasi-subjectivity which are attributed to the living beings which make it up. To overcome the subject-object predicative logic, a relationship between two naturally different subjects is crucial. (2019a, p. 86)

If the individual is subjected directly and always to the mass of political collectivity, without finding subjectification that arises through mutual horizontal recognition with an individual other, she finds herself cut off from the sensible qualities that preserve her individuation. To remain singular within a collective, there must be a dialectical and sensible mediation between the individual and the whole. Otherwise, we risk not only domination and subjection by individual others because we are in competition for the sole universal; we risk the subsumption into a political homogeneity that tends to undermine our individuality. This danger can be overcome through subjectification first in relation to a radically different other, which establishes a meaningful ground for relating to a collectivity. As Irigaray writes, to be able to relate to others and the self through a union with an other,

... cannot be achieved by passing from a personal natural belonging to a community belonging, neglecting the stage of the cultivation of the relationship with a subjectivity differently structured, notably by its sexuation. Only this kind of situation allows us to combine nature with intellect, necessity with liberty, to reach the absolute. It only allows us to overcome the dichotomy

between interiority and exteriority through dealing with two different interiorities, the becoming of which is together supported and limited by one another. (2019a, p. 86)

I add that while we can read Irigaray as alluding to historical and cultural notions of man and woman found in the east and west, we need not read her as exclusively referencing these identities. Thus, in my view, an expanded notion of sexual difference can accommodate relations of sexual difference that are not necessarily those between men and women. A relation of sexual difference can mean a relation between one and a sexually different other without presupposing that the sexually different other be the binarily conceived opposing pole of a biologically determined sexual spectrum (a notion that is rendered incoherent in the context of Irigaray's work). A sexually different other in my reading can refer to an other who is sexually different, broadly conceived, and without presupposing what sex either of the two might be.

In Irigaray's notion of a possible emancipatory and peaceful politics, in order to create the necessary recognition and respect for difference, a crucial intermediary element, the two, must exist between the individual and society. Before building a political or social network of relations, a place for the couple must be established so that the individual can create a subjective identity prior to its being exposed to community. As Irigaray writes, 'Between the one and the other, a micro-culture is set up. It can become the leaven for a universal culture that keeps alive the energy of each one as well as that of the relation between the one and the other' (2008, p. 57). The couple can be conceived as the relation between two that attends to the sensible differences between them so that there can be a continuity between body and mind, and so that rather than having to go outside of the subject in order to find mediation in the world of objects, the bodies of the subjects can provide the necessary mediation for self and other recognition' (Irigaray 2019a, pp. 85–86). Rather than going directly from the individual to the collective whole, Irigaray proposes a society that preserves a place for difference and singularity through the relation of two subjects. Society must be explicitly built on the figure of the two, and be acknowledged to consist in a network of relations which links directly between different members in relations of mutual difference, that ground and become infrastructural to the cohesiveness of society, but also to the preservation and natural becoming of individuation.

This corresponds to Irigaray's notion of sexual difference:

Only between two living beings, the body itself as matter can be the source and the place of our sharing. And, between the two, the subject-object syntactic connection is no longer the one which is suitable for favouring a link between nature and spirit. Each is both nature and spirit, and no object is necessary between them if they recognize each other as such without dividing themselves into a body and a mind. Between them as two, each subjectivity corresponds with a body which can unite with the other and find in this union the source and the becoming which fit a desire for the absolute. The mediation of an object is not necessary between two living beings, especially two subjects sexually different by nature. (Irigaray 2019a, p. 85–86)

Through the relation to another who is radically different from them, the subject's own singularity is reaffirmed, and the other's singularity is affirmed as well. Irigaray's emphasis on the sexually different other in the relation between the two is important because it gives a sensible counterpart to the otherwise ambiguously ideal social distinctions between consciousnesses, political communities, cultures, and other indices of differences. For Irigaray, sexual difference is an irreducible difference that is a bridging relation between nature and culture; nevertheless, it is so without presupposing that sexual difference, or as she more recently puts it, sexual difference, is reductively biological. This framework of sensible and natural relations of difference with the other is one that could provide the foundation of an identity for relating to each other in a political collectivity without being subsumed, by the other, or the whole. Without this recognition of sexual difference, as Laura Roberts articulates, 'There is no room within Western thought, according to [Irigaray], to recognize a truly different other. She maintains that, along with the historical emergence of the masculine subject, and the concomitant repression of a positive recognition of sexual difference, diversity is still lived hierarchically and that, in the West, there "is not really any other, but rather only the same: smaller, greater, or equal to me"' (quoted from *I Love to You*, in *Democracy Begins Between Two*, p. 125)' (Irigaray 2015, p. 63).

The Two of the Family

A crucial difference between Irigaray's understanding of relating in two and the predominating western notion of collective political relations is that political collectives are thought to be composed of ones that instantiate a neutral universal. Yet Irigaray's understanding is that political relations are composed of relations between two. Thus, in her view, a subject's relation with any other is an instance of the self-other relation; each relation is between one and one other, a relation in two, not a relation from the lone individual directly to the whole or multiplicity. In order to establish a stable framework for the cultivation of relations in two, the more enduring relationships in two need to be given a sustainable structure within which to elaborate themselves. A pivotal instance of this two is exemplified in the couple, and the transition from the couple to the family is integral to the building of society according to Irigaray. Thus, liberating the couple from its subjection to the whole could be a crucial step in liberating the individual from the collectivity without separating itself from it. This liberation, according to Irigaray, could in part be accomplished by extricating the relations of the family from their subjection to neutral and ideal/ideological politics. In her work, *Between East and West* (2002), Irigaray articulates a family structure not comprised of a patriarchal family head nor requiring the sanction of a child (Irigaray 2002). Rather the family 'begins with two,' with the couple (2002, p. 105 ff.). Irigaray's critique of the patriarchal family uncovers how its organization is a microcosm of western patriarchal society, and grounds the broader context of the patriarchal relations. Thus, a crucial aspect of dismantling patriarchy and homogeneity is to refound the family on the couple as opposed to the neutral individual. Irigaray also suggests moving away from the foundation of the family

that presupposes the necessity of the couple and child, which reproduces the subordination of the family to the material reproductive function of society. A refounding of the family on the couple would be to establish families in which individuals can cultivate themselves within their concrete and mutually in(ter)dependent relations, thus supporting families establishing differentiated relations to build upon in the wider social relation.

In her chapter, 'Between Myth and History: The Tragedy of Antigone,' (2013, pp. 113–137) Irigaray traces the relationship between the family as the basic compositional element to the structure of society, and the way the composition of the family itself conditions the fabric of political reality. Irigaray conceives of family composition in a way that bridges the domestic sphere with the political, a connection that could form the basis for a new politics that does not relegate the domestic to a 'constitutive outside' of political interaction. Her vision contrasts dramatically with the radical separation of the political from the domestic that forms a hallmark of the patriarchal family. She proposes that to create a more suitable future, it will be important to establish a civil code that enacts rights and protections reciprocally empowering members of the family. This would offer protection appropriate to differing sexual existences and generations within the family, especially women and sexually and culturally/racially minoritized persons, who have historically and intersectionally been subjected to a masculine culture of violence and repression, and who have largely been tasked with the responsibilities of providing the reproductive labor of society (Irigaray 2002, pp. 131–145; Roberts 2019, pp. 141–144).

Western patriarchal culture assumes that men will be responsible for the political sphere, and that the rest of the family operate as the material support for that political existence. Generating a civil code could contribute to liberating the domestic sphere from the lack of differentiation it suffers under these demands. The recognition of a different form of family not grounded in the patriarchal ethos could begin a series of changes that help with the emergence from the patriarchal milieu. If liberating the family involves empowering its members with rights and protections relative to the other members, such a resistance to subjection and homogeneity also leads to empowerment on a more general level. Irigaray writes, 'A woman cannot remain under the guardianship of the State, especially a warlike State, without the possibility to oppose her own rights, but also duties, to the power of this State' (2014, p. 171). When individuals are empowered to cultivate their individualization and independence within the family, they can be emancipated to become legitimately empowered political subjects, bridging the divide between domesticity and political life.

Peace Instead of Power

Along the same lines, an Irigarayan approach to political relations suggests that liberating members of society relative to others involves avoiding initially subjecting them to one another as presumptive adversaries. As an illustration of this point, consider the particularly striking moment in the history of political philosophy when Aristotle identifies the fundamental political relation as one of domination and

natural hierarchy, for instance, as embodied in the relation between master and slave, man and woman, and parent and child (Aristotle 1984, *Politics*, Book 1, 1252a9 ff.). For Aristotle, whose philosophy embodies the inheritance of the patriarchal context of ancient Greece, it is inconceivable that political relations would consist of any other structure than one of domination and subjection. This not only grounds Aristotle's, and other classical and modern notions of the political; it becomes the presumptive understanding of relating to an other, and defines human nature as adversarial, a presupposition which emerges more fully in social contract theories. It appears today in the contexts of political realism, just-war ethics, free-market economic theories, as well as justifications of the continued subjugation of women, racialized and other minoritized persons. While various moral and ethical theories address these political ills, for instance, with moral proscriptions against corruption and violence by those in positions of power, Irigaray suggests that additionally, reconceiving of the grounding of political relations is necessary to end cyclical irruptions and subduings of violence. Moreover, she insists that in order to remedy the underlying causes for conflict and suffering, we must first begin to value the right of human beings to exist and develop their own transcendence and flourishing—over any right to property (for instance, Irigaray 2011, 197 ff.). In order to do so, it is necessary to generate an understanding of how relations between two could be cultivated politically, creating a politics modeled on relations between a subject and another subject rather than on relations of individual subjects to the world of objects.

If we are to respect such a right to exist, and the rights of the family members vis-à-vis the others, especially the rights of women, sexually, racially, and economically minoritized persons, and children, political philosophers must develop a philosophically rich understanding of how to conceive of relations with the other. As western political philosophy has historically been practiced, the principle of the right of the strongest is a burden born especially by women and sexual minorities who are designated as the subordinate membership of sexually conditioned relations. This principle sums up a political logic of patriarchy, instantiating a masculine ethos that places violence at the founding moment of politics and civilization. This is also the ethos that leads Aristotle to locate politics in the relation between natural leaders and those presumed born to be slaves, but even more exactly, in the supposedly natural political dyad of dominator and dominated (Aristotle 1984, *Politics* I.2, 1253b ff.). The right of the strongest eventually sees its reversal in the ethics of Christianity, but this offers little comfort, as Nietzsche observes, since it is grounded in *resentiment*. Its immanent logic is not fundamentally different than that which it is attempting to subvert. A politics grounded in moral purity does not alter the concept of power that founds it; it rather only attempts to temper it; the turning of the cheek is a gesture that eschews violence, but in doing so, affirms its inevitability. Power in such a conception of western politics is the physical and juridical force that backs the leaders: the king, the statesman, the father, or a god. As the myth goes, even in the original creation, man was meant to 'subdue [the earth]; and have dominion over [...] every living thing that moves upon the earth' (Genesis 1:26). And such power, even when it is controlled and channeled away from violence still finds its source in it. In his 'Truth and Juridical Forms,' Foucault (2001) demonstrates that the working

out of juridical forms are the evolutions of relations of the contest. The political ethos of might transforms its original structure to fit the modern era, where democracy plays the old role of monarchy. But this does not fundamentally alter the basis of politics, only its expression. If it were true that all relations with the other are fundamentally violent, the way for instance, Thucydides's Athenians appear to have conceived of them when they say 'you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must' (Strassler, 1996, p. 352), then we can expect to be at the edge of conflict in political circumstances. The best we could hope for is a temporary tranquility, but never a lasting peace. To subvert the inevitability of the collective politics turning violent, and to reconceive of politics on more peaceful foundations, involves a radical transformation of western conceptions of political relations, especially those that ground contemporary political institutions, such as social contract theory.

Beyond the Social Contract to Sexual Difference

In classical political theory, individualism is assumed to be the only way to resist being lost within the sea of anonymous 'ones' of the collective. But, Irigaray notes, when liberal contract theories emerged, 'Diversity was still conceived of and lived hierarchically, the many subordinate to the one' and 'Others were nothing but copies of the idea of man, a potentially perfect idea which all the more or less imperfect copies had to equal' (2000, p. 122). The path to individuation and the way to becoming a 'who,' however, is not, according to Irigaray through individualization with respect to a single dominant one that is to be emulated and worshiped; rather it is through mutual horizontal relation with a heterogenous other, as well as establishing a relation of oneself to oneself. As she says of her philosophical aims in articulating this point, '...it was to free the two from the one, the two from the many, and the other from the same, and to do this in a horizontal way by suspending the authority of the One: of man, of the father, of the leader, of the one god, of the unique truth, etc.' (2000, p. 129). Moreover, 'It was a question of releasing the other from the same, of refusing to be reduced to an other (male) or an other (female) of the one, not becoming him, or like him, but constituting myself as an autonomous and different subject' (2000, p. 129).

When there is only one valuable subject, then all others are forced to conform to that subject's order, rendering others as mere reflections or inferior copies. Thus, some modern western philosophers posit that a social contract becomes necessary to adjudicate the relations between individuals and channel them through a central authority who has the power to subdue their supposedly natural tendency to conflict violently with each and every other (see also Pateman's 1988, and Mills's 1999, indispensable discussions of how women, racialized, and othered subjects are excluded from the political autonomy and authority of the contract). Notably, Henri Rousseau (2002) in his 1775 *Discourse on Inequality* observes that greed and envy, and along with them aggression and conflict, emerge *because* of the rise of society.

Society's institution produces these skirmishes, then society also must step in as a means to subdue them.

Rousseau, while one of few philosophers to entertain sexes as philosophically important, nevertheless thinks within the patriarchal structure of hierarchy between the sexes. We can understand part of the difference between what Irigaray imagines and Rousseau's picture of society by appealing to Irigaray's notion of sexual difference. For Rousseau, only the masculine sphere is naturally dominant, strong, and worthy. The feminine exists merely as a complement to support the ascendancy of the masculine which is meant to take power, to rule, and to bring mankind to its fruition (Okin, cf. 1979; Driker-Ohren 2020). Women are not recognized in a qualitatively different way; rather they are seen in their relation to men. When Rousseau assumes that there will be competitiveness when society is formed, he does so on the basis of the example he has at hand. It is a war of all men against all men competing for the title of victor. This orientation, of which Rousseau takes part, can be explained primarily by his belonging to the tradition of western patriarchy that views women as subordinate. As Irigaray writes,

In order to emerge from a maternal and natural origin, man—in particular, but not only, Western man—did not recognize the difference of the other part of humanity and did not attempt to enter into relations with it by accepting the partial nature of his masculine condition. Instead he endeavored to dominate the world by gathering everything together according to his own perspective and by guaranteeing such a totality with supreme values, authorities, or divinity. All that was accomplished according to his own necessities and abilities, but was presumed to correspond to the reality and the truth of all and for all. (2014, p. 176)

The recognition of genuine difference cannot come about in a culture that denies the existence of an identity for women beyond that of the maternal support for the masculine. Even before having transcended the traditional roles of the sexes and conservative mythologies currently surrounding masculinity and femininity, sexual difference is a radical difference that western patriarchy cannot admit to consciously, even as a material foundation.

If such a difference were recognized for its positive political potential, it could begin to dismantle the vertical structure of political life by undoing quantitative comparisons and instituting instead qualitative differentiation that does not invite hierarchical comparison. This would be a stage in ending patriarchal rule, and would be an essential step, argues Irigaray, in rendering possible the peaceful coexistence of the other. Rousseau was able to recognize that outside of society, humankind might be able to coexist peacefully and without brutal and competitive struggle. But he was not able to envision such a possibility inside of society. Rousseau was trapped in the same sort of logic that he diagnosed as causing the prejudiced view of human beings as natural rivals. He had only witnessed the relation of men to women in patriarchal colonial imperialism, and assumed this hierarchy represented their nature. The competition he witnesses between men and women is an artificial one, but the only relation available to his partial experience; thus, he imagines hierarchical relations between the sexes are the only type that exist.

A Way Toward Peace

There are at least two major obstacles to envisioning a society that is not competitive. One is that patriarchal and warlike political structures have become the presumptive norm, especially in the west. But a second no less important reason is that the west never sufficiently contemplated an alternative. In writing about the east, Irigaray proposes one such alternative view of differences that may be cultivated—both from the point of view of a heterogenous subjective position (her own, for instance) that seeks to link both perspectives, but also because classical eastern philosophy, such as Yoga, and Confucianism, do not presume competitiveness. Western societies have for the most part never sought to build on the relation of the two, either because the two was assumed to be reducible to the one or because of the fear of being harmed or annihilated in conflict. If a society, on the other hand, values difference, the valorization of the figure and the social element of the two and the couple could build an ethos and a network of relations of difference that is both dynamic, and sustainable. If citizens, especially women and other intersectionally disadvantaged individuals are given dignity and autonomous identity through the elaboration of a civil identity, something that Irigaray makes the case for, women and others could have the capacity to resist and to relate to men from a position of civil independence and freedom. This civil autonomy would give women and other disadvantaged persons political protection, explicit rights to resist domination, and thus also a means to pursue relations that contribute to their own flourishing.

The presence of electoral democracy on its own is not enough to overcome the threat of violence, war, and terror, either domestic or international and intercultural. If a society, even a democratic one, is still built on dominance, it cannot overcome its foundation in hierarchy. Even in cases where sovereignty is not literal but representational and rests in the hands of the people, democratic governments still wield the threat of violence as the means of keeping manifest violence at bay. To overcome this, society itself must be refounded not on violence but on peace. And this begins not originally at the level of government or electoral politics. When even the nominally free nations are built on a conceptual foundation of domination, these institutions formally and practically enact dominance as their ethos. Imagine, alternatively, a government founded on the relation of the two, elaborating a framework of relations between different subjects that has horizontality as its basic principle. To break up the state's 'monopoly on violence,' the key is not to fight the state in its violence, but to refound the state non-violently.

Recent critiques of police brutality and incarceration, which are forms of state violence, address the symptoms, such as racism, of the state founded on a presumption of sameness as opposed to difference, hierarchy as opposed to horizontality, and domination as opposed to peace. But to end police brutality and mass incarceration, and the structures of racial and sexual domination, we must form states that provide a substantial framework within which to establish civil society on a foundation that respects the rights of citizens to live with basic dignity, something that is not achieved without creating a political space for relations with the other. In order to move out of an epoch of violence, we must conceive of a different politics that

makes peace possible, one which imagines ways of fostering relations between the two at the ‘individual’ level and at the level of government. Infrastructure is necessary at some stage to support being in such relations of difference as Irigaray has articulated in works such as *Democracy Begins Between Two* (2000). Such infrastructure would need to exist at the level of law, even elaborated at an international scale, to ensure that relations of difference between individuals be encouraged and protected (Irigaray 2014). As Irigaray suggests, some form of rights, such as a civil code, that are supportive of sexuate considerations ought to be a part of this, beginning with the prohibition of sex-based violence, the political support of women’s rights to relate to their own children, freedom from domination by their partners, the right to divorce, to abortion, and other basic freedoms and rights based on natural and cultural differences (Irigaray 2002, pp. 142–143; Irigaray 2000, pp. 174–184). We can call these sexuate rights without presuming that they would only support women; these rights could apply to anyone who is vulnerable to these injustices, including gender non-conforming persons, and children. Such rights could provide a framework for working out and establishing differences between people of varying identifications, including sexually, racially, religiously, and in terms of ability. The goal of such articulated rights is that each and every person find the freedoms and protections they need within the civil framework that allows for difference to be elaborated without the need to reduce each and every subject to the same ‘type’ of (white, straight, capable, adult, male, etc.) citizen. The cultivation of true peace not founded on violence depends for its very existence on the possibility of becoming sensitive to difference, as Irigaray has most recently articulated in her book, *Sharing the Fire: Outline of a Dialectics of Sensitivity* (2019).

What is lacking in many cases is a natural belonging that allows human beings to form a suitable context within which to meet the other in a way that supports their mutual growth and recognition, for instance, literal spaces and times to meet with the other in a way that promotes relations besides monetary ones. Relatedly, the lack of thinking of limits has caused an inability for subjects in many of the world’s cultures to become sensitive to the autonomy of the other, and to be capable, as Irigaray puts it, of letting them be, and of recognizing their own ‘to be’ (Irigaray 2017, p. 62). Recognizing that human living and relating with others should be primary, not the relation of individuals to property, is necessary. Such a recognition is a far cry from most western political philosophy’s attitude that human life is fundamentally the process of a machine that must survive, or worse, a subprocess of a political superstructure, one that at all levels must fight and often times conquer in order to defend itself from threats. The energy that human beings could create for themselves, and between one another is thus diverted and wasted on the project of power balancing, or on a kind of presumptive competitiveness that is supposed to be energizing. But all of these pursuits drain the energy of citizens (humans, subjects) into a desolate game that we subject ourselves and each other to as mere tokens.

For Aristotle, natural differences amount to human persons being arranged in a natural hierarchy; differences for Aristotle are on a spectrum of better and worse. Therefore, hierarchy is a natural expression of natural differences. Sexual difference, on the other hand, according to Irigaray, is an example of a non-hierarchical difference. This non-hierarchical difference can be a model for viewing other differences

as non-hierarchical, including race, ability, sexuality, and others. In the classical western patriarchal mindset, a primary 'competition' is between masculine and feminine subjectivity—masculine subjectivity unconsciously presumes that to subordinate the feminine is necessary in order to exist as an independent subjectivity. This is in part because masculine subjectivity in the west, and the ethos and culture of masculinity, has not developed its capacity to relate to the other, to recognize what it owes to the maternal subject, or the capacity to as Irigaray puts it, 'breathe on its own' (Irigaray 2015, pp. 253–258). However, this presumption rather serves to belie the unconscious dependency it seeks to mask. Relatedly, Eva Kittay (1999) has noted that, for instance, Rawlsian (2001) distributive justice frameworks do not take into account caring and caregiving relationships, and relationships of dependency, such as that of the newborn, as in Irigaray's book, *To Be Born* (2017). Yet a radical proposal that does not depend as much on the rights framework of a Kantian social ontology would be one in which the so-called duties of caregiving were also undertaken as a generative practice and relation, one which serves not only to sustain life, but to create energy for the building of a shared relation between two. This would be to share in the necessities for life (like eating and drinking together, but also caring for each other) in a way that also amounts to a sharing together of spiritual attainments on an intimate and relational level, putting each back in touch with their specifically human and natural roots, as opposed to the requirements of a technocratic culture.

Putting into practice the ideal of mutually relating in difference on a local level could begin to amount to more widespread social changes. For instance, Irigaray has organized some of her own 'micro-cultures' that she intends could become part of the 'leaven' of broader social change. She has put together small temporary communities, for example, her international seminars on her work, in which she models and institutes occasions for relating on the basis of philosophical contemplation, sensitivity to differences, and sharing in the necessities for life, like eating and moving, in a way that recognizes relationships between individuals and to the whole. This is not just a simulation of what she envisions for the broader society, but a chance to begin to seed such a society's growth in the here and now. This expresses her political philosophy that micro-political relations form the substance of the broader relations. They may be manifold, but each and every relation between two is a substantial, independent, and also interconnected part of the whole.

As Irigaray has written about the seminar and work leading up to the collected volume, *Towards a New Human Being* (2019a), a collection of essays relating to her book, *To Be Born* (2017),

One of the changes that we little by little innovate in our meetings, in particular those about *To Be Born*, is to think in a sexuate way and in a mixing of the sexes. And this not only inaugurates the nucleus of a more living and ethical cultural community, thanks to the respect for mutual otherness, but also brings more quality, flavor and pleasure to the exchanges. To listen to the words of a woman or of a man, instead of to the abstract discourse of castrated individuals, introduces a sensitive and even sensuous dimension into the talks and discussions. They become the flowering of our lives and our desires and

are no longer more or less competitive and conflicting performances. Furthermore, the consideration for the difference of the other teaches us the respect, and even the taste, for meeting between beings belonging to other countries, cultures and even other kingdoms—which are indeed present in some texts of this book. (p. xv)

Individual, familial, national, and international peace depends on horizontal relations between mutually different others, first between two, for whom there is a qualitative, sensitive relation, not a hierarchical, quantitative relation, and ultimately among societies built out of a multiplicity of such relations. A first step in realizing such a political existence is initiating the ability to conceive of the possibility of relations with others that are not grounded in dominance. Because of the pressures imposed by living under up-until-now hierarchical regimes, many cultures labor under the misapprehension that violence is inevitable because peaceful relations with the other are not experienced as normal. This prejudice is symptomatic of western and/or patriarchal culture(s) that are founded on sameness; the possibility of two individuals being in a mutual relation of difference, one differing from the other, and the other differing from the one, remains only partially conscious under such a cultural mindset. Thus, establishing the conceivability of another way of living is almost the first step in transitioning to such a new way of life—that coupled with the practical and imaginative living of such relations. An integral part of the hope of emerging into, as Irigaray has put it, a ‘new human being’ is to both believe and act on a belief in not only non-violence, but mutual sensitivity to the being of the other, coupled with an acknowledgment of the fundamental unknowability and profound difference of the other. This sort of attitude, not generally encouraged or even conceived in most western societies, is necessary to the hope of emerging from the social contract that binds in terms of violence and domination. Rather than living under such a contract of mutually assured aggression, cultures could begin to truly live once they leave behind the prejudice of slavery as the basic element of politics, in favor of difference, mutual desire, and love. It may sound fantastic; yet a lack of political imagination in favor of a fatalistic realism is not working. Instead, to cultivate political imaginations and fill them with hope based on the realizable possibility of difference and quality, as opposed to sameness and quantity, is what most gives rise to the realistic possibility of change.

Declarations

The author declares no competing interests.

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