

Limitations of Duality: Reexamining Sexual Difference in Feminist Philosophies of Nature

*Original*

Limitations of Duality: Reexamining Sexual Difference in Feminist Philosophies of Nature / Pitton, Camilla. - In: FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY QUARTERLY. - ISSN 2371-2570. - ELETTRONICO. - 9:4(2023). [10.5206/fpq/2023.4.15401]

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2991034 since: 2024-07-19T10:55:11Z

*Publisher:*

Western Libraries

*Published*

DOI:10.5206/fpq/2023.4.15401

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2023

# The Limitations of Duality: Reexamining Sexual Difference in Feminist Philosophies of Nature

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## Recommended Citation

Pitton, Camilla. 2023. "The Limitations of Duality: Reexamining Sexual Difference in Feminist Philosophies of Nature." *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 9 (4). Article 1.

## **The Limitations of Duality: Reexamining Sexual Difference in Feminist Philosophies of Nature**

Camilla Pitton

### **Abstract**

The attempt to rearticulate traditional conceptions of nature can be both a useful strategy and a stumbling block when it comes to feminist examinations of the continuity between the objectification of women's bodies and the domination of nature. This paper contributes to existing debates by providing a critique of what I term the "duality view" of nature: a view stipulating that nature is primarily characterised by a stable sexual duality, and advancing that the objectification of women's bodies arises because the specificity of "femaleness" is ignored and duality is therefore neglected. I focus, specifically, on Alison Stone's interpretation of Luce Irigaray, insofar as the account emerging from Stone's interpretation clearly outlines the principles that most versions of the duality view should endorse. I problematise this account by showing that it becomes inconsistent with the critique of objectification which grounds it in the first place. I conclude by advancing that, overall, a view insisting on a natural sexual duality because of normative reasons conflicts with the feminist considerations at its basis. I also suggest that while the present analysis is primarily condemnatory, it can contribute to the development of feminist philosophies of nature by fleshing out avoidable pitfalls.

**Keywords:** nature, duality, sexual difference, objectification, embodiment, Luce Irigaray, Alison Stone

### **Introduction**

In this paper, I address a certain "duality interpretation" of Luce Irigaray's philosophy of nature that has consolidated in the literature,<sup>1</sup> according to which Irigaray posits a conception of nature that is both sexed and dual on the basis of a specific critique of the objectification of women and nature. Firstly, I show that the duality view becomes philosophically inconsistent when developed on the basis of

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Alison Stone's interpretation of Irigaray's work, which is duly assessed in this paper, a prominent example of this kind of reading can be found in the work of Elizabeth Grosz (2011).

Irigarayan insights; secondly, this assessment of Irigarayan scholarship allows me to advance that *any* philosophy of nature grounded on the notion of a stable sexual duality encounters insurmountable obstacles when it draws resources from a feminist critique of the objectification of nature. Specifically, an account that posits nature to be primarily characterised by sexual duality is argued to be incompatible with a feminist critique of objectification, and thus to become inconsistent by virtue of invalidating its own normative starting position. Since a critique of objectification like Irigaray's remains genuinely insightful, I advance that feminists should attempt to elaborate a philosophy of nature grounded on this critique but avoid prioritising the notion of duality.

Keeping with these objectives, I begin in section 1 by explaining Irigaray's account of objectification and its relevance to feminist analyses, thus contextualising Irigaray's work and, more generally, the attempt to rearticulate nature. In section 2, I illustrate Irigaray's philosophy of nature through an assessment of *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (Irigaray 1999). I select this book, instead of Irigaray's more recent works on nature, for two reasons: first, *The Forgetting* explicitly brings to the fore the connections between a feminist critique of objectification and a rearticulation of nature; second, it lends itself to be read both in terms of the duality view, thus facilitating an appreciation of the attractiveness of this account, and as a problematisation of any realist philosophy of nature, thus pointing to possible alternatives. Following this, in section 3, I offer an exposition of the duality view of nature by engaging with Alison Stone (2003, 2006). I argue that while Stone's dualistic philosophy of nature corresponds to an interpretation of Irigaray's work, its moves should be adopted by any variation of the duality view calling for the cultural expression of sexual difference.

In section 4, I advance that the necessary naturalisation of the masculine tendency towards objectification, and the simultaneous endorsement of a view which takes culture to be called for by nature, leads *feminist* supporters of the duality view to problematise their own normative starting point. This renders the duality view incompatible with the feminist critique of objectification that has to ground it, thus making unfeasible its adoption on the basis of feminist considerations. Finally, I address in section 5 a potential rebuttal of my critique, which hinges upon the claim to realism that Stone attributes to Irigaray: if Stone, Irigaray, or any supporter of the duality view have good enough reasons to consider a dualistic view of nature phenomenologically realistic, normative coherence should be deprioritised. In response, I show that the justifications that a dualist account can offer depend either on the assumption of duality or on arguments unable to address my critique.

By underlining the necessity of the principal argumentative moves Stone makes with respect to a view which endorses the cultural ratification of sexual difference out of a naturalist impulse, I demonstrate that any account presenting a

similar impetus encounters the same difficulties. Insofar as we take an assessment and a rethinking of nature to be important to feminism and accept, to some degree, that the objectification of women and of nature are connected, my analysis shows that the duality view is to be rejected. Consequently, it also provides, through diffractive means, some parameters under which the articulation of a philosophy of nature can adequately theorise the liberation of women and nature from objectification. I thus conclude by briefly fleshing out the possibility of an alternative to the duality view.

### **1. Objectification, Women, and Nature**

In this section, I briefly sketch Irigaray's view of objectification in order to explain the critical assessment which grounds her philosophy of nature and the duality view. This summary will allow me to contextualise both a rearticulation of nature, in general, and the duality view, specifically, within debates in feminist philosophy.

To begin, Irigaray's critique of objectification transverses her whole oeuvre. Starting with *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray (1985a) identifies the conceptual apparatus that sustains the objectification of women's bodies with views that attribute passivity and inertness to matter. First, in advancing that women have been assigned the role of the other with respect to the normative ideal of the male or masculine subject, Irigaray exposes the association of women to objects. As she puts it:

Subjectivity is denied to woman: indisputably this provides the financial backing for every irreducible constitution as an object.  
(Irigaray 1985a, 133)

Irigaray argues, moreover, that since subjectivity has been linked, in the conceptual history of the West, to the ideal of disembodied-ness, the objectified woman also comes to be characterised in terms of materiality. Accordingly, she rhetorically asks: "Without the exploitation of the body-matter of women, what would become of the symbolic process that governs society?" (1985b, 85).

In exposing the association between women and matter, Irigaray already points to the fact that traditional views of subjectivity posit a certain continuity between women and a primarily material nature. However, she ultimately advances that the connection between the two is not merely metaphorical: as the establishment of the "masculine," disembodied subject is equally dependent on the contrast between self and a passive nature, the position of women and of nature with respect to the subject end up coinciding. Following Ann V. Murphy (2001), this suggestion arguably radicalises in Irigaray's "later" works and provides the basis, for

authors like Stone, to develop the duality view. Following this line of argument, it is not only the case that the roles assigned to nature and to women coincide; more fundamentally, nature is dominated on the basis of its femaleness, and/or women are oppressed because of their physiological proximity to nature.

Provisionally sketched thusly, Irigaray's analysis is not unique. Susan Hekman, for instance, highlights the centrality of the notion of objectification within twentieth-century Western feminism, by advancing that "the principal thrust of the feminist critique is that the subject has been conceptualised as inherently masculine" (Hekman 1991, 45). She adds that "the subject/object dichotomy on which this conception rests defines women as inferior" (Hekman 1991, 60). The preoccupation with the dichotomy and with the masculinity of the subject is clear in Irigaray, and so is her agreement with Hekman's (1991, 60) claim that "unless this dichotomy is displaced [the] inferiority will persist." It should be stressed, however, that Irigaray's focus on the process of subject-formation begets a concern that is different with respect to epistemological analyses of the masculinity of "subject-knower" popular within strands of North American feminism: the problem does not lie in the fact that the subject posits a certain knowledge of itself and, consequently, a certain knowledge of the object; rather, the primary issue lies in a model of active identity which renders passive its oppositional, material other.<sup>2</sup>

The connection between objectification and naturalisation is, similarly, not exceptional. Braidotti et al. (1994, 30), for instance, argue that "male, mind, culture and subject are categories which exercise hierarchical control and domination over female, body, nature and object." In this respect, a diagnosis of the condition of femininity, as naturalised and objectified, remains clearly relevant to feminist projects interested in investigating their othering of women. Nevertheless, the differences between Irigaray's assessment and the aforementioned analyses make her philosophy of nature worthy of attentive consideration.

Rather than simply warranting a reinvention of epistemic practices or a reevaluation of certain "feminine" attributes, and of nature itself, Irigaray's assessment of objectification articulates and addresses some specific conceptual requirements for feminist philosophy. Namely, insofar as we (i) advance the objectification of women to be reliant on the contrast between the disembodied subject and inert nature; and (ii) subscribe to the idea that the liberation of women must not simply attempt to inscribe women under the dominant model of subjectivity<sup>3</sup>—leaving the dichotomy between subject and object or subject and nature intact—we also arrive

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<sup>2</sup> Christine Battersby's (1998) *The Phenomenal Woman* examines the difference between these two positions.

<sup>3</sup> Irigaray claims, specifically, that "any theory of the 'subject' has always been appropriated by the 'masculine'" (Irigaray 1985a, 133).

at the following conclusion: (iii) the liberation of women requires the elaboration of a framework whereby nature, or the sensible, does not function as an oppositional, passive other. Expressed differently, since sexual difference, as traditionally conceptualised, begets the objectification of women and nature, sexual difference should be rearticulated; this requires rethinking nature and our relation to it.

Irigaray's philosophy of nature emerges in response to this problem. If we accept Irigaray's idea that the subject/object divide is not solely an epistemological problem, and that the naturalisation of women and feminisation of nature is not merely a metaphorical operation (independently of whether we essentialise their coincidence), her rewriting of nature becomes an attractive response to ongoing practices of domination.

## 2. Irigaray's Rethinking of Nature

In this section, I outline the elements of Irigaray's work that are essential for understanding the relevance of her reconceptualization of nature and for revealing, in the following sections, the reasons why its "duality interpretation" is philosophically troublesome. I examine, in view of these objectives, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (Irigaray 1999) because this book explicitly positions itself as a response to the problem of objectification. Whilst *The Forgetting*, as the name suggests, explicitly focuses only on Heidegger's conception of nature, its scope remains, in fact, far reaching. Irigaray's argument centrally employs her strategy of reducing dissimilar philosophical outputs to coinciding positions. It operationalises, therefore, what might be regarded as Irigaray's genealogy of Western patriarchal thought, which aims to show and exaggerate a certain continuity in the positioning of women and of the feminine within different philosophical traditions. Although this strategic operation is also an object of critique, on Christine Battersby's part for instance,<sup>4</sup> it functions, in this book, to problematise the exceptionality of Heidegger's conception of nature.

It should be clarified, however, that it is not within the scope of this paper to determine whether the duality view is the right interpretation of Irigaray's philosophy of nature (as presented in *The Forgetting* or elsewhere). Anne van Leeuwen (2013) and Claire Colebrook (2022) have already argued, very convincingly, that Irigaray is not concerned with assigning to an alternative idea of nature the status of a veritable ground, origin, or constitutive outside; in other words, it is not unproblematic to claim, in the first place, that Irigaray attempts to articulate a certain essence or truth about nature. Insofar as the duality view, as we shall see, remains realist in the sense

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<sup>4</sup> Battersby (1998, 101) laments that Irigaray treats "western metaphysics as homogeneous, and also as concealing a 'forgotten' mode of being (that is related to birthing)."

that it proposes to describe what nature is truly like, its association to Irigaray is disputable. Additionally, Irigaray's adoption of the expression "at least two" in *The Forgetting* suggests that a binarism of sexes is not the obvious interpretative choice even when Irigaray's work is advanced to adopt a realist approach. In focusing on the duality interpretation, I aim to show, nonetheless, that arguments like the ones found in *The Forgetting*, concerned with displacing the patriarchal objectification of nature and women, could call for, and *have* called for, the elaboration of a philosophy according to which nature is dual and sexed. As we shall see in the next section, this view remains appealing for a number of reasons, even when it is considered a superficial reading of Irigaray's texts.

Keeping with these purposes, we should highlight that Irigaray identifies Heidegger's post-*Being and Time* conception of Being or *physis* [nature] with an objectification of matter,<sup>5</sup> to then position unobjectified matter as a forgotten condition of possibility for Heidegger's ontology (Irigaray 1999, 11). While arguably coinciding in Heidegger, the terms Being and *physis* are used interchangeably by Irigaray for the purposes of classifying Heidegger's ontology as a philosophy of nature. Accordingly, to both ground her charge of objectification and make her overall critique of Heidegger relevant to feminism, Irigaray argues that Heidegger's use of specific spatiotemporal categories (permanence, appearance, and distance) to describe *physis* brings his ontology close to other traditional Western conceptions of nature. As in views that a feminist reader would consider objectifying, nature is predetermined and encountered as an object (Irigaray 1999, 11).<sup>6</sup>

More specifically, by virtue of considering Heidegger's ontological categories an imposition onto matter—boundaries forced onto it (Irigaray 1999, 16)—Irigaray advances that, in Heidegger, Being or *physis* "must assimilate something" on which such categories can be imposed "in order to have begun to be" (Irigaray 1999, 26). Further, closely following Heidegger's argument concerning the necessity of man (or of his thinking) to the disclosure of Being, as presented in the *Conversation* (Heidegger 1966), Irigaray argues that the Heideggerian subject is constituted through a separation from nature which allows "him" to impose himself onto the latter (Irigaray 1999, 30). Two things follow.

First, the notion of assimilation, derived from the insight that the imposition of ontological categories transforms and thus assimilates some given content, allows Irigaray to posit an alternative kind of matter or nature; this nature is hidden within, and forgotten by, or (according to another interpretation) withdraws as the condition

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<sup>5</sup> I will hereafter use Irigaray's transliteration *physis* rather than Heidegger's *phusis*.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Fielding (2003, 6) argues, in this respect, that "Irigaray is disturbed by Heidegger's phenomenological categories since they address and take up only that which we have encountered before in our field of vision."



of, Heidegger's ontology. Second, Irigaray advances that Heidegger reserves a discrete space for the feminine, without acknowledging it. Nature, like women, remains indeed a material other that is subject to determination by thought. Irigaray's constant use of the feminine to describe nature thus signals the attempt to articulate an intrinsic connection between Heidegger's formulations of Being and human essence and a familiar positioning of the feminine other: nature and women are repressed and yet assimilated and transformed for the very establishment of the masculine subject. Particularly, Irigaray's metaphorization of birth, according to which nature "gives herself in the 'form' of fluids" (Irigaray 1999, 32), conjoined with the idea that this process is "forgotten," serves to accentuate Heidegger's reliance on a very traditional understanding of the coming-to-be that constitutes the subject (Faulkner 2001, 132): a manufactured self-birth.

The move of associating Heidegger's approach to nature to other masculine conceptions thereof is fundamental to Irigaray's argument. It allows her to establish that we have reasons to accept the premise, initially presented as a hypothesis, that Heidegger's approach to nature *imposes* its own schema; that is, insofar as we are ready to accept, as feminist readers, that traditional approaches are objectifying and thus inaccurate. In this respect, Irigaray's argument relies on (i) establishing that Heidegger reinforces existing yet not necessary conceptions of nature, of the feminine, and of the subject, and on (ii) the acceptance, on the part of the reader, that these existing ways of conceptualising nature are already objectifying.<sup>7</sup>

For the purposes of explicating how an analysis like Irigaray's could ground both the realist interpretation on which a duality view of nature is grounded and an antirealist reading, one last consideration regarding Irigaray's strategy is necessary. *The Forgetting* brings forth a critique of the Heideggerian "belonging-together" of Being and the logos (Irigaray 1999, 124–28). Irigaray considers, specifically, Heidegger's appropriation of Parmenides, whereby the logos is identified with "apprehending," and where apprehending becomes the disclosure that which appears. As Being or *physis* appears while concealing itself, apprehending and *physis* are, for Heidegger, opposed—just like culture and nature can be argued to be. It is, however, precisely the manner in which these two strive in opposition—namely, in their being distinct but necessary for each other—that warrants their reciprocal "belonging-together."<sup>8</sup> This belonging-together is thus, for Heidegger, an ontological

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<sup>7</sup> The potential and reasonable worry that Irigaray might be misinterpreting Heidegger by speaking of an imposition of ontological categories is, therefore, circumvented via an argument displaying Heidegger's proximity to canonical and patriarchal accounts of the subject vis-à-vis nature.

<sup>8</sup> On this, see Heidegger's (2000) *The Introduction on Metaphysics*, chapter four, section 3, subsection D.

necessity given by the requirement that Being is to be apprehended and that thinking apprehends Being.

Irigaray charges this belonging-together with artificiality inasmuch as it is marked by an approach to nature which is characteristically patriarchal: nature is assumed to necessitate human thinking and is viewed as a unitary object of thought, completely assimilable by the latter; in this assimilation, the oppositional difference between nature and thinking is reduced not only to unity but also to a sameness, in view of the presumed harmony between thinking schema and nature's structures—just like the difference between femininity and masculinity is traditionally reduced to indifference by the imposition of a masculine paradigm. In contrast to this view, Irigaray formulates the idea of *physis*, or nature, as composed by “at least two” (Irigaray 1999, 127) that are not reduceable to unity nor to a belonging-together. This formulation follows the insight that a “difference that never reduces to one” (Irigaray 1999, 124) would remain structurally unspeakable by a form of apprehending which emerges by subduing its difference with its other. This speculative proposal can beget, nonetheless, two distinct rearticulations of the relationship between Being/nature and thinking/apprehending: a full rejection, on the one hand, of the necessity pertaining to their belonging-together, and the retention, on the other hand, of a “partial” belonging-together, still entailing a relation of necessity which, however, only runs from Being to apprehending or to thinking.

The second option entails that whilst nature needs to be apprehended, apprehension is not necessarily (or not always) related to nature. In other words, nature, under this interpretative lens, needs to be understood to be allowed its proper growth, but it is not a necessity that human apprehension and culture will understand it or emerge by understanding it. It follows that the misapprehended Being *functions as ground of thought*: in the case of patriarchal thinking, as a ground that is assimilated, stabilised, and negated—thus constituting a negative condition of possibility. Nonetheless, since this difference can be appropriately apprehended, given that Being necessitates apprehension, difference can also become a positive ground for thinking: the object towards which thought orients itself. This interpretative position assumes therefore the possibility of harmony between thinking and nature, like Heidegger's belonging-together under Irigaray's reading. However, it is not bound to reduce harmony to sameness insofar as it does not start from two equally unitary terms; it can thus identify a form of thinking which can only entertain a unitary articulation of its object with a misapprehension, by simply assuming that the difference this thinking fails to articulate is given.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Note here that this position could be criticised as a correct reading of Irigaray, insofar as a harmony between thinking and nature can be advanced to beget a view of thinking whereby the latter necessarily sees its object as unitary. Since, as I will show,

On the other hand, the first position implies that there can be no ontological and necessary connection between articulations of nature and nature itself, meaning that nature does not require its own apprehension or conceptual mediation. Two conceptual avenues follow from this option: (i) natural difference remains a ground from which thought is divided and which thinking misapprehends in its incipit (meaning that difference is the negative origin of patriarchal thinking). However, in contrast to the framework positing a partial belonging-together, the present account *denies that Being requires apprehension*. The obvious implication is that thinking is bound to misapprehend Being by imposing itself as an apprehension thereof. Alternatively, (ii) the full rejection of a co-belonging of thinking and Being annuls any relation of necessity between thought and Being, including the nonrelation or the negative relation figured in misapprehension. In this respect, (ii) signals that Irigaray might *not* be positioning “natural” difference as the negative ground of patriarchal thinking and as the possible positive ground of feminist thought. In other words, (ii) would not simply be a critique of patriarchal thinking which delimits the latter by positing difference as a necessary albeit forgotten origin; it would correspond instead to a critique of patriarchal thinking qua the positing of grounds: a thinking that postulates Being or nature to be a sensible origin for thought, which thought always ends up objectifying.

There are specific advantages to each position. When difference is interpreted to be a ground or a given, Irigaray’s philosophy of nature can be seen to follow a specific methodology: a problematisation of Heidegger’s articulation of the logos premised on the idea that *there is* a type of difference which negatively grounds the logos and which the logos ignores or cannot speak. The outcome of this analysis is also quite straightforward: in postulating the possibility of non-oppositional difference, and in positing that any doctrine which employs categories similar to Heidegger’s remains blind to this difference, we can advance that these doctrines misapprehend and forget *physis*. Connectedly, we also obtain a specific rendition of

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the duality view relies on this partial belonging-together, the above could already represent a reason for rejecting the duality view—either as a correct interpretation of Irigaray or as an account which can problematise a full belonging-together of thinking and Being for the sole reason that it articulates the object of thought as unitary. I choose however not to entertain this objection because supporters of the duality view might argue that thinking of nature as a unified object does not necessarily imply that we cannot articulate the internal difference which arguably characterises it. Simultaneously, they might advance that Heidegger’s belonging-together should be rejected because it is tied to other objectionable descriptions of nature, or because it does not, in fact, entertain a view whereby nature is marked by difference.

the “forgetting of air.” As van Leeuwen highlights, this notion can be interpreted to entail an idea of “nature as a transcendent foundation or ground” (van Leeuwen 2013, 458). Nature grounds thought since thinking assimilates and stabilises nature, separates it from itself, and finally transcends it. Nature prior to its assimilation and determination as an object is nonetheless forgotten because patriarchal thinking cannot but think it as such object.

On the other hand, difference might be identified in this work not simply with the ground of thinking but with the only concept capable of problematising the notion of grounds. Van Leeuwen argues, accordingly, that Heidegger’s characterisation of the “forgetting” (which entails not simply the forgetting of something, but also the constitutive forgetting of the forgetting) cannot have gone unnoticed in Irigaray. She thus advances the following:

The point, then, for Irigaray, is not to participate in this specular forgetting through a nostalgic call to remember *she (who) gives air*; . . . rather, the point, paradoxically, is not to forget this ineliminable and constitutive forgetting. (van Leeuwen 2013, 459)

For van Leeuwen this second critical avenue warrants the remembrance of the forgetting, achieved through an upholding of sexual difference “not as a transcendent given but as the genesis of difference *within* a transcendental inquiry that does not forget the constitutive withdrawal of its own conditions” (van Leeuwen 2013, 461).

While a feminist critique of objectification can embrace either interpretation of nature and difference for good reasons, in the next section, I address the notion of nature *qua* ground insofar as the duality view of nature is rooted in it.

### 3. The Duality View

Having exposed the central elements of Irigaray’s philosophy of nature, I assess here the duality view that it inspires. Whilst maintaining that Irigaray’s general strategy remains incredibly promising, I advance that reading the difference that characterises nature in terms of sexual duality renders any feminist proposal of this kind philosophically weaker: it leads to the upholding of an account of the nature-culture relation which ultimately invalidates the normative analysis wherefrom this account emerges. Furthermore, I argue that, although Stone’s interpretation of Irigaray is my object of analysis, most variations of the duality view, which do not rely on Irigaray’s work, must subscribe to similar “Irigarayan” premises. It is because the duality view, in all its variations, remains an attractive avenue for feminist critiques of objectification that we should thoroughly assess it and outline its flaws.

In “The Sex of Nature”, Stone attempts to show (i) that Irigaray’s position corresponds to a realist essentialism and (ii) that this realist essentialism “generates

a powerful political theory” (Stone 2003, 61). The term “realist” is used by Stone to distance Irigaray’s work (at least starting from the mid-1980s) from the “strategic” essentialism her earlier writing is associated with: from a strategy which employs essentialising descriptions of femininity only for the purpose of destabilising patriarchal views of women. Stone’s two theses represent, therefore, a critique both of those who view Irigaray’s essentialism as realist but reject Irigaray on this basis<sup>10</sup> and of those advancing that Irigaray’s later works continue to adopt a strategic essentialism.<sup>11</sup>

It is Irigaray’s philosophy of nature that, according to Stone, allows her to establish a realist view of sexual difference. Specifically, Stone advances that human sexual difference is grounded on what is considered a real difference between two rhythms that are arguably discernible in any natural phenomena and thus in nature itself;<sup>12</sup> she thus interprets Irigaray’s postulation of difference in terms of two temporal patterns permeating nature. These two temporal patterns are argued to be inalienably dissimilar, to depend on each other (or on their difference) for their own accentuation, and to manifest most resolutely in human sexual difference. As Stone writes, “Nature is permeated at every point by rhythmical duality, and strives for the full realization of this duality, which occurs in human sexual differentiation” (2003, 61). Accordingly, this interpretation posits, on the one hand, that the rhythmical duality pertaining to natural phenomena “is structurally isomorphic with human sexual differentiation” (Stone 2003, 63): nature and humans both manifest a duality whereby “each pole depends upon its other and yet follows its unique rhythm” (Stone 2003, 63). On the other hand, Stone’s account assigns to nature a determinate hierarchy, which places humanity at the top in virtue of its capacity to accentuate duality through cultural practices: inorganic nature conditions a more clearly dualistic organic nature, which in turn produces humans able to “display their duality still more perfectly” in culture (Stone 2003, 64).

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<sup>10</sup> For an example of this interpretation, see Ann V. Murphy’s (2001) “The Enigma of the Natural in Luce Irigaray.”

<sup>11</sup> For an example, see Danielle Poe’s (2011) “Can Luce Irigaray’s Notion of Sexual Difference be Applied to Transsexual [sic] and Transgender Narratives?”. In this chapter, Poe examines and employs arguments offered by Irigaray’s early writings in order to problematise essentialist readings of Irigaray’s late works.

<sup>12</sup> The idea of rhythm is found most explicitly in Irigaray in *Sexes and Genealogies*, where she writes: “Nature’s noise is rhythmic. What’s more, it respects the differences in rhythms. It *informs*. . . . It is in continuous becoming” (Irigaray 1993, 108). *The Forgetting*, however, already contains mentions of rhythm, when Irigaray, for instance, speaks of things “entrusting to the other the very *rhythm* of their breathing” (Irigaray 1999, 177).

Stone's evaluation of cultural practices is thus evidently premised on the possibility of a "correct" attitude towards nature. Since Stone identifies the realisation of a culture of sexual difference with an "ethical duty," corresponding to the requirement imposed by nature to manifest its duality, her account should be seen to subscribe to a partial belonging-together of *physis* and the *logos*, redefined as the possibility of a reconciled relation between nature and culture. Just as a partial belonging-together entails the potential for misapprehension, a compatible notion is indeed found in Stone's claims concerning the logic of sameness permeating dominant cultural practices. According to Stone's argument, the natural reality of sexual difference is culturally misinterpreted as homogeneity between sexes since the female part of the real is ignored and wrongly modelled after masculinity. Women are forced to adopt "a male self-identification" (Stone 2003, 73), while the distinctiveness of a female rhythm is denied by a patriarchal culture which ends up regulating femaleness in accordance with the male rhythm. Women and the female part of nature remain the other of maleness, but only because they are rendered an object defined and determined by the male subject. Since "men and women have," however, "a duty toward nature to . . . fulfill the drive to bipolarization pervading the whole cosmos" (Stone 2003, 71), the liberation of women and the fulfilment of nature's purposes come to coincide.

I will not delve into the details of Stone's proposal concerning a feminist political/cultural program as they are not relevant to the present analysis. Two general considerations suffice. First, Stone's notion of the "ethical duty" depends on the conceptual acknowledgement of the duality pertaining to nature and sexual difference, which serves to posit this duty in the first place. In other words, insofar as Stone diagnoses in patriarchal culture the ignoring of sexual difference and of the duality pertaining to nature, transmuted into a defective acceptance of difference, she must identify the acknowledgment and recognition of sexual difference with the primary steps towards sexual and environmental justice. Secondly, while Stone's claims concerning rhythms are likely absent from other feminist philosophies of nature, the general structure of Stone's account *should* be reflected in any theory which both characterises nature as primarily dual and critiques patriarchal culture.

Inasmuch as an account concerned with the oppression of women maintains that a determinate female nature or essence exists but has been misinterpreted (for instance, through the lenses of passivity and objecthood), any such theory must advance that the recognition of sexual difference is critical to the feminist project—irrespective of whether sexuate nature is interpreted biologically or through other forms of essentialism.<sup>13</sup> Like in Stone's interpretation of Irigaray, patriarchal culture

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<sup>13</sup> As Stone, for instance, highlights, "Irigaray's idea that bodies constantly grow, passing through forms . . . , conflicts with the recognisably essentialist view that

must be charged with an inability to recognise and express sexual difference and femaleness. When this type of argument comes to be tied to considerations concerning nature more generally—for example, through the idea that sexual difference reflects an all-encompassing natural reality—it also necessarily connects the liberation of women to the liberation of nature. Generally speaking, the duality view explicitly subscribes, therefore, to the following precepts: (i) the problem with patriarchy, and environmental domination, lies in the cultural dismissal of duality; (ii) recognition and expression of duality are the only available solutions to the problem of objectification and correspond, additionally, to a demand stipulated by nature. In the remainder of this section, I advance that a third, more implicit, precept is upheld by the duality view: if not a necessity, patriarchal culture must be considered by this view an ontological potentiality gestated by nature, rather than a mere possibility. This, I argue in the next section, prevents us from regarding the patriarchal objectification of nature and women as normatively objectionable.

The identification of patriarchy, or of a culture that misapprehends nature and sexual difference, with a potentiality gestated by nature ensues from the double alignment of maleness to a part of nature and to the dominant culture. In order to explain why patriarchal culture privileges masculinity and ignores femininity, patriarchal culture must indeed be connected to maleness, and thus to the male natural rhythm. This implies, in turn, that natural maleness presents the potential to misinterpret femaleness and thus to gestate a misapprehending culture. In her book, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference*, Stone specifically appeals to Irigaray's (2000) *To Be Two* to advance that, for Irigaray, "one half of this duality inevitably comes to deny duality, and to deny nature precisely insofar as it recalls duality" (Stone 2006, 148; emphasis mine). This denial is thus considered an "inbuilt propensity" (Stone 2006, 148) for masculinity: because of an innate tendency, male nature engenders a culture which opposes the duality of nature, thus becoming a part of nature turning against nature as a whole.

Textual evidence for Stone's notion of an "inbuilt propensity" can be accepted on the condition that Irigaray's whole project is taken to be realist. While *To Be Two* does *not* identify violence with "an inherent part of the masculine" (Irigaray 2000, 71), Irigaray appears to link, as Stone's argument posits, the violence of patriarchal culture to a natural male characteristic: the innate tendency to "manufacture externally"

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bodies have fixed, invariant forms which constitute them as belonging to a particular sex" (Stone 2006, 104–5). Nonetheless, as Stone also recognises, this idea of growth still posits two natural characteristics as determinant of the categories of male and female sexes, at least insofar as the temporality of their becoming is concerned. In this respect, Irigaray's essentialism can be said to accommodate change and yet to remain grounded on a natural and ontological binarism.

(Irigaray 2000, 76), contrasted to a femaleness which is *naturally* not called to master what is external to her (Irigaray 2000, 72). More precisely, Irigaray centrally suggests that male violence, as the cultural regulation of nature, is ultimately connected to the fact that

he will *never* generate in himself and must fabricate things outside of himself, . . . while she generates internally. (Irigaray 2000, 76, emphasis mine)

If Irigaray's comments regarding the difference between women and men are interpreted to speak of essence of nature, this quote corroborates Stone's reading: sexual difference is linked to a dissimilar relation to externality which is, in turn, made dependent on a natural property—independently of whether the inability to generate internally is connected to physiological reproduction. Irigaray thus accuses men of ignoring the irreducible difference between their interiority and exteriority, and of upsetting, consequently, "the rhythm of natural growth" (Irigaray 2000, 69) by imposing their own productive rhythm onto the whole of nature. In ignoring the otherness of the outside, the argument goes, men simultaneously homogenise it to the self and reassert the divide inappropriately by rendering the outside a passive canvas for the inscription of their rhythm. The original duality internal to nature is thus sublimated into a divide between subject and object. Accordingly, the very formation of patriarchal culture is identified with an ontological potentiality, which is formulated, in turn, by marking the difference between male and female nature.

The idea that the duality view finds in nature the causal origin of patriarchy can be challenged if the masculine tendency to "externalise" is identified with the result rather than with the cause of the process through which nature turns against itself (a position which arguably could be attributed to Irigaray). Under this reading, externalisation would characterise a cultural form of masculinity and disassociate itself from *natural* sexual poles. If not Stone's, a different version of the duality view could avoid positing that patriarchy and the defiance of nature it entails are contained within nature as potentialities. However, such a version of the duality view would struggle to reconcile the pervasiveness attributed to sexual duality and the idea that the defiance of nature has an origin which is external to this duality: if all there is prior to the arising of culture is a nature characterised by two poles, "one pole of this difference" (Stone 2006, 147) must contain the seeds of the defiance of nature patriarchy accomplishes.

This does not imply that patriarchy is associated, by supporters of the duality view, to an inescapable telos. As Stone rightfully stresses, the violence against nature and femaleness, resulting from the male propensity to deny duality, can be



considered a *tendency* whose actualisation is not inevitable.<sup>14</sup> This also means that the duality view can establish a continuity between nature and culture without positing that patriarchy and domination are inevitable. Doubts about the suitability of this account to sustain a critique of patriarchy emerge, nonetheless, precisely in view of the association of patriarchal violence with a natural tendency.

#### **4. The Problem of Normativity: Between Nature and Culture**

There are some obvious advantages pertaining to the adoption of the duality view. This account can, for a start, conclusively establish a connection between the objectification of nature and of women by positing a coincidence between the two. Furthermore, as shown above, this interpretation is *prima facie* capable of explaining the arising of an objectifying culture without framing it as absolutely necessary. Keeping these merits in mind, my aim here is to point out that the naturalisation of “male” violence problematises the very normative standards on the basis of which a culture of sexual difference can be considered desirable and patriarchy objectionable. It does so in virtue of (i) framing the relation between nature and culture in such a way that it becomes unfeasible to posit that a culture of sexual difference is categorically called for by nature; and by (ii) implicitly postulating a naturally enabled transformation of nature. To demonstrate this, I will reexamine the nature-culture relation stipulated by the duality view in consideration of the necessary naturalisation of patriarchal violence. I will then suggest that my critique of the duality view has implications which reach beyond the mere problematisation of Stone’s account and of Irigaray’s philosophy of nature (if Stone’s account is accepted as a faithful interpretation of the latter).

As the above analysis of *The Forgetting* has clarified, a philosophy of nature that rejects the reciprocal necessity of nature and culture is bound to either of the following positions: a full rejection of the belonging-together of nature and culture or a partial acceptance thereof, which postulates that it is necessary to apprehend nature’s difference, even though culture and apprehension do not necessarily ensue from nature. When connected to the endorsement of duality and thus to a realist account of nature, the two options concerning the nature-culture relation also entail two distinct accounts of the relation between nature’s duality and its recognition: a full rejection of the belonging-together must attribute to nature the capacity to respect and thus recognise sexual duality. For this reason, indeed, cultural

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<sup>14</sup> Stone, importantly, disagrees with Irigaray in claiming that, since nature is not fully patriarchal, as she interprets Irigaray to suppose, some of its “elements have already redirected the potential destructiveness of significant numbers of men, to at least some extent” (Stone 2006, 153). In Stone’s view, therefore, male violence in the West is not as pervasive, or not as continuously pervasive, as Irigaray might be positing.

apprehension is not considered a necessary perfecting of nature. On the other hand, a partial acceptance of the belonging-together must deny that a perfected recognition of duality is to be found in nature; it is because duality is not properly expressed and recognised that a human culture manifesting this duality becomes necessary. In this respect, these two frameworks also differ in the extent to which they consider the recognition of alterity, which patriarchy and man fail, to characterise nature prior to culture and objectification.

As we have also seen, since Stone considers culture a perfecting of nature, she identifies in her account a partial belonging-together of nature and culture, and thus the idea that nature requires its cultural apprehension and expression. The naturalisation of male violence stipulated in the duality view, and analysed in the previous section, forces us however to refine our initial articulation of the partial belonging-together: as the misrecognition carried out by men emerges from something pertaining to nature (a tendency characterising one side of nature's duality), patriarchal culture can be said to still express one part of nature while ignoring its essence (duality) and nature's own call. The denial through which patriarchal violence arises is thus given by nature itself, meaning that nature enables its own misapprehension, through its "tendency to turn against itself, as it manifests itself through men" (Stone 2006, 153). The male denial of duality becomes, in this sense, the naturally enabled starting point of culture, of male humanity dividing itself from nature, and of nature's development into an object, the experience of which comes to be mediated by concepts obeying a masculine logic.

Bringing together the adoption of the partial belonging-together that the duality view necessarily entails, and the naturalisation of violence, which is similarly unavoidably stipulated by this view, leads us therefore to the following two considerations: first, the emergence of patriarchal culture should be considered part of a dynamic internal to nature; second, a culture of sexual difference is to be identified both with the rectification of this dynamic and with the fulfilment of the ethical duty to express and recognise nature's duality. The term "dynamic" does not refer here to an idea of teleological progression, as already indicated above.<sup>15</sup> It signals, instead, that the development of nature into patriarchal culture should be

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<sup>15</sup> As noted above, it would be wrong to conclude that this interpretation forces us to concede that nature calls specifically for the emergence of a masculine logos. There is an important difference between "enabling," which leaves the door open to the possibility that a certain potentiality is not actualised, and "calling-for" as the necessary actualisation of potentiality. Nevertheless, even in considering masculine nature an *enabler* of misapprehension, whose proper actualisation could then depend on historical accidents, we would still have to maintain that there is something in nature which strives towards the denial of duality.

understood in terms of a continuity because patriarchal culture advances the male part of nature. While it is true that, in this view, duality corresponds to the very essence of nature, the subsequential male ignoring of difference becomes nothing less than an altering of nature by nature—its own, not externally imposed, transformation.

This is where what I call the problem of normativity arises. Neither the naturalisation of violence—which could be opposed on some specific normative grounds—nor the suitability of Stone’s *specific* political proposal in the wake of this naturalisation are at issue here.<sup>16</sup> Instead, an incongruity becomes detectable once we consider that a propensity towards sameness or misrecognition of duality, on the one hand, and the disposition towards the manifestation of duality, on the other, are implicitly posited by this view to equally belong to nature. Specifically, the idea that patriarchy should be normatively opposed on the basis of nature’s “call,” or on the basis of internal requirements attributed to nature, is invalidated, because nature’s propensity to develop its duality cannot be considered more significant than its tendency to deny duality.

Mobilising the idea of immanent recognition is helpful to explicate this point. In the partial belonging-together presently considered, nature cannot be said to perfectly express and thus to fully recognise duality. This insight could entail either that recognition and misrecognition of duality correspond to two natural tendencies—attributable in turn to femaleness and maleness—or that nature, as matter devoid of thought, cannot be assigned a conceptually mediative capacity like recognition. In the former case, the fact that nature requires culture in order to perfect its duality via its recognition and expression signals that the tendency towards recognition is either as powerful as or less powerful than the tendency towards misrecognition. Given that it is misrecognition that ends up prevailing with the arising of patriarchal culture, failing to oppose patriarchy would not be ethically deplorable, as we would just be licensing the prevalence and development of one of nature’s tendencies. In the latter case, the mediative capacities of recognition and misrecognition would not belong to matter in its natural, precultural state; consequently, the development of one capacity over the other cannot be opposed on the basis of nature’s original morphology.

In either interpretation, the “triumph” of denial and of misrecognition cannot be considered, therefore, an imposition against nature or antinatural, because both interpretative options stipulate that the recognition of difference remains imperfect and unaccomplished prior to culture, and that misrecognition is as natural as

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<sup>16</sup> Mary Beth Mader (2008, 135–38) wages an important critique of Stone’s political proposal by problematizing the idea that a culture of sexual difference can be considered capable of expressing nature’s duality and indeed can perfect the latter.

recognition. The naturalisation of patriarchal violence or objectification—spurring a view whereby the misrecognition of duality is not antinatural—and the simultaneous establishment of a realist view of natural sexual difference requiring apprehension/recognition warrant, therefore, a rejection of the “ethical duty”; or a dismissal of the ethical considerations grounding the endorsement of a culture emphasising duality and rejecting objectification, insofar as these considerations only hinge upon the manifestation of duality as called for by nature itself.

This dismissal ensues precisely because the duality view purports that nature is characterised by a sexual duality which naturalises the male tendency to separate from nature and to ignore its duality: inasmuch as both the recognition of duality and misrecognition are understood to be naturally enabled, the duality view assigns to nature two possible dynamics. Since these two dynamics stand on equal grounds, we are prevented from favouring the recognition and expression of duality on the basis of nature’s drive to develop towards duality through culture: this development cannot be considered superior to or more “natural” than the cultural denial of duality. The duality view becomes therefore unable to object to and to negatively regard the objectification of women and nature. It should be considered, accordingly, inconsistent since it nullifies its own starting position: a normative assessment which opposes objectifying approaches to nature and women.

Let us recall that the adoption of a framework denying any form of connection between nature and culture (the rejection of the belonging-together) cannot be attributed to Stone’s duality view because of the hierarchical view of nature it purports. The association of this framework to similar accounts which consider necessary the cultural expression of sexual difference in virtue of its naturalness is similarly foreclosed (also when these accounts are not inspired by Irigaray nor Stone): in postulating the necessity of cultural expression, as we have seen, we are forced to reassert a partial belonging-together of nature and culture. However, even conceding, on purely speculative grounds, that an account of nature positioning duality as primary might view the cultural expression of duality only as a necessary *remedy*, a rejection of the belonging-together of nature and culture could not be sustained coherently. Viewing cultural apprehension as a necessary remedy would allow such an account to posit that nature does not originally call for culture. Nonetheless, by dividing nature into a male and a female part, the duality view would still internalise the drive towards violence into male nature in order to explain how patriarchal culture arises. In other words, a duality view rejecting the belonging-together would still advance that patriarchal culture is enabled by nature. As such, it would still lack normative reasons to reject objectification.

This leads us to a final consideration: since the naturalisation of male violence is an inescapable feature of any account which both characterises nature in terms of sexual duality and begins from a critique of the patriarchal view of nature, any such

account, independently of its specific features, remains self-contradictory. While I have clarified that this inconsistency becomes most apparent when we consider the possibility of waging any normative rejection of patriarchy, it should be highlighted that the problems concerning the endorsement of a culture of sexual difference point to a more general issue: the very idea of an original, stable duality becomes problematic—as we shall see in more detail below—in consideration of its inability to provide coherent diagnoses of the misinterpretation of this duality and of the development of culture in relation to nature. Questions concerning the suitability of specific cultural/political proposals remain, in this sense, secondary to the problems arising when we endorse the idea that a dual sexual difference amounts to nature's essence.

## 5. Beyond Duality

If Irigaray's philosophy of nature has been shown to present inconsistencies when read through the interpretative lenses of sexual duality, the significance initially attributed to her project should spur some further questions. What does it mean, beyond but also in light of the vernacular employed so far, to reject the duality view? Does the problematisation of the normativity pertaining to this view provide sufficient grounds for its dismissal? If a full rejection is warranted, is an alternative, similarly attempting to oppose objectifying tendencies, possible? In this final section, I address these questions in order, while acknowledging that each problem necessarily intersects with the others. Although I lack the space to adequately elaborate an alternative, I will show that the present assessment of the duality view can diffractively provide some criteria to be followed in such an endeavour.

A first consideration to ponder upon when we ask, "What does it mean to reject the duality view?" concerns the scope of the critique that has been presented so far. In view of the issues emerging from the attempt to conciliate a dual philosophy of nature with political proposals grounded on the notion of sexual difference, it is critical to elucidate whether we should just reject the suggestion concerning the cultural ratification of duality or also the view of nature grounding it. I have clarified why the normative grounds whence the endorsement of a culture of sexual difference would arise are invalidated. Yet, if a feminist account of nature is to be judged on the basis of its ability to reject patriarchal and objectifying views of nature, a full rejection of the duality view is warranted.

The reasons for this are simple. As I have argued, the cultural manifestation of sexual difference is the only type of cultural transformation that can be tied to the duality interpretation, in view of the requirement, imposed within the latter, to grant expression to both parts of nature. The troublesome position Stone assigns to patriarchal culture—which is tied to the male misinterpretation of nature—invalidates, however, the normative grounds sustaining the endorsement of a culture

of sexual difference. In other words, the attempt to reconcile nature's call for the expression of duality with the naturalisation of patriarchal culture fails, rendering the account both self-contradictory and unable to sustain a rejection of objectification. As problems pertaining to the very framing of the nature-culture relation stand at the basis of this failure, and since this specific framing of the nature-culture relation amounts to a fundamental precept of the duality view, we have grounds for rejecting this view *tout court*.

It could nonetheless be objected that if any supporter of the duality view can provide good enough reasons for considering nature to be primarily sexually differentiated, concerns about the ensuing political proposals, or about consistency in the assessment of objectification, become secondary. Stone purports after all that Irigaray is "attempting to describe sexual difference and nature as they really are, independently of the way we think about them" (Stone 2003, 70). If she succeeds in this endeavour, charges of incongruity should be directed to nature rather than to a view seeking to describe it. However, the reasons for adopting the duality view which Stone attributes to Irigaray fall short of this objective. They are phenomenological and ethical: in view of the degradation of the sensible and of the material carried out by the conceptions of nature Irigaray opposes,<sup>17</sup> sensible experience becomes critical to uphold, according to Stone's reading of Irigaray. As Stone continues, "The reason why sensible experience should be accepted as veridical is" in turn "ethical" (Stone 2003, 65), since rejecting the sensible corresponds to denying "our most elemental realities and needs" (Irigaray 1993, 178; quoted in Stone 2003, 65); for this reason, any framework allowing us to attest to sensibility should be given epistemic privilege.

The circularity of arguing for the "reality" of a view by positing other "realities and needs" should be sufficiently evident. Less so is the rationale for rejecting the duality view if its upholding relies on the idea that sexual duality is "the basic, sensible, way in which we experience nature" (Stone 2003, 78)—as thinkers unfamiliar with Irigaray, but concerned with demonstrating that "nature is really sexually dual," might also purport. Accepting this phenomenologico-ethical explanation would legitimise, indeed, a privileging of the sensible through an opposition to objectification, which is, in turn, grounded on the operational premise equating objectification with inaccuracy. I will not debate, here, the phenomenological reasons themselves—that is, whether we experience natural phenomena and ourselves as expressing a pole of a duality. I will only stress that a privileging of the sensible should not be granted, unquestionably, the capacity to legitimise a certain view of nature if we are also compelled to reject this view for different reasons. We have seen, specifically, that this account is unable to ground a normative rejection of objectification; if the

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<sup>17</sup> This point is brought forth, specifically, by Irigaray (1996) in *I Love to You*.

privileging of the sensible is tied to such rejection or reversal, there are no ethical reasons that can spur us to endorse it.

An account attempting to simultaneously ascribe to nature an original and stable sexual difference and to sustain an opposition to “patriarchal” approaches to nature, conceptually and via ensuing practical proposals, remains therefore incoherent. The very notion of objectification of nature and women, whence the proposal concerning the duality of nature emerges, becomes unsustainable in its normative dimension when the idea of duality it grounds is properly thought through. Insofar as objectification is aligned to masculinity and to an opposition to the feminine, the idea of a primary, natural duality forces us to regard objectification as naturally enabled. While it does not properly constitute an original teleology, this move ascribes to nature an internal dynamic of which objectification and patriarchal culture are part. Such a dynamic comes to be opposed, in turn, to nature’s call for the fulfilment of its essence.

The opposition to objectification on the basis of which this account was developed, and in light of which a culture of sexual difference could find legitimation, is thus invalidated, since “doing what nature wants” is no longer as clear of a prescription as it was. It could undoubtedly be objected that different normative grounds can be extrapolated in view of the evident oppression of women patriarchy carries out: if we accept that this oppression is tied to the patriarchal misapprehension of nature, we should clearly reject the latter. Let us recall, however, that the duality view establishes a connection between the oppression of women and of nature by hypothesising, or using as an operational premise, its ascription of duality to nature. If this ascription becomes unsustainable because it nullifies its very starting position, we should also deny that this account can exhaustively explain the connection between women, nature, and oppression. Then, in answer to the initial question, “What does it mean to reject the duality view of nature?” we can finally claim that the whole account demands abandonment or significant revision because it becomes unable to sustain its own opening move.

In *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference*, Stone (2006) attempts a revision: she joins Hölderlin and Schelling to Irigaray to transform the idea of a stable, original sexual difference into an account of nature whereby the latter constantly self-differentiates and subsequently breaks the poles of its own differentiation. Stone’s reasons to do so do not coincide with the problems I have highlighted, but lie in the desire to supplement Irigaray’s framework with an explanation of the idea that “bodies are naturally internally multiple as well as sexed” (Stone 2006, 193). Lacking the space for further assessment, I am happy to provisionally accept that Stone’s restatement could be capable of overcoming the

problems pointed out in this paper.<sup>18</sup> After all, I have demonstrated, as initially intended, that ascribing an original, stable duality to nature—that is reflected in human sexual difference—is problematic, and that it is so for reasons which are more substantial than the ones identified by Stone. By highlighting both the attractiveness that the duality view carries with respect to feminist projects dealing with objectification and the urgency that should be attributed to such projects, I have also shown why this exposition is indispensable.

While the reader might be motivated, given the above, to become familiar with drastic restatements of the duality view and to evaluate their potential success in overcoming the issues identified in their original articulation, this assessment should also encourage us to look for alternatives. If we have no additional, foundational reasons for establishing a realist view of natural, sexual duality, the attempt to elaborate alternatives to Stone's proposal becomes more than warranted. If we are willing, moreover, to follow Irigaray's critical diagnosis, two further avenues open up. The first is exemplified by the works of authors like Luciana Parisi (2010) and Rosi Braidotti (2003), who reinterpret Irigaray in order to rearticulate nature in terms of multiplicity or plurality. While Braidotti's proposal has been already problematised by Stone because of its attempt to conciliate a grounding natural multiplicity to cultural duality (an attempt which is not reproduced by Parisi),<sup>19</sup> both authors reassert the realism characterising the duality interpretation: the idea that difference (now rendered plural) constitutes the material origin of culture and thinking.

This realism, as I have already noted, is problematised by van Leeuwen and Colebrook as a valid interpretation of Irigaray's philosophy of nature. Colebrook, for instance, advances that Irigaray's considerations concerning nature and difference can remain "critical of any grounding or Same" by ironically inhabiting the structure of thinking "where the feminine has been produced as ground or origin" (Colebrook 2022, 132). In other words, Irigaray might appear to identify difference with a material origin, but only to expose the move through which the feminine is positioned as sensible ground by traditional views of nature and theories of the subject. If lifted beyond exegeses of Irigaray's work, this critique suggests that any postulation of an essence or truth about nature, as temporally and ontologically prior the patriarchal articulation thereof, runs the risk of reducing, again, nature to an object towards which thinking is oriented and which it transcends. A second response to the problem of objectification emerges, therefore, as the possibility of opening "the closed logic of essence by repeating, mimicking or miming the way in which thought has always *produced essence* in terms of its own activity of grounding" (Colebrook 2022, 130). It

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<sup>18</sup> For a critique of Stone's re-elaboration of the duality view, which focuses on her attempt to reconcile duality and multiplicity, see Guenther (2010, 27–30).

<sup>19</sup> See Stone 2006, especially pp. 122–24.



is the object of further investigation to determine which of these avenues can succeed in the objectives fleshed out above.

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