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The Necessary Feminisation of the Hegelian Dialectic

By claiming that self-consciousness exists only as recognized, Hegel undermined the paradigm of the autonomous subject. But since in western culture autonomy is paired with masculinity, it follows that what Hegel proposes is in fact a feminisation of our notion of subjectivity. His misogyny, however, prevents him from noticing this, and in his description of the ethical state he reinstates the masculine, self-subsistent subjectivity as the model of the citizen and excludes women from the public sphere, which leads to inconsistencies in his theoretical project. I argue that this is the result of denying women recognition so that men could have the love and care guaranteed in order to uphold their illusion of autonomy, which jeopardizes the idea of the ethical state. In this way, both Hegelian insights and his blind spots provide us with tools for the analysis of contemporary democracies struggling with the inheritance of liberal contract theories and capitalist (ir)rationality.

Keywords: autonomy, care work, ethical state, family, recognition, women's subjectivity

Introduction

Hegel did not devote much space to women, but in what he did write on the topic there are quotations providing unambiguous evidence for his misogyny. No wonder that feminist engagements with his philosophy have mostly been critical (see e.g. Jagentowicz Mills [1996a], Hutchings and Pulkkinen [2010]). There are, however, also exceptions and, for example, Kimberly Hutchings (2003) argues that Hegel's anti-dualism can be a source of inspiration for feminists who strive to displace the cultural binaries supporting the oppositional characterisation of genders and, in effect, patriarchal domination.

Seyla Benhabib (1996) distinguishes three types of feminist approaches to classical philosophy. The authors relying on the "good father" approach draw on whatever they find inspiring in their favourite philosopher's works and tactfully look away when he "utters inanities" on women (Benhabib 1996, 26). Contrariwise, the "rebellious daughter" approach adherents claim that masculine domination pervades the very categories of traditional philosophy, which, therefore, cannot be meaningfully utilised for feminist purposes. Benhabib herself proposes to adopt a middle ground method, a "feminist discourse of empowerment," which refuses to abandon the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality but at the same time challenges the fundamental assumptions of the classics (Benhabib 1996, 27).

The approach taken in the present article could be labelled as "the good father gone astray and set right by the rebellious daughter," since it argues for a transformation of fundamental philosophical categories but finds its source—overlooked by the author himself—in Hegel's own works. My contention is that by stipulating that self-consciousness exists "only as something recognized" (Hegel 2018, 76), Hegel introduces a new type of subjectivity, whose traits coincide with what is culturally coded as feminine.¹ However, his misogyny makes him unaware of the potential conceptual and social revolution implicit in his ideas, which leads to inconsistencies in his political philosophy. In this way, the femininity of the Hegelian self-consciousness remains only "in itself" and

1 Let me underscore that when writing about men and women I have in mind the cultural patterns of masculinity and femininity, which, though having influence over all of us, are realized in varying degrees by individuals. For example, care is still supposed to be the responsibility of women, and in this respect it is feminine, even though there certainly exist caring men and selfish women. I definitely do not intend to support an essentialist thesis that women, as opposed to men, are intrinsically caring.

must necessarily be spelled out and made “for itself.” The necessity stems both from the logic of the dialectic and the historical developments, namely, the advent of feminism. Hegel maintained that “every individual is a *child of his time*; so philosophy too is *its own time apprehended in thoughts*” (PR, 15; *Pref.*).² Reading Hegel through a contemporary feminist lens and amending his ideas to suit changed historical conditions is, therefore, in accord with the historicity and dynamic nature of his philosophy.

The article starts with a discussion of two stories of recognition presented in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. I will argue that the self-consciousness that “has come out of itself” undermines not only the western tradition of self-positing “Cartesian subject” but also the masculine ideal of autonomous subjectivity. This, however, is soon reinstated in the description of the self-consciousness “equal-to-its-own-self,” which enters the life and death struggle for recognition. And even though Hegel shows persuasively that domination is self-subverting, and only the former type of subjectivity is capable of mutual recognition, which is the basis of Spirit, the schema of master and slave has often been considered as *the* model of Hegelian recognition.

I propose that the reason for this is that autonomy and belligerence are the expected characteristics of masculine subjects, which in patriarchal culture have the status of “subjects in general.” But interdependence and care are indispensable for the Hegelian project of ethical life as an organic unity, and in the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* he tries to include them in the state defined as the dialectical synthesis of the family and civil society. However, as I will argue in the second section, if care is supposed to be solely the duty of women who are excluded from civil society, there is no way a caring attitude can be incorporated in the public sphere. Delineating the stakes of Hegel’s theoretical short-sightedness, I will draw on Carole Pateman’s (1988) analysis of the sexual contract. We will see that its terms enable husbands to have recognition guaranteed and at the same time avoid the self-defeating consequences of domination—of course at the cost of women.

To analyse in more detail why Hegel falls into this trap which jeopardizes his theoretical enterprise, in the third section we will go back to the *Phenomenology* where the family is described as oppositional to the state, with the clash between the divine and state laws resulting in the

2 I preserve the original italics in all quotations from Hegel and quoting his works I give both page and paragraph number. I use the abbreviations: PR (*Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*), PS (*Phenomenology of Spirit*), L (*Love*), with details of the editions in the references.

destruction of ethical life. I will argue that the roots of understanding the family and divine law as threatening to the (male) individual and the state lie in the lack of recognition of women as wives and mothers, which is prevented by the masculine illusion of self-subsistence. As a result, contrary to Hegel's dictum, it is men who are the "eternal irony of the community." We will conclude that the risk a subject must take to become a self-consciousness is not the risk of death, but of rejection in love: of granting the other the right to refuse. Thus, the dialectical synthesis producing true equality and freedom in ethical life is possible only if masculine subjects "come out of themselves" and transform their understanding of autonomy so as to acknowledge their vulnerability and dependence on the other.

Two Tales of Recognition³

Hegelian self-consciousness is a stage in the development of Spirit which comes into existence when the subject realizes that all the attempts to conceive of reality as separate from itself are futile. It cannot see the world otherwise than through its own categories, thus, it "is to itself its own object" (PS, 72; § 166). Its vulnerability as a subject co-constructed by its perception of the world becomes evident when it meets its counterpart and both self-consciousnesses try to fit the other into their own categories and at the same time notice that they are objectified by the other's eyes:

There is for self-consciousness another self-consciousness; it has come *out of itself*. This has a twofold significance: *first*, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an *other* essence; *secondly*, in doing so it has sublated the other, for it does not see the other as an essence either, but in the *other* sees *its own self*. (PS, 76; § 179)

For the self-consciousnesses to retain the status of subjects and not just objects in the other's outlook on the world, both of them must simultaneously suspend their own notions defining their counterpart and distance themselves from the way the other perceives them. They must accept that their categories may not capture the reality adequately: I am more than what the other sees in me and they also transcend my limited knowledge of them. On the other hand, the other's eyes may

3 The analysis of mutual recognition presented in this section owes a lot to Williams (1992) though it also differs from his interpretation in many respects.

make us see ourselves in a new light and reveal unnoticed aspects of our characters, so in the process of mutual recognition we must also allow them to perceive us from their own perspective. If such sublation of our categories is performed successfully, both self-consciousnesses are recognized as subjects:

This ambiguous sublation of its ambiguous otherness is equally an ambiguous return *into itself*; for *first*, through the sublation, it receives back its own self, for by sublating *its* otherness it again becomes equal to itself; but *secondly*, it equally gives the other self-consciousness back to it again, for it found itself in the other, it sublates this Being *of itself* in the other, thus lets the other again go free. (PS, 77; § 181)

This allows the self-consciousnesses to construct a common reality in which they are simultaneously subjects, its co-constructors, and objects perceived by the other. In this way, they form Spirit: “the unity of these self-consciousnesses: *I* that is *We*, and *We* that is *I*” (PS, 76; § 177). Mutuality is, however, vital here: “one-sided doing would be useless because what is supposed to happen can only come about through both” (PS, 77; § 182). Withdrawing our categories from the other and agreeing to become incorporated in their outlook on the world is risky, because they may use this to objectify us and destroy our subjectivity. Thus, it is tempting to simply force the other to recognize us as the creators of the only valid perspective, and in the *Phenomenology* the account of the life and death struggle follows immediately the presentation of mutual recognition.

Hegel describes the self-consciousness entering the struggle as a “simple Being-for-itself, equal-to-its-own-self through the exclusion *from itself* of everything *else*” (PS, 77; § 186). This leaves no space for the negotiation of a common reality and the struggle ends with one of them imposing its categories on the objectified other. However, forced recognition proves to be worthless and in striving to deny his vulnerability the master is in effect even more dependent on the slave: “The *truth* of the independent consciousness is accordingly the *servile consciousness* (...) its essence is the inverse of what it wants to be” (PS, 80; § 193).

We can see, therefore, that the two stories of recognition are associated with two utterly different types of subjects. The accomplishment of mutual recognition or its degeneration into self-defeating domination turns on the attitude of the self-consciousnesses: will they be able to accept their dependence on the other and construct a synthesis of their perspectives or will they stick to the illusion of autonomy and use force

to obtain recognition? The former stance is in accord with the Hegelian dialectical reason, as opposed to the one-sidedness of the abstract understanding. But even though Hegel shows clearly that domination self-destructs and there are no winners in the life and death struggle, this has been commonly understood as *the* Hegelian account of recognition. It may be partly due to the obscurity of the passages describing the double sublation of otherness necessary for mutual recognition, or to the influence of Alexandre Kojève, which, via Sartre, caused even Simone de Beauvoir to deplore the fact that women do not kill: “The worst curse on woman is her exclusion from warrior expeditions; it is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal; that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills” (Beauvoir 2011).

I would contend, however, that the reason is that being dependent and objectified by the other (even if only in a sublated way) is incompatible with masculine subjectivity: autonomous, controlling and defining the world. Before Hegel, the subject was generally understood individualistically in Western philosophy, with the self-positing Cartesian subject as an extreme case. But even the Aristotelian idea of the “social animal” underscored only the importance of political participation for full humanity. Male individuals’ education depended on negotiating their position with other men, but their dependence on women’s reproductive work necessary for their upbringing and everyday sustenance was erased. That is why, as Carole Pateman famously claimed, “the »individual« is a patriarchal category” (Pateman 1988, 184). Hegel’s claim that recognition is not only a question of social status but is also indispensable to our very existence enables including individual neediness and vulnerability in the notion of subjectivity. To gain recognition we must accept our dependence on the other, but what is more, we must also allow them to see us their way, which further subverts patriarchal masculinity as defining the world and not being the object of others’ definitions.⁴

In this way, Hegel includes in his account of subjectivity the dependence which in patriarchal culture is displaced onto women. But his feminisation of subjectivity has also another aspect, because the very ability of synthesis demands attention to the other’s perspective. Care, the traditional female responsibility, consists precisely in “coming out of yourself” and focusing on the other’s needs, which limits the inde-

4 Such epistemological domination is the reason why mansplaining still comes so naturally to most men.

pendence of carers. As Carol Gilligan (1982) showed in her seminal work, instead of relying on well-defined rules to find the right solution, the ethics of care stipulates that we take into account the perspectives of everybody our action will affect. And since their requirements are often in conflict, this relies on the ability to think in a dialectical way and form a synthesis accommodating all the relevant needs as well as possible.

The femininity of the self-consciousness that has “come out of itself” becomes even more compelling if we notice that the critique of various culturally entrenched dualisms which coincide with and enforce the man/woman divide is a frequent theme in feminist literature. For example, Val Plumwood (1993) challenges the equation of women with nature, as opposed to the masculine—and “generally human”—culture, but also argues that we should abandon the modern attitude towards nature based on mastery and exploitation. Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz (1994) criticises both the Cartesian detachment from denigrated bodies and the displacement of corporeality onto women so that men could maintain the illusion of themselves as pure minds unsullied by carnal needs and desires. Hegelian dialectical patterns are also recognizable in the work of Patricia Hill Collins (1990), who proposes a “both/and conceptual stance” as the basis of Afrocentric feminist thought, and of Donna Haraway (1988), who strives to overcome the dualism of the subject and object of cognition. This list could be continued. But I hope we can see by now that the repudiation of the feminine, which is the cornerstone of patriarchal masculine subjectivity, leads precisely to the one-sided thinking Hegel so passionately criticised. And it inevitably breeds domination.

Is the State Ethical?

Hegel certainly did not intend to gender the two types of subjectivities in his account of recognition, and the conclusion that it is the feminine one which is rational would undoubtedly astound him. In the account of the family in the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, however, the subjects are gendered explicitly, but if we compare them to the ones which were the upshot of our analysis of the *Phenomenology* in the previous section, we notice a telling shift.

We cannot say we are surprised to learn that man is “powerful and active” and “has his actual substantial life in the state, in learning (...) as well as in labour and struggle with the external world and with him-

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self (...) he fights his way to self-subsistent unity with himself.” And neither is it unexpected to read that woman is “passive and subjective” and “has her substantial vocation in the family, and her ethical disposition is to be imbued with family piety.” But it also turns out that the masculine subject is “spirit in its self-diremption into personal self-subsistence for itself and the knowledge and volition of *free universality*” whereas the feminine one is “spirit maintaining itself in unity,” and its knowledge and volition has “the form of *concrete individuality* and *feeling*” (PR, 168–169; § 166).

Thus, contrary to the *Phenomenology*, it is the masculine, self-subsistent subject that is universal and internally divided here, while the feminine one is unitary and particular. It could not be otherwise if men are supposed to be the driving force of the dialectic of the state and not the self-defeating “equal-to-its-own-self” subject whose “essence is the inverse of what it wants to be” (PS, 80; § 193). However, the philosopher’s earlier insight that self-subsistence is untenable and Spirit is impossible without the acknowledgment of our interdependence is still valid, and in the analysis of the family, civil society and the state we can find mechanisms analogical to the ones leading to the self-destruction of enforced recognition.

As understood in the *Philosophy of Right*,⁵ ethical life is supposed to be an organic unity of individuals which preserves their distinctness and thereby establishes their freedom: “The *right of individuals* to be *subjectively determined* as free is fulfilled when they belong to an actual ethical order, because (...) it is in an ethical order that they are actually in possession of their *own* essence or their own inner universality” (PR, 160; § 153). At this stage, the subject has fully internalized the laws: “his spirit bears witness to them as to *its own essence*, the essence in which he has a *feeling of his selfhood*, and in which he lives as in his own element which is not distinguished from himself. The subject is thus directly linked to the ethical order by a relation which is closer to identity than even the relation of faith or trust” (PR, 155; § 147).

Therefore, if marriage is supposed to be ethical, it must not be forced in any way and Hegel writes that the “objective source [of marriage] lies in the free consent of the persons, especially in their consent to make themselves *one person*, to renounce their natural and individual personality” (PR, 164; § 162). But what can women renounce if they are confined to the family? Arguing against consanguineous marriage Hegel points out that “individuals in the same circle of relationship have no

5 As we will see later on, this is different in the *Phenomenology*.

distinctive personality of their own in contrast with that of others in the same circle” (PR, 170; § 168). He can see, therefore, that for marriage to be the ethical unity preserving difference and founded on authentically free consent, the husband and the wife must be separate and, at least to some extent, independent. However, he somehow forgets this when he depicts women as passive and excludes them from the public sphere. As a result, the family he defines should rather be described by William Blackstone’s infamous phrase: “the husband and wife are one and that one is the husband.”

While the family is the seat of love and care, civil society is composed of selfish individuals who, however, are interdependent because their needs can be realised only through a social system:

In the course of the actual attainment of selfish ends (...) there is formed a system of complete interdependence, wherein the livelihood, welfare, and rightful existence (...) of one individual are interwoven with the livelihood, welfare, and rights of all. On this system, individual welfare, etc., depend, and only in this connected system are they actualized and secured. (PR, 181; § 183)

The idea that an aggregate of individuals furthering only their own ends would somehow secure the welfare of all reminds us of “trickle-down economics” where “a rising tide lifts all boats.” However, Hegel himself is aware that “trickle-down universality” cannot work since “contingencies, physical conditions, and factors grounded in external circumstances (...) may reduce people to *poverty*” (PR, 219; § 241). Additionally, “at the other end of the social scale, [we can see] conditions which greatly facilitate the concentration of disproportionate wealth in a few hands” (PR, 221; § 244). What is worse, this cannot be amended simply by charitable assistance to the poor, because if the needy “receive subsistence directly, not by means of their work” this violates “the principle of civil society and the feeling of individual independence and honour in its individual members” (PR, 221–222; § 245). On the other hand, it is no use to give them work either, since there is not enough demand for products and Hegel concludes that “despite *an excess of wealth* civil society is *not rich enough*, i.e. its own resources are insufficient, to check excessive poverty and the creation of a penurious rabble” (PR, 222; § 245). Therefore, civil society must seek out new markets through colonisation. The 19th century belief that there will always be new lands to conquer is, however, an illusion, and there is no doubt that such a solution to the internal problems of civil society is untenable. In this way, its self-defeating character becomes evident: it can neither

provide a satisfactory social order for its own citizens, nor participate in world history on terms of equality and mutuality.

Thus, the ethical character of both the family and civil society is highly questionable, which raises doubts concerning the very possibility of the state as the pinnacle of the Hegelian ethical life. Though the state is supposed to be the synthesis, actually civil society “presupposes the state; to subsist itself, it must have the state before it as something self-subsistent” (PR, 181; § 182, *Add.*). Certainly, capitalist economies would collapse without the state taming their inequality producing mechanisms and providing at least a minimum of care, but this does look like a rather *ad hoc* solution and undeniably undermines the logical construction of this part of Hegelian dialectic.

Care is the necessary foundation of the state, understood as “the actuality of concrete freedom” where

personal individuality and its particular interests not only achieve their complete development and gain recognition of their right for itself (...) but, for one thing, they also pass over of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and, for another thing, they know and will the universal; they even recognize it as their own substantial spirit; they take it as their end and aim and are active in its pursuit. (PR, 235; § 260)

Because the state takes care of the individuals, they care for the universal good, fully identifying with it as their purpose. However, if women have been denied access to civil society, their “particular interests” are far from “complete development” in the state. Hegel would say that their interests are satisfied in the family, but equating women’s needs with those of the family erases their separate subjectivity and leaves their “personal individuality” utterly unrecognized. On the other hand, if male individuals either further their particular ends in civil society, or are taken care of in the family, they have no chance to transcend their selfishness and learn to “will the universal.” Which, actually, will not be truly universal if it does not include the interests of women understood as subjects in their own right.

Let us go back to the root of this predicament: the two types of subjectivity in the family. Mutual recognition is essentially a symmetrical process, so if Hegel had stuck to his earlier idea that domination is untenable, he would have seen that describing one party as “powerful and active” and the other as passive and devoted to others’ wellbeing cannot yield genuine reciprocity. The idea that care and family unity should be dialectically mediated by the atomicity and selfishness of civil

society does make sense, since self-care is a necessary aspect of care. Without the ability to set one's boundaries, to refuse excessive burdens and to ask for help if needed, care turns into self-effacing sacrifice which cannot be the basis of ethical mutuality. However, the synthesis of selfishness with care is impossible if these two moments are divided between two distinct kinds of individuals and the carers are excluded from the public sphere. Therefore, caring and selfishness must be conceptualized as the aspects of every single individual, with the family as the environment where care is *reciprocally* given and received, and civil society as the sphere of self-interest.⁶

But if self-centredness and "struggle with the external world" are also necessary moments of subjectivity, this brings us back to the analysis of mutual recognition, which certainly does not consist simply in openness to the perspective of the Other along the Levinasian lines. Entering the negotiation of mutuality is risky, and because our "coming out of ourselves" can be exploited by the other, we need a healthy dose of self-assertiveness to prevent it. The Hegelian life and death struggle is sometimes understood literally, as depicting the pre-social stage of human development, when the lack of social structures made physical combat the only way of solving conflicts with those who came our way. However, since humans, just as apes, are social animals, a truly lone self-consciousness has never existed.⁷ Thus, Hegelian recognition should rather be understood as an abstract framework describing manifold processes of negotiation of our position in social relations starting in infancy⁸ and continuing throughout our whole lives in the cultural and legal environments provided by the societies we live in.⁹

6 Some authors (e.g. Hutchings 2017) interpret Hegel's theory of the state as depicting its two separate spheres: the family and civil society. Though there is no space in this article to analyse this in more detail, I would contend that they should also be understood as different types of social interdependence, which, synthesised dialectically, form two aspects of being a citizen, just as abstract personhood and morality are two moments of the ethical individual. Thus, the problem is not that men have to "move literally and metaphorically between private and public spheres" (Hutchings 2017, 108), but that these two aspects of self and being with others are not properly synthesised in men if care is the sole responsibility of women who, being excluded from the public sphere, have no chance of such synthesis at all.

7 The few cases of people who managed to survive physically without human interaction show clearly the destructive results of such deprivation for psychological development.

8 Jessica Benjamin (1988) uses the Hegelian framework of recognition to describe mother-infant relations.

9 Robert R. Williams (1997) argues that recognition is the basic concept

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This suggests a different interpretation of the passage from the section on recognition where Hegel writes: “The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a *person*; but it has not attained to the truth of this recognition as recognition of an independent self-consciousness” (PS, 78; § 187). The courage stipulated here needn’t always consist in putting our physical integrity at stake but rather in risking our social or psychological lives when we “come out of ourselves” and allow the other to modify our perspective, or, conversely, when we intervene in theirs. Both these abilities are necessary for genuine mutuality and for the construction of our shared reality. But what we construct in this way is not only our social world but also our emotional communities of care and love, where it is especially difficult and painful to accept the risk of rejection. Consequently, it is tempting to develop a social structure minimizing this risk for us by invalidating the separate subjectivity of the other.

Though Hegel was a ruthless critic of the liberal understanding of the state as an atomistic aggregate of interests, he does subscribe in his own work to one of the foundations of this modern political order: the fantasy of autonomous individuals raised on the backs of women and their invisible reproductive work.

In her classic *The Sexual Contract*, Carole Pateman (1988) maintains that the idea of the public sphere where autonomous individuals interact to form the capitalist economy and the liberal political order depends—or rather parasitizes—on the hidden private sphere where patriarchal individuals receive the care necessary to uphold the illusion of their independence. Though Hegel was a ruthless critic of the liberal understanding of the state as an atomistic aggregate of interests, he does subscribe in his own work to one of the foundations of this modern political order: the fantasy of autonomous individuals raised on the backs of women and their invisible reproductive work.¹⁰ The internally divided masculine subject struggling “with the external world and with himself” regains his integrity in the family where “he has a tranquil intuition of this unity, and there he lives a subjective ethical life on the plane of feeling” (PR, 169; § 166). Laura Werner writes that in his early Jena works Hegel remarked that “a mended sock is better than a torn one; not so with self-consciousness” (quoted in Werner 2010, 204), and she adds that women are “the ones repairing the torn socks and the torn self-consciousnesses returning home to find wholeness” (Werner 2010, 206).

In this way, the masculine, self-subsistent subject turns out to be critically dependent on the work of his subordinate wife, just as the

permeating the whole of Hegelian ethical and political philosophy.

10 In this sense the Hegelian family is indeed modern as Hutchings (2017) argues. This does not, however, imply women’s emancipation but their subordination disguised by proclamations of universal equality—a feature shared by modern theories resting on what Pateman labels the “fraternal contract.”

master from the *Phenomenology* was reliant on the slave. Why doesn't Hegel conclude that "the truth of the masculine consciousness is accordingly the feminine consciousness" and its autonomy is sheer illusion? Pateman writes that the sexual contract, which is the hidden fundament of modern social contract theories, is internally inconsistent, because even though women are assumed to be in general incapable of entering into contracts, there is one contract they *can* but also *must* enter: the marriage contract (Pateman 1988, 6). And if we look at it from the perspective of recognition we see, how it provides a "solution" for male masters. They can have recognition guaranteed, because women are not in a position to reject them, but it is not worthless, like the slave's forced recognition, because it is lovingly given! This oxymoronic fiction of mandatory voluntariness is what the Hegelian dialectic of the state rests on. But as a fiction, it definitely cannot be a firm ground and, contrary to Hegel's infamous dictum, it makes men, not women, "the eternal irony of the commonwealth" (PS, 190; § 475).

Men: The Eternal Irony of the Commonwealth

Love and politics seem to be completely different spheres of human interaction and the thesis that men's inability to bear rejection in love shapes the ideological fundamentals of modern democracies may seem a bit far-fetched. Fortunately, our good father Hegel has provided us with insightful analyses supporting this claim, which (being simultaneously an errant father) he subsequently overlooked. In this section we will study the description of ethical life in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where it is a relatively early stage in the development of Spirit. And while in the *Philosophy of Right* the ethical order is the Spirit's highest achievement, a synthesis with which all individuals can identify as truly their own, in Hegel's earlier work the ethical realm is "an immaculate world, a world unsullied by any discord" (PS, 183; § 463), but at the same time—and precisely because of the immediate character of its unity—a world divided with deadly conflicts leading inevitably to its destruction. But before we proceed to Hegel's famous treatment of Sophocles's *Antigone*, let us look in more detail into his depiction of love and marriage.

In his early essay devoted to love, Hegel wrote that "genuine love excludes all oppositions" (L, 304) and "in love, life is present as a duplicate of itself and as a single and unified self" (L, 305). We can see, therefore, that in this case there is no delineation of boundaries, which we witnessed in the description of mutual recognition. And since this

is what enabled the construction of shared reality and the validation of the self-consciousnesses' cognitive abilities, we cannot be surprised that "love completely destroys objectivity and thereby annuls and transcends reflection, deprives man's opposite of all foreign character, and discovers life itself without any further defect" (L, 305). The understanding of love as a merging without internal differences is also preserved in Hegel's mature *Philosophy of Right*, where we read that in love "I do not wish to be a self-subsistent and independent person and that, if I were, then I would feel defective and incomplete" and that is why love is "the most tremendous contradiction" (PR, 162; § 158, *Add.*).

But if equitable relationships are supposed to rest on mutual recognition, why shouldn't it be the basis of love? In the *Phenomenology* Hegel writes that in the family recognition is possible only between a brother and a sister, since "the moment of the *singular Self*, recognizing and recognized, may here assert its right, because it is linked to the equilibrium of the blood and to a relation devoid of desire" (PS, 181; § 457). The desire preventing recognition in marriage is, however, exclusively male because the wife

remains immediately universal and alien to the singularity of desire; whereas in the husband these two sides are separated, and since he possesses as a citizen the *self-conscious* force of *universality*, he thereby purchases for himself the right of *desire* and, at the same time, preserves his freedom in regard to desire. Insofar, then, as in this relationship of the wife there is an admixture of singularity, her ethical character is not pure; but insofar as her ethical character is pure, the singularity is a matter of *indifference*, and the wife lacks the moment of recognizing herself as *this Self* in the other. (PS, 181; § 457)

Thus, being a citizen gives the man the right to desire, but also "preserves his freedom in regard to desire." This surely means he can control his own urges, but it also implies the freedom from being the object of someone else's desire. Consequently, being deprived of citizenship, women can neither actively desire, nor can they disentangle themselves from being objectified by the desires of others. The result is, as Hegel says plainly, that wives are not recognized as individuals, and conversely, for them also "it is not *this* husband, not *this* child, but *a husband, children in general*" (PS, 181; § 457). It appears, therefore, that "a wife" is only a social function: interchangeable and unrecognized as this particular person, and supposed to provide care for whoever happens to fill the slot of "a husband" or "children in general."

It appears, therefore, that "a wife" is only a social function: interchangeable and unrecognized as this particular person, and supposed to provide care for whoever happens to fill the slot of "a husband" or "children in general."

Moreover, Hegel also denies the possibility of recognition between parents and children, because the former's role is fostering the independence of their offspring—"seeing the Being-for-itself come about in the other, without taking it back again"—and the latter fight their way to separation "in which the source dries up" (PS, 180–181; § 456). This, however, must concern mainly (or rather only) mothers, since it is they who are responsible for care work, and it is hard to imagine that a citizen would "dry up"—lose all purpose in life—because his children have become independent.

But as we know from the passages on recognition, due to the self-subverting nature of domination, the subordinated hold a certain power over their apparent masters. And this explains why Hegel describes the family and its divine law as a murky, underground "law of weakness and darkness" supported only by "bloodless shade" (PS, 189; § 474). "The Penates stand opposed to the universal spirit" (PS, 177; § 450) and the commonwealth's attitude is "negative with regard to the family, and consists in extracting the singular from the family," because "he is *actual* and *substantial* only as a citizen, the singleton, so far as he is not a citizen and belongs to the family, is only the *unactual* marrowless shadow" (PS, 178; § 451). The universality that the individual can attain in the family is only "*pure Being, death; it is immediate, natural having-become, not the doing of a consciousness*" (PS, 178; § 452).

It is somewhat baffling to read that as members of the family we are virtually dead and the only truly ethical duty towards our relatives is burial. It also seems rather unappreciative to dismissively reduce all the care work necessary to raise new citizens to the contingent "rendering some assistance or service" (PS, 178; § 451). I would contend that the root of these ideas lies in the fear of unrecognized, and therefore even more threatening and engulfing, femininity. The wife who sees her husband overwhelmed by animal desire is the witness of his dependence, and to the extent that she can refuse him satisfaction, has power over him. The mother reminds the public "autonomous individual" of his childhood helplessness and the massive amounts of daily care he needed to become an adult. This threatens the image of the citizen as an independent being concerned with the universal and untarnished with carnality.

But such a hostile and controlling attitude towards the family, repudiated as the feminine sphere, creates a deep conflict in society, which is self-subverting because of the crucial interdependence of these domains:

human law in its universal Being-there, the commonwealth, in its overall activation manliness, in its actual activation the government, *is, moves, and main-*

tains itself by consuming into itself the separation of the Penates, or the independent singularization into families presided over by womankind, and by keeping them dissolved in the continuity of its fluidity. But the family is, at the same time, in general the element of human law, the universal ground activating the singular consciousness. Since the commonwealth only gets its subsistence through the breakdown of domestic happiness and the dissolution of the self-consciousness into universal self-consciousness, it creates for itself in what it suppresses and what is at the same time essential to it, in womankind in general, its internal enemy. (PS, 189–190; § 475)

We can see, therefore, that women cannot obtain recognition because they are wives and mothers: because men desire them and are dependent on their care. But as Hegel showed in his analysis of recognition, domination stems precisely from the refusal to accept our dependence on the other. As a result, his supposedly objective analysis of the relations between the sexes justifies the subordination of women. The “equal-to-its-own-self” master tried in vain to achieve independence by dominating the slave, and men’s attempts to uphold the illusion of their autonomy by refusing women recognition are just as futile. But while Hegel was positive that the master’s position is untenable, he maintains that being a citizen frees a man both from his passions and from the emasculating, though indispensable, care he receives in the family. In this way, men’s efforts to erase their dependence on women are woven into the political structure.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel shows that such a manoeuvre gives rise to a deep rift in society and, therefore, is bound to fail. He reintroduces it, however, in his later work in a modified form. In the *Philosophy of Right* the philosopher aims to construct a rational state and knows that the family must be one of its fundamentals. But because he denies women separate subjectivity, the domination of the masculine public sphere over the family is still preserved and the difference from his earlier account of the relations between the sexes is only superficial: the dialectic supposed to construct ethical universality provides only a disguise for inequality. Although the account of ethical life in the *Phenomenology* is usually interpreted as a depiction of classical Greek society, the destructive internal tension described there is endemic in any society based on the illusion of the male self-subsistent subject resting on the exploitation of female reproductive work. And because Hegel cannot give up the ideal of masculine autonomy and sticks to the beligerently selfish model of the citizen, his mature political theory conceals the domination of women under the veil of ethical universality,

just as the proclamations of equality in social contract theories discussed by Pateman masked the domination inherent in the sexual contract.

In this way, we can see that the internally flawed structure of the Hegelian state, which leads to the collapse of civil society, stems precisely from men's fear of their dependence on women. For the masculine "self-subsistent" subjects fantasising about heroic struggles the risk of being rejected in love is too much to bear. As a result, men resort to devising social structures where they can have guaranteed the loving care of subordinated women. But since such dependence is distressingly humiliating for supposedly autonomous individuals, they shut the caregivers out of the public sphere to hide this vulnerability. And this is what makes men "the eternal irony of the commonwealth."¹¹ Dreaming of autonomy and daring deeds, but unable to risk equality in love and helplessly dependent in everyday chores. In need of care but unable to accept it openly since it threatens their honour as self-subsistent beings. Priding themselves on their universality and posing as the fundamentals of the state, but constantly destroying it with pointless fratricidal bloodshed and the ruthless enforcement of arbitrary orders.

This brings us back to *Antigone* and we can see that, just as in the account of recognition, it is the feminine self-consciousness which is universal here. This may sound surprising, because, analogously to the life and death struggle, the masculine self-defeating attitude has been read as the rational one by many commentators who maintain that Antigone, unreasonably attached to primordial divine law, simply blocks the way of the Spirit's inevitable progress. To counter this, feminist authors argued for the inclusion of women in the dialectic of recognition (Jagentowicz Mills 1996b) and for the significance of distinctly feminine voices (Irigaray 1996). But as Kimberly Hutchings rightly underscores (Hutchings 2003), Hegel does not side with Creon, but presents both parties in the tragedy as destructively one-sided:

Ethical self-consciousness now experiences in its deed the developed nature of its *actual* course of action, as much when it submitted to divine law as when it submitted to human law. The law that is manifest to it is linked in the essence with the opposed law; the essence is the unity of both; but the deed has only carried out one law against the other. But since the two laws are linked in the essence, the fulfilment of the one evokes the other and calls it forth as a violated

11 In the passage where Hegel famously uses this expression in reference to women, he charges them with preferring "the frivolity of unripe youth" to "the earnest wisdom of mature age which (...) only thinks of and cares for the universal" (PS, 190; § 475), which sounds a bit incel-like.

For the masculine "self-subsistent" subjects fantasising about heroic struggles the risk of being rejected in love is too much to bear. As a result, men resort to devising social structures where they can have guaranteed the loving care of subordinated women. But since such dependence is distressingly humiliating for supposedly autonomous individuals, they shut the caregivers out of the public sphere to hide this vulnerability.

and now hostile vengeance-seeking essence, into which the deed transformed it. (PS, 186–187; § 469)

However, if we look at it more closely, it is actually Antigone who proposes a synthetically universal closure of the deadly combat of her brothers. The burial of Polyneices is not only her sisterly duty—he deserves it simply as a human being. What is more, it is also necessary for the polis if it is supposed to be a rational state, not a barbaric one. Antigone's action is based on care: both for her dead brother and for the universality of the state. And it is Creon's undialectical obduracy which causes the death not only of the heroine, but also of his son, Antigone's fiancé, and his wife.

Hegel underscores that both brothers have an equal right to the crown, though they are also equally in the wrong. However, on the logic of accomplished facts, the one who is actually in possession of power has the—contingent, human—right to it. Therefore, “the commonwealth (...) will honour the one who was found on its side; on the other hand, the government, the restored simplicity of the Self of the commonwealth, will punish the other, who already proclaimed its devastation on the walls, by withholding the last honour (...) the honour of the departed spirit” (PS, 188–189; § 473). Patricia Jagentowicz Mills argues that Antigone's resistance is certainly not the result of her femininity, because she transcends the traditional woman's role by her intervention in the public sphere—contrary to her quiet and obedient sister Ismene (Jagentowicz Mills 1996b, 71). But what she transcends is also the uncritical one-sidedness of the ethical realm which prescribes unwavering adherence to *our* party and equally determined hostility towards *them*. By acknowledging the human dignity of the enemy her position is a truly universal one.¹²

That Hegel fails to see this, is proof of the pervasiveness of his misogyny, because he also writes that

the ethical *action* has in it the moment of crime, because it does not sublimate the *natural* allocation of the two laws to the two sexes, but rather, as *undivided* focus on the law, remains within *natural immediacy*, and, as doing, makes this one-sidedness into guilt by seizing on only one of the sides of

12 The conflict between Antigone and Creon can also be read as a political clash between two concepts of the state: the dialectical one based on the feminine rationality of care, and the authoritarian model based on masculine domination. After all, if it were not for patriarchy, she would be the natural successor to the throne.

the essence, and reacting negatively towards the other, i.e. violating it. (PS, 186; § 468)

We can see, therefore, that Hegel was aware that “the *natural* allocation of the two laws to the two sexes” must be sublated. Unfortunately, he himself did not perform it, neither in the *Phenomenology*, nor in his later work,¹³ leaving it to “rebellious daughters.” He writes that the “equilibrium [of the ethical world] can be living, it is true, only because inequality arises in it and is brought back to equality by *justice*.” And justice is reinstated by “the government of the people” “which brings back the Being-for-itself that breaks away from the equilibrium, the independence of classes and individuals, into the universal,” but what “brings back to equilibrium the universal when it becomes too powerful over the singleton” is “equally the simple spirit of him who has suffered injustice” (PS, 183; § 462). It is astonishing that he overlooks that it can also be a “she” even though the only example of an individual opposing the government in the name of justice he provides is a woman.

Feminisation, Humanisation, Love and the State

What would have happened if Hegel had stuck to his earlier insight that domination is untenable and that what makes us fully human is mutual recognition, which demands the acknowledgement of our dependence on the other, but also the ability to set boundaries? He would have avoided the error of denying women recognition and portraying them as an underground destructive force hostile to the state. Or rather, the ethical life as analysed in the *Phenomenology* would really be only an interim stage in the development of Spirit, complemented by an account sublating this self-subverting notion of citizenship and granting recognition to wives and mothers. In his mature work he would have seen that activity and passivity, self-subsistence and dependence must be synthesised in every individual, because dividing these two aspects between different types of subjectivities cannot yield genuine mutuality. In short, such a feminisation of the dialectic would have meant a thorough humanisation of women and would have put Hegel much ahead of his times. Thus, historical situatedness was undeniably a crucial factor hindering his progressiveness—and theoretical consistency.

13 The few references to *Antigone* in the *Philosophy of Right* simply reiterate the binaries of his analysis in the *Phenomenology* with no trace of transcending them. See: PR, 169; § 166.

“The most tremendous contradiction” of the desire to be one with the other can, however, be achieved only through domination. This is the attitude of the “equal-to-its-own-self” master self-consciousness that does not tolerate otherness within the realm of the world it single-handedly defines. In this way the result is indeed a contradiction, because such love inevitably degenerates into violence.

But he would also have been ahead of our times, because the radical reformation of our understanding of love and the state which follows from Hegel’s early insights has not been accomplished yet. Hegel knew that “true union, or love proper, exists only between living beings who are alike in power” (L, 304). The mutual recognition between lovers implies, however, that women must genuinely have the power to refuse, but also to actively desire—and thus objectify—the other. But in spite of campaigns like #MeToo sexual violence is rampant, and sex is still too often understood as a resource that women have and “unfeelingly” deny to men (Holloway 1984), not as a reciprocal process of giving and receiving, desiring and being desired.

This is because love is a particularly intense relationship and rejection strikes us to the very core of our subjectivities. “The most tremendous contradiction” of the desire to be one with the other can, however, be achieved only through domination. This is the attitude of the “equal-to-its-own-self” master self-consciousness that does not tolerate otherness within the realm of the world it single-handedly defines. In this way the result is indeed a contradiction, because such love inevitably degenerates into violence. It is perpetrated not only on the interpersonal level, but also social (victim blaming) and institutional (lack of procedures for the effective prosecution and prevention of sexual and domestic violence). But as Pateman shows, its roots run much deeper and can be traced to the very concept of the autonomous individual. Hegel’s theoretical conundrums serve as an excellent illustration of her theses showing the intricate connections between love and the state, between the social and the sexual contract.

If Hegel had accepted that love must rest on mutual recognition, this would have deprived men of the fundamentals of their illusory autonomy: the fiction of “voluntary” recognition which cannot be refused and the entitlement to women’s care. Hegel underscores that marriage must not be forced, but free choice of a spouse is not enough without economic, social and political equality. Denying women access to the public sphere and, importantly, giving husbands full control over family property, Hegel puts wives at their mercy. Though nowadays in western societies women have the right to own property, earn and vote, we are far from full equality and wives cannot effectively leave husbands they are economically dependent on, which results in high rates of domestic violence.

A society of fully independent individuals furthering their own ends could not endure. Not only because no rationally calculating being would take on themselves the burdens of bearing and rearing children,

but also because all of us need love and care. That is why we do need to develop a notion of the state which cares for its citizens who are “linked to the ethical order by a relation which is closer to identity than even the relation of faith or trust” (PR, 155; § 147). Hegel did not accomplish this, because, as I argued, the fiction of autonomous master subjectivity persists in his description of male self-subsistent individuals in the *Philosophy of Right*. The point, however, is not that we should renounce the idea of individual independence altogether, but rather that we reformulate it as something bestowed on us by the other’s truly voluntary recognition. As the outcome of mutual boundary negotiation enabling the construction of a We that does not erase the singular selves comprising it. Acknowledging this dependence on the other, which in patriarchal culture is displaced on women, makes masculine struggling subjectivities feminine but also simply human. And this in turn enables the humanisation of women, making room for their right to refusal.

One of the features of independent individuals is the right to own property: to be able to exclude others from the use of some resources and to have personal space. This topic needs much more extensive analysis than can be devoted to it here, but the Hegelian concept of the ethical state demands also a radical transformation of our understanding of property along the dialectical lines of mutual recognition. Hegel does note that individual property must be recognized by others (PR, 65; § 51), but he does not develop this idea in his description of the state, in effect leaving this concept in the form pertaining to the liberal abstract right. He fails to analyse what truly common property could mean on the level of family, since that would come alarmingly close to the humanisation of women. Consequently, in his discussion of inheritance quarrels we can see independent individuals in conflict, not ones sharing their common resources on the basis of love and mutual care. But such a considerate attitude is precisely what is needed to unravel the paradoxes of civil society, which rest on the assumption that accepting help is dishonourable but accumulating vast resources is simply rational, even if done at the cost of others who are deprived of care, or worse, down-right exploited.

To enter the process of mutual recognition we must acknowledge our vulnerability and be able to give and receive care, but we also need the capacity to set boundaries and actively resist injustice. Thus, the feminisation of the dialectic proposed here means the humanisation of both men and women. Only the individuals in which these two aspects of the self are synthesised can construct the rational state Hegel posits. But this would have to be a state taking seriously the protection of

women's rights: effectively eradicating sexual and domestic violence, ensuring full reproductive rights and preventing the exploitation of reproductive work. The true ethical unity must be mediated by difference—both in the state, and in the family—which is impossible without the independent subjectivity of women. Moreover, as Jessica Benjamin (1988) persuasively shows, to recognize her children and raise them as capable of mutuality the mother must herself be recognized as a separate being with her own independent needs and goals in life. To this end, care must be a social, not solely individual, responsibility, and masculine subjects must renounce their illusory autonomy and replace it with dialectical interdependence. Which, as Hegel shows, is simply rational.

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Tytuł: Nieuchronna feminizacja heglowskiej dialektyki

Abstrakt: Postulując, iż samowiedza istnieje tylko jako uznana, Hegel podważył paradygmat autonomicznego podmiotu. Jednak ponieważ w kulturze zachodniej autonomia powiązana jest z męskością, jego propozycja oznacza de facto feminizację naszego rozumienia podmiotowości. Jego mizoginia uniemożliwia mu jednak dostrzeżenie tego i w swoim opisie etycznego państwa Hegel przywraca męską, samoistną podmiotowość jako model obywatela, wykluczając kobiety ze sfery publicznej, co prowadzi do niespójności w jego teoretycznych zamierzeniach. Argumentuję, że jest to konsekwencją odmówienia kobietom uznania, by mężczyznom mogła przysługiwać gwarantowana troska i miłość. Podtrzymuje to ich iluzję autonomii, lecz jednocześnie zaprzepaszcza ideę etycznego państwa. W ten sposób zarówno rozpoznania Hegla, jak i jego przeoczenia dostarczają nam narzędzi dla analizy współczesnych demokracji zmagających się z dziedzictwem liberalnych teorii umowy społecznej oraz z kapitalistyczną (ir)racjonalnością.

Słowa kluczowe: autonomia, etyczne państwo, podmiotowość kobiet, praca opiekuńcza, rodzina, uznanie