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# Participatory Love: Exploring Non-Oppressive Relationality Through Plato, Hegel and Irigaray

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Participatory Love: Exploring Non-Oppressive Relationality Through Plato, Hegel and Irigaray

by

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A THESIS

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## Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the question of non-oppressive relationality in the context of love. In taking this question up, I look to the work of Plato, Irigaray and Hegel, who each identify a problem of oppression and respond to it through a model of non-oppression as participation, sharedness and unity, respectively. Through an exploration of each thinker's model of non-oppression, I show that we gain two central insights: i) a new way of thinking about the self, which brings new ways of relating to others into being, and ii) the conditions required to bring this self, and non-oppressive relations with others, into being. Motivated by a concern for how we can be ourselves with another in love, I then consider the limitations of each model in relation to this concern.

Key Words: Non-Oppression, Relationality, Selfhood, Participation, Desire, Love

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## Dedication

In memory of my Auntie Lorraine,  
who always understood my love of learning, and helped me love it even more.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Symbols, Abbreviations, & Nomenclature.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Context and Approach .....	1
Structure.....	3
Chapter 1: Plato and Participation as Non-Oppression in Love .....	6
1.1 Introduction.....	6
1.2 The Problem of Conventional Ancient Greek Erotics .....	7
The Ancient Greek View of Conventional Erotic Relations .....	7
Plato's Critique of Conventional Erotic Relations.....	13
1.3 Participation as a Model of Non-Oppression in <i>The Symposium</i> .....	16
The Birth of Eros as In-Betweenness: Troubling the Active-Passive Binary.....	16
The Dynamic and Shape of Erotic Activity for the Lover.....	17
The Dynamic and Shape of Erotic Activity for the Beloved.....	21
1.4 Limitations to Plato's Project: Reconsidering the Erotic Activity of the Beloved .....	25
Considering the Beloved's Experience in The Symposium: The Case of Alcibiades .....	25
Considering the Beloved's Experience in The Phaedrus.....	28
1.5 Conclusion .....	32
Chapter 2: Irigaray and Sharedness as Non-Oppression in Love .....	34
2.1 Introduction.....	34
2.2 The Problem of the Masculine Economy.....	35
The Masculine Economy in Plato's Hystera.....	35
The Sexed Experience of Oppression in the Masculine Economy .....	38
2.3 Sharedness as a Model of Non-Oppression .....	43
Establishing Sexual Difference: Realizing the Sensible Transcendental .....	44
Maintaining Sexual Difference in Love: Limitations to Irigaray's Project .....	49
2.4 Conclusion .....	55
Chapter 3: Hegel and Unity as Non-Oppression in Love .....	57
3.1 Introduction.....	57
3.2 The Problem of Self-Containment.....	59
3.3 Recognition as a Model of Non-Oppression in <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i> .....	61
Bringing in an Intersubjective Self-Conception .....	61
Examining the Conditions for Recognition in Lordship and Bondage.....	65
3.4 Unity as Model of Non-Oppression in <i>Philosophy of Right</i> .....	70
From Intersubjective Recognition to Ethical Life .....	71
The Meaning of Love as Unity in Marriage .....	75
3.5 Conclusion .....	82
Conclusion .....	84
Overarching Insights.....	84
Further Exploration.....	85
Bibliography .....	88

## List of Symbols, Abbreviations, & Nomenclature

ESD	Irigaray, Luce. <i>An Ethics of Sexual Difference</i> . Translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993.
Phdr.	Plato. <i>Phaedrus</i> . Translated by Stephen Scully, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003.
PR	Hegel, G. W. F. <i>Elements of the Philosophy of Right</i> . Translated by H. B. Nisbet, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
PS	Hegel, G. W. F. <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i> . Translated by A.V. Miller, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
SOW	Irigaray, Luce. <i>Speculum of the Other Woman</i> . Translated by Gillian G. Gill, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.
Symp.	Plato. <i>Symposium</i> . Translated by Seth Bernardete, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
TS	Irigaray, Luce. <i>This Sex Which Is Not One</i> . Translated by Catherine Porter, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

# Introduction

## **Context and Approach**

This thesis introduces the broad question of non-oppressive relationality in the context of love. This broad question is motivated by a more specific concern for how one can come to know themselves and be themselves in a relationship with another. While dominant conceptions of non-oppressive relationality have been advanced by the liberal tradition, I argue that these conceptions of non-oppressive relationality have obscured rather than addressed the heart of the problem at hand. In other words, it is not despite, but because of existing approaches to answering the question of non-oppressive relationality, that undertaking this question is still of critical concern and relevance. Within these liberal approaches, I identify two main ways that non-oppressive relationality has been conceptualized. The first is a contractual view of relationality, which has deep roots throughout the liberal tradition (e.g., Locke, Kant) and posits that we are acting freely in ourselves, and towards one another, when individuals conceive of and agree to the terms of their relationship (Chambers 2019, Sunstein and Thaler 2008). In this formulation, it could be said that each individual sees themselves reflected in the private contract and this contract ought to constitute the relationship. Indeed, many feminist thinkers (Chambers 2019, Brake 2012) who identify the institution of marriage as a source of oppression, have turned to the contractual line of thinking as an alternative for conceptualizing non-oppressive relationships.

The second view is a consensual understanding of relationality which, generally speaking, begins by qualifying what counts as an individual's agreement to enter into a (usually sexual) encounter either within or outside of a longstanding relationship (Wertheimer 2003, Archard 1998). In this view, individuals must enter into the encounter with some understanding of what



they desire, or think they desire, within it. The resulting encounter ought to take both individual's desire and expectations into account. In both the consensual and contractual view, a relationship comes into being as a direct result of the individuals within it and, in more sophisticated formulations, allows for negotiation or reconsideration of terms and agreement once the relationship has been initiated.

Considering these two dominant conceptions of non-oppressive relationality, I argue that the most critical aspect of non-oppression has been obscured. What both conceptualizations rely on, but are unable to fully capture, is a conception of participation as crucial to knowing when we are living as ourselves, and when we are not—especially in our relationships with others. In both the contractual and consensual view of relations, there is a tendency to conceive of participation as a discrete event or series of events actioned by an individual whose identity or being is taken as given. In this thesis, I argue that we must think of participation in a different way, wherein participation is inextricably tied to a way of being and living in the world as ourselves. Through my project of reconceptualizing relational participation, I uncover intellectual resources in the Western tradition of political thought that allow one to see that relations which can appear as non-oppressive under consensual or contractual forms of relationality, may no longer count as non-oppressive after all. In order to judge relationships as oppressive or non-oppressive, we require a new path forward.

This path begins with goal of discerning a deeper meaning of participation, wherein I look to three thinkers in particular: Plato, Hegel and Irigaray. Although these thinkers are writing in different ages and cultural traditions—4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Athens, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, and contemporary France—they share a deep concern for the problem of oppression within intimate relations, and in response, advance models of non-oppressive relationality that are founded on

robust conceptions of participation. For each thinker, we only come to know ourselves, and know ourselves in our relations with others, if our self-conception is achieved in a participatory way. In learning what it is to be ourselves, we can enter into relations with a keen awareness of what oppression entails, and how to work within oppressive relations in order to attain liberation.

In engaging with these thinkers, the broad movement of my thesis is threefold. First, I locate the problem of oppression that each thinker is responding to. In doing so, I examine the conditions in which we are unable to be ourselves. Second, I reconstruct the model of non-oppression that each thinker advances in response to the oppressive conditions they identify. Within each model of non-oppression, we gain two central insights. The first insight, is a new way of thinking about the self, which brings new ways of relating to others into being. The second insight, is an awareness of the conditions required to bring this self—and non-oppressive relations with others—into being. Following the examination of each model of non-oppression, I consider limitations to each thinker’s proposed model in regards to my overarching aim of thinking through non-oppressive relationality in love.

## **Structure**

In regards to the specific structure of my thesis, I begin Chapter 1 with an examination of Plato’s erotic works, in order to explore the meaning of participation as non-oppression in love. Within this chapter, Plato identifies the problem of oppression within conventional Ancient Greek erotics. Within conventional erotics, participation takes a conformative shape, for we are most ourselves in our adherence to strict social categories and socially determined relations between categories, because these categories are said to capture our true nature. In response, Plato offers a model of non-oppression as participation. Within this model of non-oppression, participation is no longer conformative, but transformative, as eros compels us to transform our self-conception and

relations with others in respect to the idea of the Beautiful. The result, is that participation must be taken up in an active way, wherein both lover and beloved must be involved in their own self-transformation in respect to the Beautiful. Despite this deep concern for the mutual *activity* of both lover and beloved, however, I find that Plato's project is ultimately unable to secure *mutuality* in the relations between lover and beloved. The result, is that Plato cannot secure mutually beneficial activity for both lover and beloved. This limitation then leads me to Chapter 2, where I aim to understand the meaning of participation in relation to sharedness, as that which structures the form and extent of participation available to us in love.

In taking up this question of sharedness, I look to Irigaray. Irigaray locates the problem of oppression in what she calls the "masculine economy", as a system where sharedness is really the domination of the masculine over the feminine. Within the masculine economy, Irigaray finds that possibilities for participation are made by and for the masculine. That is, there is no possibility to craft our own self-conception, and participate in a relationship as this self. As a result, she proposes a model of non-oppression where we can be ourselves with another. This is achieved in two steps. First, true difference in the form of sexual difference must be established, and second, this sexual difference must be maintained within love as the non-oppressive structure of sharedness. Despite Irigaray's concern for reconciling difference and sharedness, however, I show that her account is unable to realize both aims. Ultimately, Irigaray repeats a structure of irreducible individuality that we also find in Plato, and a true sharedness in love becomes unattainable.

In Chapter 3, I consider the limitations that we are left with in Plato and Irigaray's accounts of non-oppressive relationality. In response, I turn to Hegel, as a thinker who shares many of Plato and Irigaray's own concerns but approaches the problem of oppression in a structurally new way. Here, the problem of oppression identified by Hegel is that of the self-contained individual. It is

the irreducible individuality that Plato and Irigaray sought to preserve as the self, which actually prevents us from becoming ourselves for Hegel. In response to this condition of oppression, Hegel proposes two models of non-oppression: recognition rooted in intersubjectivity in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and ethical life rooted in a relationship between subject and the larger cultural and institutional world in *The Philosophy of Right*. Through recognition, we gain a self-conception that is tied to another. However, I argue that this self-conception cannot be said to be non-oppressive, unless it is constituted within a system of freedom. Hence, I turn to Hegel's model of non-oppression in ethical life, and specifically, towards his account of love as unity within marriage. I argue that marriage presents the fullest possibilities for non-oppressive relationality within love, because it is here that mutuality and self-constitution become intrinsically related.

## Chapter 1: Plato and Participation as Non-Oppression in Love

### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the idea of participation in Plato's erotic works, *The Symposium* and *The Phaedrus*. In relation to my broader aim of securing non-oppressive relationality, I turn to Plato's account of participation for his deep attempt to actualize non-oppression. As will be seen, Plato attempts to actualize non-oppression through a structure of participation that generates a shape of activity appropriate to non-oppression. For Plato, participation is only possible if we first understand what it is we are participating *in*. The structure of participation that Plato advances, at its core, is one where we (as the lover), participate in an object of our activity (as the Beautiful). The shape of activity that follows is that of eros, or desire for the Beautiful. At first, it may seem that *The Symposium* and *The Phaedrus* are unlikely choices for my project. Both texts focus on male relationships, hierarchical relations and relationships that do not even involve human beings. As will be seen throughout this chapter, however, Plato's discussion of erotic relationships actually brings much to bear in regards to our understanding of non-oppressive relationality today.

For Plato, oppression within erotic relationships is a problem that he is deeply concerned with. Here, strict social categories structure erotic relationships around an active-passive binary, wherein an active lover pursues a passive beloved. As will be seen, Plato works to reconfigure conventional erotic relationships, in order to show that both the active and passive roles of conventional erotics are really conditions of oppressive inactivity. Within his model of non-oppression, Plato introduces a structure of participation that is concerned with the participation of all erotic partners—not in respect to the desires of a sole individual or social convention—but in

respect to the Beautiful. As a result, mutual activity is made central to his account of erotic relations.

My exploration of this model of participation occurs in four parts. In section 1.2, I examine the meaning of conventional Ancient Greek erotics. Following this, I advance Plato's critique of these conventional erotics. In section 1.3, I show how Plato responds to the oppressive conditions of conventional erotics and reconstructs a model of participation as non-oppression in *The Symposium*. Next, in section 1.4, I consider limitations to Plato's project in the experience of the beloved in *The Symposium* and *The Phaedrus*. I conclude the chapter in section 1.5.

## **1.2 The Problem of Conventional Ancient Greek Erotics**

### *The Ancient Greek View of Conventional Erotic Relations*

In *The Symposium* and *The Phaedrus*, Plato critiques his own time's conventional erotic institution of pederasty, which, in turn, calls the Ancient Greek conventional view of all erotic and sexual relations into question. In order to understand the nature of Plato's critique, it is first necessary to understand why the Ancient Greeks considered conventional erotic and sexual relations to be non-oppressive. Once this reasoning is established, we can then turn to Plato's critique and overturning of these conventional erotic relations. In order to reconstruct the conventional Ancient Greek view of erotic relations, I draw upon two famous speeches from Athenian law: Demosthenes' *Against Neaera* and Aeschines' *Against Timarchus*. Within these speeches, I focus on examining the role that social categories play in relation to sexual and erotic relations. Both speeches are relevant to such a task, because they shed light on the meaning of sexual and erotic relationships as defined by the *nomos*, or social convention. Indeed, within both speeches, the charges laid upon the accused are understood not in relation to individual actions alone, but in relation to the social categories that each belongs to, for these categories are said to encapsulate their true "nature".

These social categories then exist in relation to other social categories, where the order of the entire system depends on the order of each of its linked components. As will be seen in an examination of these speeches, deep tensions ensue if one acts outside of their given social category.

In *Against Neaera*, we see the implications that arise when one acts outside of their given social category. In this speech, these implications are played out in the relationship between Stephanus, an Athenian citizen, and his relationship with Neaera, an hetaera, or mistress, who is foreign to Athens and poses as his wife. The nature of their relationship results in charges being laid against Neaera, however, these charges can really be considered charges against Stephanus.<sup>1</sup> We see this when Apollodorus brings attention to Stephanus living “with a foreign woman against the law,” and marrying, “off the daughters of *hetairai* as if they were his own”.<sup>2</sup> Despite Stephanus’ complicitness in the relationship, however, it is Neaera who poses the deepest threat to the Athenian *nomos*. As an hetaera by “nature”, Neaera risks the dignity of the most elite social category of women—the wives of Athenian citizens—by pretending to be of the same social category as them. Apollodorus emphasizes this clear distinction between categories of women: “we have *hetairai* for the sake of pleasure, concubines for meeting our bodily needs day-by-day, but wives for having legitimate children and to be trustworthy guardians of our household”.<sup>3</sup> Each category of women is defined by a set of constraints, which marks out the role appropriate to them in Ancient Greek society, as well as the appropriate use of their body for sexual purposes in accordance with this role. If Neaera were to be accepted as a wife, she would only lower the dignity of the category of wives for the Ancient Greeks, since her “nature” falls below the “nature” of

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<sup>1</sup> Demosthenes, “*Against Neaera*,” in *Speeches from Athenian Law*, ed. Michael Gagarin, trans. Victor Bers (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 144–182. Text will be cited by page and paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> *Against Neaera*, 150, [13].

<sup>3</sup> *Against Neaera*, 180, [122].

wives. In understanding her role, and using her body, for the sake of pleasure as an hetaera, while posing as a wife, Neaera deviates from the social category of wife that she attempts to belong to. Neaera's deviation then threatens the *nomos*, as Apollodorus affirms: "the laws will lose their force, and the lifestyle of the hetairai will have the authority to bring about whatever those women want".<sup>4</sup> By acting outside of the constraints expected of her, Neaera's social deviation poses harm to all of Ancient Greek society .

If the hetairai had the "authority to bring about whatever [they] want", this would infringe on the position of men, who are responsible for maintaining their wives' position within the larger social order. While women vary in "nature", from the *pornē* (female prostitute) and most sexually available to all and therefore least dignified, to the hetaera (courtesan/mistress) and sexually available to few and less dignified, to the wife who possesses clear sexual boundaries and is most dignified, all women exist along a spectrum of submission.<sup>5</sup> The meaning of this submission is clear in the case of the *pornē*, who will accept money for the use of her body without much restriction on that use. The wife, however, becomes submissive in a different way. As David Cohen points out, "women are thought to embody a seething sexuality that can ignite an uncontrollable response in men. To preserve social order, this potentially destructive force must be controlled and mediated through the institution of the family, which, when properly contained and channeled, it serves to reproduce".<sup>6</sup> Hence, Apollodoros emphasizes that the role of male citizens is to, "keep the women in your care from being brought down to the same level of honor as this whore".<sup>7</sup> The relationship between men and women is not just rooted in biological reproduction—it is rooted in

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<sup>4</sup> *Against Neaera*, 178, [112].

<sup>5</sup> Dover, James K, *Greek Homosexuality* (London: Duckworth, 1978), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Cohen, David, *Law, Society and Homosexuality in Classical Athens* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 2003), 141.

<sup>7</sup> *Against Neaera*, 178, [112].



the larger goal of producing *politēs* (citizens). While the male citizen is by “nature” capable of guiding their wives to a dignified and honorable life, and the wife is capable of taking up this way of life, a foreigner and a *hetairai* is by “nature” unfit to guide or take up dignity and honor in the same way. Neaera might produce children with Stephanus, but her social deception in posing as a wife effectively destabilizes the reproduction of the Ancient Greek social system. Further, Neaera is seen to do damage to herself through her social deception, because it is within our social categories that we find the boundaries for our physical and social integrity. Thus, it is in acting outside of social constraints, that the Ancient Greeks understand Neaera as doing damage to herself and to broader society.

In *Against Neaera*, we gain insight into the use of social categories to regulate sexual behaviour for men and women, rather than the presence of an unmediated, abstract principle alone. At this point, however, we must consider the difference between sexual and erotic relationships for the Ancient Greeks. While the relationship between men and women is a sexual one, it is not considered an erotic relationship, for this conventionally erotic relationship is only present in the institution of pederasty. It is the homoerotic relationship between male lover (*erastes*) and male beloved (*eromenos*) which is the site of *eros* for the conventional Ancient Greeks. As will be seen, the “structuring principle” of these relationships is an active-passive conceptual binary.<sup>8</sup> The lover, as the older male citizen, actively pursues a younger, passive beloved. The lover ought to educate the beloved about the *nomos*, and although he ought not to, he will likely seek physical gratification from the beloved.<sup>9</sup> The beloved, as the passive member of the relationship, must never publically

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<sup>8</sup> Sean Corner, “Sumposion”, in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*, ed. Thomas K. Hubbard, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 212.

<sup>9</sup> Corner, “Sumposion”, 212.

reciprocate the lover's desire, but instead, display a show of resistance to the lover's advances.<sup>10</sup> The reason for this resistance, is that while women exist by "nature" along a spectrum of submission, the Ancient Greeks held a general "prohibition against males of any age adopting a submissive role that was unworthy of a free citizen".<sup>11</sup> A tension thus arises when we consider that eros entails the "obsessive focussing of desire on one person," wherein the beloved is continually pursued for the unspoken purpose of submitting to the lover, and frequently, will end up gratifying the lover anyway.<sup>12</sup> In an attempt to address this tension, conventional erotics have the beloved acts in a way that is distinct from the feminine form of submission. Accordingly, Dover asks: "what does the eromenos get out of submission to his erastes? The conventional Greek answer is no bodily pleasure, should he do so, he incurs disapproval as a pornos and as perverted".<sup>13</sup> In order to avoid the social outrage of being seen as pornos (male prostitute), let alone a kinaidos (a man who takes pleasure in and seeks out sexual submission to other men and is thus seen as effeminate), the beloved must always resist the lover, and if he does gratify him, display no pleasure in doing so. In this way, the pederastic institution tries to avoid making the beloved into that which he is not (and ought not be), so that male citizens may engage in erotic relationships in a way that suits their standing as citizens, rather than undermines it.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, we see in *Against Timarchus*, why Aeschines charges Timarchus with being unworthy of public life.<sup>15</sup> For, according to Aeschines, Timarchus had prostituted himself in his

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<sup>10</sup> Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, *Law, Society and Homosexuality in Classical Athens*, 171.

<sup>12</sup> Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 63.

<sup>13</sup> Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 52.

<sup>14</sup> Corner, "Sumposion," 212.

<sup>15</sup> Aeschines, "Against Timarchus," in *Speeches from Athenian Law*, ed. Michael Gagarin, trans. Victor Bers (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 183–244.

youth, and as a result of these “reckless offences” against his body, he should lose his rights as an Athenian citizen.<sup>16</sup> As with *Against Neaera*, this charge must be understood in the context of the wider social order. The citizen who chooses to make a life secretly prostituting himself to lovers, and the citizen who seeks out submission within these relations, are unfit for public office not because of acts committed per se, but because the acts committed belong to a different category of being than the free male citizen. As John Winkler notes, this is why the *kinaidos* is seen as the most undignified social category of men, for he not only acts in socially deviant way, he is “socially deviant in his entire being”, because he “flagrantly violated or contravened the dominant social definition of masculinity” in his willingness to submit to another.<sup>17</sup> In his characterization of Timarchus, Aeschines thus highlights the slavishness of Timarchus’ condition as being unfit for male a citizen: “he did all this as a slave to the most disgraceful pleasures, gluttony and expensive eating and flute-girls and courtesans and dice and the other activities that should never have control of a decent and freeborn man”.<sup>18</sup> At this point in his youth, Timarchus ought to have acted in accordance with the conventional role of the beloved. Instead of resisting one of his suitors Misoglas’ advances, however, Timarchus was, “young and unprincipled and ready for the acts that Misoglas was eager to perform, and Timarchus to have done to him”.<sup>19</sup> Timarchus neither resisted Misoglas, nor feigned disinterest or displeasure in his sexual relationship with him. Thus, Aeschines emphasizes that in selling sexual favours and taking pleasure in doing so, Timarchus is by “nature” a *kinaidos*, and “not fit to share the rights of citizenship”.<sup>20</sup> In both speeches, sexual

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<sup>16</sup> *Against Timarchus*, 194, [19], [22].

<sup>17</sup> Winkler, John J, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 46.

<sup>18</sup> *Against Timarchus*, 201, [42].

<sup>19</sup> *Against Timarchus*, 201, [41].

<sup>20</sup> *Against Timarchus*, 193, [17].

and erotic relations become damaging for the conventional Ancient Greeks when individuals act outside of the social categories which encapsulate their true “nature”.

### *Plato's Critique of Conventional Erotic Relations*

In response to the conventional erotic relations of his time, Plato re-indexes the meaning of hierarchical and conformative erotic activity within conventional relationships to participatory and transformative erotic activity within his new philosophic identification of the true nature of eros. Through this reconfiguration, Plato show that the active-passive categories of conventional erotics are actually categories of unerotic, and thus oppressive, inactivity. In other words, the conventional erotic roles available to lover and beloved, despite their conventional meanings of “active” and “passive”, will both be shown to be conditions of inactivity because neither lover nor beloved act in a way that is erotically active. While I explore Plato's structure of participation as non-oppression and the nature of erotic activity generated by it in the next section, I first examine how and why Plato finds oppressive and conformative activity, or erotic inactivity, within the Ancient Greek nomos.

Within conventional erotic relations, the entire social order relies on an adherence to strict social categories. For the lover, this conformative expectation means that the choice to pursue a particular beloved is constrained from the beginning by a set of criteria which limits the possible choice of beloved, and the extent to which the lover's erotic choices can be said to be the lover's own. The beloved is similarly limited in his ability to choose the role of the beloved, for there is a set of pre-existing constraints that make him eligible for the role, regardless of his desire to take the role on. The only conditions that need to be met, in order for one to be a potential lover or a potential beloved, are one's age and social standing. A lover is capable of being a lover by virtue of being an older male citizen, and a beloved by virtue of his teenage youth and beauty. That which

we least control or contribute to, dictates whether or not the role of lover or beloved is open to us in the first place. One then actually *becomes* a lover in the mere pursuit of a chosen beloved boy, and a beloved becomes beloved simply by virtue of being pursued. Neither the lover's nor the beloved's actions are consciously connected to anything other than the nomos, and so, the actions that they take are already given to them. The conformative activity of the conventional lover and beloved cannot be considered the transformative activity that Plato is interested in, since lover and beloved's actions are guided by an idea of them that is already determined. Who they are going to become, and how they will act, is decided from the start by a nomos that demands nothing more than their reception of the values the nomos already holds.

As a result of socially given roles, the conventionally erotic relationship is founded on ideas of who the lover and beloved already are, and each must act towards the other in a way that follows from their particular role. The lover must actively court the beloved, and the beloved must passively resist these advances in order to remain a beloved (rather than become a pornos or kinaidos). The relationship between lover and beloved then becomes centered on keeping one another the same—meaning, within the boundaries of their given social categories—instead of helping one another transform beyond the constraints that the nomos provides. In this way, the conventional erotic relationship proves itself to be akin to the relationship of the “bad lover”, which Plato mentions in *The Phaedrus*. There, Plato claims that it is a sick lover who, “schemes to keep the boy totally ignorant and totally fixed on him”.<sup>21</sup> It is a possessive lover who, “can’t restrain his jealousy, or his impulse to prevent the boy from attending all sorts of occasions, especially the beneficial ones, where he may best grow into a man”.<sup>22</sup> The lover would keep the beloved ignorant

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<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Stephen Scully (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), 239b. Hereafter cited as Phdr.

<sup>22</sup> *Phdr.*, 239b.

and weak, so that they could stay together as they already are. This love is, by nature, a jealous and fragile love, because any transformation on the part of the lover or beloved which defies these boundaries, risks the loss of the relationship.

Indeed, if either lover or beloved acted in a way that ran counter to their roles, their identity as lover or beloved, and thus the nature of their relationship, would immediately change. For instance, the beloved that actively pursues a lover, or willingly accepts advances or gratification, becomes a *kinaidos* rather than a beloved.<sup>23</sup> The consequence, is that there is no possibility for either lover or beloved to change their self-conception and act outside of their given erotic roles, for their relationship is founded on their relation to one another as determined by the *nomos*. While the intent of the conventional lover is, ideally, to educate the beloved in the ways of the *nomos*, this education takes place within the constraining boundaries of the *nomos*, for the purpose of reinforcing these boundaries. Relationally, the implication is that the nature of erotic activity is actually pinned to the qualities of the beloved's body—being male, being young—for the purpose of maintaining a larger social order. That is, the relationship is founded on the lover's pursuit of the beloved as an object given to the lover by society and thus not part of genuine *eros*, wherein the erotic activity of the lover ends with the boys coming of age. This ceasing to be of age is not the result of the lover, the beloved, or the relationship between them—it is a contingent fact of physical nature. The lover's efforts to educate the beloved do not make him any less desirable to the lover, because the source of the lover's activity is rooted in the beloved's appearance. Thus, erotic activity is spurred and extinguished by the mere contingency of the beloved's age, and the erotic feelings this arises in the lover. What is missing here for Plato, is an intrinsic way for the

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<sup>23</sup> Lear, Andrew, "Ancient Pederasty: An Introduction," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*, ed. Thomas K. Hubbard (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 119.

relationship between lover and beloved to generate activity for both partners, in and as *that* living relationship.

### 1.3 Participation as a Model of Non-Oppression in *The Symposium*

#### *The Birth of Eros as In-Betweenness: Troubling the Active-Passive Binary*

In the *Symposium*, Socrates presents a speech about love, or eros, which he originally receives from Diotima of Mantinea. Although Diotima is not present at the symposium, we are told that she has taught Socrates all that he knows about erotics. In order to explore the nature of eros, Diotima tells Socrates that he must first know “who Eros himself is”.<sup>24</sup> She states that the nature of eros will be revealed through the story of Eros’ birth, which takes place during a festivity celebrating the birth of Aphrodite. Here, Eros’ mother Penia (poverty) finds Poros (resource) passed out in the garden of Zeus and conceives Eros with him: “Penia, who because of her own lack of resources was plotting to have a child made out of Poros, reclined beside him and conceived Eros”.<sup>25</sup> Penia, or poverty, represents a condition of lack, which brings her into a relationship with Poros, or resource, who represents a condition of fullness. Despite her seemingly passive characterization, Penia’s condition of lack spurs an active pursuit of fullness, wherein she “plot[s] to have a child made out of Poros”.<sup>26</sup> Penia experiences lack, however, this lack drives her towards fullness via an active “plotting” that will bring Eros into being.

Once conceived, this same movement is preserved in Eros, for he represents the relationship between his parent’s conditions: Eros “has the nature of his mother, always dwelling with neediness. But in accordance with his father he plots to trap the beautiful and the good, and

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<sup>24</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Seth Bernardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 210a. Hereafter cited as Symp.

<sup>25</sup> *Symp.*, 203b–d.

<sup>26</sup> *Symp.*, 203c.

is courageous”.<sup>27</sup> Eros is by nature in-betweenness, for he experiences neediness in relation to the divine, while also participating in the divine through an active pursuit of possessing the Beautiful.<sup>28</sup> From the beginning of Eros’ birth story, eros troubles conventional Greek understandings of erotic relationships, or the pederastic lover’s active pursuit of a passive beloved. If the story of Penia and Poros is read in accordance with the active-passive categories of the Greek *nomos*, then it seems as though Penia and Poros stand in for these active-passive categories. Penia, as the one who is “dwelling with neediness” and “begging” for resources, would be characterized as passive, while Poros, as the one who “plots”, “traps”, “seeks” and “hunts” beauty and wisdom with courage would seem to be characterized as active.

The true nature of Eros, however, blurs these active-passive erotic categories, for the actions that eros demands of us are not in respect to our conventional social roles. In conventional erotics, the lover’s personal desire, as constrained by the *nomos*, drives his action towards the beloved, and the beloved passively receives this desire as per social convention. For the philosophically erotic lover and beloved, however, the nature of erotic participation is understood in respect to the Beautiful. While conventional erotics aim back at the *nomos* that establishes it, philosophic eros aims at something that goes beyond its origins of fullness and lack. In the following subsections, I show how Plato refigures conventional Greek erotic relations in respect to the Beautiful, by exploring the dynamic and shape of erotic relations for lover and beloved.

#### *The Dynamic and Shape of Erotic Activity for the Lover: The Beautiful-Lover Relation*

In order to recover Plato’s insights into the meaning of non-oppressive relationships, I reconstruct the participatory structure present within his account. Here, the lover and beloved’s participation

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<sup>27</sup> *Symp.*, 203d.

<sup>28</sup> *Symp.*, 202d.



in the Beautiful take two different forms, and this participation generates a specific shape of erotic activity for each. For this reason, I begin by examining the way that the Beautiful spurs activity in the lover, and following this, the way that the lover spurs activity in the beloved. Taken together, we can then see how this triadic relationship between the Beautiful, the lover and the beloved must always embody activity, if the lover and beloved are to participate erotically. For the lover, erotic activity takes on the following logic: (1) the nature of eros is “of the good’s being one’s own always”; (2) the lover will “earnestly apply themselves to a certain single kind” of good, wherein his desire is a “whole desire of good” rather than a desire for a part of it; and, (3) the appropriate activity for a lover of the whole good, is bringing “to birth in beauty both in terms of the body and in terms of the soul”, wherein the lover of soul is active in the best way.<sup>29</sup>

For Plato, erotic activity is by nature generative because eros is desire for the whole of the good. If eros were desire for a part of the good, then one would seek to possess those “good things” in order to “be happy”.<sup>30</sup> However, this kind of happiness would stop generation: one becomes “happy by the acquisition of good things; and there is no further need to ask, “For what consequence does he who wants to be happy want to be so?” But the answer is thought to be a complete one”.<sup>31</sup> Eros is desire for fulfilment, and so, it is defined by an inherent lack that perpetuates activity. If one believed they had achieved a “complete” answer, they would no longer be erotic at all, since eros is the generative pursuit of completion. Diotima asserts that the activity suitable to the lover is not to treat Eros as that which is Beautiful and thus complete, and tells Socrates, “you believed, in my opinion, as I conjecture from what you say, that the beloved is Eros,

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<sup>29</sup> *Symp.*, 203d, 206a–c.

<sup>30</sup> *Symp.*, 205a.

<sup>31</sup> *Symp.*, 205a.

and is not that which loves”.<sup>32</sup> Instead of being the Beautiful, Eros is “of engendering and bringing to birth in the beautiful”.<sup>33</sup> Eros is thus the process of wanting the good to be one’s own *always*, wherein the lover engages in a generative pursuit of the Beautiful as a result.

Desire for the Beautiful begets Beautiful things in the Beautiful, and Diotima traces this erotic movement through the ladder of love, where the lover gradually pursues reflections of the Beautiful that come into increasingly closer contact with the Beautiful itself.<sup>34</sup> The insight to be gained by the ladder of love, is that nature of erotic activity will correspond to the condition of our soul in respect to the Beautiful. It is a condition of fullness or lack in respect to the Beautiful, rather than activity and passivity in respect to the *nomos*, which informs the shape of erotic activity appropriate to one’s soul. The participatory activity required of lover and beloved is thus reconfigured. The lover is spurred by lack to pursue the Beautiful, and in this pursuit, is filled with reflections of the Beautiful. The lover then teaches the beloved what they now know about the Beautiful, and the beloved, who had been lacking in this knowledge of beauty, receives it, and is thereby filled with Beauty as well. The lover, who continues on with his pursuit of the Beautiful, eventually comes to see that his prior understanding of the Beautiful was not a full one—he is lacking still, and the cycle of lack and fullness continues for lover and beloved. In this way, Plato introduces a new way of thinking about participation as transformative and mutually active, rather than conformative and unequal.

Turning now to the specific movement of the ladder of love, we see that the erotic lover’s soul is receptive to the Beautiful, and so, he understands that desire will be in cyclical motion as he ascends the ladder. Each movement upwards brings forth a progressively fuller understanding

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<sup>32</sup> *Symp.*, 204c.

<sup>33</sup> *Symp.*, 206e.

<sup>34</sup> *Symp.*, 210c.

of the Beautiful. On the first rung, the lover pursues the Beautiful through an initial love for the physical beauty of a beloved. Here, the lover's condition is one of fullness. Filled with an awareness of the physical beauty of beloved, the lover delivers a speech affirming this beauty in the beloved: "if the guide is guiding correctly, he must love one body and there generate beautiful speeches".<sup>35</sup> Once the lover has generated his beautiful speech, he returns again to a condition of lack, for he realizes that his love for the beloved's body is really his love for a quality in which other bodies share:

the beauty that is in any body whatsoever is related to that in another body; and if he must pursue the beauty of looks, it is great folly not to believe that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same. And with this realization he must be the lover of all beautiful bodies and in contempt slacken this [erotic] intensity for only one body, in the belief that it is petty.<sup>36</sup>

While it may seem that the beloved is no longer implicated in the lover's journey at this point, each of the lover's successive speeches will actually implicate the beloved in a way that generates mutual activity. On the second rung of Diotima's ladder, the lover births a speech which teaches the beloved that his particular physical appearance is actually connected to a deeper quality that all bodies share. The lover then continues to pursue the Beautiful beyond bodies, for he comes to see "the beautiful in pursuits and laws".<sup>37</sup> The following movements for the lover are then to, "lead [the beloved] on to the sciences", and finally, "discern a certain single philosophical science", where the lover reaches the form of Beauty itself.<sup>38</sup> Throughout this process, the lover's desire never fixates or freezes on the physical qualities of the beloved as the socially determined object of his desire, for the beloved is only a reflection of the Beautiful, and not the Beautiful itself. The result, is that feelings like jealousy and possessiveness are foreign to the lover's desire, and

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<sup>35</sup> *Symp.*, 210b.

<sup>36</sup> *Symp.*, 210b–c.

<sup>37</sup> *Symp.*, 210c–d.

<sup>38</sup> *Symp.*, 210c.

indeed, one who acts in a jealous or possessive way cannot be erotic at all, for this possessiveness would stop the movement of desire completely. On the part of the beloved, this means that transformative action is also required on their part. In order to remain open to the lover's speeches throughout the ladder of love, the beloved must actively tend to themselves, and transform their self-conception. In doing so, the beloved will eventually reach a condition where they are ready to be a lover themselves. In the following subsection, I now examine the dynamic and shape of erotic activity for the beloved within this broader structure of transformative participation.

*The Dynamic and Shape of Erotic Activity for the Beloved: The Lover-Beloved Dynamic*

As we have seen, the lover's relationship to the Beautiful generates the erotic activity that moves him towards increasingly unmediated contact with the Beautiful. For the beloved, however, erotic activity occurs not in respect to the Beautiful simply, but through the lover. The lover, as the one who comes to know the Beautiful most deeply, is thus the one who knows the beloved's soul most deeply. While the lover is initially drawn to the beloved through an appreciation of their bodily beauty, the lover's pursuit of the truth leads him to realize that the truth of the beloved is not in physical qualities alone, but in the Beautiful. In contrast, the conventional beloved would believe that what he most is are these physical qualities, as dictated by the *nomos* and validated by the lover. In order for a beloved to begin to care for his soul in a way that will be receptive of the Beautiful, he must first come to know what the true nature of his soul is. Thus, the lover births Beautiful speeches that will show the beloved the truth of his soul, so that he may then care for this soul in the right way.

The nature of the lover's speeches will follow from the lover's own progression up the ladder of love. Importantly, however, the lover's movement up the ladder of love also implicates the beloved in a way that establishes mutual activity. Hence, I argue that the ladder of love spurs

erotic activity not just in the lover, but in the beloved as well. As the lover comes to greater understandings of the Beautiful, he births speeches that reflect these greater understandings. In seeking to have the Beautiful himself, the lover births speeches that make the beloved better:

even if someone who is decent in his soul has only a slight youthful charm, the lover must be content with it, and love and cherish him, and engender and seek such speeches as will make the young better, in order that [the lover], on his part, may be compelled to behold the beautiful.<sup>39</sup>

While the lover progresses through the ladder of love as a result of his relation to the Beautiful, the lover's relation to the Beautiful also sets the beloved's activity into motion. Where the lover is "compelled to behold the beautiful," he also births "speeches as will make the young better".<sup>40</sup> The process of being made "better", while generated by the lover, must ultimately be taken up by the beloved, who is ideally attuned to his *own* soul's condition of fullness or lack. The shape of erotic activity for a beloved that begins to ascend Diotima's ladder is thus to remain receptive to the lover's speeches (and experience lack), wherein the beloved then comes to know themselves in the way that the lover knows them (and experience fullness). Similar to the lover, who must not settle on a single rung of the ladder as though it were the completion of his pursuit of Beauty, the beloved must not cling to a single self-conception as though it were the completion of his self-transformation. Given that the lover's progressive movement towards the Beautiful will generate new speeches, and these speeches teach the beloved about his own connection to the Beautiful, the beloved will change his self-conception in order to continue receiving the lover's speeches in a generative way.

Looking to the ladder of love's initial rung, the lover first perceives the physical beauty of the beloved and, through struggle, comes to birth a Beautiful speech that he directs towards the

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<sup>39</sup> *Symp.*, 210c.

<sup>40</sup> *Symp.*, 210c.

beloved.<sup>41</sup> The beloved, who lacks an awareness of his own connection to the Beautiful at this point, must open himself to receiving the lover's speech. Here, the beloved already understands himself as a Beautiful boy by convention, which means that openness to the lover's speech is not difficult.<sup>42</sup> After receiving the lover's speech, however, there is further action demanded of the beloved. The lover's first movement up the ladder of love requires that their appreciation for a particular beloved is transformed into a love for the beloved's qualities.<sup>43</sup> The lover then begets speeches about Beautiful qualities, meaning, they are no longer speaking about the beloved alone, for these qualities are applicable to more than a particular beloved. At this point, the beloved ideally begins to understand himself as more than a Beautiful body, and begins to see the Beautiful qualities that he ought to nurture in his soul. The lover thus shows the beloved that he is loved for a deeper reason than what the *nomos* provides, and instead of preventing him from changing, the lover compels the beloved to transform his self-conception. In this way, the conformative participation of the conventional beloved takes on a new shape as transformative participation for the Platonic beloved.

As the lover continues his generative pursuit of the Beautiful, he eventually births the speeches that will show the beloved the nature of the beloved's connection to laws, sciences, and the Beautiful itself.<sup>44</sup> For the beloved, erotic activity takes the shape of transforming his self-conception, which is also the pre-condition for continuing to receive the lover's speeches. Through these speeches, the beloved continues to see the truth of himself as the lover perceives him, and he must care for himself in a way that maintains this self-conception before he can receive the next

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<sup>41</sup> *Symp.*, 210a.

<sup>42</sup> *Symp.*, 210a.

<sup>43</sup> *Symp.*, 210b–c.

<sup>44</sup> *Symp.*, 211c.

speech, and care for himself accordingly. The beloved thus cares for himself in a way that progressively becomes a caring for the Beautiful, and in this way, he is opened to the possibility of leading a philosophic life. This caring for the Beautiful culminates in the lover's speech on "a certain philosophical science", where the beloved becomes aware that their truest self must take up the activity of the philosophic self.<sup>45</sup> Through a radical openness to the Beauty generated by the lover, the beloved begins to know himself as the lover understands him, and in this way, is prepared to open himself to the Beautiful without the lover's mediation. It is only once the beloved becomes a lover himself, however, that he will finally be able to give birth in the Beautiful by generating his own Beautiful speeches.

In sum, for both lover and beloved, erotic activity is spurred from outside of themselves, however, the dynamic of erotic activity is different for each. The lover generates an understanding of Beautiful in the Beautiful, while the beloved cultivates his share in the Beautiful within himself. That is, the lover generates Beautiful speeches in the Beautiful, while the beloved receives these speeches in a way that changes his self-conception—awakening him to his connection to the Beautiful—and spurring his attentiveness to his soul, wherein he seeks to maintain this connection. Whereas conventional erotics bar the beloved from participating in a transformative way, Platonic erotics necessitate that both lover and beloved participate in a way that transforms their self-conception. Changes in the lover and beloved's self-conception are not a threat to the continued existence of the relationship between lover and beloved, rather, they are the condition of it. In this sense, Plato's model of participation as non-oppression provides us with deep insight into a love that does not demand another be anything other than what they know themselves to truly be. In his love for the Beautiful, the erotic lover does not presume he possesses full knowledge about

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<sup>45</sup> *Symp.*, 210c.

anything, much less himself, and the beloved learns that what he most is, is dictated not by the many, but his soul's own connection to the Beautiful. Both lover and beloved become active participants in a relationship that is based on the process of becoming, wherein the conventional impulse to possess an object of love becomes generative, rather than jealously fixed on keeping another yours forever.

#### **1.4 Limitations to Plato's Project: Reconsidering the Erotic Activity of the Beloved**

While we gain an understanding of the meaning of Platonic participation via the Beautiful-lover-beloved structure, we must further examine this structure, in order to assess the extent to which erotic activity can be realized for both lover and beloved. We know that, broadly speaking, love as participation allows both lover and beloved to be attuned to themselves in an active way. Powerfully, this means that our self-relation is no longer dependent on our conformity with established expectations of who we are, as with conventional erotics. Instead, we must actively engage in the process of coming to know ourselves, and the structure of our relations ought to assist, rather than hinder us, in this pursuit. The question that arises, however, is whether the conditions for erotic activity, produced by the Beautiful-lover-beloved structure, can be met by both lover and beloved. If we find that Plato's model of non-oppression comes at the cost of no mutuality and equality between lover and beloved, we will have to reassess our way forward. In order to explore this question, I turn to *The Symposium* and *The Phaedrus*, paying particular attention to the experience of the beloved, whose erotic activity seems restricted throughout both dialogues.

##### *Considering the Beloved's Experience in The Symposium: The Case of Alcibiades*

Looking first to *The Symposium*, we see that the beloved's erotic participation progressively abstracts him, to the extent that it becomes difficult to consider him a self at all. In this abstraction,



erotic participation becomes limited when the conditions of erotic activity cannot be fully carried out. We see the difficulty of self-abstraction reflected in the experience of Alcibiades, beloved of Socrates, who stumbles drunkenly into the symposium and eventually confronts Socrates, to “tell the truth” of their relationship.<sup>46</sup> As we learn from Alcibiades’ speech, Alcibiades has received Socrates’ erotic speeches before, and upon receiving them, knows what he ought to do but struggles to act upon them: “For he compels me to agree that, though I am still in need of much myself, I neglect myself and handle instead the affairs of the Athenians”.<sup>47</sup> Alcibiades knows that the truth of his soul is more than his physical appearance or love of honor, and yet, he continues to care for himself as if this were all that he were. Alcibiades then feels shame before Socrates, for Alcibiades knows that he has turned away from a tending to his soul:

In regards to this human being along have I been affected in a way that no one would suspect was in me—to feel shame before anyone at all. Only before him do I feel shame. For I know within myself that I am incapable of contradicting him or of saying that what he commands must not be done; and whenever I go away, I know within myself that I am doing so because I have succumbed to the honor I get from the many.<sup>48</sup>

The nature of Alcibiades’ discontent, is an inability to continue transforming his self-conception by letting go of prior self-conceptions attached to the *nomos*. Although Socrates generates speeches that allow Alcibiades to know himself, the self that can be known is one that becomes increasingly removed from earthly life, and so, demands to be cared for in an increasingly abstracted way. What once counted as erotic activity is soon discounted as that activity at all, until the only erotic activity appropriate to the beloved is contemplation of the Beautiful. Thus, the beloved’s connection to the embodied lover, the city, and their own particularity, will no longer be the focus of their self-cultivation, should they wish to remain receptive to the lover’s speeches.

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<sup>46</sup> *Symp.*, 214e.

<sup>47</sup> *Symp.*, 216b.

<sup>48</sup> *Symp.*, 216b–c.

Here, there are two main problems. First, it is the lover's ascent which compels the beloved to transform; the lover acts in relation to the Beautiful alone, and the beloved must follow the lover wherever the lover goes. In contrast, the lover does not take his bearings from the beloved at all, and so, mutual activity precludes mutuality here. Second, an openness to the lover's speeches will compel the beloved to gradually relinquish their lived attachments to the world. Indeed, each ascent by the lover progressively intensifies the lover's conviction—and so the beloved's understanding—that the body is “trivial”, and even infected in relation to the “vast open sea of the beautiful”.<sup>49</sup> This disassociation with earthly things makes the process of self-transformation increasingly difficult for the beloved.

Should the beloved wish to follow the lover in an ascent of the ladder of love, he must be come to a self-conception that abstracts him from all earthly things, including his embodied relationship to the lover. What the case of Alcibiades shows, however, is that these conditions—which are required for the beloved to participate erotically in the relationship—are actually a cause of harm in and of themselves. According to Alcibiades, this harm comes about because Socrates inverts the lover-beloved relationship—Socrates does not pursue Alcibiades, but causes Alcibiades to pursue him—and so, “he brings it about that he is the beloved rather than the lover”.<sup>50</sup> Instead of tending to his own soul in relation to the Beautiful, Alcibiades attempts to gain the Beautiful by physically gratifying Socrates.<sup>51</sup> When Socrates refutes Alcibiades' advances, Alcibiades interprets this as Socrates committing “an outrage” against his “youthful beauty”.<sup>52</sup> And so Alcibiades laments “I believed I was something special” to Socrates, who in reality “believes that

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<sup>49</sup> *Symp.*, 210d–e.

<sup>50</sup> *Symp.*, 222b–c.

<sup>51</sup> *Symp.*, 217a.

<sup>52</sup> *Symp.*, 219c–d.

all these possessions are worth nothing and we are nothing”.<sup>53</sup> While one could suggest that Alcibiades’ experience is the result of him not acting as an ideal beloved, Plato seems to share an awareness that this is not exactly the case. The ideal beloved would overcome his attachment to prior self-conceptions, climb upwards on the ladder of love, receive the lover’s final speeches, and become a lover himself. The erotic activity that would then be available to him, would be the erotic activity suited to his soul’s new condition as a lover. But in Alcibiades’ experience, the conditions required for erotic activity to take place affect him in such a way that his current condition is unbearable, and further participation difficult. In response to the harm inflicted upon Alcibiades, Plato refigures the participatory structure of erotic relations in *The Phaedrus*, thereby bringing new shapes of erotic activity into being that are beneficial to both lover and beloved. As will be seen, in *The Phaedrus*, lover and beloved are brought into contact with the Beautiful through earthly representations of the divine. In this way, Plato presents a possible way for the lover and beloved to participate in an erotic relationship, while remaining here on Earth.

#### *Considering the Beloved’s Experience in The Phaedrus*

In this section, I examine *The Phaedrus*, where the relationship between lover and beloved is explored in further depth by Plato. Through this text, I will argue that the erotic relationship between lover and beloved shifts, in an effort by Plato to make the erotic relationship mutually beneficial for both lover and beloved. I begin by summarizing the new meaning of eros for Plato in *The Phaedrus*. Here, eros is reconceptualised as recollection, wherein earthly experiences become equally and immediately connected to the Beautiful. Eros now moves us from “here to there” through remembrance.<sup>54</sup> Understood in this way, there is no longer a progressive ascent to

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<sup>53</sup> *Symp.*, 219c, 216e.

<sup>54</sup> *Phdr.*, 250e.

the Beautiful that compels the beloved to leave earthly things behind, or else be left behind. Instead, the lover recalls the Beautiful as that which has already been seen: “someone who has amply observed things from that past realm, at first shudders and feels something of those old terrors come over he when he sees a god-like face or any part of the body which is a good imitation of beauty. Later, looking more, he feels reverence as if he were before a god”.<sup>55</sup> Tracing the myth of the winged soul, we learn that the philosophic lovers’ souls have been taken upwards, wherein they pattern themselves after the Gods and remain on a divine path.<sup>56</sup> The lover begins with the knowledge of the Beautiful, and so, always sees the truth behind their embodied experiences.<sup>57</sup> To most human beings, this philosophic lover appears mad, for they continually look upwards in their memory of the Gods while remaining situated here on earth.<sup>58</sup> In contrast, the beloved’s soul has little or no memory of the heavenly forms, and their perception of earthly beauty does not easily connect them to the divine things that lie beyond.<sup>59</sup> Although the lover experiences all physical beauty more deeply through thought, the beloved does not have the means to interpret their experiences in the same way.<sup>60</sup> Hence, while in *The Phaedrus*, the beloved becomes involved in an erotic relationship without the self-abstraction of *The Symposium*, there is now no path for the beloved to actively participate in the process of becoming conscious of themselves. The result, is that in order for the beloved to move towards Beauty, the Beautiful must be mediated through the lover who then shapes the beloved accordingly.

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<sup>55</sup> *Phdr.*, 251a–b.

<sup>56</sup> *Phdr.*, 248a–248c.

<sup>57</sup> *Phdr.*, 249c.

<sup>58</sup> *Phdr.*, 249c–e.

<sup>59</sup> *Phdr.*, 250e.

<sup>60</sup> *Phdr.*, 255d.

According to Plato, each lover chooses a God after “his own tastes”, and fashions their beloved after this god.<sup>61</sup> By sculpting and fitting the beloved into this divine ideal, the lover can then honor the beloved as a god.<sup>62</sup> As the lover honors the beloved in this way, the lover’s desire is truly erotic, for the “lover is no longer pretending but truly feels his servitude” to the beloved as servitude to the Beautiful.<sup>63</sup> As we can see here, the beloved’s soul is no longer cared for by themselves, but by the lover. Whereas the lover consciously recollects the truth behind earthly beauty and transposes this pattern onto the beloved, shaping them in accordance with it, the extent of the beloved’s participation in the Beautiful is in their openness to being shaped. Given that the beloved is unconscious of what is being done, it is through obedience to the lover, rather an active care for their soul (as in *The Symposium*), that the beloved’s connection to the Beautiful is nurtured. It becomes clear, then, that although Plato attempts to bring the lover and beloved into closer contact with the Beautiful in *The Phaedrus*, they will not become closer in a way that maintains the erotic activity of the beloved.

While in the *Symposium*, the beloved experienced eros as a receptiveness to the lover’s speeches, which spurred the beloved’s own erotic activity, the beloved in *The Phaedrus* only experiences erotic activity as a receptiveness to the lover’s love. Upon first embodied encounter, the lover takes in the beauty of the beloved, and as the lover recalls the divine beauty that he already knows, desire flows into him like a stream. The lover is gradually filled with desire, and as the excess flows out, it enters the beloved’s eyes before moving to their soul.<sup>64</sup> The beloved is now in love, though, “he is at a loss to say with what. He doesn’t know what he has experienced,

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<sup>61</sup> *Phdr.*, 252d–e.

<sup>62</sup> *Phdr.*, 252d–e.

<sup>63</sup> *Phdr.*, 255a–b.

<sup>64</sup> *Phdr.*, 255d.

nor is he able to explain it”.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the beloved “does not realize” that in the lover, they are seeing themselves “as though in a mirror”.<sup>66</sup> In *The Symposium*, the beloved had to understand their connection to the Beautiful through the lover’s speech, in order to understand themselves. There was some perception of the difference between the Beautiful relayed by the lover, and the beloved’s current self-conception, which the beloved had to actively address in order to care for their soul. In *The Phaedrus*, the beloved is unaware that the lover reflects his own beauty back to the him. Thus, when the lover is absent, the beloved experiences desire as a desire for the lover, since he does not know that this desire is a desire for the Beautiful, and that this Beauty is also in him.

The beloved experiences an “image or copy of love”—a simulacrum of the lover’s love.<sup>67</sup> This simulacrum has a clear impact on the extent of erotic activity for a beloved, which we see as well in the experience of Alcibiades in *The Symposium*. For, although Alcibiades ought to relate to the Socrates through the reception of Socrates’ Beautiful speeches—wherein these speeches teach the beloved about the Beauty in himself—Alcibiades sees the Beautiful in Socrates instead. Thus Alcibiades remarks that when Socrates, “is earnest and opened up, I do not know if anyone has seen the images within; but I once saw them, and it was my opinion that they were so divine, golden, altogether beautiful, and amazing”.<sup>68</sup> For the beloved in this condition, the Beautiful cannot be separated from the lover. This inability to escape this simulacrum of love, means the beloved feels they must always be near the lover, in order to be near beauty. And, this holds true for both Alcibiades in the *Symposium* and the beloved in *The Phaedrus*.<sup>69</sup> In regards to Alcibiades

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<sup>65</sup> *Phdr.*, 255d–e.

<sup>66</sup> *Phdr.*, 255d–e.

<sup>67</sup> *Phdr.*, 255d–e.

<sup>68</sup> *Symp.*, 214a.

<sup>69</sup> *Phdr.*, 217a.

specifically, he cannot move past the notion that he must possess Socrates in order to remain in contact with the Beautiful. Thus, Alcibiades reverts to the only active role that he knows within an erotic relationship—the role of the conventional lover—wherein he pursues Socrates in the hopes of gratifying him, in order to possess the Beautiful. For the beloved in *The Phaedrus*, a similar pursuit of physical gratification occurs, and in both cases, this activity is not suited to eros, and so, does not count as erotic activity at all. Overall, the problem that persists within both dialogues, is that lover and beloved come to know themselves in different but interlaced ways, wherein active participation within the relationship is not truly open to both. Since Plato's model of participation does not secure the erotic activity of both lover and beloved within a condition of mutuality, mutually beneficial erotic activity is not secured for both within love. Without this mutually beneficial erotic activity, participation within love is limited for the beloved, who remains dependent on the lover for their own self-transformation.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

In sum, Plato provides us with important insights into the meaning of non-oppressive relations, and especially, the conditions that would and would not contribute to our ongoing erotic activity. Further, Plato continually gestures towards the importance of securing shapes of activity that bring mutual benefit to both erotic partners. Despite this, however, Plato's structure of participation is ultimately unable to secure erotic relations that benefit both lover and beloved within a relationship of mutuality. In response to this problem, I argue that a fuller understanding of participation is needed. Here, I identify the need to examine a new structure of non-oppression: sharedness, for sharedness seems to change the nature of participation that is possible in erotic relationships, and the extent to which participation is a realizable possibility for all erotic partners.





## Chapter 2: Irigaray and Sharedness as Non-Oppression in Love

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I move Plato's discussion of participation onto new ground. For Luce Irigaray, we can only understand the meaning of participation as non-oppression if we situate participation within the larger issue of sharedness. Through a broad critique of the history of Western political thought, Irigaray argues that participation has not been fully realized for all participants in love. By examining the extent of participation available to the feminine within love, and the form that this participation typically takes, Irigaray advances the position that sharedness has only served the interests of the masculine. She then finds the relationship between men and women to be an oppressive one within these conditions, because the only form of participation available to women, is a form of participation that has already been determined for them by the masculine. Even if participation within relationships is fully realized within our current conditions, it is an oppressive rather than liberatory form of participation for Irigaray. Further, this oppressive relationality will not only be oppressive for women, but will oppress men as well, since Irigaray argues that any identity constructed without a truly different other becomes fragile: it can only prove its own existence by ensuring that what it excludes remain excluded. Hence, Irigaray takes it as her aim to continually recall difference to the masculine, thereby destabilizing the masculine identity and making space for non-oppressive sexed identities to exist in the future. It is only once true sexual difference is established, that real sharedness becomes a possibility and love can become non-oppressive for Irigaray.

I carry this chapter out through an interpretive reading of Irigaray's central early works: *Speculum of the Other Woman*, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, and *This Sex Which is Not One*. In

line with Irigaray's ultimate aim—of making space for difference, rather than dictating what that difference will be—I propose that her works must be read in the same light. Written in highly ambiguous, poetic and playful language, Irigaray's works call out to the reader to engage in the process of imagining future possibilities for the self rather than expecting to find the answers in the text itself. Through this approach to her texts, my aim in this chapter is threefold. In section 2.2, I examine the masculine economy as the condition of oppression identified by Irigaray. In section 2.3, I focus on drawing out the broad conditions that make a future imagining of difference possible for Irigaray, and show the way in which sexual difference is this broad project. I then examine the limitations of these conditions for a theory of non-oppressive relationality in love. Specifically, I examine the way in which Irigaray's theory—while critical of the history of Western political thought, and especially Plato—ultimately sets up a relational structure in love that poses the same difficulties for sharedness present in Plato. I conclude the chapter in section 2.4.

## **2.2 The Problem of the Masculine Economy**

### *The Masculine Economy in Plato's *Hystera**

A central concern raised in feminist theory is that dominant conceptions of the self have really been masculine conceptions of the self, and hence, destructive of difference and the possibility for true sharedness. In this regard, the work of Irigaray is particularly interesting, for she pays close attention to those critical attempts within the history of Western political thought, where the problem of domination over difference is taken most seriously. Rather than argue that historical attempts to establish non-dominating relations with the other have failed, Irigaray is interested in showing that these attempts have been structurally unable to account for difference in the first place. Oppression for Irigaray is thus a situation where it is impossible for difference to exist—what she refers to as the masculine or phallic economy. At its core, the masculine economy is a

system of oppressive unity, which purports to encompass difference while really excluding it. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray illustrates this failure to secure difference as a result of the masculine economy specifically within Platonic metaphysics. When the full body of Irigaray's early work is taken into account, however, we can see that the overall problem of oppression she finds in Plato, is really a problem of oppression she finds running throughout the history of Western political thought.

I trace the broad movement of Irigaray's critique of the masculine economy through one of the most detailed and well known sections of *Speculum of the Other Woman: Plato's Hystera*. The reason for this, is that *Plato's Hystera* is one of Irigaray's most comprehensive articulations of the broader problem of the masculine economy, which she remains concerned with throughout all of her early work. In *Plato's Hystera*, Irigaray argues that our pursuit of the Truth is really our participation in the masculine. In the pursuit of the Truth, one believes they are taking up a relationship with that which they are not, however, this is really the masculine is taking up a relationship with itself. The Truth, as the masculine, becomes the standard by which oppositions can be judged in accordance to their likeness with the Truth: "*selfhood is yielded up to the Idea*" as subjects become mere "*mirrors, specula*, for reflections, images, fantasies, of Truth".<sup>1</sup> While the Truth is positioned as the masculine origin of all being, Irigaray famously argues that there is another origin—the cave as an instantiation of the maternal feminine. In her reading of Plato's myth of the cave, Irigaray attempts to uncover this maternal origin, stating: "this cave is always already an attempt to re-present another cave, the *hystera*, the mold which silently dictates all replicas, all possible forms, all possible relations of forms and between forms, of any replica".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Irigaray, Luce, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian G. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 291. Hereafter cited as SOW.

<sup>2</sup> SOW, 246.

What Irigaray proposes, is that the cave is actually a copy of the Greek hystera, an original womb that is never represented as an origin. The hystera, as the feminine, is excluded from the Truth, as the masculine system of representation. The reasoning for this exclusion, Irigaray argues, is that the feminine (as it exists outside of the masculine economy) is truly different than the masculine, meaning the inclusion of the feminine into the masculine economy would call the masculine economy into question.

In calling attention to the hystera within the myth of the cave, Irigaray is really calling attention to the feminine within the masculine economy. This masculine economy is oppressive to difference, because in order for the masculine to exist, difference must be displaced. Irigaray illustrates this erasure of difference as the hystera, or maternal origin, being rendered an empty “*backcloth*”, “background”, or substrate for representations of the masculine.<sup>3</sup> What is important to note here—and what is implicit in the descriptors of backcloth, background and substrate—is that the elimination of difference can never be a true elimination, for the masculine necessarily depends on what it excludes in order to maintain its own existence. While the maternal origin is displaced in the sense that it receives no representation within the masculine economy, this elimination causes the feminine to become the substrate for the masculine’s own sense of self. In order to be represented within the masculine economy, then, the feminine must take up the form that the masculine delegates to her, in the interests of maintaining himself. This process of being represented only through roles that have been pre-determined for you is described by Irigaray:

an ideal of truth is in fact necessary to under-lie and legitimize the metaphors, the figures used to represent the role of women, without voice, without presence. The feminine, the maternal are instantly *frozen* by the “like” the “as if” of that masculine representation dominated by truth, light, resemblance, identity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *SOW*, 245, 257.

<sup>4</sup> *SOW*, 265.

The logic of the masculine economy is imposed onto the identity of the feminine, thereby restricting difference by restricting her fluid possibilities of becoming. All “difference” is constructed only in relation to the masculine, which results in a “hardening of dichotomies, categorical differences, clear-cut distinctions,” via the construction of binaries between men and women, wherein both terms serve the interests of the masculine.<sup>5</sup> The masculine economy is an oppressive unity, because false “differences” are created in a way that displaces true difference.

*The Sexed Experience of Oppression in the Masculine Economy*

While Irigaray engages with *Plato's Hystera* in order to show the presence of the masculine economy in the furthest reaches of the history of Western political thought, her project as a whole continually traces these oppressive dynamics throughout other philosophic thinkers in the Western tradition. In this section, I consider all of Irigaray's early works together, in order to interpret the core of her critique regarding the implications of the masculine economy as a system of oppression, in respect to the self-conceptions of men and women. From these implications, we will then be able to appreciate the model of non-oppression that Irigaray eventually proposes.

Although the masculine economy first purports a concern for unity, it really instantiates constricting dichotomies that serve the masculine alone. These dichotomies are created through a dynamic of masculine displacement and re-occupation of the feminine. Once the feminine origin is displaced, it is re-operationalized within a binary term that proves the unity of the whole. In this sense, Women are not the Other of men because the category of “Woman” eliminates the feminine “before any perception of difference”.<sup>6</sup> Irigaray lays this problematic out, wherein man and his

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<sup>5</sup> *SOW*, 247.

<sup>6</sup> Irigaray, Luce, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 98 and *SOW*, 134. Hereafter cited as ESD. The lowercase use of women by Irigaray indicates the possibility for a future identity of women, while the

(same) other, “move around within a whole. And often the one and the other destroy the place of the other, believing in this way to have the whole; but they possess or construct only an illusory whole and destroy the meeting and the interval (of attraction) between the two”.<sup>7</sup> Man creates a category of “Woman” to be the other that he will “reconcile” himself with in the movement towards an oppressive unity.

Of deep concern to Irigaray, is a displacement of the feminine which is then made to occupy matter, so that the masculine may reject his materiality and pursue transcendence. In other words, men and Women appear to form a natural unity, because matter displaces the feminine, and then this matter is recast as the category Woman in relation to spiritual masculine. Materiality is thus instrumentalized to establish the authority of the masculine subject, and then subordinated by the masculine subjectivity that it helps found.<sup>8</sup> The category of Women is made the material, and the material is then emptied of its connection to the spiritual. Meanwhile, the category of men is made spiritual, and the spiritual is emptied of its connection to the material. Masculine desire within this economy divides (the possibility of) an embodiment that is both physical and spiritual: women become constrained within horizontality, or the material substrate, from which man pursues vertical transcendence towards a future God.<sup>9</sup> As it currently stands, the categories of men and Women do not allow a true sharing in love for Irigaray, because their relationship is predicated on the disunity between body and spirit. When women are restricted to pure materiality so that men can form an identity as men, the relationship between the two contains the following dynamic: “he believes that she is drawing him down into the depths; she believes that he is cutting himself off

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uppercase Women/Woman indicates the symbolic category that women must occupy in order to be represented within the masculine economy.

<sup>7</sup> *ESD*, 54.

<sup>8</sup> *SOW*, 265.

<sup>9</sup> *ESD*, 109.

from her to constitute his transcendence”.<sup>10</sup> Women, restricted to the maternal materiality defined for her by the masculine, lose claim to their own embodiment as an ethical site in and for herself within the masculine economy.<sup>11</sup>

Women are now made to take on the bodily functions of men, and men the spiritual functions of women. The result, is that women’s bodies are used to mediate men’s connection to nature, and women are made dependent upon men to mediate their spiritual connection to God—and even then Irigaray maintains that this is a connection to a God in the image of man. In my interpretation, the self-conception of both men and women is at risk here: men create themselves only through and inside Women’s bodies. They only gain an understanding of themselves through a restriction placed on the becoming of women, who remain trapped in an identification with materiality—especially as the womb. What appears to be a unity between men and women, is thus the justification for women’s delegation as *place* for man. According to Irigaray, if a woman has her own place, this is “the boundary, that which delineates us from other bodies”.<sup>12</sup> When women are used *as* a place, her body is made to be, “opened over and again to pleasure, to jouissance, or to conception” which are not her own.<sup>13</sup> When women are reduced to materiality such as the womb, they must forgo all bodily boundaries in order to be representable (and thus, hold value) in the masculine economy. In this condition, women have no identity, for “there is never any idea that the boundary of the containing body might be the skin [...] that the boundary of the containing body might be the bodily identity of woman”.<sup>14</sup> Women are defined entirely by their ability to be entered by and for the masculine, and so, they are to remain completely unbounded. No self-

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<sup>10</sup> *ESD*, 202.

<sup>11</sup> *ESD*, 199.

<sup>12</sup> *ESD*, 36.

<sup>13</sup> *ESD*, 149.

<sup>14</sup> *ESD*, 50.

conception is possible, because women's bodies are never allowed to be interpreted by and for women, and no re-imagining of their identity can take place as a result.

As Irigaray makes clear, however, women still hold power in this position. Difference can never really be eliminated, for a constitutive outside will always remain.<sup>15</sup> As this constitutive outside, there is no need for women to wait for men's permission in order to grasp their own freedom. Through an awareness of both the masculine economy, and the possibility of an alternative economy, women are subversive. Women know the logic of the masculine economy by virtue of having to adhere to it in order to exist. At the same time, they are also the exclusions that allow the masculine economy to exist. By becoming aware of the stereotypes that they mime in order to exist as Women, women can repeat them in a way that destabilizes the masculine economy. That is, they repeat them with the knowledge that these stereotypes do not encapsulate them completely. In this way, they make themselves, and others, aware of an "elsewhere"—an entirely different economy of the maternal feminine, with its own logic. When women are asked what they are thinking, Irigaray remarks: "nothing. Everything" at once.<sup>16</sup> Women are positioned to know both economies, and in this way, can reveal the irony of the masculine economy to itself. In purporting to know the whole truth, man actually divides it—he purports to know "everything"—the Truth—and yet, women are capable of knowing something *else*. What registers in the masculine economy as "nothing" is actually the very possibility for difference. Hence, women hold the power to de-stabilize a masculine system that cannot confront the differences it excludes, and which men are paradoxically made dependent on.

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<sup>15</sup> Irigaray, Luce, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76. Hereafter cited as TS.

<sup>16</sup> TS, 29.



Man's self-conception is at stake in the masculine economy, because he lacks a truly different other—any “difference” man defines himself in relation to is constructed to reflect himself back to him. As a result, man finds no limitation in his relation with Women. He cannot take on the bodily identity of the other as his own self limit, and without this limit, there is nothing preventing him from assimilating the other into himself. He dominates her, and yet, is made reliant upon her, for his identity as man is supported by an understanding of the maternal feminine that *he* crafts. Ironically, the masculine identity that results from this self-same system is not only unstable, it also makes the maternal feminine all-powerful. Because men's self-conception is supported by the maternal-feminine, man is always dependent on finding the maternal feminine in women. In order to secure a non-oppressive relationship with the other, as well as himself, Irigaray states:

If man achieves autonomy from a maternal that supports him, from the kind of all-powerful Other that is finally extrapolated into God, then perhaps he will discover that there is something inhering in the female that is not maternal? Another body? [...] which would oblige man—humanity—to glimpse something other. Something not of his world. Not built to his specifications.<sup>17</sup>

An embodied self-conception is required, if man is to confront women as an other, and know himself as different from this other. This would allow men to take on a self-conception that does not depend on Women for materiality, and for women to take on a self-conception that they choose themselves. That is, to truly know himself, man must allow women to be herself, beyond the restrictive identity of maternal materiality that is placed upon her. Hence, Irigaray argues that heterosexual relations must not be predicated on suitability or complementarity, but rather, resistance to the idea that the other ought to suit us perfectly.<sup>18</sup> To encounter women as other,

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<sup>17</sup> *ESD*, 146.

<sup>18</sup> *ESD*, 74.

would be to recognize her bodily boundaries as woman, and thus, experience one's own self limitation as a man: a self that has limits to knowing, controlling and entering the other. It is only in this way, that, "man might then discover that something of another world persists in the female. Something that lives. That is neither plant nor animal, neither mother nor child simply. Something or someone other. So very different that he can have no idea of it? Or else that—by bending that something to his idea—he loses its power?"<sup>19</sup> Man can confront true difference when women have the freedom to become something other than the maternal feminine he desires. For this reason, establishing an irreducible sexual difference becomes critical problem for humanity, because without it, neither men nor women can be at home in their own bodies.<sup>20</sup>

### **2.3 Sharedness as a Model of Non-Oppression**

By shedding light on the masculine economy's refusal to confront difference, Irigaray identifies sexual difference as one of, "if not the issue, of our age".<sup>21</sup> Through Irigaray's analysis of the masculine economy, we see that it is not participation in love, simply, which ought to concern us. Instead, the true problem to be solved is sharedness in love, and the way in which we participate within love as embodied beings, through another, without ever dominating their difference. In addressing this problem, Irigaray advances a model of non-oppression in which there are two central movements. First, we must establish sexual difference. In order to do so, we must find a way to live sexual difference as embodied beings, so that the "dissociation of body and soul, of sexuality and spirituality, or the lack of passage for the spirit" is resolved. For Irigaray, this will occur when we establish our bodily identity, wherein men and women will return to their own

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<sup>19</sup> *ESD*, 147.

<sup>20</sup> *ESD*, 36.

<sup>21</sup> *ESD*, 5.

bodies in a way that forges a connection to both body and to spirit. Second, and from this unification of body and spirit, Irigaray aims to discover “another parousia of the body”—a carnal or sexual ethic that would allow men and women to unite in a divine love while maintaining sexual difference between them.<sup>22</sup> Within this non-oppressive love, “a fecundity of birth and regeneration” in and through each other would occur, in such a way that the meeting of sexually different lovers is both physical and spiritual.<sup>23</sup> Through these two movements—establishing and maintaining sexual difference—sensible transcendence is achieved within love, for body and soul are unified in our sexual identity, and in the relationship between men and women. It is in this way, that Irigaray attempts to root traditional transcendence in the material world as a sensible transcendence. Through this reunification of sexuality and spirituality, Irigaray maintains that, “sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our ‘salvation’ if we thought it through”.<sup>24</sup>

*Establishing Sexual Difference: Realizing the Sensible Transcendental*

For Irigaray, a central requirement for creating an identity is to take up a relationship with some irreducible difference. Traditionally, Irigaray finds that this has occurred through access to a transcendent God, wherein, “I strive toward the absolute or regress to infinity under the guarantee of God’s existence”.<sup>25</sup> We come to know our limitations, finiteness and a pathway to becoming in relation to the absolutely divine. The problem for women, is that the context in which Women currently operate, is such that they have no, “signs available for their own relationships, or the means of designating a reality transcendent to themselves—their Other, their God or divine

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<sup>22</sup> *ESD*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> *ESD*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> *ESD*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> *ESD*, 17.

being”.<sup>26</sup> In a system of sameness, women are used to mediate men’s relationship to nature, or act as the substrate for men to take up a spiritual relationship. The consequence, is that, “love always postpones its transcendence beyond the here and now”, for there is no way to access transcendence in and through one’s own, lived body.<sup>27</sup>

Irigaray maintains that a sensible transcendence can be achieved in one of two ways: “either the intuition of a god or divine principle aiding in the birth of the other without pressuring it with our own desire [...] or the intuition of a subject that, at each point in the present, remains unfinished and open to a becoming of the other that is neither simply passive nor simply active”.<sup>28</sup> A sensible transcendence requires (i) access to a female and male God, in and through the body, which will guide perpetual becoming, and/or (ii) an ethics of sexual difference for the present, wherein I confront the other as irreducibly different from me. Given that this thesis is concerned with non-oppressive relationality with an other in love, I examine the second path, where the discovery of sexual difference is also the discovery of sensible transcendence within men and within women. Masculine transcendence will be replaced with a sensible transcendence when sexual difference designates a reality transcendent to us, which is experienced in and through the body, thereby generating infinitely more difference within us.

To achieve a sensible transcendence in an ethics of the present, men and women must first identify authentically with their own bodies. In knowing themselves in this way, they are then able to confront an other without the fear of self-loss. When men and women know themselves as a sexually embodied being, they confront the sexually different other in a way that recalls their sexed

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<sup>26</sup> *ESD*, 114.

<sup>27</sup> *ESD*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> *ESD*, 112.

identity. The physical meeting between men and women thus maintains difference rather than excludes it:

The sexual *act* would turn into the act whereby the other gives new form, birth, incarnation to the self. Instead of implying the downfall of the body, it takes part in the body's renaissance. That there is no equivalent act, in this sense. Most divine of acts.<sup>29</sup>

When a subject knows themselves in respect to sexual difference, as the irreducible source of difference that recalls their own limits, fixed self-knowledge is impossible, for the self and the other are in a state of perpetual becoming. The body of men and women take a stable form, which allows the identity of each to exist in relation to the other, however, the sexed subjects inhabiting both categories are in a constant state of alterity. The sexual act becomes a unification of sexuality and spirituality, for each meeting between men and women spurs further alterity between and within them. This generates an eternal process of becoming, which Irigaray finds and appreciates in Plato, but endeavours to make embodied. Through sensible transcendence, Irigaray ensures that a meeting between men and women spurs a constant source of difference (to generate the process of becoming) between sexed subjects, but also within the sexed self.

In her exploration of the logic underpinning these sensibly transcendent bodily identities, Irigaray makes continual reference to the meaning of the body—and often, to female anatomy like the vaginal lips.<sup>30</sup> Importantly, this recourse to female anatomy has been interpreted as essentializing women—wherein the possibilities for women's freedom appear to follow from women's anatomy—I advance at least two reasons why this might not follow. First, when Irigaray's writings on the vaginal lips, skin and the mucous are considered together, the underpinning logic remains consistent. Within her consideration of each, is a way of thinking about, and as subject,

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<sup>29</sup> *ESD*, 51.

<sup>30</sup> *ESD*, 18.

that stands outside of the masculine economy. Regardless of each body part's association with masculine or feminine becoming, Irigaray emphasizes the way in which all of these body parts stand in for a logic that the masculine economy cannot interpret. Second, a central aim of Irigaray's project is criticizing the way in which the feminine has traditionally been associated with reproductive organs, wherein women's bodies are understood only in relation to man's desire. Irigaray thus enters the masculine economy through that which is representable within it, and then speaks through Women's body in a way that subverts the masculine understandings and representations of it.

In light of Irigaray's approach, I argue that the broad contribution of her engagement with the body is a new way of thinking about the subject, which ought to inform both men and women in the establishment of their bodily identities. This is the idea of "a threshold that is always *half-open*".<sup>31</sup> The two lips, the skin, and the mucous are each characterized by this half-openness, a disposition to the world that offers "a shape of welcome" without the need to "assimilate, reduce or swallow up".<sup>32</sup> If a subject takes up this disposition to the world, they find themselves clearly bounded, limited as and in their bodies, without ever closing themselves off from the other or the world. As a "stranger to dichotomy", the half-open subject is "never fixed" in form.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, the specific reference to female anatomy, in the form of the two lips, works against essentialism by being, and the very least, an expansion of Women's identity. Whereas the vaginal opening is marked as *the* sex organ by the phallus in the masculine economy, the vaginal lips remain unfixed, and thus, "serve neither conception nor jouissance" in the service of man.<sup>34</sup> While the female body

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<sup>31</sup> *ESD*, 18.

<sup>32</sup> *ESD*, 18, 111.

<sup>33</sup> *ESD*, 18, 111.

<sup>34</sup> *ESD*, 18.

stands in for the concept of half-openness via the vaginal lips, this concept could also be articulated in the male body as flesh. The flesh, is that which bounds off a body and gives “back to the other the possible site of his identity”, while remaining porous and semi-permeable to others and the external world.<sup>35</sup> Always indeterminate, the two lips, the skin and the mucous—or this new subject—is open to confronting alterity within itself and outside of itself, while also marking (and knowing) itself as different from another body.<sup>36</sup> What sets Irigaray’s account of endless becoming apart for the process of becoming for Plato, is that Irigaray pins the process of becoming to sexual difference, which we engage in always through our own bodies here on earth.

Within the sexed subject, Irigaray calls this constant state of alterity the movement of self-love, which men and women will experience in their own way. Broadly, however, both men and women will experience self-love as “a particular movement, a kind of play between active and passive, in which, between me and me, there takes place this double relationship, neither active nor truly passive”.<sup>37</sup> This self-love is predicated upon the subject and self as two terms, where love of self is the movement between them. Fluid difference can arise in the subject, because “neither the subject nor the self is fixed in its position” internally.<sup>38</sup> Difference is never fixed, but always present, because self-love becomes a *way of relating* to the self in an infinite process of becoming. As a dynamic relation of difference, self-love requires, paradoxically, that there is no attachment to the self being loved. In order to participate in love, each must be “detached from self and from the other”.<sup>39</sup> As a way of relating to the self, self-love requires an openness to alterity

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<sup>35</sup> *ESD*, 206.

<sup>36</sup> *TS*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> *ESD*, 59.

<sup>38</sup> *ESD*, 59.

<sup>39</sup> *ESD*, 200.

through continual self-loss, and an acknowledgement that the self, nor the other, can ever be anticipated.

As will be seen in the next sub-section, alterity also figures into our relations with others. When confronting a sexually different other, my own sexed body is recalled to me, because I know that I am not that other body. I am not that body, because the irreducibility of sexual difference recalls my own bodily limits to me. As a half-open subject, I am open to the other, but there is a limit that cannot be erased by them.<sup>40</sup> I embody this limit as a subject with bodily boundaries that mark me off from the other, and I understand these bodily boundaries as belonging to my identity as man or woman.

If Irigaray had ended her project here, with a model of the subject that will encounter alterity in another, the very idea of sharing in love would not be possible. That is, there would be a model of self-love, as an internal alterity which gives access to the infinite through becoming, but a sharing between men and women would be impossible, since there would be nothing for them to share in.<sup>41</sup> In recognition of this, Irigaray includes a second movement in her project, stating that, “between man and woman, whatever the differences may be and despite the fact that the concept of the one, male or female, cannot envelop that of the other, certain bridges can be built”.<sup>42</sup> This bridge between men and women will be an intersubjective love—irreducible to men or women—in its role as an intermediary that preserves difference between them.

#### *Maintaining Sexual Difference in Love: Limitations to Irigaray’s Project*

Thus far, a recovery of sexual difference involves the following logic: (i) it aims to discover a sensible transcendence, wherein body and spirit are unified through sexual difference, meaning

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<sup>40</sup> *ESD*, 18.

<sup>41</sup> *ESD*, 202.

<sup>42</sup> *ESD*, 93.



(ii) men and women must create their own bodily identities within their own sexed category, where they can access an infinite source of difference in and through themselves, and (iii) there must be some intermediary between men and women, which allows them to encounter the infinite in each other.<sup>43</sup> By building “bridges”, “passages” or “intermediaries” between men and women, Irigaray seeks a way to preserve the inherent generation of sensible transcendence in the sexual union. Put differently, the purpose of building bridges between men and women, is to craft a way of being together as men and as women, while preserving the spirituality of the sexual encounter via infinite generation of difference. The divine sex act is only possible once body and spirit are united, and so, the purpose of sex must be the preservation of this unity. Thus, intersubjective love between men and women becomes that which aims to preserve this embodied unity, while uniting with another. The question at hand, though, is the extent to which Irigaray provides a real alternative to Plato’s model of love, if she only reconceptualises the subject and not the structure of love that subjects act within. If Irigaray does not substantially restructure love, we run the risk of reproducing the difficulties with sharedness that we found in Plato.

Irigaray’s sexual ethic attempts to secure love as an intermediary, where men and women can unite with each other, without destroying the difference they find in one another. The aim of this intersubjective love is to preserve an irreducible sexual difference between individuals, and afford men and women access to transcendence through their participation in a shared intermediary, or intersubjective love. Refuting a model where “two merely formed a one”—a “complementary”—in which love could take place, Irigaray calls for the discovery of, “how *two* can be made which one day could become a *one* in that third which is love”.<sup>44</sup> The two sexually

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<sup>43</sup> *ESD*, 112.

<sup>44</sup> *ESD*, 66.

different others are to maintain their sexual difference, and share out of their own sexual difference in a third intermediary of love. Here, Irigaray cites a specific section of Diotima's erotic speech in *The Symposium*, whose insights she claims have yet to be truly appreciated: "*the union of man and woman is, in fact, a generation; this is a thing of divine; in a living creature that is mortal, it is an element of immortality, this fecundity and generation*".<sup>45</sup>

The possibility of divine generation between man and women, a kind of immortality accessible through the mortal body, is the model that Irigaray seeks to take up in her third of love. Following Diotima, Irigaray maintains that "love is seen as creation and potentially divine, a path between the condition of the mortal and that of the immortal".<sup>46</sup> For Irigaray, this conception of love would allow us to participate in the divine as embodied beings, with another. Intersubjective love becomes the path that allows for a continual encounter between two opposite terms, which are never destroyed in their encounter, but rather, transformed.<sup>47</sup> By nature of being an intermediary, love requires difference, however, what it produces is not a synthesis, but the repeated insistence of itself as that mediator "which makes possible the passage" between terms.<sup>48</sup> Here, a synthesis would be unable to preserve the independence of its terms within a third term that is also a new reality, because men and women are irreducible categories of being with their own sexed realities for Irigaray. Love is never destroyed in an encounter of difference, for it always remains present as a third term that mediates between the irreducible terms of men and women.<sup>49</sup> Through love, sexed subjects encounter difference in a way that transforms them, for they engage

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<sup>45</sup> *ESD*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> *ESD*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> *ESD*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> *ESD*, 21.

<sup>49</sup> *ESD*, 21.

in a process of endless becoming, rather than fulfilment.<sup>50</sup> In this way, Irigaray argues that much of Diotima's speech embodies an understanding of sharedness that supports her conception of the subject in perpetual becoming.

Where Diotima's conception of love goes wrong for Irigaray, is the movement beyond an embodied passage between mortal and immortal. The moment that Diotima separates the soul and the body—wherein a lover can participate in the Beautiful biologically, or participate in the Beautiful through their soul—is the moment that love loses its status as an embodied intermediary. For heterosexual lovers, partners unite in order to bring forth the child, wherein participation in immortality is limited to biological generation.<sup>51</sup> In homoerotic male relationships, a relationship between men is taken up for the purpose of participating within the divinely Beautiful through the soul.<sup>52</sup> The body and soul are not only separated, but hierarchized, as one becomes nearest to the Beautiful through their soul, and love as an embodied intermediary is lost as a result. What Irigaray does not consider, however, is that model of love she proposed, actually shares the same structure as the model of love she critiques in Plato's erotic works.

Within our examination of Plato, we saw an inability to secure mutually beneficial erotic relations, or equal participation within the Beautiful. Through an engagement with Irigaray, we see that there is also an inability to recognize difference in the other for Plato. Specifically, the structural relation underpinning Plato's account of eros is unable to account for difference as particularity in the other, since the only difference visible in this system is that which affirms the Beautiful. Thus, the extent of sharing with another in love, is only to further one's own participation in the Beautiful—for men, it does not matter who the other is, only that uniting with

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<sup>50</sup> *ESD*, 25.

<sup>51</sup> *Symp*, 206c–d.

<sup>52</sup> *Symp*, 209a.

them will result in a child, or progression to the Beautiful. For women, it only matters who the others is, to the extent that women are dependent on men for the procreative act to participate in the Beautiful. Despite Irigaray's awareness of this structural problem in Plato, and her own aim of establishing embodiment, difference and sharedness in love, the extent to which she carries out her project can be further examined.

Although Irigaray's intersubjective love aims towards a non-oppressive sharedness between men and women, this sharedness is most accurately understood as an intermediary that safeguards sexual difference. Instead of re-envisioning the relationship between self and other to mutually produce a dynamic conception of sharedness in love, relationality becomes aimed at preserving sexual difference between individuals. The result is a reproduction, rather than a restructuring, of the relational structure underpinning Plato's account of eros. We can see this problem emerge in Irigaray's transition from self-love to an intersubjective love. Since self-love is conceptualized as an infinitely transformative relation that constitutes the sexed individual, intersubjective love seeks to preserve this movement. Thus, intersubjective love is only transformative to the extent that it safeguards the sexual difference which spurs individual transformation as a sexed being.<sup>53</sup> While self-love, as the subject who is both "subject" and "self", is a third term that preserves and produces difference, intersubjective love is three terms that are really two—there is no greater unity possible between men and women. The relationship between men and women is thus "the chronology of lovers' unions and separations. Both fulfilling the cycles of their solitude to come back to the other".<sup>54</sup> Men and women will each establish their own place, a bodily identity that they can always return to, so they may then venture out of themselves,

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<sup>53</sup> *ESD*, 27.

<sup>54</sup> *ESD*, 200.

and meet the sexually different other in a third space—the “shared” passage of love. We see, then, why the only possible ethical relationship that results for Irigaray is one where both men and women know “how to separate and how to come back together” through their own “quest of self” if they are to exist together in love.<sup>55</sup> Difference exists, but only through the cultivation of individual “place” for men and women: the sexually different bodily identity. Sexually different others may then “come back together” to relate in nearness, respecting the irreducible limit between them to avoid assimilating or absorbing the other into self.

Love as generation, which was supposed to unite embodied beings in a shared love that links mortal and immortal through perpetual becoming, occurs regardless of intersubjective love. That is, self-love is already characterized by a perpetual becoming that is spurred by the other. Given that sexual difference is the structure of mediation for Irigaray, the same questions raised in Plato can be raised again here. First, why would we need another to participate in an Irigarayan love, if generation is already guaranteed by virtue of the mere existence of irreducible sexual difference? For Irigaray, this question is difficult to answer, because there is no independent reason why love would be necessary for men or women. Indeed, intersubjective love can be replaced by any type of mediating intermediary connected to the individual, and Irigaray appeals to wonder or desire as interchangeable with love throughout *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.<sup>56</sup> Second, Irigaray is unable to answer the question of why one might choose a particular partner to unite with in love? Although Irigarayan lovers would be concerned with human beings in a way that Plato cannot be, a similar problem persists in both. Since the Beautiful is the source of difference for Plato, what may appear as a concern for a particular other is really a concern for the Beautiful. While Irigaray

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<sup>55</sup>ESD, 71.

<sup>56</sup>ESD, 76.

shifts the source of difference into embodied beings, meaning a concern for human beings is inevitable, this concern is similarly shallow—a concern for a particular other only matters in relation to sexual difference. As a consequence, Irigaray’s concern for recovering difference is really only a concern for recovering those differences which are visible in Irigaray’s system—the two categories of sexual difference. Overall, this continuation of a fixed limit by which we come to know ourselves, means that the problem of sharing in love endures from Plato to Irigaray.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the most that intersubjective love can ever be within a system of fixed sexual difference, is a relation between already constituted sexual categories, wherein there is nothing to truly share in beyond each subject’s access to an intermediary. As a result, the highest ethical aim of intersubjective love is to establish an alliance between men and women, which allows categories of men and women to exist near one another, and to affect and be affected by one another, without collapsing the mediating structure of sexual difference.<sup>57</sup> Just as sharedness in love remained limited to participation in the Beautiful, wherein this participation did not necessarily stem from any appreciation or need of the difference in the other, sharedness in love for Irigaray remains limited to participation out of our own sexual difference. While there was at least an attempt by Plato to offer some reasoning behind partnership in love, the only reason why the sexually different other is required for Irigaray, is to provide that fixed limit which recalls our own sexual difference to us. As with Plato, there is no impetus to perceive and value differences in the other, so long as they fall outside the terms that structure difference in each account. The point of sexual difference is to make us aware of the sexed other, and beyond this recognition, there is no fundamental reason

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<sup>57</sup> *ESD*, 27.

why we ought to be with or need the other that we choose to love. In sum, while Irigaray moves towards an idea of an unfixed self within self love, she ultimately confines this self within a relationship that remains structurally similar to Plato, and thus fails to address the problem of sharing within love.

## Chapter 3: Hegel and Unity as Non-Oppression in Love

### 3.1 Introduction

Thus far, we are left to grapple with the ongoing problem of sharedness. For Plato, the structural difficulty of securing sharedness shows itself in the inequality between lover and beloved, wherein participation within love is always hierarchical. As we move progressively closer to the Beautiful, we also move away from earthly things, including our relationships to one another. While Irigaray's project takes the relationship between sharedness and difference seriously, her solution is ultimately unable to reconcile both aims. Where oppression is understood for Irigaray as an oppressive unity—meaning the terms making up the “unified” whole actually serve the interests of the masculine alone—a model of non-oppression becomes centered on subverting the existing system by acting outside of it. For Irigaray, that which exists outside of the existing system is sexual difference. The result, is that instead of a reconciliation, we are left with a model of sharedness that privileges (and is structured to protect) irreducible individuality as the categories of men and women. Any relationship between sexed individuals must preserve sexual difference, and allow each sexed individual to return to themselves, unscathed in their interaction, as these sexed individuals. The only difference that would matter to us, in Irigaray's account, is sexual difference. And, the primacy of the sexed individual means that sharedness is limited to a sharing out of our own sexual difference (as Irigaray understands it). The result, is that Irigaray's model of non-oppression comes at the expense of a deeper foundation for being together. Thus, neither sharedness nor difference is fully realized within Irigaray's model of non-oppression.

In both cases, Plato and Irigaray were unable to secure a model of non-oppression capable of reconciling the tension between sharedness and the individual. Instead, each left us with a model



of non-oppression that looks structurally similar to the other—for both, we end up with an individual that can only be itself in respect to something *other*—the Beautiful, sexual difference—than the individual they are in love with. For this reason, the other becomes extraneous or threatening to the self. Rather than turn away from the question of sharedness, however, I propose that we look to a thinker who takes up the question of sharedness in a structurally new way. Thus, in this chapter, I look to Hegel’s work in *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Philosophy of Right*. Within these works, it is clear that Hegel shares many of Plato and Irigaray’s own concerns regarding the nature of non-oppression. As with Plato and Irigaray, Hegel is concerned with proposing a conception of the self that can be considered free in its relationship with others. At the same time, his approach is structurally different, in that he introduces a self-conception that includes another within it. Through an examination of two models of non-oppression—recognition and ethical life—I argue that the most compelling attempt to solve the problem of being oneself with another lies in the institution of marriage, where love is conceptualized as unity.

I develop this argument in three parts. In section 3.2, I examine self-containedness as a condition of oppression for Hegel and illustrate why a model of non-oppression must not be predicated on the irreducible individual. In section 3.3 I show what it would mean to bring another into our understanding of the self through recognition as a model of non-oppression. Following this, I illustrate the shortcomings of recognition for a model of non-oppression that also secures our freedom, and show why a movement to ethical life is necessary. In section 3.4, I propose a model of unity as non-oppression through Hegel’s discussion of marriage, as the place where self-constitution and mutuality become intrinsically related. I then consider the extent to which a model of non-oppression as unity can be considered a solution to the problem of being ourselves with another. I conclude the chapter in section 3.5.

### 3.2 The Problem of Self-Containment

In this section, I show that for Hegel, oppression is a condition of taking oneself to be independent and self-contained. Through Hegel's discussion of self-containedness, we thus gain an understanding of what the self cannot be, and the conditions in which a self concerned with the other would not be possible. At first, it is not immediately apparent why an independent consciousness would be in a condition of oppression, given that the independent consciousness appears to be free—seemingly under no rule but their own. Indeed, for Irigaray, sharedness in love was only non-oppressive for heterosexual partners if this sharing was founded on, and sought to maintain, each individuality as irreducibly different from the other. There ought to be no loss of self in the other, because this would open the self to domination by the other's desire, whereby the other then dictates who they want you to be, and your own desire is eliminated. Relationships were thus predicated on a perpetual return to the self through sexual difference. Here, sexual difference became a meeting place for, and boundary between, self and other—partially open to allow their meeting, but closed enough to contain each individual as man and as women. Following Irigaray, a relationship between self-contained, independent consciousnesses would seem to resist the dynamic that dominates difference in or by another. For Plato, this dynamic of dominance was also resisted through a structure of participation that maintains individuals as radically open to the world, but separate from one another. For Plato, we participate in love through an erotic pursuit of the Beautiful, wherein a fixation on the other as the object of our desire becomes an unerotic way of living. Responding to the oppressive form of togetherness present in conventional Greek erotics, love is only non-oppressive when we allow the other to change in relation to the Beautiful as the object of our desire. We remain open to the Beautiful—and the other to the extent that we find the Beautiful in them—but the other is only extraneous, rather than necessary, to our pursuit of Beauty.

For both Plato and Irigaray, the broad form of relationality brought into being is such that we take up a relationship with a mediating structure, wherein this mediating structure maintains ourselves and another as separate individuals. As a result, these non-oppressive relationships are, at their core, a relationship between ourselves and the mediating structure. Meanwhile, the individual we are relating to becomes extraneous or threatening to our own individuality. It is interesting, then, that Hegel identifies the condition of the self-contained individual as the ground of oppression he seeks to overturn. While Hegel's exclusion of the self as independent will prove significant, it is important to note that Hegel nonetheless carries forward Plato and Irigaray's insight that love can only be non-oppressive if individuals are actively participating within a mediating structure that is irreducible to them. As will be seen, Hegel preserves this insight, but proposes a mediating structure that is not founded on the individual sexed body, nor the Beautiful as an object of our desire. For Hegel, that which mediates love must not only be participated in, but *shared* in with the other through this participation as well. Looking now to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I show how Hegel overturns the self-contained individual, in order to bring about a structurally new way of thinking about the self, and the self's relation to the other.

For Hegel, our freedom is only possible if self-consciousness is achieved. In order to show why the self-contained individual is a condition of oppression, then, Hegel will explain why self-consciousness would be unachievable in such a position. If an individual were conscious of itself outside of its relations with others, such a consciousness could only be "self-equal through the exclusion of itself from everything else".<sup>1</sup> That is, in order to prove that it is self-contained, consciousness would have to construct its identity against everything that lies external to it,

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel, G. W. F, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, ¶186. Hereafter cited as PS.

wherein it cannot find itself in anything outside of itself.<sup>2</sup> The meaning of consciousness could only be self-containment if the self was immediately apparent to itself, instead of cultivated through its relations with others.<sup>3</sup> The implication, is that everything “‘other’ for consciousness would be seen as an unessential, negatively characterized object”—that which consciousness does not find itself in.<sup>4</sup> As we can see, our conception of the self also influences how we understand others, and what our relationship to others will be as a result. When the self-contained consciousness takes the other consciousness to be unessential to it, the point of concern for Hegel, is that the other consciousness is not unessential at all. What the self-contained consciousness takes to be an unessential, negatively characterized object is actually consciousness in its own right. The truth of the relationship between consciousnesses is actually that “one individual is confronted by another individual”.<sup>5</sup> While the self-contained consciousness seeks to affirm its identity through reference to the self as already apparent to it, Hegel proposes that the process of identity construction can only take place within the living relationship between self and other. Elaborated in the chapter on lordship and bondage, Hegel illustrates the way in which our understanding of the self will be transformed when we consider the breaking down of self-containedness to be a condition of freedom, rather than the actualization of freedom itself.

### **3.3 Recognition as a Model of Non-Oppression in *Phenomenology of Spirit***

#### *Bringing in an Intersubjective Self-Conception*

In this section, I reconstruct Hegel’s conception of the self in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, within the Lordship and Bondage chapter. I examine this passage, because it is here that we are introduced

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<sup>2</sup> *PS* ¶186.

<sup>3</sup> *PS*, ¶186.

<sup>4</sup> *PS*, ¶186.

<sup>5</sup> *PS*, ¶186.

to a self that requires an other as part of its own self-conception. In thinking through the meaning of an intersubjective self-conception, Hegel begins to lay the groundwork for a way of being with another that allows us to remain with ourselves. In this respect, I propose that we gain an important insight for a model of non-oppression from *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Namely, that a structure of mutuality can be built into our conception of the self, and recognition is one shape of this actualized self-consciousness. Central to Hegel's model of recognition, then, is the notion that we cannot come to know ourselves prior to our relations with others, because the self is only made certain of itself in the relationship between self and other. Thus Hegel states that, "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged".<sup>6</sup> Within the process of recognition, a relationship to ourselves can only occur as a relationship mediated through another. It is only in the mediation of ourselves through another that we become self-conscious, because it is through the other that we *find ourselves* rather than *lose ourselves*:

Each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself; and each is for itself, and for the other, an immediate being on its own account, which at the same time is such only through this mediation. They recognize themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas Irigarayan participation in sexual differentiation cannot include an other without risking the loss of the self, and Platonic participation in the Beautiful is possible without a sustained relationship with the beloved, in Hegel's account both the individual and the other are made to participate equally within recognition as one shape of mutuality. Within Hegel's model of recognition, then, we gain access to a way of being that is only made possible through another.

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<sup>6</sup> *PS*, ¶178.

<sup>7</sup> *PS*, ¶184.

While Irigaray cautioned against the process of losing oneself in another—for fear that one will return to themselves as a self they have not chosen—self-loss for Hegel is also a return to self. In confronting another, we experience this self-loss and self-return in the following way: “it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an *other* being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self”.<sup>8</sup> It loses itself in an other, because it is in the interaction between consciousness and the other, that consciousness becomes aware of the other’s perception of it. Consciousness then confronts its own self as “an *other* being,”—because it finds this perception of itself in the other rather than within itself—and yet, overcomes this otherness because it is seeing itself in the other, rather than the other as its own essential being.<sup>9</sup> This process of recognition includes mutuality to the extent that each consciousness is physically dependent on the other for their own existence. In this general model of recognition, the individual supersedes the other, who is no longer an essential being foreign to it, and in this supersession, allows the other to go free.<sup>10</sup> The other is also recognized as a self-consciousness, who in turn recognizes themselves in the individual, supersedes the individual, and allows the individual to go free as well. Supersession occurs in a such a way that each individual can, “preserve and maintain what it superseded, and consequently survives its own supersession”.<sup>11</sup> Both individuals preserve the other that they supersede, and in doing so, continue to have their own existence affirmed.

The model of selfhood emerging through a process of recognition stands in contrast to Plato and Irigaray, for whom the self is found in relation to a permanent order—the Beautiful,

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<sup>8</sup> *PS*, ¶180.

<sup>9</sup> *PS*, ¶180.

<sup>10</sup> *PS*, ¶180.

<sup>11</sup> *PS*, ¶188

sexual difference—which we find ourselves in, but cannot accept as being a part of us without losing sight of the other’s important to our own self-conception. For Hegel, however, we cannot understand consciousness as existing separately from the other. Unlike the Beautiful and sexual difference, when we participate in the other as a mediating shape of our own self-consciousness, the other as a mediating shape participates *back*. We are mutually dependent on one another for our own self-consciousness. A self-contained consciousness would not be able to achieve self-certainty, since its own self “still has no truth,” because, “each is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other”.<sup>12</sup> In taking oneself to be the truth, the world external to the self would have to be false. In order to gain self-certainty, then, the self-contained consciousness would have to prove its own truth by proving the falsity of the other.<sup>13</sup> Thus, consciousness would attempt to become certain of itself via a life-and-death-struggle:

In so far as it is action on the part of the *other*, each seeks the death of the other. But in doing so, the second kind of action, action on its own part, is also involved; for the former involves the staking of its own life. Thus the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death-struggle.<sup>14</sup>

Consciousness seeks to prove its independence by eliminating the other completely. In the death of the other, however, consciousness, “does away with the truth which was supposed to issue from it, and so, too, with the certainty of self generally”.<sup>15</sup> This “abstract negation” is unlike the negation of consciousness that experiences mutual recognition, because what is superseded is not preserved, and the individual loses the other on which its own sense of self is dependent.<sup>16</sup> The self-contained consciousness believes life only belongs to it when its given content and form are its own. Thus,

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<sup>12</sup> *PS*, ¶186.

<sup>13</sup> *PS*, ¶187.

<sup>14</sup> *PS*, ¶187.

<sup>15</sup> *PS*, ¶188.

<sup>16</sup> *PS*, ¶188.

self-certainty fails when it is grounded on simple immediacy, because anything external to it is seen as destructive of it.

*Examining the Conditions for Recognition in Lordship and Bondage*

The conditions for recognition arise through the relationship between lord and bondsman, wherein this relationship begins when the self-contained consciousness risks its life in order to prove itself against the other. In doing so, the self-contained consciousness seeks to show that what it most is, is not natural desire (here, the will to live), but rather, its status as an independent individual.<sup>17</sup> What the self-contained consciousness now realizes, however, is that in order to prove its independence, it requires its own life—and the other requires its own life, too.<sup>18</sup> The self-contained consciousness cannot eliminate the other in order to assert itself, because it depends on the other to recognize it as an independent consciousness. Hence, the life-or-death struggle between two previously independent consciousnesses will end as one consciousness chooses to cling to their life instead of asserting independence, thus subordinating himself to the other.<sup>19</sup> As a result, two new moments emerge as relations of domination and subordination are brought into being. The first is a “pure self-consciousness” or the being for itself of the lord, while the second is the being for another of the bondsman.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the life-or-death struggle, where self-contained consciousness could not prove its independence beyond merely thinking it was independent, the lord here is actually made independent.<sup>21</sup> This is because the lord, “is a consciousness existing *for itself* which is mediated with itself through another consciousness”.<sup>22</sup> The lord mediates itself

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<sup>17</sup> *PS*, ¶187.

<sup>18</sup> *PS*, ¶189.

<sup>19</sup> *PS*, ¶189.

<sup>20</sup> *PS*, ¶189.

<sup>21</sup> *PS*, ¶190.

<sup>22</sup> *PS*, ¶190.



through itself through the bondsman, because the bondsman puts aside its own actions and takes up the actions of the lord:

The other consciousness sets aside its own being-for-self, and in so doing itself does what the first does to it. Similarly, the other moment too is present, that this action of the second is the first's own action; for what the bondsman does is really the action of the lord. The latter's essential nature is to exist only for himself; he is the sheer negative power for whom the thing is nothing. Thus he is the pure, essential action in this relationship, while the action of the bondsman is impure and unessential.<sup>23</sup>

Importantly, while the lord believes that in this relationship he exists only for himself, this is not actually the case.<sup>24</sup> Since the lord gains the object of his desire through the bondsman, the lord believes that he gains self-certainty as an independent consciousness.<sup>25</sup> This is because the lord understands the foundation of self-certainty as the fulfilment of his own desire in the world. As we have seen, however, the foundation of self-certainty is actually the relationship between self and other, wherein the truth of the lord is in the bondsman, and vice versa. Hence, Hegel argues that the, “*truth* of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the bondsman,” and the truth of the dependent consciousness is, “the independent consciousness that is *for itself*”.<sup>26</sup> As will be seen, the superordinate lord will lack the conditions for freedom, while the relations of subordination experienced by the bondsman will secure the path for the bondsman's liberation. The significance of this inversion, is that Hegel finds the conditions for recognition, and gestures towards the conditions for our freedom, in the condition of the consciousness that appears the least free—the subordinated bondsman.

Recognition (and the associated aim of mutuality) is made possible when the bondsman experiences a breaking down of immediate desire. In this breaking down of immediate desire, the

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<sup>23</sup> *PS*, ¶191.

<sup>24</sup> *PS*, ¶192.

<sup>25</sup> *PS*, ¶192.

<sup>26</sup> *PS*, ¶193, 194.

ground of self-certainty shifts from the individual to the intersubjective relationship. The bondsman, as the self-consciousness which loses the struggle against another, concedes to be dominated to prevent the complete loss of his life: “for this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord.”<sup>27</sup> Unlike the independent consciousness, who would rather die than lose its status (and thus, loses its status anyways), the dependent consciousness will let go of its conception of itself—and take on another—in order to preserve its life. In doing so, “this pure universal movement, the absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness absolute negativity, *pure being-for-self*, which consequently is implicit in this consciousness.”<sup>28</sup> In fear, the bondsman experiences the breakdown of its given self, and relinquishes its immediate desire in order to take on the desire of the lord. In doing so, the bondsman sets the stage for self-certainty to be grounded not on the satisfaction of their immediate desires, but through a mediated relationship with another. Thus, the bondsman is implicitly being-for-self in its unwillingness to lose the life on which it depends to eventually be for itself in a way that belongs to it.

While the self-contained consciousness believes that its life only belongs to it when its given form and content belong to it, the bondsman shows us a different way to think about a life that is ours. For the bondsman, life belongs to him not because of his given content, but rather, because of his life’s form—the bondsman lives as a condition for action in the world. In holding on to life, the bondsman is not clinging to his givenness, for he only clings to life by letting go of his given self. In clinging to life, the bondsman is really clinging to the possibility of a life that is

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<sup>27</sup> PS, ¶194.

<sup>28</sup> PS, ¶194.

his own. As will be seen, while the breaking down of the given self will also be a condition required for freedom, it is only an initial and thus incomplete movement. The full conditions for freedom only become apparent in ethical life (as we will see in the next section). Nonetheless, Hegel gestures towards these full conditions in his discussion of explicit being-for-self—meaning, when consciousness finds itself outside of itself.

According to Hegel, there is explicit being-for-self when fear is made real in the world through service and obedience.<sup>29</sup> Hence, the bondsman is explicitly being-for-self when it actualizes the lord's desire in the world.<sup>30</sup> While the lord's being-for-self exists merely in thought, it comes to exist objectively through the bondsman. Although the lord gives the object of desire to the bondsman, the bondsman actively replaces his natural immediacy with the intentions and actions that will produce the object in the world for consumption: "through his service he rids himself of his attachment to natural existence in every single detail; and gets rid of it by working on it".<sup>31</sup> In work, the bondsman participates in an act of creation that is conducive to (but not yet sufficient for) self-formation, while the lord lacks a creative act because he only consumes the object of desire. It is only the bondsman who actually brings something to bear in the world. As being-for-self becomes real in the world, it truly is an independent thing, and once the dependent consciousness realizes this, it confronts the object as the truth of itself—"consciousness, *qua* worker, comes to see in the independent being [of the object] its *own* independence".<sup>32</sup> Being-for-self is no longer other to the bondsman at all—it belongs to him explicitly. The bondsman finds itself outside of itself, wherein that which is outside of itself is brought into being by and for it.

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<sup>29</sup> *PS*, ¶196

<sup>30</sup> *PS*, ¶194

<sup>31</sup> *PS*, ¶194

<sup>32</sup> *PS*, ¶195.

As we have seen, intersubjective recognition requires the breaking down of self-containedness, while freedom requires that we then constitute ourselves in a living relationship with the world. In other words, we must actively constitute ourselves before we can be certain of ourselves with another, for one must know what it means to be with themselves, before they can be with another. Of course, we do not yet know what freedom would look like for Hegel, because in the example of the lord and bondsman, the bondsman receives neither mutual recognition nor actualized freedom. Instead, Hegel's discussion of the lord and bondsman works to clarify the conditions that make an intersubjective self possible. It is in thinking through the most extreme breaking down of self-containedness, that we become aware of self-containedness as a condition of oppression. Further, it is in thinking through servitude as a condition that can open the possibility for recognition and our freedom, that we become aware of relations of dependency as a condition of freedom, rather than oppression.

In sum, while it appears that recognition is the way forward for a model of non-oppressive relationality, this will not actually be the case. The conditions for recognition do not necessarily secure the conditions required for freedom, and without freedom, recognition is rendered hollow. That is, being with another can only be meaningful if we first know what it means to be with our self in a free way. While Hegelian theorists of recognition such as Axel Honneth argue that mutual recognition can constitute the foundation of an ethics where our individual aims are checked and balanced by the aims of others, this approach assumes that the self remains unaffected, rather than transformed, by another.<sup>33</sup> In contrast to Honneth's position, I advance the view that the mutuality offered within intersubjective relations will be rendered an empty aspiration if the self we are

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<sup>33</sup> Honneth, Axel, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundation of Democratic Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 44.

within these relationships is not constituted in a living relationships with the world. For it is only in a relationship to the world—and not to another human being (e.g., the master)—that the dual process of breaking free of our givenness and taking up self-creation can occur. Given that recognition requires a system of freedom in order to hold meaning, the question we must now turn to, is how we can be ourselves (by constituting ourselves) with another. In the following section, I turn to *Philosophy of Right* in order to reconstruct Hegel’s model of non-oppression as unity, with the aim of securing the conditions for liberation and mutuality in love.<sup>34</sup>

### **3.4 Unity as Model of Non-Oppression in *Philosophy of Right***

Thus far, both Plato and Irigaray have contributed valuable ways of thinking about the problem of oppression within loving relationships, however, their theories face a similar obstacle. Neither Plato nor Irigaray has fully addressed the need for a sharing in love, wherein another is no longer extraneous or threatening to our sense of self, but intrinsically connected to it. The root of this difficulty lies in each thinker’s conception of the self. For both, the self knows itself as free from the domination of the other when it is cultivated in respect to something independent from the other. The implication of these self-conceptions for relationality, is that non-oppressive love becomes a way to preserve the other and ourselves, in a relationship that would otherwise be destructive of us both. For Plato, love becomes oppressive when it stops the generative pursuit of the beautiful (and thus, both lover and beloved’s pursuit of self). If one (mistakenly) believes they have found the object of their desire in another, this freezes desire, and prevents both from transforming their self-conceptions in respect to the Beautiful. For Irigaray, love as an intermediary that preserves sexual difference is the only way to be with another without assimilating each

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<sup>34</sup> *PS*, ¶195.

other's difference. Love for Plato and Irigaray is not an elaboration of the problem of domination—wherein we see the self that has been cultivated being dominated by the other—but rather, the shape of being together that solves the problem of preserving each thinker's conception of the self. In this sense, we can understand why the structure of love is rather indifferent to our sharing with another for Plato and Irigaray, given that there is nothing unique to be gained from this sharedness which we cannot achieve on our own. For Hegel, however, there is something unique to be gained from sharedness, which can only be understood through ethical life.

### *From Intersubjective Recognition to Ethical Life*

While Hegel's discussion of intersubjectivity helps us to understand the importance of sharedness with another, the meaning of this sharedness is superficial if it is not situated within the larger, positive project of ethical life. Intersubjective recognition brings another into our own self-conception, wherein we gain awareness of ourselves through another, however, the self that we become aware of cannot be said to fully belong to us. We see Hegel gesture to this failure of intersubjective recognition to meet the demands of selfhood in the relationship between lord and bondsman. It is only in the bondsman's subordination that the bondsman grasps the conditions for his liberation. The bondsman experiences a breaking down of self-containedness that results in the replacement of his given nature by work, thus setting the stage for him to contribute to his own self shaping. In the movement from intersubjective recognition to ethical life, the self will be further transformed so as to exist in the process of making ourselves in the world, not through another, but through ourselves. While *Phenomenology of Spirit* sets the groundwork regarding what the conditions for non-oppressive relations might include, *Philosophy of Right* undertakes the work of elaborating a positive model of non-oppression that can generate these conditions. As will be seen, this model of non-oppressive relationality will be realized in a system of freedom as

ethical life. In ethical life, intersubjective subject-subject relations will be transformed into institutional subject-substance relations. Through this transformation, we will come to see that mutual recognition can only be non-oppressive in the context of a *system* that secures our freedom as self-determining beings. Ultimately, it is within this system of ethical life that we will gain an understanding of love that is attentive to many of Plato and Irigaray's own concerns regarding non-oppressive relationality, while also bringing sharedness in as a foundation of love.

Although in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, self-consciousness is transformed into an "'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" through intersubjectivity, where our dependence on others will really be a dependence on ourselves, self-consciousness is not the final shape of selfhood.<sup>35</sup> At this point, we have a way of being with another in a shape of mutuality, however, we lack an understanding of what it means to be with oneself. Thus, there is no real way to gauge whether or not one exists with another in a manner that is truly non-oppressive. In response, I turn to *Philosophy of Right*, where we gain our self-understanding not through interpersonal relations, but through ethical life, where the self is constituted by taking up a relationship with the world. It is within the modern world that Hegel finds the conditions required for a system of non-oppression as ethical life, and he states accordingly that:

Ethical life is the *Idea of freedom* as the living good which has its knowledge and volition in self-consciousness, and its actuality through self-conscious action. Similarly, it is in ethical being that self-consciousness has its motivating end and a foundation which has being in and for itself. Ethical life is accordingly the *concept of freedom which has become the existing world and the nature of self-consciousness*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *PS*, ¶177.

<sup>36</sup> Hegel, G. W. F, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §142. Hereafter cited as PR.

Within modern life, freedom exists not just abstractly—it is the “*Idea of freedom*” that actually lives in the world.<sup>37</sup> Freedom is made actual in the world when self-consciousness is no longer alienated from the world, but rather, is constituted in the living relationship between subject and substance. Intersubjective subject-subject relationships are thus replaced by a relationship between subject and substance. Substance here means ethical substance, or content that exists in the world as a system of laws and institutions, and this systemic existence “constitutes its *rationality*”.<sup>38</sup> These laws and institutions are truly objective, because they exist in the world in a way that belongs to everyone. That is, these laws and institutions are not a reflection of any individual preference, for they are “exalted above subjective opinions and preferences,” accessible to all, and ought to contain the possibility to be lived out by all.<sup>39</sup> Here, the crucial point is that while institutions exist in the world as something irreducible to any one individual, they must nonetheless be animated by and lived out through subjectivity. Objective institutions require that we interact with them and the members that make them up. In this way, institutions have being in and for themselves, because they exist not just as independent substance (in-itself), but through a relationship that subjectivity takes up with substance (for-itself).

We see, then, that the self cannot be understood as pure substance or pure subject for Hegel. We are neither content that is merely given to us, nor the completely subjective expression of our immediate desires. Instead, the self is the unity of subject and substance, achieved when subject goes out into the world, finds itself as ethical substance, and actively takes up substance’s content. Hegel states that, “in ethical life as a whole, both objective and subjective moments are present, but these are merely its forms. Its substance is the good, that is, the fulfilment of the objective

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<sup>37</sup> *PR*, §142.

<sup>38</sup> *PR*, §144, 145.

<sup>39</sup> *PR*, §144, 145.



[united] with subjectivity”.<sup>40</sup> We find Hegel’s concern for this movement expressed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as well, where Hegel states that “everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*”.<sup>41</sup> Through ethical life, we transform ourselves from naturally-determined beings into self-determined beings. While we come into the world with natural substance, these drives and desires are merely given to us—we do not put them there. If we live in accordance with natural substance, we are not self-determined, because we merely accept the natural drives and desire that arise contingently within us. For Hegel, we cannot be free living at the level of natural substance, because self-determined beings actively choose their own content, and act in accordance to a principle that they put there.<sup>42</sup> Because the external world is “not something *alien* to the subject,” it is in choosing one’s ethical substance, and conforming to its demands, that the individual finds their liberation.<sup>43</sup> In replacing natural substance with ethical substance, then, the subject is actually taking up a relationship with itself by transforming itself.<sup>44</sup> The living relationship between subject and substance found in ethical life *is* freedom, because we are liberated from those conditions of dependency that run counter to ethical life and actively achieve our liberation through rational self-limitations that we choose. Further, the taking up of substance—which exists objectively in the world—also liberates the individual from indeterminacy, or “the moral will which arbitrarily determines its own indeterminate good”.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *PR*, §144A.

<sup>41</sup> *PS*, ¶17.

<sup>42</sup> *PR*, §149.

<sup>43</sup> *PR*, §148.

<sup>44</sup> *PR*, §147.

<sup>45</sup> *PR*, §148.

Here, we can see that the structure of mediation Hegel proposes in ethical life offers a distinctly new way of being one's self with another. For Hegel, we will create ourselves by taking up a relationship with social institutions, and then mediate our self through these institutions that exists objectively in the world. It is only in this living relationship, that we can constitute and come to know ourselves. While Irigaray and Plato locate the self internally and externally, respectively, social institutions cannot constitute the foundation of who we are in either account. The reason for their turning away from institutions, is that they may be potential sites of oppression, which prevent us from living authentically when these institutions advance only the contingent desire of particular individuals or interests. On this point, and in the context of love, all three thinker's merge in their agreement that radically subjective love must be mediated in a way that replaces it with some ethical or objectively structured love, so that love overcomes any one individual's desire over another. What is interesting about Hegel's project, however, is that he reformulates the problem of sharedness through the very conditions that appear the most rife for oppression in Plato and Irigaray's accounts of love: the sexual relationship with a life-partner within the institution of marriage.

### *The Meaning of Love as Unity in Marriage*

Thus far, mutuality and ethicality exist in separate models of non-oppression. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we gain a model of non-oppression where mutuality is made central, through Hegel's general discussion of recognition. In the master-slave relationship specifically, we gain an understanding of the conditions that would be required for this mutual recognition, and Hegel hints at the conditions that would be required for our freedom (and fully realized in ethical life). In *Philosophy of Right*, we gain this model of ethical life. Here, our freedom is realized when we constitute ourselves by taking up a relationship to institutions that live in the world. While this

transition from an intersubjective to ethical self-conception affords us freedom, wherein we actively constitute ourselves in a life we can call our own, the aim of mutuality has been left behind. In order to advance a model of non-oppressive love, it seems crucial to preserve both the self-constitution of ethical life, and the insight of mutuality present in intersubjective recognition. While Hegel has shown us a way to be ourselves in ethical life, we now need to discern a way for us to be ourselves with another in love. If we find that Hegel is unable to fully account for mutuality in love, then his account will ultimately illustrate the same difficulty as Plato and Irigaray's accounts of love: an inability to reconcile the tension between being ourselves and being with another. In light of this tension, I look to a specific institution within ethical life—the institution of marriage—which I argue is the place where mutuality and self-constitution become intrinsically related.

Self-constitution is made possible in marriage when marriage exists as an ethical good in the world, and one who chooses to be married *knows* it is an ethical good. This is because within ethical life, “it is in ethical being that self-consciousness has its motivating end”.<sup>46</sup> One only lives freely when they constitute themselves as an ethical being. In choosing to constitute oneself as an ethical being through marriage, one must actively take up a form of self-consciousness appropriate to marriage, which then takes the place of the given self. We can understand, then, why there was no possibility for self-constitution in the relationship between lord and bondsman. The lord's motivating aim is not ethical being, but their own subjective desire (to see the object of their desire produced in the world by the slave) and the bondsman's motivating aim is the preservation of his own life (wherein the bondsman has the conditions for a life that is his own, but no system of freedom to actualize it within). The lord takes his given self to be himself, and has no reason to

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<sup>46</sup> *PR*, §142.

constitute himself as something else, while the bondsman lacks ethical being life as a motivating end, and a system of ethical life to pin the process of self-constitution to. It is only within ethical life that we can truly live a life that is our own, for we now have a motivating end of ethical being, and a system in which we can actually constitute ourselves as ethical beings.

Unique to the process of self-constitution in marriage, is that the mode of self-consciousness appropriate to marital partners includes another within it.<sup>47</sup> This consideration of the other is unique, because in the political and economic spheres of ethical life—where ethicality is considered most complete for Hegel—we constitute ourselves through institutions that can affirm us as members of the whole. As members of a corporation—an association of members of who share an end in their particular social interests—for instance, we depend on an objective institution for recognition that we belong to the whole.<sup>48</sup> We do not depend on the other for recognition of our membership within the whole. Within marriage, however, recognition by the other is required for the existence of the institution.<sup>49</sup> Without the other, I cannot exist as a marital partner in the marital union, and the marital union cannot exist without its marital partners. In marriage, we continue to know ourselves as members of the whole, however, this membership necessarily involves the other: “I am not isolated on my own, but gain my self-consciousness only through the renunciation of my independent existence and through knowing myself as the unity of myself with another and of the other with me”.<sup>50</sup> In order to constitute oneself as a member of the marital union, then, one must choose to “*constitute a single person*” with the other.<sup>51</sup> The result,

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<sup>47</sup> *PR*, §158.

<sup>48</sup> *PR*, §253.

<sup>49</sup> *PR*, §253.

<sup>50</sup> *PR*, §158A.

<sup>51</sup> *PR*, §162.

is that love is not present as a purely subjective feeling, but rather, as “consciousness of my unity with another”.<sup>52</sup>

Importantly, this coming together as a single person is not a self-limitation in marriage, for each marital partner attains, “their substantial self-consciousness within it,” meaning, “it is in fact their liberation”.<sup>53</sup> Both partners seek to constitute themselves as ethical beings, and it is in the marital relationship that they become conscious of and actualize themselves as these ethical beings. In other words, uniting with another in marriage is what allows each marital partner to gain self-consciousness and actualize themselves as the ethical being they have chosen to become. Within the marital union, love then acts as a “spiritual bond” that maintains ethicality.<sup>54</sup> This is because each marital partner will regulate their natural desire in relation to love as this spiritual bond, in order to continue constituting themselves in accordance with ethicality.<sup>55</sup> Hence, Hegel states that love as a spiritual bond, “asserts *its rights* as the substantial factor and thereby stands out as indissoluble *in itself* and exalted above the contingency of the passions and of particular transient caprice”.<sup>56</sup> As a result of the marital self-conception, both partners must constitute themselves, and continually regulate themselves, in a way that always considers the broader union. As a result, sharing in love is no longer hierarchal like Plato, nor parallel like Irigaray, nor missing a deeper reason to unite as in recognition. Instead, love is structured as a unity that makes a deep concern for mutuality and freedom intrinsic to it.

Mutuality must always be present in marriage, because each marital partner understands themselves as the unity of themselves with the other. Thus, one acts not in respect to the

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<sup>52</sup> *PR*, §158A.

<sup>53</sup> *PR*, §162.

<sup>54</sup> *PR*, §163.

<sup>55</sup> *PR*, §163.

<sup>56</sup> *PR*, §163.

themselves, nor just the other, but in respect to the union that they share in together. Significantly, this means that the broader marital union *is* the living relationship between marital partners and vice versa. In living out the marital relationship, then, mutuality must always be present, for mutuality exists in the mediating moment of self and other as marital partners. This stands in contrast to the structure of mediation present in Hegel's intersubjective model of non-oppression. In the intersubjective model, one mediates themselves not through a shared marital identity, but directly through the other. Within this model, recognition is only mutual because each depends on the existence of the other for their own sense of self. What is missing in this intersubjective model, is a mediating structure that can also provide a reason to unite and share in life with another, as well as a deeper reason to stay united within the relationship. In Hegel's model of marriage, we find a deeper reason in the union as a third term that both marital partners mediate themselves in. One chooses to take up the marital identity in the pursuit of ethical being—or, freedom in living a life that is one's own—and one stays united with the other because the other is intrinsically important to the marital union—and thus, one's own freedom.

Thus far, it seems as though Hegel offers a promising approach to the question of non-oppressive relationality in love. In line with Plato and Irigaray, Hegel advances a structure of mediation that is irreducible to us, and which we mediate ourselves in. Unique to Hegel, however, is a mediating structure that includes another within it, such that our relationship with the other becomes necessary to our own self-conception. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, one only gains self-consciousness by mediating themselves in the other. In *Philosophy of Right*—within the institution of marriage—one only gains self-consciousness as a marital partner. In both cases, we come to a self-understanding that involves an other, through a mediating structure that includes another, and

our relationship with the other becomes necessary to our own self conception as a result. This stands in contrast to the models of non-oppressive relationality proposed by Irigaray and Plato.

For Plato and Irigaray, their respective structures of mediation bring a transformative self-conception into being, but not necessarily relations of sharedness with the other. For Irigaray, we mediate ourselves in sexual difference, wherein the sexed other recalls the irreducibility of our own sexed self. It cannot be said that we truly share in sexual difference with the other, because the other is not necessary to our own self-conception, and we only participate in sexual difference out of our own sexually embodied identity. In other words, we create ourselves as men or women prior to entering into a relationship, and love is only structured to preserve our self-conception in a confrontation with the other. Similarly for Plato, the lover mediates themselves in the Beautiful, and the self-conception the lover comes away with does not rely on the other in order to be achieved. For the beloved, however, a self-conception only becomes possible through the lover. Eros mediates the Beautiful for the lover, and the lover mediates the Beautiful for the beloved. As a result, the lover's self conception requires the Beautiful but not the beloved, while the beloved's self conception is made dependent on the lover through whom the Beautiful is mediated. A relationship with the other cannot be mutual, for only one partner requires this other for their own self-conception. Thus, we can see that Plato and Irigaray's structures of mediation do not include the other in a way that makes a relationship between lover and beloved necessary to our own self conceptions. Considering that Hegel brings self and other together in a necessary way within marriage as a structure of mediation, then, his model of non-oppression seems the most promising for thinking through the question of non-oppressive relationality.

Before we can accept Hegel as a solution, however, a further question arises: in reconciling mutuality and self-constitution within marriage, to what extent has Hegel actually reconciled our

relationship with an other and with an institution? In other words, while we know that we are relating to the institution of marriage in order to become a marital partner—for we constitute ourselves within and in accordance to marriage in order to do so—in what way do we relate to the other *as an other* within marriage? This question is important, because if Hegel only brings an other into our own self-conception in a way that disregards the other as an individual, then the marital union is primarily a relationship between ourselves and the institution of marriage, at the expense of a true relationship to the other as well. If this is the case, then Hegel's solution to non-oppressive relationality runs the same problem that we encounter in Plato and Irigaray's models of non-oppression: the other cannot be fully accounted for in a model of non-oppressive relationality. In order to assess whether or not this is the case, I return to Hegel's opening remarks on the family. Here, Hegel considers the tension between self and other within love, which he refers to as the paradox of love:

The first moment in love is that I do not wish to be an independent person in my own right and that, if I were, I would feel deficient and incomplete. The second moment is that I find myself in another person, that I gain recognition in this person, who in turn gains recognition in me. Love is therefore the most immense contradiction...<sup>57</sup>

The nature of this paradox, is that I feel incomplete as an independent person without the other (and thus want to unite with the other), while at the same time, I want to be recognized and affirmed by the other as my own person. For Hegel, marriage is supposed to be the place where this tension is reconciled, because one finds their substantial self-consciousness in the marital union, and thus, understands themselves in their unity with another—one is with themselves with the other.

At the same time, in taking up a relationship with a marital partner for the sake of constituting ourselves as a marital partner, the other only matters to us to the extent that the other

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<sup>57</sup> *PR*, §158A.



matters to the institution of marriage. And for the institution of marriage, the other only matters to us to the extent that they are a marital partner. That is, while we require an other to constitute the marital union, it does not matter who the other actually is as an individual. Indeed, the only criteria that Hegel places on an other, in order to be a marital partner, is that this other constitutes themselves as an ethical being, and chooses to do so through marriage. We can see, then, why Hegel states that an arranged marriage is more ethical than a marriage that arises from the mutual inclination of its particularized individuals.<sup>58</sup> A marital relationship only comes into being because both partners want to be married and know that it is an ethical good. Outside of this criteria, each partner is not concerned with who the other is when making their decision to enter into marriage. In considering the extent to which the other actually matters to us, then, we have returned to a problem that has appears throughout this thesis. If we cannot account for the other as an individual within marriage, it cannot be said that Hegel fully solves the problem of being ourselves with another in love.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In sum, we find in Hegel a seeming solution to the problem of being oneself with another. The model of intersubjective relationality in the *Phenomenology* brings a new conception of the self into being, where the other is part of our own self conception. Through Hegel's discussion of recognition, each realizes that they are dependent on the other for their own sense of self, and the result is a process of mutual recognition. In order for recognition and mutuality to hold force, however, these insights needed to be situated within ethical life. That is, in order to be with another and be recognized by that other, one must first know what it means to be with themselves. Within

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<sup>58</sup> *PR*, §162R.

ethical life, Hegel proposes that being with ourselves requires that we constitute ourselves as ethical beings. In the process of self-constitution, however, mutuality is no longer secured. As we saw, self-constitution and mutuality only become intrinsically related to one another within the institution of marriage. It is within Hegel's account of marriage, that we uncover a promising solution to the problem of being ourselves with another. Upon further consideration, however, this solution proves insufficient, and the problem of being ourselves with another remains unresolved. While the other matters to our own self conception, and our actions towards the other must always be out of mutuality, we have no way be with the other *as an other*.

## Conclusion

### **Overarching Insights**

This thesis has been concerned with the question of non-oppressive relationality in love. Through an engagement with the work of Plato, Irigaray and Hegel, I have gained several central insights for thinking through a model of non-oppression. First, each thinker has identified a problem of oppression relevant to love, and in this way, has shed light on the conditions in which we cannot be ourselves in a relationship. Rather than end their projects with an identification of the problem of oppression, however, each thinker initiates a deep positive project in response to the oppressive conditions they identify. I have come to see that, at the core of each thinker's positive project, is that which is really at stake in love for all three: not the relationship that individuals are participating in, but rather, my own sense of self. For Plato, Irigaray and Hegel, I must know who I am before I can enter into a loving relationship with another, and I must know that I am participating in this relationship with another as my self, in order for the relationship to be considered non-oppressive. In stark contrast to dominant models of non-oppression—i.e., contractually or consensually based models where an individual's identity or being is taken to be given—this thesis has uncovered three participatory conceptions of the self, which require that I actively participate in transforming myself by participating in the Beautiful, my own sexual difference or ethical life. In establishing participatory self-conceptions out of the conditions of oppression that each thinker is concerned with, Plato, Irigaray and Hegel have each provided me with a powerful way to judge when I am not myself with another in an oppressive kind of love—and how I might get out of this condition and into a non-oppressive one.

Second, within a non-oppressive relationship, each thinker has provided insight into the conditions that would be required of love. I have shown that love cannot be the radically subjective expression of my own desires and feelings, and of the other's own desires and feelings. If this were the case, the deepest shape of mutuality that relationality could take, would be a kind of agreement or compromise between individuals, who each seek the realization of their own individual desires through another. Instead, love requires that we participate in something that we can share in with another. For Plato, Irigaray and Hegel, this is some objective mediating structure that is irreducible to any particular individual, and in which individuals can find themselves by transforming themselves. Within the mediating structure that individuals transform themselves in accordance to, each can then unite with the other in a non-oppressive way— as the self that each has transformed themselves into. Understood in this way, I gain new possibilities for being myself with another, because that which the relationship takes place *in*—The Beautiful, love as an intermediary (where we participate out of our sexual difference), ethical life—is also where I find myself.

### **Further Exploration**

Ultimately, while these overarching insights help us think through the meaning of non-oppressive relationality, the question of how to be ourselves with another remains unresolved. While Hegel's account of non-oppression seemed to include the necessary components of a solution—self, other, mutuality, and freedom all reconciled within marriage—I ultimately found his solution to be incomplete. Specifically, in Hegel's failure to account for our relationship with the other *as an other*, marriage only preserves the other within it as a general marital partner, and not as an individual. As a result, we are left with three models of non-oppressive relationality in love, wherein the tension between self and other that was apparent in Plato and Irigaray's models of

non-oppression is raised once again in Hegel. Considering that each model explored in this thesis has been unable to provide an answer to the problem of being ourselves with another in love, some reflection on a path forward is required.

If living in a condition of non-oppression requires that I actively participate in transforming myself, and yet, I want to be with another in love, this could mean one of two things for a path forward. Within a loving relationship, the other must be i) separate from my process of self-transformation, or ii) intrinsic to it. What can be known for certain, is that the process of self-transformation must not be hindered by an other or the broader relationship, for if this were the case, I could no longer be myself within love. On the one hand, participation in my own self-transformation is essential to the meaning of my freedom, and so, it may be that the other can only be involved with my self-transformation in love in an extraneous or limited way. In this formulation, a relationship with the other is not required for my own pursuit of self, as we found with Plato and Irigaray. If the other is indeed separate from my process of self-transformation in love, then love becomes a way of being with another than does not infringe on this individual path of self-transformation.

On the other hand, it may be that there is something about the other that is intrinsically important to my own process of self-transformation in love. If this is the case, then my desire to be myself with another in love is not a paradox of love, but a concern that gets to the heart of love itself. Here, we could look to Hegel as a way forward, however, we would first need to find a way to bring the other *as an other* into the loving relationship. Non-oppressive relationality in love would have to encompass not just my relationship to an institution, but my relationship with a unique individual as well. Last, it may be the case that wanting to be myself, and wanting to be with another in love, is just a paradox that I need to accept. I both need another, and I do not need

another. In accepting this paradox, I might find that the reason to unite with another cannot truly include the other's uniqueness. If this is this case, then the real reason I unite with another may belong to a larger order—The Beautiful, sexual difference, ethical life—wherein Plato, Irigaray and Hegel's models each capture this condition, and a lack of concern for the other ought not be my primary concern at all. Going forward, however, my own sense is that there is something about the other that matters to the experience of love, and that a model that cannot capture this importance of the other cannot be considered fully complete. Thus, my hope is to continue exploring the question of non-oppressive relationality with the role of the other in mind.

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