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Wonder and Generosity

To arrive at the constitution of an ethics of sexual difference, we must at least return to what is for Descartes the first passion: *wonder*.

—Luce Irigaray

As I mentioned in the introduction, the passions of wonder and generosity provide my starting point for thinking about the role of the passions in ethical and political questions. In her book *The Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993a), Luce Irigaray reads texts in the history of philosophy by Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas in a productive and sympathetic, although not uncritical, way for what they can contribute to this new ethics that incorporates the passions. For her, the question of sexual difference is the philosophical question of our age (1993a, 5). In a very suggestive reading of René Descartes's *The Passions of the Soul* (1989), she argues that Descartes is right to place wonder as the first of all the passions and that wonder can provide the basis for an ethics of sexual difference. However, unsurprisingly, Descartes himself is not thinking of sexual difference in relation to wonder, although he does discuss sexual difference in the context of desire (1989, 67–69). Furthermore, he believed that a different passion, generosity, by which he means proper self-respect that leads to respect for others, is the true basis for ethics. In this chapter, I discuss this meeting between Irigaray and Descartes and what I see as the implications of the encounter. As concepts, wonder and generosity are enormously fruitful because they provide us with a way to think about how to respond to both difference and similarity and their relation. Through my reading of both Irigaray's and Descartes's texts, I argue that we should respond to other differences, beyond sexual difference,

with wonder; that the passions of wonder and generosity need to be brought together to ground an ethics; and that wonder and generosity must be understood as responses or attitudes that we can cultivate in ourselves, rather than simply fleeting passions.

The Passion of Wonder

Irigaray's earliest work, including *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1995a) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985b), provides a complex critique and analysis of the exclusion of the feminine in Western thought. In other works, especially *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993a), she concentrates on articulating a feminist ethics that takes women and men to be specific in their needs, interests, and rights. This is what she means by an ethics of sexual difference. Her critique of the Western philosophical tradition aims to overcome splits between reason and passion, mind and body, and the sensible and the transcendental. In an unexpected turn, Irigaray argues that wonder can be the basis for an ethics of sexual difference: "To arrive at the constitution of an ethics of sexual difference, we must at least return to what is for Descartes the first passion: *wonder*" (1991a, 171).¹ Of course, she believes that other passions such as desire and love are important, as we will see in the following chapter, but wonder plays a distinctive founding role in her thought concerning sexual difference and ethics. Wonder is surprise at the extraordinary, and Irigaray believes that it is the ideal way to regard others, because it is prior to judgment, and thus free of hierarchical relations. Wonder involves recognizing others as different from ourselves. Generosity, in contrast, is based on respect for the self and involves regarding others as essentially similar to ourselves, as we shall see. To understand the force of Irigaray's claim, we need to examine what Descartes means by wonder.

Descartes believes that all passions are based on wonder (in French, *l'admiration*) and five other primary passions—desire, hate, love, sadness, and joy. All other (secondary) passions are composed of some combination of these six. These passions of the soul, or emotions as we tend to call them, are a subset of the full range of passions, which includes perceptions and sensations, or passions of the body (1989, 56, 32–34). Descartes called them passions because he saw them, in general, as reactions to actions of the body (the brain) and distinct from actions or thoughts of the soul. Wonder is the first of all passions, according to Descartes, since:

When the first encounter with some object surprises us, and we judge it to be new, or very different from what we knew in the past or what we supposed it was going to be, this makes us wonder and be astonished at it. And since this can happen before we know in the least whether this object is suitable to us or not, it seems to me that Wonder is the first of all the passions. It has no opposite, because if the object presented has nothing in it that surprises us, we are not in the least moved by it and we regard it without passion. (Descartes 1989, 52)²

According to Descartes, wonder is a sudden surprise of the soul (or mind) which is related only to impressions in the brain, which represents some things as rare. A particular object seems so worthy of attention that we are transfixed by it, without making a judgment about whether it is good or evil. It is only later, when we decide whether it is good and pleasing or bad and painful, that we feel love or hate toward it. So, wonder is the first or primary passion for several reasons. First, wonder is primary because unlike the other passions, it is prior to judgment and comparison—we experience wonder without knowing whether the object is good or evil, whether it is useful or not, or even what kind of a thing it is. Second, wonder is the first of all passions as it has no opposite.³ Third, wonder is fundamental in being united to most other passions since they involve surprise—otherwise, we would not be moved by the object (Descartes 1989, 52–53, 103). For example, indignation involves wonder because we are surprised by things not being done in the way we believe they ought to be done.

Wonder may appear to be a rather intellectual or “cool” passion, a view Descartes seems to accept since he says that it affects only the brain, rather than the heart and the blood (1989, 57–58). Nevertheless, he argues that wonder still has great power to move us due to the surprise it involves.⁴ Descartes contends that wonder is a useful passion for it leads us to learn and remember things through the strengthening force of surprise. We do not necessarily remember unfamiliar things that appear again, unless the original idea is reinforced by wonder (or through greater understanding). Wonder is a response to the rare and extraordinary; things appear to be rare and extraordinary if they are unfamiliar or unexpected (1989, 59). Only wonder makes us notice those things that are rare; other passions make us notice things that seem good or evil to us. Once we have recognized the rarity of the object, we can go on to investigate and understand its nature

(1989, 59, 61). This investigation will usually dispel the wonder, as we learn, for example, how something works or why it happens.

This description of wonder raises the question: If we have made no judgment about the object, a defining feature of wonder, how can we recognize it as rare or extraordinary? In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes argues that a judgment occurs when the will either affirms or denies some perception of the understanding or intellect (1984, 40–41). All the passions dispose the soul to will whatever actions the passions have prepared the body for (1989, 40). For example, the feeling of fear inclines us to will the body to run away from what we fear. Judgments also influence the soul to will particular actions and ideally, our passions will reinforce accurate judgments. My view of how we can understand responding to an object with wonder before we have formed a judgment about the object is that objects worthy of wonder stand out against the undifferentiated background of those everyday and familiar things that we can easily categorize. Against this background, we can perceive that something is different or unfamiliar without making a judgment or assenting to anything particular about it.

From Descartes's standpoint, it is valuable to be born with some capacity for wonder, which disposes us to learn more, and we should cultivate an ideal or appropriate propensity to wonder (1989, 60–61). On the one hand, given that wonder is thus connected with intelligence and curiosity, those who have little capacity to wonder are unlikely to be knowledgeable.⁵ On the other hand, he warns against having too much wonder, claiming that an excess of wonder and wondering about things that are beneath our consideration is always detrimental. Such an extreme of wonder Descartes calls astonishment (*L'estonnement*) (1989, 58). Wondering at everything could be said to be akin to wondering at nothing because there is no distinction between what is worthy of wonder and what is not. Descartes believes that those who lack confidence in their own judgment will wonder to excess, for they wonder at things of no importance and cannot pass beyond wonder to the stage of reflection. This excess of wonder can develop into a habit if we do not correct it and gain a more extensive knowledge of things.

Furthermore, wondering too much can stall or distort the use of our reason since there is no discrimination between what is rare and what is commonplace. Descartes argues that it is easy to counteract the danger of wondering to excess by gaining more knowledge and thinking about things that seem most rare and strange (1989, 61). Wonder usually decreases over time, because the more we encounter rare things about which we wonder, the more we become used to them and understand them and find that the

things that we encounter later are common and familiar. A clear example is small children, who find so much of what they experience evocative of wonder and for whom this surprise gradually diminishes as they grow older and more educated. Descartes suggests, as I will discuss farther on in the chapter, that the most worthy objects of lasting wonder are God and that which, in us, is most similar to God's qualities, our free will.

Wonder's relation to education and philosophy is quite clear from Descartes's account, but understanding how wonder can form the basis of an ethics of sexual difference requires attention to Irigaray's appropriation of the concept of wonder. Irigaray finds a connection between Descartes's account of the passions and psychoanalysis, saying, "Situating the passions at the junction of the physical and the psychological, he [Descartes] constructs a theory of the *ego's* affects which is close to Freud's theory of the drives" (1993a, 80). However, Descartes is not thinking about sexual difference in relation to wonder, just as Freud does not think of wonder, "the passion that Freud forgot?" (1993a, 80).⁶ Irigaray is thinking about both in order to situate an ethics of sexual difference.

Wonder and the Ethics of Sexual Difference

The idea of an ethics of *sexual difference* is distinctive, because traditional ethical theories have rarely theorized the ethical relevance of the existence of two sexes. Previous ethics have either assimilated women to men, seen women only in relation to men, or claimed that there is one neutral subject, the human being, for whom ethical principles will always be the same. For example, utilitarianism concerns the greatest happiness of the greatest number of human beings; ethical rules or principles, as in Kant's ethics, are supposed to apply to everyone, regardless of sex; and John Rawls's theory of justice sets sex and gender aside as irrelevant to moral deliberation (1975, 537). Of course, sexual difference *has* been recognized in misogynist ways in the history of philosophy, as in Aristotle's politics (1984, 1259b1–60a31).⁷ However, this approach to sexual difference is not what Irigaray has in mind. She also criticizes Emmanuel Levinas for his representation of the feminine as "the reverse side of man's aspiration towards the light, as its negative" (1991a, 179).⁸ For her, Levinas does not recognize the specificity of femininity but only the feminine as it is viewed by men.

In contrast to these approaches, what Irigaray is proposing is a *non-hierarchical* recognition of sexual difference, where each sex is thought of as

autonomous and self-defined, so that women are not understood through a male paradigm of humanity (1993a, 5–19). If the idea that women and men are different is taken seriously, then it is clear there must be more than one set of interests, values, and perspectives in culture. Feminists have pointed out that there are ethical and political issues of particular concern to women, such as reproductive freedom, maternity leave, child care and work, and rape, for example. Women may reason differently about ethical problems—for instance, Carol Gilligan argues that women tend to rely on an ethic of care rather than justice in trying to resolve moral dilemmas (1993). Most importantly, it cannot be taken for granted that men can represent women's interests or make decisions on women's behalf. Irigaray's idea of an ethics based on wonder challenges the view that ethical subjects of different sexes can be substituted for each other.

On Irigaray's account of ethics, wonder provides the model for the way in which the sexes should respond to each other. Her conception is that the other, male or female, should surprise us, and appear very different from what we expected (1993a, 74). We should not assume that we know everything about the other. As Irigaray puts it, "Wonder might allow them [the sexes] to retain an autonomy based on their difference, and give them a space of freedom or attraction, a possibility of separation or alliance" (1993, 13).⁹ The advantage of wonder is that it goes beyond what is or is not considered suitable for us. If the other "suited us" completely in the sense of being enough like us not to surprise, we would have reduced the other to ourselves, as it would be to understand and respond to them only on our own terms. In regarding the other with wonder, their existence resists assimilation or reduction to sameness or self and we are able to accept differences in them. Irigaray describes the response of wonder: "In order for it to affect us, it is necessary and sufficient for it to surprise, to be new, *not yet assimilated or disassimilated as known*" (1993a, 75). Something is "disassimilated as known" if it is not absorbed or incorporated into the subject. What sets the object of wonder apart is that it cannot be circumscribed or defined (1993a, 81).

Irigaray argues that then wonder awakens our passion, our attraction to what is not known, and curiosity toward what we have not encountered or made ours (1993a, 75). Irigaray's understanding of the nature of wonder is consonant with that of other philosophers, such as R. W. Hepburn, who in his well-known essay on wonder, puts the point aptly: "I give myself to wonder in ways not too fancifully analogous to how I give myself in a friendship, entrusting myself to another in an open and therefore vulnerable

way” (1984, 134). Wonder is a way of responding directly to the other, rather than imposing or projecting our own views or self-understanding on them. With the other passions, the subject’s judgment affirms an object as having a particular nature—lovable, hateful, or beautiful. But wonder is a direct response to the object.¹⁰ Irigaray says that wonder involves a realization that the self is not alone. Furthermore, she thinks that this realization that one is not the only (type of) being in the world involves a loss of (perceived) power, because the existence and independence of the other has to be recognized.¹¹ The experience of wonder implies acknowledgment that the other cannot be possessed (1993a, 75).

Irigaray remarks on the connection between wonder and knowledge and creativity, by stating that wonder is the passion that inaugurates love and art and thought (1993a, 82). Similarly, Amélie Oksenberg Rorty notes in her discussion of the importance of the body in Descartes’s thought that “[i]t is the emotions, and particularly the emotion of wonder, that energize science and give it directions” (1992, 386). The passions in general provide us with some sense of what is important to us, and wonder does this without evaluating the object. On Descartes’s account, we will not know whether something is really important until we have investigated it. However, Irigaray claims that in wonder, the subject welcomes as desirable what it does not know or what is foreign to it and so sexual difference can be understood in these terms and an ethics can be developed (1993a, 79). The idea of desirability being connected to wonder in this way seems to be a significant shift from Descartes’s view, as he believes that wonder does not entail a particular judgment about whether the object is desirable or not (1989, 52). Irigaray takes him to be saying that “difference attracts” (1993a, 79) and that wonder involves a kind of attraction and curiosity toward what we do not fully understand. What Descartes says is that in wonder the object seems worthy of consideration and attention because of its rarity, which does not necessarily imply desirability, though it implies some impetus toward further understanding (1989, 59). Whether this is sufficient for Irigaray’s ethics is a question that we need to look into further.

In Irigaray’s view, the relation between those who differ, especially sexually, has to be reworked through the notion of wonder (1993a, 12, 74). She argues that sexual difference is ontological, and so fundamental to ordering society.¹² Her claims about wonder have to be understood as normative rather than descriptive, as it cannot be said that women and men do respond to each other with wonder in general. Women and men currently respond to each other in many different ways, some of which

could be considered to be closer to this wondering attitude and others much farther from it. I take seriously Descartes's view that wonder does not have a precise opposite, due to its basic nonjudgmental nature.

However, not having a direct opposite means that wonder can have a range of contrary passions and attitudes, some that we might see as more positive than others. These contraries could include complete indifference or nonrecognition of the extraordinariness of the other. Both sexes could adopt this indifference to the other sex by separating themselves from or avoiding members of it. Other extremes could include the contempt, hatred, or fear evidenced in the worst kind of misogyny. This approach regards differences with scorn or horror and tries to harm the other. More benign attitudes can include awe or adoration that both sexes may feel for the other, yet without wonder this perspective would impose an idea of what the other is. For example, one may take oneself as a model and project that onto the other sex or invent a fantasy of sexual stereotypes and treat the other in those terms. Romantic love as it is depicted in countless Hollywood films is an everyday case in point. What makes each of these disparate passions contrary to wonder is that they do not respond to the other as they are; rather, they project or impose the passion on them, whether it be awestruck worship or scorn. As I will go on to discuss in this and the following chapter, a failure to respect the other only compounds the failure of wonder. I take it that Irigaray is articulating an account of a response to the other for both sexes that overcomes the range of problems in each of these attitudes.

The culture that we live in is one that consists in experiences of a range of these relations of passions between men and women, as well as some relations that may come close to regarding each other with wonder, although that is difficult in a culture where women are oppressed. In *I love to you*, Irigaray suggests that such encounters are possible, if only ephemerally, even now, as she describes her discussion of mixed-sex politics with Italian politician Renzo Imbeni and a crowd of both their supporters. She writes that "a miracle took place" in reference to the discussion as a whole and in relation to him. For her, the experience was one where they did not give up their identities and as an encounter it is one characterized "by the need for the recognition of another who will never be mine" (1996, 7–11). While one might question her interpretation of this particular event, one can see how it works as a kind of image of wondering and respectful relations.

Thus, I see Irigaray's recommendation as that women and men *should* respond to each other with wonder. At this stage, it is not quite clear what it means to regard the other sex with wonder, particularly on the basis of

Descartes's account of wonder. We are supposed to wonder at something rare to us, yet how can the other sex be rare? Irigaray could mean that in each encounter with the other sex we should regard them with wonder; or that we should always have the response of wonder; or that we should approach special relationships with wonder; or that when we think about sexual difference, we should think about it with wonder, in terms of something extraordinary, for sexual difference is extraordinary. Most plausibly, Irigaray's recommendation must refer to each encounter with the other as taking place in wonder. And this seems to be Irigaray's view: "Thus man and woman, woman and man are always meeting as though for the first time because they cannot be substituted one for the other" (1993a, 12–13). Consequently, the attitude of wonder permeates every encounter. Wonder, on this account, does not mean simply curiosity; rather, it leads to an appreciation of the other's qualities. Hepburn argues that there is an appreciative–contemplative aspect to wonder (1984, 134–35), and in this sense, wonder recognizes and affirms the value of the other.

As Irigaray argues, sexual difference is not quantitative (1993a, 76), even though it is traditionally measured by such standards, notoriously in the case of Freud's notion of penis envy (1961, 243–58), which Irigaray has criticized to great effect in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a) and elsewhere. Nor is sexual difference a question of better or worse, as both adoration and contempt toward the other sex are inappropriate (1993a, 13). Wonder is the passion that can express this relation since wonder does not involve judgment and comparison. Then one can accept that the other has different experiences, and different ethical considerations may be relevant. Since wonder takes the object as it is, the other is prior in a way that they are not in the case of other passions.¹³ We should encounter the other with wonder and recognize their uniqueness as not just a difference from ourselves, and accept their independence from us. Then the other will strike us as new, unfamiliar, and original like the stars, a great artwork, or the universe.¹⁴ The other is accepted in their irreducible alterity, in terms of their priority for the subject. Irigaray argues that in wonder, there is an acceptance and respect of both sexual specificities (1993a, 74). Wonder seems to be ideal to express the kind of openness to otherness that so holds Irigaray's interest. However, the concept of wonder alone may not be rich enough to incorporate or generate the notion of respect and acceptance of others, which also concerns Irigaray, and this is an issue I will return to farther on in the chapter. For now, I will leave this concern aside to focus on the importance of wonder.

According to Irigaray, any meeting between the sexes always results in effects or products, although this fecundity has not been understood or developed (1993a, 14). Men and women must always leave a remainder not reducible to their relation, which explains the attractions of the encounter. The products of the couple are not only children, although one of Irigaray's important points is that this particular form of creativity should be valued in a way it traditionally has not been (1993a, 11, 14). The nature of these new products will only emerge as the ethics of sexual difference becomes a reality, though they would clearly include artistic and theoretical products. The two sexes create their own ideals, which are different. She claims that "man and woman is the most mysterious and creative couple" (1995a, 112). Her view makes for a fascinating comparison with Freud's view of the mother-son relation as the most satisfying one (1964, 133) and Plato's view of male homosexuals as forming the most creative couples (1999, 208e–209d).

Irigaray believes that the ethics of sexual difference can generate a different relation between subjects, the subject and the world, and between the subject and God (1993a, 8). An acceptance of sexual difference requires a revolution in all spheres of existence: not just ethics, but also aesthetics, language, and our understanding of history and religion. In more recent work, Irigaray argues that such an ethics of sexual difference can only exist in a context where sexual difference is recognized in law: "We have to rethink the whole of the law in such a way that it is just to two genres different in their needs, their desires and their properties" (1991a, 201). She believes that specific rights for women and men must be defined and enshrined in law—how she sees this is as a change in "the mode of relationship between one and the other, between man and woman on the civil and affective plane" (1995, 111). While these are clearly important considerations, and I believe that Irigaray is right to connect personal ethics with legal and political institutions, a discussion of the relation between law and ethics would take me into the concerns of the following chapters. More central here is the question of whether the ethics based on wonder should apply only to sexual difference.

Wonder and Other Differences

The focus on sexual difference in Irigaray's view of ethics raises the question of whether her view can and should be extended to other kinds of differences between human beings. This point has tended to be a controversial one among

commentators. On the positive side, Tina Chanter, in *The Ethics of Eros*, claims that Irigaray's attempt to think about difference in a nonhierarchical way "extends to a rethinking of all our relations, not only with other people, but with nature" (1995, 143). Furthermore, Mary Bloodsworth argues that since Irigaray is concerned with rethinking dualisms, her work can be used to disrupt racial dualism (1999, 77). Still, Irigaray's view is a little more complicated than that, insofar as she sees sexual difference as fundamental. For example, she says that sexism is "the most unconscious form of racism" (1993b, 120). Racism can be understood here to mean discrimination or prejudice in general. She also says that "sexual difference is the most radical difference and the one most necessary to the life and culture of the human species" (1992, 3). One criticism that has been raised against Irigaray is that there is a bias toward heterosexuality in her view, particularly in her claim that the encounter between man and woman is the most productive of encounters. Moreover, she has become more emphatic on this point, stating in an interview that homosexuality is an earlier stage of development than heterosexuality (1998, 19). Such a stance raises problems for the formulation of an ethics. On this issue, Elizabeth Grosz notes that gay and lesbian theorists are right to be concerned about this aspect of her views (1994a, 348), which institute a new hierarchy that is simply a reversal of the Platonic view.¹⁵ It is odd because such a reversal parallels the complete rejection of heterosexuality Irigaray warns against in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985b, 33). These comments suggest that Irigaray accepts a hierarchy in types of differences, an anomaly in a supposedly nonhierarchical ethics.

However, in her book *Intersecting Voices*, Iris Marion Young argues that Irigaray's view of wonder "can easily be extended . . . to any structured social difference, whether of sex, class, race, or religion" (1997, 45).¹⁶ Young develops this idea by maintaining that people should regard each other as "irreversible," or not mirrors of each other. Instead, we should accept the differences of the other, adopt a stance of "moral humility," acknowledge that our relations with others are asymmetrically reciprocal, and not attempt to espouse their standpoint and speak on their behalf (1997, 49). I support Young's stance that wonder, as openness to difference, can and should be extended beyond the realm of sexual difference.

A more adequate feminist ethics is one that takes into account a range of ethically relevant differences. A range of differences between human beings appear worthy of wonder, such as ethnic and cultural differences, generational differences, and differences in sexuality. The response of wonder cannot be confined to the relation between the sexes but should be extended

to all our relations with others. Although sexual difference is extremely important, it should not overshadow and obscure other differences. A range of different groups have issues that are of special concern to them, a concern that others should recognize. For example, land rights affect indigenous groups in ways they do not affect other people, and disabled people are aware of needs that people who are not disabled cannot be. These kinds of differences should be taken into account when formulating an ethics and when reasoning about specific issues, and members of these groups should be recognized as having distinct points of view that only they can articulate. I discuss in more detail how we can conceptualize these differences in ethical and political contexts in chapter 3, and explore questions regarding the special concerns of asylum seekers and refugees, victims of extreme wrongdoing, and indigenous peoples in chapters 5, 6, and 7 respectively.

Relations across and within these difference will also have their own remainder or products. Irigaray's insight that the oppression of women has obscured women's creative potential and that this potential will only be realized when women are recognized as subjects holds true for other oppressed groups as well.¹⁷ In relation to the couple, the different world Irigaray envisages will ensure that homosexual couples, for example, will also be fruitful in ways not yet experienced.

One of the central assumptions of many ethical theories is a belief in the power of the individual to imagine themselves in the place of others and to make judgments on their behalf on that basis.¹⁸ Although it is important to develop our capacity to respond sympathetically to the experience of others through the imagination, limits to this ability ought to be recognized and understood. Where the experience of others is different to our own, we may not be able to imagine what that experience feels like, or we may be apt to project our own experience onto theirs. Extending the notion of wonder beyond sexual difference involves an acceptance of the difference of others and the limits on our ability to understand their experience. Wonder is an ideal notion to encapsulate this acceptance, yet wonder too has its limitations.

The Limits of Wonder

Irigaray's focus on wonder concerns relations between the sexes, and even when generalized to other differences, the focus remains on relations with others, rather than self-concern. Having a sense of one's own value

is extremely important, particularly for women in a sexist society and for oppressed peoples generally. Robin S. Dillon provides an illuminating discussion of the ways in which women's basal self-respect is often damaged (1997, 226–49).¹⁹ Irigaray is very much aware of this problem and concerned with self-respect and self-love. On her account, we cannot understand ourselves as simply a reflection of other's views of us. Such an approach would reintroduce the notion of “mirroring” or symmetry, of which Young is rightly so critical, into our ethical relations. While the mirroring Young is concerned with is the mirroring that occurs when we project our own self-understanding onto others, the mirroring involved in assimilating others' views of us can also be harmful. A consideration of Descartes's special sense of generosity in tandem with Irigaray's concern with these questions will provide a starting point for thinking about respect and love and in general.

Irigaray's account of wonder considered alone, while extremely appealing, seems to stretch the concept of wonder beyond its scope in order to include the concepts needed to develop such an ethics. Wonder, in my view, cannot both be prior to judgment *and* involve an attraction to and respect for the other. I believe the idea that our response to others must involve wonder is very important, but that alone it cannot yield respect, acceptance of autonomy, and so on. Irigaray notes in an interview that the relation between men and women she has in mind is one of reciprocal respect, autonomy, and also reciprocal affection (1995a, 111), which indicates that wonder has to be combined with other appropriate passions and responses to bring about the kind of changes envisaged. In the following chapter, I will outline the role of respect and love in developing an ethics of the passions. Here, my focus is on the relation between wonder and generosity.

Young has pointed out some of the problems with Irigaray's account of wonder, saying:

This concept of wonder is dangerous. It would not be difficult to use it to imagine the other person as exotic. One can interpret wonder as a kind of distant awe before the Other that turns their transcendence into a human inscrutability. Or wonder can become a kind of prurient curiosity. I can recognize my ignorance about the other person's experience and perspective and adopt a probing, investigative mode toward her. Both stances convert the openness of wonder into a dominative desire to know and master the other person. (1997, 56)

The risk or danger is wonder leading to other more inappropriate attitudes through curiosity or through excessive reverence. Yet one could argue that a wonder of this kind is not a proper or true wonder, which is open to the difference of other. Part of the difficulty here is trying to speak of wonder in isolation and also not being clear about the object of wonder. Wonder as initially understood by Descartes leads to curiosity and scientific investigation of the world. Applying wonder in this sense to human relations could lead to both sexes treating the other like objects that need to be probed and manipulated. What both this and the attitude of “distant awe” are lacking is an openness to change in the other, an openness that needs to be articulated.

Young’s solution is that we need a respectful stance of wonder, yet as I will argue, the danger implies that wonder must be *combined* with respect. We cannot expect that a single passion uncoupled with other important passions can constitute an appropriate response to the other. Irigaray herself is conscious of this issue. In another essay in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, “Love of Same, Love of Other,” she notes that “[t]he Other can only exist if it can draw on the well of sameness for its matter. . . . If this were not so, that Other would be so other that we could in no way conceive it” (1993a, 97–98). Irigaray comments in relation to the issue of love between women “*no love of other without love of same*” (1993a, 104). She also indicates a need for common goals: “These two subjects [the sexes] share the common goal of preserving the human species and developing its culture, while granting respect to the differences” (1995b, 12). This problem can be fruitfully overcome by taking a closer look at Descartes’s passions and his concept of generosity and bringing it into dialogue with Irigaray’s reading of wonder.

The ethics Irigaray suggests can only be developed if we clarify how we can move beyond wonder, to esteem and respect, rather than arrogance or contempt, or reverential awe. Once we pass beyond surprise, something must prevent us from moving to an inappropriate attitude toward the strangeness of the other. Irigaray understands wonder as comprising a set of appropriate responses to difference. However, while wonder is a very rich concept, it needs to be linked to other passions and responses to provide a basis for respect for difference. She suggests that herself; my argument here is that we can deepen the reading of Irigaray through examining Descartes’s approach to ethics. On Descartes’s conception, wonder is a more neutral term, and this very neutrality is what commends wonder to us as an initial response to difference. Irigaray is not alone in envisaging a greater role for wonder in our ethical lives. Hepburn argues that a range of moral attitudes have an affinity to wonder, such as respect, compassion, gentleness, and

humility, because they are only a “short step” away from wonder and follow from its other-regarding aspect (1984, 145–46). Yet we need an account of how these correlates can be developed from wonder in order to make a genuine ethics possible.

Generosity and Ethics

Descartes’s account of generosity, and of how the passions should be cultivated and restrained provides some means for understanding how an ethics linked to the passions could be developed.²⁰ He argues that “all the good and evil of this life depend on them [the passions] alone” (1989, 134). Due to the passions, Descartes believes, we desire things that are useful for us and are repelled by what is harmful (1989, 51–52). The mind has a practical concern with self-preservation, and the passions can help us to avoid pain and to pursue pleasure. In giving an account of the usefulness of the passions, Descartes attempts to explain how we move beyond wonder and live ethically.

The passions that follow wonder, according to Descartes, are either esteem or disdain and scorn. They are united with wonder depending on whether it is the greatness or the meanness of an object that we wonder at. Once an object is esteemed or disdained for its worth or lack of worth, wonder is no longer pure in the sense of being nonjudgmental, and becomes part of the realm of opposites, as do most passions. In Descartes’s view, esteem and disdain or scorn are species of wonder—when we do not wonder at the greatness or meanness of an object, we do not make more or less of it than reason tells us—so we then esteem or disdain it without passion. Once comparisons are made between ourselves and others, ideally magnanimity or *generosité* will follow, or otherwise wonder could be followed by pride or vicious humility (1989, 102–103).²¹ We either regard the other as an equal, which is appropriate, or we conceive of ourselves as superior or inferior to others, both, for Descartes (and for Irigaray), inappropriate responses.

The key to leading a good life, for Descartes, comes through cultivating the passion of *generosité*, or generosity, which has a very special meaning in his work, quite different from its current use in English.²² Generosity is a species of wonder combined with love and joy, which involves having proper pride or rightful self-regard (1989, 103, 107). Generosity is esteem of ourselves, an appropriate judgment about our worth that should be developed as a habit. It has the following features: (1) knowing that nothing is really

ours except the freedom to control our willing, and that we should only be praised and blamed for using that freedom well or badly; and (2) feeling within ourselves a strong constant resolution to use our free will well—to always have the will to carry out what we think is the best course of action (1989, 103, 121–22). For Descartes, this is to pursue virtue in a perfect manner. What we esteem in ourselves is a virtuous will. My view is that Descartes's conception of esteem here is close to what we today call respect and that becomes apparent in his account.²³

Generosity is the key to all the virtues and a way of overcoming the disruptions of the passions, giving us control over them. It is similar to “nobility” or Aristotelian “great-souledness” or “pride,” although it is more egalitarian, because Aristotle believes that there are very large differences between what people are worth, and only a great person should think they are great (1995, 1123b1–15).²⁴ On Descartes's understanding, people of generosity are “easily convinced” that others also have the same capacity to exercise free will for good or evil ends. If we have generosity, he argues, we will not prefer ourselves to others because others can also use their free will as we do (1989, 105). This is what he calls virtuous humility. Descartes accepts that it is possible to lose the basis for self-regard through laziness or cowardice, and people may have an improper pride due to such things as wealth and title, or even for no reason at all (1989, 105–106). Nevertheless, we should esteem ourselves and others for the possession of free will and the resolve to use it well.

This self-esteem is thought by Descartes to make it possible to have the right kind of regard for others: if we value ourselves appropriately, then we will respond to others appropriately (1989, 104). Descartes is rather insightful on this point. Robin Dillon argues that for the person lacking in basic self-respect, the “all-consuming project is to find some value for herself; other things, other people, matter only in relation to her worthlessness. But to be blessed with secure basal self-respect is to be able [to] move through life oblivious to issues of self-worth—for these issues have already been resolved—to be free to attend to the independent value of other people and things” (1997, 242). We can understand the esteem Descartes refers to as a basic form of respect, although he reserves the term *respect* or *veneration* for our response to other free beings that may do us either good or evil (1989, 109). In generosity, we recognize the worth of others, so that respect, veneration, and magnanimity follow wonder. In Descartes's view, having rightful self-esteem protects us from dependence on what others think of us, and prevents jealousy and envy, as what we think worth pursuing depends

only on ourselves (1989, 105). Here, he is a little sanguine in believing that our sense of ourselves can and should be independent of others' views of us.

Furthermore, Descartes argues, generosity strengthens a healthier form of regard for others, and prevents hatred, because we regard them as equally capable of a virtuous will (1989, 104). The lack of virtue that the virtue of generosity and its virtuous humility can be contrasted with are improper pride on the one hand and vicious humility or servility on the other (1989, 105–107). The worst kind of pride is that which is baseless, and he notes that we are often led into this kind of pride by flatterers who praise us for worthless or even blameworthy actions. The person proud in this way focuses on worldly goods rather than their own virtue, and tends to be driven by anger, hatred, envy, and jealousy due to the scarcity of those goods. Although Descartes is not considering contexts of oppression where a severe lack of those goods could be an appropriate case for anger, his point about the way this kind of pride can distort passions is well taken. In contrast, unvirtuous humility or servility, he suggests, is usually due to a lack of resoluteness, weak will, and dependence on others for our survival and well-being. Such a person is servile to those they are afraid of or hope to gain something from, but arrogant to people they do not see as useful. Here Descartes neglects our important dependence on others, yet describes a very recognizable sycophantic character type.

In a more positive vein, Descartes is optimistic that everyone can attain the virtuous will no matter how weak they are, although ignorance is the greatest obstacle to doing that. Generous or noble-minded people find doing good to others important and disdain their own interests: “They are always perfectly courteous, affable, and of service to everyone” and “entirely masters of their Passions” (1989, 105). He sees this control of the passions emerging from our focus on whether we have acted rightly rather than on the things the unjustly proud is concerned with. If we have generosity or proper self-esteem, we respect other people appropriately, and have no remorse, he argues, for we know that we have done our best. Moreover, we have little cowardice or fear—we are self-assured due to our confidence in our own virtue (1989, 191). These points explain why Descartes believes generosity is the key to the virtuous life. One problem that arises for Descartes is whether acceptance of our will and a resolution to carry out the most ethical course of action is sufficient for a virtuous life. Some people may be in a better position to judge what the best alternative is, say, by having a better education, or by having more experience of the world. As Descartes expresses this point, “There are some people who possess far sharper

intellectual vision than others” (1985, 191).²⁵ He believes that everyone can act virtuously, although the best way for some to act virtuously is to take cues about what is moral from those possessed of a sharper intellectual vision (1989, 49). Nevertheless, on his account, generosity is the key virtue even when we are being guided by others.

Despite coming from such a different perspective, Irigaray also suggests that self-respect is central to developing ethical relations with others. This aspect of her account can be seen if we go beyond her discussion of wonder and see that in the context of her project. She does not use the precise language of generosity as proper self-esteem or respect, but she does discuss autonomy, the development of a distinct identity, and human dignity (1996, 50). The development of self-respect is the corollary of not being appropriated by the other and having one’s specificity acknowledged (for example, 1996, 48, 62). Her account of the history of male theorizing about women is one of women’s assimilation to a distorted masculine experience, where women cannot articulate a distinct subjectivity. A wondering recognition by the other would be one aspect of human relations that would facilitate development of self-respect. The transformation in our cultural and political acknowledgment of women that Irigaray argues for would also be of great benefit.

The difference between Descartes and Irigaray here is that Descartes conceptualizes self-respect as something that we will easily feel and will easily extend to others whereas Irigaray sees self-respect, especially for women, as a self-relation we will have to struggle to attain. As she writes, “I search for myself, as if I had been assimilated into maleness. I ought to reconstitute myself on the basis of a disassimilation” (1993a, 9). One can see this as a woman finding respect for herself as different from men. Yet another perspective that makes more sense of Irigaray here is that one needs to respect what it is about oneself that makes one special—the possibility of change and choice that we share with others. In wonder the autonomy of the other is recognized and so each, both men and women, can have self-respect.

The other difference from Descartes here is that Irigaray is conscious of how we cannot unilaterally develop self-respect but self-respect is related to how others regard us and the social, political, and cultural context in which we live. Her view recognizes that self-respect is to a great extent reliant on the respect of others. Her approach to the question of self-respect, respect for the other, and love, is to consider the conditions that could bring that about, not just how the individual might by themselves develop self-respect. For Irigaray, self-respect comes both from the self and through relations

with others. Her return to historical women figures can be understood as developing a connection that enables women to experience themselves as part of history and so as having a place from which to relate to others, or self-respect (1993a, 1993b). Self-respect is dependent on that recognition that there (at least) two sexes, that women's identity is not subsumed into men's. She notes that what men and women have in common is both the capacity "*To suffer and to be active. . . .* Becoming more open because of the freedom of each, male and female" (1993a, 93). Here, Irigaray stresses both freedom and necessity, with freedom for women being dependent on a conception of the feminine distinct from that of the masculine.

There must also be possibilities of a sense of self that is not simply relational, "as keepers of home and children, mothers, in the name of the property, the laws, the rights, and obligations of the other's State" (1993a, 109). This is not to deny the importance of those relations, but, again, to conceive women as not reducible to those relations.

Similarly, Irigaray's later concern with overcoming exploitation and advancing women's civil identities as "human persons" (1996, 21) is linked to developing women's self-respect. The love for self and other she describes, which I will discuss in the following chapter, is linked to going beyond self-effacement, self-sacrifice, erasure, and changing the dynamics of the couple and the mother-daughter relationship. I will argue that respect in general has a special relationship to love that is relevant to both self and other relations. Irigaray's work also delineates limits to esteem for the self that might prevent respect for the other, such as the "solipsistic, egocentric, and potentially imperialistic subject" (1996, 47). The self should have respect for self and respect for others, recognizing their existence, their needs, their desires and interests. She states quite explicitly that the truth of the self involves "fidelity to the being I am, being given to me by nature and which I must endorse, respect and cultivate as one half of human identity" (1996, 107). The respect for the self needs to be established and cannot be taken for granted. In recent work, Irigaray stresses the "shared world" that is created through respect for the other and their difference. But she also notes that this must be done "without forgetting to come back to oneself for a gathering of one's self" (2008a, 110), a way of referring to reflection on who we are as autonomous beings. Irigaray emphasizes cultivating our affects, especially the need for "mutual respect" and self-affection, a question I will discuss in the following chapter (2008a, 134–36).

In formulating what is central to generosity and respect for others, Descartes's reliance on the notion of free will, particularly understood as

a capacity that we all possess equally, may give some reason for hesitation in accepting generosity as a useful passion. However, although this understanding of free will is central to his account, and I accept that free will is important, I do not believe that one must be committed to this specific characterization of the basis of similarity between human beings to find generosity central to developing an ethics of the passions. One might take the shared human condition as a starting point, for example, or one could include a rich notion of the human condition with a stress on freedom. Yet Irigaray's appropriation of Descartes may not be so far away from him in spirit in her stress on autonomy and the openness of wonder to difference and change in the other. For instance, she writes, "It is . . . incorrect to say that my will could be identical, equal or similar to that of everyone else. It must be distinguishable in order to be appropriate to myself and positive in relation to others while respecting their own identity" (1996, 52).²⁶ Here, Irigaray focuses on the way in which our differences will mean that we make different choices, choices that in general we should value. She also centers on freedom in recent work, contextualizing that freedom in relation to the freedom of others and nonhuman living nature: "Freedom must, at every moment, limit its expansion in order to respect other existing beings and, even more, to find ways of forming with them a world always in becoming where it is possible for each human or non-human living being to exist—or ex-ist" (2008a, xx). Respecting ourselves and others for our capacity for freedom—generosity—is another way of being open to difference. In the final section of this chapter, I consider the relation between wonder and generosity.

Wonder and Generosity Meet

Generosity appears to be the converse of wonder, in the sense that generosity implies regarding others as like us in some basic sense, in that the differences between people are recognized as an expression of our similar freedom. That recognition may be difficult in the case of distant others, when people find it hard to extend their self-respect in that way because they seem to be utterly different. In contrast, wonder involves regarding others as very different from ourselves in what they wish for and how they experience the world, in how they express that freedom. My argument here is that generosity and wonder are both needed in the development of a passional ethics of respect for difference. Generosity and wonder balance