

## **PHL 661 Topics in Feminist Theory: Irigaray's Philosophy of Sexual Difference**

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### **Course Description**

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Luce Irigaray famously stated that, “sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age. According to Heidegger, each age has one issue to think through, and one only. Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our ‘salvation’ if we thought it through.” In this course, we will try to make sense of and provide a context for this radical and perplexing claim. Starting with early works such as *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, we will examine Irigaray’s philosophy of sexual difference as primarily a critical project meant to deconstruct and turn on its head a philosophical canon arguably blind to the issue of sexual difference. Turning to later works such as *The Way of Love* and *In the Beginning, She Was*, we will go on to scrutinize her attempt to construct a culture of two, both in terms of the development of a properly feminine subjectivity, and in terms of examining the relation between the sexes. The course provides a solid foundation for students interested in feminist thought in general and French Feminism in particular. The question of sexual difference will be examined in relation to subjectivity and otherness, language, birth and motherhood, love and desire, embodiment, and racial and cultural differences. We will examine Irigaray’s engagement with thinkers such as Beauvoir, Freud, Plato, and Hegel.

### **Course Requirements**

**Participation (20%):** Discussion is an essential element of this class. Students are expected to attend every class, and to actively participate on a weekly basis. Please come to class prepared and willing to engage in conversation about the readings and issues at hand, and to create an intellectually stimulating and productive environment. Read assigned texts at least once, take careful notes, prepare and bring questions, and always bring a hard copy of the text that we are working on to class.

**Oral Presentation (20%):** Each student will give an oral presentation in a week of their choosing. Presentations should be about 30 minutes in length, and ideally you should *not* simply read a paper. Think of these presentations more like an exercise in teaching the assigned materials rather than as a conference presentation. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with me during office hours, prior to their presentations, to go over what you plan to discuss and the structure of the presentation.

**Prospectus (10%):** Students are asked to turn in a prospectus in preparation for writing their final research paper. Your prospectus is due in class on March 2, and should be 3-4 double spaced pages in length. It should include a brief thesis statement, several research questions, a tentative outline of your argument, and an annotated bibliography listing 3-5 sources that you will be drawing from in your paper.

**Research Paper (50%):** Final papers are due at noon on March 16, should be 12-15 double spaced pages in length, and should draw from assigned readings. Reference to relevant secondary literature is strongly encouraged but not required. **Late papers are not accepted.**

## Course Materials

Books have been ordered to the DePaul Bookstore. PDFs have been uploaded to D2L (under “Content”) and should be printed before class. **Please always bring annotated hard copies of readings to class.**

A wide range of recommended readings are also available on D2L. You will find a folder for each week with a set of essays and book chapters related to that day’s topic. You are in no way required or expected to read these, but they are there for you as an additional resource, and they might be particularly helpful as you prepare oral presentations and research papers.

## Required Books

Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

———. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

———. *The Way of Love*. Trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček. London: Continuum, 2002.

## Required Readings on D2L

Beauvoir, Simone de. “Introduction.” In *The Second Sex*. Trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010, pp. 3-17.

Irigaray, Luce. “A Personal Note: Equal or Different?” In *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*. Trans. Alison Martin. New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 9-14.

———. “The Other: Woman.” In *I Love To You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*. Trans. Alison Martin. New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 59-68.

———. “The Question of the Other.” In *Democracy Begins Between Two*. Trans. Kirsteen Anderson. New York: Routledge, 2000, pp. 121-141.

———. “Sexual Difference.” In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 5-19.

Freud, Sigmund. “Femininity.” In *Freud on Women: A Reader*. Ed. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl. New York: W. W. Norton, 1990, pp. 342-362.

Plato. *Republic*. Trans. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1991, pp. 193-204.

Irigaray, Luce. “Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother.” In *Sexes and Genealogies*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 9-21.

———. “On the Maternal Order.” In *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*. Trans. Alison Martin. New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 37-44.

- . “The Wandering of Man.” In *In the Beginning, She Was*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 83-112.
- Cixous, Hélène. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” Trans. Keith and Paula Cohen. *Signs* vol. 1, no. 4 (1976): 875-893.
- Irigaray, Luce. “Women’s Exile.” In *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*. Ed. Deborah Cameron. New York: Routledge, 1990, pp. 80-96.
- Hegel, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 266-294.
- Irigaray, Luce. “Between Myth and History: The Tragedy of Antigone.” In *In the Beginning, She Was*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 113-137.
- Plato, *Symposium*. Trans. William S. Cobb. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, pp. 37-49.
- Irigaray, Luce. “A Reading of Plato, *Symposium*, ‘Diotima’s Speech’.” In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 20-33.
- . “I Love to You.” In *I Love To You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*. Trans. Alison Martin. New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 109-113.
- . “In Almost Absolute Silence.” In *I Love To You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*. Trans. Alison Martin. New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 115-119.
- . “Approaching the Other as Other.” In *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*. Trans. Stephen Pluháček. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, pp. 121-130.
- Deutscher, Penelope. “*Between East and West* and the Politics of ‘Cultural Ingénuité’: Irigaray on Cultural Difference.” In *Returning to Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy, Politics, and the Question of Unity*. Ed. Cimitile, Maria C. and Elaine P Miller. Albany: SUNY Press, 2007, pp. 137-150.
- Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo. “Contingency and Race.” In *In-Between Bodies: Sexual Difference, Race, and Sexuality*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007, pp. 45-58.
- Salamon, Gayle. “An Ethics of Transsexual Difference: Luce Irigaray and the Place of Sexual Undecidability.” In *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, pp. 131-144.
- Poe, Danielle. “Can Luce Irigaray’s Notion of Sexual Difference Be Applied to Transsexual and Transgender Narratives?” In *Thinking With Irigaray*. Ed. Mary C. Rawlingson, Sabrina L. Hom, and Serene J. Khader. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011, pp. 111-128.

## Reading Schedule

### Jan 5: Woman as Other

- Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Introduction (D2L)
- Irigaray, “A Personal Note: Equal or Different?” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The Other: Woman” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The Question of the Other” (D2L)

### Jan 12: A Philosophy of Sexual Difference

- Irigaray, “Any Theory of the ‘Subject’ Has Always Been Appropriated by the ‘Masculine’” (*Speculum*)
- Irigaray, “Sexual Difference” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “This Sex Which is Not One” (*TSNO*)
- Irigaray “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine” (*TSNO*)
- Irigaray, “When Our Lips Speak Together” (*TSNO*)

### Jan 19: Freudian Blind Spots: Woman as Lack

- Freud, “Femininity” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry” (*Speculum*)

### Jan 26: Platonic Reversals: Cave or Womb?

- Plato, *Republic*, 514a-525c (D2L)
- Irigaray, “Plato’s *Hystera*” (*Speculum*)

### Feb 2: Matricide and Maternal Genealogy

- Irigaray, “Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “On the Maternal Order” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The Wandering of Man” (D2L)

### Feb 9: Écriture Feminine

- Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “Women’s Exile” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The ‘Mechanics’ of Fluids” (*TSNO*)
- Irigaray, “When Our Lips Speak Together” (*TSNO*)

**Feb 16: Irigaray's Antigone**

**Invited Guest: Dr. Rocío Zambrana, University of Oregon**

- Sophocles, *Antigone*
- Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§ 444-483 (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The Eternal Irony of the Community” (*Speculum*)
- Irigaray, “Between Myth and History: The Tragedy of Antigone” (D2L)

**Feb 23: Between Subjects in Love**

- Plato, *Symposium*, 199c-212d (D2L)
- Irigaray, “A Reading of Plato, *Symposium*, ‘Diotima’s Speech’” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “I Love to You” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “In Almost Absolute Silence” (D2L)

**Mar 2: Speaking With the Other, Being With the Other**

- Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, vii-xxii and 1-95 (*Way of Love*)
- Irigaray, “Approaching the Other as Other” (D2L)

**Mar 9: Challenging the Primacy and Binary of Sexual Difference:  
On Racial/Cultural Difference and Transgender Identity**

- Deutscher, “*Between East and West* and the Politics of ‘Cultural *Ingénuité*’: Irigaray on Cultural Difference” (D2L)
- Bloodsworth-Lugo, “Contingency and Race” (D2L)
- Salamon, “An Ethics of Transsexual Difference” (D2L)
- Poe, “Can Luce Irigaray’s Notion of Sexual Difference Be Applied to Transsexual and Transgender Narratives?” (D2L)