

Luce Irigaray's Project for a New Human Being

Cosmin-Florentin Spaschi
"Al. I. Cuza" University of Iasi

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Luce Irigaray's *To Be Born: Genesis of a New Human Being* aligns with the author's previous works and demonstrates the importance of life processes in relation to our human becoming. The world that, in particular, the Western European culture has built over time, departs from some patterns that should remain fundamental to humans. The author's thesis states that we often compare ourselves with God or with animals and forget those structures that give meaning to the life itself. The consequence of this way of representing life is that "the world that we have built deprives us of our real potential" (p. 94). Furthermore, in a sense taken from Heidegger's work, we are captive in an inauthentic existence in which we don't have any beacons to guide us. Life itself is in danger, says Irigaray, and the causes that send us to this threatening kind of being are also inspired by the Heideggerian works. First of all, our "onto-theological tradition - have substituted a celestial genealogy for natural roots" (p. 93).

This implies that our origin has a transcendent principle and not the fact that we were born after a simple relationship between two different human parts. At the same time, this tradition that Irigaray recalls may also be accused of having a

model of education that always takes into account the ways in which things should be, not as they are in reality. This framework limits the meanings of the complex aspect of life. The criticism of this metaphysical model has the consequence that we are now into a new philosophical period: "Criticizing and abandoning the supersensitive values, thanks to which humanity kept its becoming on hold, forces us to discover another setting or frame starting from which we can achieve our destiny" (p. 85).

The post-metaphysical epoch places us, as Heidegger intuited, in an era in which technology dominates us in an overwhelming way. Irigaray's opinion is that we must not let ourselves trapped in the mirage produced by the technical-scientific structure of the world. It aims to plan human life and behaviors, which also leads to various forms of alienation. In a general manner, "our religious, cultural and political ideals are unable either to secure the safety of humanity or to offer it a plan for constructing a future which corresponds to our current necessities" (p. 99).

Irigaray emphasizes in her book the proposal which reflects the construction of a new world based on foundations taken from the relationship of desire and love between us. This project is built like a journey: from the birth of a person to the point of which it comes to give birth to others. The sixteen chapters of the book are short descriptions of how education should be done according to this new approach.

In Prologue, Lucy Irigaray states that the way we come to investigate our origin is one that does not allow us to live in ourselves and also in the world. We have built through our cultural tradition, forms of thought that depart us from our true origin: a birth resulting from the union of two. In Irigaray's words: "We try to attribute to ourselves an origin by assigning an origin, a being, to everything and everyone that we approach, at a material or a spiritual level. But we do not correspond in this way to our human lot, a lot that requires us to be ecstatic in relation to our origin and our environment" (p. ix). All these ideas have to be changed with simple actions that can propose, as a search for our origin, dreams, desires, and also care for others. Leaving behind any ideal of superhuman, we must go

beyond the classical concepts of the man with the help of two actions: by cultivating our breathing and also by assuming our sexuate belonging. In that manner, we can get a real image of what life and the processes of becoming means, beyond the nostalgia of the origins.

In chapter 1, Irigaray states that we wanted our own birth, being those who decided its time. If the most developed idea of our origins is that we have been given life when God breathed on us, Irigaray believes that the will to exist, manifested by our first breath, demonstrates that it is natural and uninfluenced by external interventions. It is a truth that “such a will to live at first acts naturally, independently of the intervention of our consciousness. Unfortunately our education does not teach us how to cultivate it at a conscious level” (p. 2). Also, the way we are educated limits our sexuality. The gender aspect is that which questions the finitude of ours, not in a metaphysical way linked to death, but by a mere limitation due to our nature. Any of us represents only half of what humanity expresses in the world.

Hegel himself admits in *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* or in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “that he has underestimated the importance of the genus in the dialectical process going from nature to spirit” (p. 4). Consequently, Irigaray considers these two processes to be defining and argues that they should be highlighted more in our educational training which fails to consider the child as a whole. These processes facilitate the transition from nature to culture, from singularity to universality.

In chapter 2, Irigaray points out the risk that the newborn encounters when it comes to the world, a risk grounded in the basic needs: oxygen, food, light. That is why adults consider the newborn as completely dependent on them, forgetting that also there are certain processes of life itself, upon which they have no effect. The child always moves between empirical needs and a series of transcendental aspects. That is why it is necessary “to elaborate and to construct a place which takes into account its natural potentialities and permits it to cultivate them towards a human blooming which corresponds to them” (p. 10). It is important not to miss the fact that for this newborn the body is a place that makes knowledge possible.

Through sensations and experiences, the child begins to define his subjectivity and build his own world. Unfortunately, “a lack of cultivation of our physical properties (...), has gradually led to an exhaustion of our vitality and results today in a quite anarchical re-emergence of our natural belonging, of which we know almost nothing” (p. 11). That’s why education needs to interfere and eliminate this issue.

In chapter 3, Irigaray mentions that the aspects of transcendence, such as growth or movement, in the newborn are the vital ones. That does not depend in any way on the cultural acquisition, because these vital aspects are always present. Also, through the growth and development of the locomotor system, the exploration of the world is facilitated. In contravention of these natural elements, cultural aspects automate the child by teaching him always what to do. That’s why “the human being becomes a kind of manufactured product, whose accomplishment will be subjected to an idea – an *eidōs* – of the human element which results from a culture instead of being a flowering of its natural belonging, notably into a fleshly face” (p. 16).

In chapter 4, Irigaray develops the aspect of the human need to explore the world. This is done first by moving the hands, and then by bringing objects to the mouth to be perceived. This desire to discover the world is facilitated thus by the emergence of the biped position which helps overcoming any limits. However, adult intervention is often harmful because they stop the child from getting things, from going to some places to avoid falling or burning. That’s why the natural environment has largely come to be replaced by a built environment “and it is regrettable that the environment in which the child carries on investigating is more and more made up of fabricated objects and not of living beings” (p. 21).

In chapters 5, 6 and 7, Irigaray begins to develop the problem of the loss in the world, affirming that this process of alienation can be solved by returning to itself. The thesis in this chapters is that we cannot live in the world without living in ourselves. The consequence of such a position is not narcissism, because once again in a vision taken from *Being and Time*, Irigaray says that “the world into which we are thrown or abandoned is an impersonal one, in which we get lost in a being-

with which does not consider the authentic or real being of the elements which constitute it” (p. 27). This return to oneself, and especially to life-related issues, is the one that can facilitate the departure of this impersonal empire and lead us to the development of authentic forms of interrelation. Sometimes the state of inauthenticity can be obtained, in the middle of the family: “they gain in comfort and relief from anguish or fear, humans in this way lose some intimacy with themselves and a perception of what might help them to be” (p. 35). All these models make people to “become a kind of fabricated product, the functioning of which is ruled by supersensitive patterns and ideals extraneous to their real being and which are impracticable by them (p. 38). There the following question arises: How can we become ourselves? Irigaray believes that by taking into account the transcendental potential of the child and his desires that send to powerful forms of affective energy. To become oneself entails moving away from everything that culture and the environment give us, by all the means through which people come to be considered identical and defined by a unique nature. It means positive capitalization of differences and the introduction of some forms of respect for those who are different from us.

Chapter 8 and 9 bring attention to the problem of language. Irigaray believes that language has developed a whole parallel universe that allows us to bring to life everything that lives without regard to life itself. It is also forgotten that language is produced through our body, and those forms that allow our bodies to communicate such as the sounds of a child are removed. It seems that language has become autonomous and externally being distant from us: speech has been assimilated to a tool that is useful for us to know the world, to dominate it, to construct it, without us caring enough about its contribution to our own shaping and our becoming (p. 47). Also, the middle voice that model which facilitates relationship and communication with others has no longer exist.

In chapter 10 and also in chapter 11, Irigaray states that all these arguments are sufficient to prove that the educational model built on these foundations is no longer satisfactory. They rely too much on the description of the world in an ideal way that

does not permit becoming and eliminates life, reducing everything to the stage of the object. The emphasis should be on what really exists, on the stages that describe becoming, and not on the products that the human mind has developed. It's really a danger that "the body, the affects, the emotions or feelings are invited to remain outside of the public space of the school" (p. 59), and also the fact that there are no areas in education that offer children truly satisfying models of thinking and making projections about themselves.

The proper manner in which these models are to be removed must not reflect a negative criticism, condemning and destroying everything that already exists: "on the contrary, we have to acknowledge what has been, and be capable of giving thanks for what we received. Gratitude releases us from resentment and frees our energy to construct bridges towards the future and to become ourselves, bridges in order that a new humanity can occur" (p. 64). That's why Irigaray proposes a new model that does not rely on existing patterns that would give us the world through the eyes and the brains of the antecedents. It emphasizes the results of our own experiences with the world and everything surrounding us, with the emphasis on living elements.

This own model is developed in chapters 12-16. In Irigaray's words: "The meaning that we must consider and cultivate in our epoch is first that of life itself" and is based on criteria such as desire, amorous desire, love (which puts together physical emotion and spiritual emotion). This model is an alternative to aspects of social issues in the contemporary world. In the author's view, the means that keep the differences between people through the boundaries of our sexualized, culturalized, and racialized incarnation can be eliminated by rebuilding the world based on forms of desire and love among us. Thus, Irigaray is firmly convinced that by developing this model we can improve our lives "and to let the human face blossom from desire and love, especially those inspired by life, ends by changing the face of the world in which we live so that it becomes a place in which living beings can dwell and coexist" (p. 92).

This book has the merit of bringing to our attention a well-structured and well-grounded perspective on some of the essential aspects of what the human is, especially today when we

are going through a period where inhuman issues are becoming more and more numerous. Although Irigaray is confident in her own ideas, also based on her previous studies, the book *To Be Born: Genesis of a New Human Being* doesn't offer any real conclusion. This study remains at the stage of proposing some possible alternatives to phenomena such as dehumanization, alienation, and to the possibility to get lost in a universe of inauthentic life based on prefabricated truths and the tendency to humiliate by maintaining people captive in a consuming universe.

Analyzed from a philosophical point of view, this alternative fails to illustrate how safe can be an approach, which seeks to focus only on life and everything that it permits to take place. The removal of the moral rules from this vision, which pleads for a return to nature, may be a far too expensive price to pay. Nothing guarantees that a human being lacking in morality can go beyond the simple bestial stage. It is possible that the social pressure that exists is intended to lead life further, even if it does not allow to express its full capacity.

Address:

Cosmin-Florentin Spaschi
Al.I. Cuza University of Iasi
Department of Philosophy
Bd. Carol I, 11
700506 Iasi, Romania
Email: s.cosmin94@gmail.com