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Beyond the Neuter Universal: Hegel and Sexual Difference

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Abstract

Hegel is a complicated figure for considering the philosophical significance of sexual difference. On the one hand, he grants an essential place for sexual difference in his analyses of nature and spirit. On the other hand, he treats the telos of sexual difference as a kind of sexual indifferentiation. For Hegel, both life and spirit depend on sexual difference but as something to be sublated, that is, preserved but only in so far as it is negated for a higher truth or purpose devoid of it. This essay examines this sublation of sexual difference in what Hegel characterizes as the 'universality' of the living genus and the 'universality' of the rational activity of civil society. I argue that Hegel's conception of this sublation of difference into universality relies in both instances on a teleological reduction of the ontological significance of sexual difference to reproduction and a contestable interpretation of the roles of male and female sexes in it. However, I claim that Hegel's account of the relational identity of the sexes, each as not-all of the genus given the other, is a fundamental insight for an ontological analysis of sexual difference. As such, I open a critical reappropriation of Hegel's account of sexual difference for a more difference-affirming, non-hierarchal sexual ontology. I argue that overcoming the hierarchal implications of this Hegelian account of sexual difference requires rethinking the natural and rational universal, which amounts to rethinking what Hegelianism might mean today.

At once, Hegel recognizes and forecloses the philosophical significance of sexual difference. On the one hand, he grants an essential place to sexual difference in his analyses of nature and spirit. He thinks the living being, or at least certain living beings, as essentially relational, a not-all of their genus in relation to a sexed other. This logic of difference applies also to the realm of human sociality, in the gendered division of labour between men and women.[1] Yet, on the other hand, Hegel treats the telos of sexual difference as a kind of sexual indifferentiation. For Hegel, the sex-relationship is intelligible under the analysis of the generic process,

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whereby individuals procreate and die to perpetuate the genus. Sexual difference is thus oriented toward its own dissolution into the supposed asexuality of the genus. Similarly, the purpose of the sexually differentiated family is to ground the rational activity of men in a sexually undifferentiated civil society. Women do not participate in the ascent of human spirit *as such* to the rational universal. Hence, for Hegel, both life and spirit depend on sexual difference but as something to be sublated, that is, preserved only in so far as it is negated for a higher truth or purpose devoid of it.

This article examines this sublation of sexual difference in what Hegel characterizes as the 'universality' of the living genus and the 'universality' of rational, spiritual activity. I argue that Hegel's conception of this sublation of difference into universality relies in both instances on a teleological reduction of the ontological significance of sexual difference to reproduction and a particular interpretation of the roles of male and female sexes in it. Already a number of critics have noted how Hegel's discussion of sexual difference is marked by a restrictive focus on copulation and its logical or metaphysical significance.[2] Building from this work, I examine how this reduction of sexual difference grounds or justifies its sublation in Hegel's account. The negation of sexual difference could not follow otherwise.

The following sections examine and critique Hegel's account of sexual difference in his philosophies of nature and spirit.[3] First, I consider the logical terms according to which Hegel understands sexual difference as teleologically sublated in the genus process. Second, I consider how Hegel's interpretation of this logic grounds the hierarchal social reproduction between men and women. Third, I evaluate the contemporary importance of Hegel's account of sexual difference considering its limitations. I claim that Hegel's account of the relational identity of the sexes, each as not-all of the genus given the other, is a fundamental insight for an ontological analysis of sexual difference. In fact, Hegel anticipates recent feminist work concerned with sexual ontology. However, I critique the reductive orientation of sexual difference toward its own negation, which challenges Hegel's characterization of the natural and rational universal sublating it. I argue that overcoming the hierarchal implications of this Hegelian account of sexual difference requires rethinking the natural and rational universal, which amounts to rethinking, through the lens of sexual difference, what Hegelianism might mean for us today.

I. The organic logic of sexual difference

In purely logical terms, life for Hegel represents a teleological conception of the syllogistic terms of universality, particularity and singularity. Hegel's pure logic

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considers life as a series of logical relations between syllogistic terms, not 'the life of nature' as it is 'exposed to the externality of existence' and '*conditioned* by inorganic nature' (*SL*: 677).[4] Nevertheless, Hegel's purely logical analysis makes natural and spiritual life intelligible in these syllogistic terms.

After discussing the living individual in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel turns to the genus process constituted by the reproduction and perishing of generations of living individuals. According to Hegel, the genus is the truth of life *as such* by implicating all the determinations of the living individual and its life processes, alongside its relations to other living beings of its kind. As such, the genus expresses everything there is to express about the life process of which the individual is a part. Following Hegel's understanding of universality as a principle of self-identity in otherness, the principle of universality is expressed as the subsistence or self-equality of the genus through many individuals. The principle of particularity is expressed as the instantiations of the genus in many individuals, who are equally singularities as uniting both universality and particularity. The genus, in other words, becomes the object of analysis against which the individual is measured in its inadequacy to the overarching concept of life.

If life is essentially the genus, the singular individual is deficient against the genus process as a mere moment of it. Given this deficiency, Hegel describes the relation between the self-subsistent individual and its genus in terms of a contradiction. On the one hand, the living individual is identical with the genus whose truth it is. The universality or self-equality of the genus inheres in the individual, making the individual what it is as a singular instance of it. On the other hand, the individual is non-identical to the genus as a mere singularity, not the totality of individuals constituting the genus. A contradiction therefore arises in the exemplification of the genus by the individual. Although the genus is the truth of the individual in the sense of encompassing it, the individual does not express this truth adequately on its own.

Hegel claims that the individual consequently has an impulse to sublate its inadequacy to its truth (*SL*: 687). This impulse is the universality of the genus realizing itself through the sublation of singularities external to one another through their unity and dissolution as individuals. In other words, the truth of the individual is to dissolve or cease to be. Yet, if the individual were to cease to be entirely, so too would the universal inhering in it. As such, purely logically speaking, the dissolution of the individual is simply its dissolution as 'indifferent, immediate, concrete existence', with the genus being that into which 'the isolated singularities of individual life perish' (*SL*: 688). As instances of the process of the genus itself, individual living beings relate to each other as that through which the genus works (albeit without implying that the genus has hypostatized being or intentionality of its own), namely through its unity and propagation. The genus

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'is on the one side the *generation of singularity* just as it is also, on the other side, *the sublation of it*', specifically through copulation (*SL*: 688). The individual unites with others and propagates the living species, which is nothing other than the genus process. So, the genus '*relates itself to itself as idea*, the universal that has universality for its determinateness and existence' (*SL*: 688). Following this logic of life, the individual is reducible to this activity of the genus; the individual is nothing other than a passing, dissolving, moment of the genus.

Although Hegel discusses the perishing of living individuals, a logical concept does not die in any literal, organic sense. At most, the perishing of individuals and propagation of the living species might reflect for Hegel a logical negation of a singularity into another without a return back to the negated. Yet, as we turn to concretely existing living beings in nature, in space and time, death becomes literal. In natural terms, Hegel discusses the 'contradiction' marking the individual's inadequacy to the genus, how 'the universality of the genus, which is the identity of the individuals, is different from the particular individuality of these individuals' (*PN*: §368A). The logic of perishing and propagation is exemplified or instantiated instead in the *organic* death and birth of those individuals. Although worldly being cannot be reduced to logical concepts, they express these concepts and can therefore be described in terms of them. For Hegel, living beings are not purely logical syllogisms but express the syllogistic logic of life.

Hegel describes the organic death of the singulars and the reproduction of singulars who likewise really die in terms of the bad infinite of regress. An infinite regress cannot concretely unify finitude and infinitude, reflecting an endless contradiction on the part of finite beings: 'This process of propagation issues forth into the progress of the [bad] infinite. The genus preserves itself only through the perishing of the individuals, which fulfill their determination in the process of generation, and in so far as they have no higher determination than this, pass on to death' (*PN*: §369). The universality of the genus, dependent on its instantiation in particulars, never escapes the contradiction or inadequacy of its particular members. It cannot achieve concrete existence separated from their inadequacy to its concept. As such, the living individuals resolve this contradiction by generating new living individuals and then dying. The genus can only persist in individuals as their truth, while individuals die for failing to express the truth of the genus adequately. The final purpose of the individual is to generate new life in order to die.

Let us turn more specifically to the role of sexual difference in this bad infinity. Hegel's logical discussion of copulation reduces the activity to this process, the orientation of individuals toward dissolution. Although not in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel mentions sexual difference directly in his discussion of life in the

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Encyclopaedia Logic. As he explains, the genus particularizes itself into sexes relating to each other for its perpetuation, hence as two particulars of the universal (*EL*: §220).[5] Still, Hegel recognizes that not all life is sexually differentiated.

Hegel's most extensive discussions of sexual difference occur in his Jena writings on the philosophy of nature from 1805–06, which appear in edited form by Karl Ludwig Michelet as additions to the *Philosophy of Nature*. Alison Stone notes that, although 'it might seem that we cannot wisely interpret Hegel's mature conception of men, women, and their social roles',

> the very fact that Hegel did not include an account of sex difference in the main paragraphs of his mature *Philosophy of Nature*, and that he did not in his maturity give sex difference the same prominence as he did at the time of his Jena drafts […] suggests that he saw no need to qualify or revise his Jena account of sex difference. He presumably remained satisfied with this account, as is also suggested by the fact that the Jena account ties in with those comments on sex difference that he did make during the Berlin and Heidelberg years, as well as with his treatment of women in the *Philosophy of Right*. (Stone 2010: 216)

In his Jena account, Hegel characterizes sexual difference in plants as 'quite partial' or undeveloped, which clarifies what he takes sexual difference to be (*PN*: §344A). First, plants lack a sufficiently developed return-to-self whereby living universality penetrates organs; at least some parts of plants exist as individuals of their own, capable of subsistence outside of its relation to the other parts of the plant (*PN*: §345A). Sexual difference, strictly speaking, exists between 'two opposed and independent sexes' in distinct individuals (*PN*: §342A).[6] Second, the capacity for plants to develop distinct sexual parts from an initially sexless state marks the inessentiality of their sexed parts. In contrast, sexes properly speaking must not be separable from the otherwise indifferent individual but a principle penetrating the entirety of the individual and its 'disposition' (*PN*: §348A). Third, plants do not require sexual copulation for reproduction, with this being 'a game and a luxury […] not essential to propagation' as opposed to a fully developed sexual difference marking the negation of sexed individuals (*PN*: §348A).

Hegel provides a more extended discussion of sexual difference in the context of animality. While some animals can reproduce asexually (*PN*: §365A),[7] the sex-relationship marks a 'need' on the part of sexed individuals to sublate their inadequacy viz-à-viz the genus (*PN*: §368). The sex-relationship reflects the inadequacy of the individual to the genus that is its substance or truth; the individual

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living being seeks to sublate this contradiction by bringing the genus into existence in connection with another sex of that genus. The sexual relation is thus reduced to the propagation of the genus, marking the deficiency of an individual against the genus. Although 'the individual as a *singular being* is not adequate to the immanent genus', the sex-relation is 'the identical self-relation of the genus in a single unity' (*PN*: §368). The sex-relation implicates this 'affirmative positing of the identity of both individuals' belonging to a common genus by their being 'mediated by this negation' of their sexed particularity (*PN*: §348A).

Presumably, Hegel's account might encompass certain empirical divergences in nature, for instance, how not all individuals actually reproduce or how the genus might evolve.[8] Yet, Hegel reduces the ontological significance of sexual difference to resolving the contradiction of the individual living being. This move may be charged with the idealist inversion of reality by explaining reality from a concept, declaring a logical contradiction to drive the activity of the real world. Better put, the problem might be that Hegel understands living phenomena following a pure logic of life that can be described otherwise. We will return to this question.

For Hegel, sexual difference is directed to both the propagation of life and the death of the sexed individual.[9] The reproduction of the genus amounts to the negation of the sexed individual into an asexual (*geschlechtslos*) genus process, hence the 'disappearance of the sexes' (*PN*: §368A). The common, asexual genus 'permeates both [sexes], and both find themselves within the sphere of this universality' (*PN*: §368A). It 'underlies both male and female genitals' (*PN*: §368A). Hegel seems to reason that, because the sexes commonly refer to one genus, the genus must be neither particular sex. As such, the particular sex of each living individual is nothing more than the expression of its inadequacy to this universal genus: 'The genus is present in the individual as a strain opposed to the inadequacy of its single [sexed] actuality' (*PN*: §368). Its union with the sexed other '[brings] the genus into existence' (*PN*: §368).

We may also understand the asexual genus in terms of the logic of chemism.[10] Although sexual difference is a phenomenon of life, and hence cannot be adequately grasped in inorganic terms, Hegel claims that 'in animate things, the sex relation falls under this schema' of chemism (*SL*: 646). In logical terms, chemical objects are opposed to each other as one particular object against another. Any particular object is determined in relation to that opposing particular lying externally to it, thus referring in itself to it. Yet, Hegel claims, this essential reference to totality leads it to '[strive] to sublate the immediate determinateness of its existence and to give concrete existence to the objective totality of the concept' (*SL*: 646). The striving of the particulars to sublate their one-sidedness is likewise a striving to unite with what they lack against the totality, sublating the one-sidedness of the other extreme in turn. When this unity is

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realized, the particulars dissolve into the 'neutrality' of totality (*SL*: 647). This neutrality becomes the new middle term or universal between extremes into which they dissolve. However, the neutral product presupposes the process that gives rise to it out of the opposed particulars, implying an essential reference to their subsistence as extremes (*SL*: 647). The neutral product is itself conceived as an extreme against the extremes, meaning the universal dirempts back into the extremes, just as in the sexual relation. In terms of sexual difference, the asexuality of the genus amounts to a neutralization of the sexual poles that come again to be affirmed.

This chemical logic can reflect the sexual relation assuming there really *is* a moment of non-sexuate universality in the genus process. Does that moment really exist? Hegel seems to accept that there is a literal moment of asexuality under the presupposition that embryos are hermaphroditic,[11] or as 'sexually undifferentiated, as without sexual function or impulse' (Okazaki 2022: 206–207). However, there is a breakdown in the logical connection between sexual difference and chemism because no individual, even a sexually undifferentiated one, could be adequate to the universal genus, which inheres in life, not as its own particularity. Moreover, depending on which sex traits we consider like chromosomes, there may be no purely sexless foetal moment for most living beings. Even if we posit this sexless moment considering other sex characteristics, a hermaphroditic organism need not be considered sexless, while a theoretically sexually undifferentiated being of some kind could still be considered sexually differentiated in a sense, namely, in its difference to the sexual difference of its kind. In any case, the concept of a neuter genus does not depend on a really existing neuter moment; it can be understood instead as the universal common to both particular sexes, relating them as members of *the same* genus. And Hegel nevertheless admits this sexless life is determined to develop back into 'the same natural individuality, and into a corresponding sexual differentiation and transience' (*PN*: §369). Since the genus process operates through sexed individuals, the contradiction of bad infinity persists.[12]

II. The hierarchical logic of sexual difference

Hegel's teleological reduction of sexual difference to copulation and the reproduction of the genus colours his analysis of its content. His analysis of the difference between male and female sexes in animals is presented exclusively in terms of their supposed roles in sexual reproduction. We find no discussion of non-reproductive pleasure in connection to sexuality or any other function of sexuality, for that matter, in his account of nature. Nor do we find an account of

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the significance of sexual difference beyond its teleological sublation for social reproduction in the transition from family to civil society; the functions of natural reproduction parallel, for Hegel, the social functions of men and women. Hegel's interpretation of sexual reproduction serves as the mediator between natural and spiritual sublation by associating the male with the principle of activity, sublated in the domain of spirit as social transcendence, and the female with the principle of passivity or undifferentiation. As such, this section considers Hegel's characterization of male and female sexes in terms of its restriction by this teleological treatment.

In the Jena writings, Hegel ruminates on how the female reproductive system is 'necessarily the undifferentiated element' of copulation or exhibits an 'undeveloped unity', whereas the male is 'the sundered element of opposition' or an 'active principle' (*PN*: §368A). Reminiscent of the Aristotelian conception of copulation,[13] he associates the female with the 'material element' of copulation in contrast to the seed expelled by the male representing the principles of activity and 'subjectivity' (*PN*: §368A).[14] According to Stone, these characterizations might reflect how the female continuously sustains the foetus, whereas 'the single emission of semen "represents" the child-to-be as a single individual' (Stone 2010: 227). In any case, Hegel considers the correspondence of various sex organs between males and females, supporting this image of male sexuality as active and differentiated versus female sexuality as undeveloped and passive. The medial line of the scrotum is paralleled in the vagina; the lips are conceived as shrunken scrota. The uterus, as the 'undifferentiated' site for receiving sperm and growing offspring, is reduced to a matter of indifference for the male in the prostate as a mere gland (*PN*: §368A). The ovary fails to become, as it does in the testicle, 'an independent and active cerebrality' (*PN*: §368A). And the 'active sensibility' of the penis, marked by its 'effusion of blood', has its counterpart in the 'inactive feeling' of the clitoris and menstruation (*PN*: §368A).

According to Yuka Okazaki, Hegel's account diverges in several respects from Galen's 'one-sex' model, as it makes no mention of 'vital heat' and does not correspond the same sexed parts (2022: 201). The point of others like Tina Chanter (1995: 84–85) and Laura Werner (2010: 206) who invoke the one-sex model is not that there is a technical correspondence to Galen but a general attitude that the female sex is a less developed form of the male sex. In fact, Okazaki also claims that Hegel's Jena account follows this line. The characterizations of the 'undeveloped' and 'undifferentiated' female and the references to Jacob Ackermann's research on hermaphroditism, which Hegel claims makes it 'quite understandable that one sex should change into the other' (*PN*: §368A), supposedly shows that the young Hegel conceives of females as less developed forms of males (Okazaki 2022: 201f.). In contrast, Okazaki claims, by the time

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of his lectures on nature, starting with the 1819–20 transcript, Hegel characterizes human beings and other higher animals as primordially hermaphroditic (*ursprünglich hermaphroditisch*), underscoring the common type underlying them and their formation from the same type, albeit differently (*GW*: 24/1: 173; *GW*: 24/2: 1158). Male and female sexes are therefore no longer related as deficient male to fully realized male but in terms of two distinct ways of differentiating from this 'asexual' state. Still, there is actually no significant discontinuity in Hegel's account of sexual difference; his earlier work accepts that the genitals of the sexes correspond to each other precisely because 'the same type underlies both' (*PN*: §368A), without implying the female is an undeveloped male.[15] The undeveloped or undifferentiated nature of the female can be read as a comparison between different individuals without implying that females are literally less developed males.

More radically, following Hegel's logic of sexual difference, females *could not* be inadequate males. While Werner claims that Hegel 'constructs sexual and gender difference as a *difference within the male*' (Werner 2010: 204), this would contradict the particularity of the female sex recognized by Hegel. While Stone claims that Hegel considers the female 'the being-outside-itself *of* the male […] an inadequate, self-alienated form of the male', this would ignore how the particularity of the male sex is also inadequate to the asexual genus in Hegel's account (Stone 2010: 226).

Nevertheless, Hegel also treats the differences between sexes hierarchically, not between two *equal* particulars. Although what is undeveloped or undifferentiated might not imply lower or less rational, Hegel's philosophical project involves tracing the stages of rationality in nature towards more complete adequation. As Stone explains, the association of females with matter and males with subjectivity or concept-permeated individuality, in the context of this project, is not insignificant for a sexual hierarchy (Stone 2006: 224–25). The problem of hierarchy becomes explicit in Hegel's analysis of spirit or the distinctly human realm of existence characterized by its rationality and sociality, with the association of men with universality and women with particularity in a new sense.[16] Men realize the rational essence of human spirit in a way generally foreclosed to women. They remain particulars in the genus process, unable to realize its universality, but as this particular sex attain a rational universality that is the truth or end of human spirit *as such*.

Considering how spirit sublates nature, it would be surprising for Hegel to make biologically deterministic claims about sex differences in human beings. We as spirit can make tools of our bodies, oppose our ego to the body, and imbue the body with social meaning. As Stone explains, the realm of human spirit imparts new meaning on our natural determinations, enfolding them within its structures, '[rendering] this material functional for its own ends, thereby imparting

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to this material an enhanced level of rationality' (Stone 2006: 222). The natural determinations of sexual difference come to be spiritually elevated and expressed in new ethical and intellectual significance by human beings, most importantly in its transformation into a properly ethical relation in non-capricious familial love (*PM*: §397, 518; *PhG*: §459; *LNR*: §§76–77; *PR*: §165).[17] In this sense, as he claims in the *Philosophy of Mind*, 'the difference of the natural sexes also appears at the same time as a difference of intellectual and ethical determination' (*PM*: §519).

Surprisingly, then, Hegel also claims that the natural difference between sexes, marked by differences of passivity and activity, extends into the realm of spirit (*PN*: §355A; *LNR*: §77). Stone denies that, for Hegel, biology 'predisposes [men and women] toward certain kinds of activities and away from others', although 'men's and women's different biological traits reflect and realize a difference in reproductive roles that is required by the metaphysical character of reproduction' (Stone 2010: 221). Likewise, Werner claims that the difference between sexes has a conceptual, rather than biological, basis, with neither material bodies or social and political life determining each other; they rather 'both result from the spirito-conceptual actual difference he perceives' between male and female sexes (Werner 2010: 197). However, although these interpretations rightly challenge simplistically deterministic views of the relation between nature and spirit, there is no clear distinction between the metaphysical and the biological in this case. Hegel does not derive the roles of male and female sexes logically but bases them on a perception of their anatomy. Hegel clearly argues that natural determinations provide a ground for distinct forms of subjectivity. The natural determinations of sex call for institutions capable of sublating them in the first place, responsive to the ground that these determinations provide for human sociality.

Hegel might be basing his remarks on men and women, to some extent, on empirical observation of his day. Yet, he presents this gendered division as a necessity or inevitability, marking a metaphysical closure for women,[18] when his dialectical method could be used to challenge why nature could not be more completely sublated by spirit, never mind the spurious characterizations of these natural determinations. We will return to this critique.

Hegel repeatedly connects women's difficulty differentiating from their sexual determination toward rational universality to their natural sexed determinations. The sex-relationship is akin to a relation between 'a subjectivity remaining in immediate unity with its substance' (woman) 'and a subjectivity entering into opposition to this substance' (man), associated with the 'sleeping soul' and the 'waking soul' of an individual, respectively (*PM*: §398A). Men, unlike women, better assert their subjectivity in opposition to worldly being. Given the predominance of their less differentiated *feeling*, women, like animals,

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are more susceptible than men to certain natural influences like magnetism (*PM*: §406A). Alternatively, if men are closer to animals in their activity, their ability to act in the world as individuals, women are more akin to plants that lack fully realized individuality, 'for the [plant] is a more peaceful unfolding whose principle is the more indeterminate unity of feeling' (*PM*: §406A).[19]

It seems to me ungenerous to interpret these already egregious pronouncements about women too literally. It is not as if, for Hegel, women literally lack all capacity for understanding or reason, as if they were literally incapable of articulate speech like plants or animals. However, the accomplishments of women are always qualified. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel accepts that women can be educated, although 'imperceptibly […] more through living than through the acquisition of knowledge' (*PR*: §166A). He even grants that, upon the completion of education, both sons and daughters become recognized as persons under the law, hold free property of their own, and found their own families, albeit with men as heads and women as wives (*PR*: §177). He also recognizes that some women have deviated from 'the essential vocation' of the sexes, albeit with further qualifications, for instance how the state is threatened when women come to power 'for their actions are based not on the demands of universality but on contingent inclination and opinion' (*PR*: §166A). Hegel even allows that women occasionally enter into the domains of art or science, although he denies the significance of their accomplishments and claims that they are not 'made for' these domains and the rationality they demand (*PM*: §406A).[20]

Those who would charge Hegel with contradicting his commitments to the freedom of spirit by denying half of spirit access to freedom must contend with these complications. It is not the case, as Allen Wood claims, that Hegel contradicts himself by seeing women as humans, hence subjects, but denying them subjectivity by denying them a particular social or political standing (Wood 1990: 245). Women are indeed free and self-conscious subjects in Hegel's account, only they fail to attain the more concrete or realized expressions of freedom in objective and absolute spirit for themselves (or, almost always, exist in these structures as passive imbibers of male accomplishments).[21]

Even with occasional deviations from their 'essential vocation', however, women generally fail to differentiate from the 'instinctive and emotional harmony' of the sexual relation, Hegel says. The social distinction between sexes has its origin in their 'physical basis':

> This—the sexual relation—on a physical basis, shows, on its one side, subjectivity remaining in an instinctive and emotional harmony of moral life and love, and not pushing these tendencies to an extreme universal phase, in purposes political, scientific, or artistic; and, on the other, shows an active half,

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> where the individual is the vehicle of a struggle of universal and objective interests with the given conditions (both of his own existence and of that of the external world), carrying out these universal principles into a unity with the world which is his own work. (*PM*: §397)

For Hegel, the concrete universal of free rationality can be achieved only through the arduous labour of uniting with difference, of identifying with oneself in otherness, thus in recognizing the world as one's own on which to labour with other free agents in such domains as the state, science and art. As the domain of historical development, freedom becomes more concrete or complete with the increasingly self-conscious recognition of one's freedom as a process of appropriating otherness and reflecting oneself in it, sustained by social and political infrastructures established toward this end. The universal at stake is thus one in which spirit reunites with itself and comes to know itself in otherness as the result of its self-sundering. It is a development toward the rational communities in which spirit can thus freely act on the world and transform it and the intellectual pursuits whereby spirit can know itself and its free essence.[22]

This concrete universality is realized only by men, not women.[23] As Werner claims, men work on the world and realize themselves in it, attaining an identity that does not '[close] out difference but [is] necessarily connected to it' (Werner 2010: 200). The 'free universality' or 'powerful and active' nature of men leads them to have their 'actual substantial life in the state, in learning, etc., and otherwise in work and struggle with the external world and with himself', in contrast to the passivity and subjectivity of women (*PR*: §166). Women attain only 'formal, abstract identity and unity without the reflexive process of self-differentiation', lacking 'inner complexity that results from the labor of first dividing and opposing themselves and only after that finding themselves again' (Werner 2010: 200). They lack the capacity to labour on the world and realize universally accessible achievements, or to be part of those achievements, as part of a rational community. They fail to put aside familial interests to work in civil institutions or produce universal, scientific truths. Hence, women fail to realize themselves fully as socially active, free, and rational agents, and women's individuality is not reconciled with rational university (*LNR*: §77; *PR*: §166).

Hegel further connects the 'activity' of men and the 'passivity' of women to their respective social roles in the family and civil society. As Stone notes, for Hegel, the family is an ethical community 'whose members share a sense of their common good and lack any sense of purely individual interests', although it also meets the desires of '*physical*, corporeal, individuals' (Stone 2006: 167–68). In cases of moral love, both sexes feel the drive to renounce their independence in establishing a family (*PR*: §161). As such, men also belong to families and

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experience dependence in them. Nevertheless, Hegel claims that men should partake in the family as its head, controlling its resources (*PR*: §171),[24] and also '[have] another field of ethical activity apart from the family' (*PR*: §164A). In contrast, the vocation of women 'consists essentially only in the marital relationship' (*PR*: §164A). They meet the sensuous needs of their husbands 'so that, reinvigorated, he may rejoin the quest to further the universal' (*LNR*: §77). As Mary C. Rawlinson explains, for Hegel, 'the purpose and result of [women's] labor is to *free* man *from* the body and its needs, so that he may be *free for* the theoretical pursuits of politics and science' (Rawlinson 2016: 86).[25] Women, Rawlinson continues, 'having no access to these domains, remain tied to particularity and to the repetitive, rather than "formative", labor of caring for the body' (2021: 125). For Hegel, women are not only inadequate in science, politics, and philosophy; their participation 'jeopardizes the entire human enterprise by leaving the body untended' (Rawlinson 2016: 90). In this narrative, women thus serve, in their familial role, as the ground for the reproduction of male sociality.[26]

The genus process is sublated in the moral love of the family and its now social reproduction, although the natural inevitability of death becomes a problem for the renewal of society. Much of Hegel's discussion of the family concerns the status of the child.[27] While the 'natural dissolution' of the family occurs with the death of its members, the *ethical* dissolution of the family, or the transition to a higher sphere of ethical existence, 'consists in the fact that the children are brought up to become free personalities' in the state and civil society (*PR*: §177; see also *PM*: §§521–22). The truth of the family, its telos, is its sublation by civil institutions establishing the rational, self-realizing personhood of its members (*PR*: §159). Yet, this ethical dissolution is sexually differentiated. While both men and women go on to establish families of their own, only men realize the rational universal to which the family is directed. The boy will have access to civil society in a way generally foreclosed to the girl. The sister will be unable to see herself in the universal accomplishments of her brother and return his rational gaze.[28]

The sexual indifferentiation of the rational universal thus has two aspects: first, it is an activity of only one sex; and second, it realizes the truth of spirit *as such*, the most realized expression of its freedom, where women fail to attain their own truth. In the realm of spirit, the sexual difference of the family is directed toward the sexually undifferentiated universal.

Yet, the rational universal relies on sexual difference as its sublated ground. For Hegel, one sex attains the universal where the other fails *because the other fails*. The labour of the universal thus continues to rely on sexual difference, on the ethical substance of the family and women's labour.[29] Even if the truth of the family is its ethical dissolution, the subordination of the family to the public structures of ethical life, meaning it ought not hold absolute authority over

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its members in opposition to the civil community, this community relies on the family. The difference between Hegel's account of the Ancient Greek form of the family in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the modern family in the *Philosophy of Right* hinges on the recognition of this dependence. As Stone explains, rather than 'signal the dissolution of political community', the modern state 'legally protects, supports, and regulates the family and civil society' so that individuals 'can, reciprocally, recognise the validity of pursuing private interests', since 'people's pursuit of their separate interests now typically elevates them to adhere to the common good' (Stone 2006: 177; see also *PR*: §260). Hegel's account of women as the 'eternal irony' of the community (*PhG*: 460) in the dialectic between family and civil society thus falls away in modern sociality, at least superficially. But it falls away not because women are any more inclined toward the rational universal. Rather, this achievement belongs to the civil institutions of men, capable of organizing society to sublate the family to the rational universal more adequately.

III. Beyond the end of sexual difference

It would be a mistake to conflate the systematic importance of sexual difference for Hegel's account of nature and spirit with the impossibility of interpreting Hegel otherwise. We may recognize, on the one hand, that Hegel's account of spirit relies on a limited and limiting understanding of the natural significance of sexual difference. If we erase Hegel's comments on sexual difference as obviously outdated or naïve, we remove an essential component of his account of nature and spirit. Given the systematic importance of Hegel's comments on sexual difference for universality, neutering nature and spirit amounts not to preserving the rest of his system against a momentary bias to be excised but the entire reimagining of these domains. The problem of sexual difference must be tarried with, I argue, to grasp the Hegelian system as Hegel presents it. Yet, on the other hand, once we recognize this systematic importance, challenging Hegel's account of sexual difference reveals the exercise for what it is: a reimagining of the universal. It may well be a question how far this reimagining can go while remaining Hegelian. Yet, that question would arise for anyone who rejects Hegel's account of universality viz-à-viz sexual difference in order to excise the arguably uncritical elements from his system.

In this section, I critique Hegel's teleological reduction of sexual difference to the sexually undifferentiated universality of the natural genus and rational spirit. In conversation with his feminist critics, I consider how Hegel's account of sexual difference is marked by a certain closure of its significance to its own end. The critique is motivated by two ideas.

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First, despite its limits, Hegel's account of sexual difference reveals an essential relatedness between sexes significant to the conception of most life, including human life and sociality. Hegel's most important lesson may be that no one sex can be all that a genus can be, hence that we cannot reduce the sexed other without contradicting one's own determination as sexed. Indeed, his account of the genus process and the tides of generations reminds us of the essential relationality and dependence of the (sexed) living individual, including the human being, on the difference of sexes. For such beings, this dependence is ontological in that the individual cannot exist without belonging to some sex or relating otherwise to sexual difference as its genetic condition of possibility.[30] The ontological is meant broadly in the sense of pertaining to the very being of some being. From the Hegelian perspective, an account of the being of sexed beings must include reference to sexual difference, hence a negative relation to sexual others. Despite his hierarchal view of the sexes, Hegel also considers the role of sexual difference in the constitution of distinct masculine and feminine subjectivities. The feminine subject remains a real other to man, opening a gendered division of labour in and between family and civil society. As such, Hegel's account stands opposed to a philosophical tradition that has thought the subject as neuter or modelled as only *one*. Although we may be more sceptical of how Hegel ontologizes gender roles, he gestures to the irreducibility of the one sexed subject to the other.[31] In these respects, he anticipates feminists like Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz who consider the irreducibility of sexual difference for conceiving both nature and human sociality.[32]

Second, the critique of Hegel reveals alternative possibilities for conceiving the natural and spiritual universal for a non-hierarchal account of sexual ontology. By demonstrating how Hegel's account of sexual difference is uncritically restricted by a teleological reduction of its significance, we justify this critical exercise as a challenge to the supposed inevitability of describing sexual difference in Hegel's terms. It reveals a certain unquestioned but not inevitable interpretation undergirding the Hegelian account. We may uptake the Hegelian lesson to think essential relationality of the sexes to think its significance differently than does Hegel, which may allow us to reimagine or reopen a Hegelian philosophy of nature and spirit for today. I cannot exhaust that task in this short article. However, I offer two criticisms of the teleological analysis that ends sexual difference for Hegel. The first, concerning the natural genus, offers a way of conceiving sexual difference without resorting to death. The second, concerning sexual hierarchy, offers a way of conceiving the universality of human sociality as sexually differentiated, with women having access to the rational accomplishments of civil society.

As it concerns the natural genus, the directedness of sexual difference to death fails to engage its significance as a living and lived limit for the sexed

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individual adequately. Just as Hegel provides us the ground for thinking this relationality at the heart of sexed existence, he reduces the truth of the living individual to its own death in the neuter genus. Hegel justifies this reduction by modelling his analysis of natural life off of the logical concept of life. Yet, as a logical concept, the genus is not threatened with death like it is in its natural significance. Although Hegel recognizes the dependence of the universal on the tides of individuals both logically and naturally, he does not consider the fragility of the universal in view of the fragility of its instantiations in individuals in the natural world. The reductive orientation of life toward death for the sake of perpetuating life may thus be challenged as a logical imposition onto nature. The purpose of the living individual may well be not to die for the genus, asserting its individuality to other ends, thus challenging the priority of the neuter universal to its sexed individuality in some respect. Moreover, recognizing the dependence of the genus on living individuals contains the seed of a dialectical reversal for conceiving both the logic and natural expression of life. If the genus depends on living individuals, the purpose of the genus might instead be grasped as the cultivation and flourishing of individuals in their many instantiations of this universality or common belonging. The failure of the individual to exhaust this universal might be understood as a creative divergence rather than a simple demand for death, even if death proves inevitable for it. The individual may be negated but not for the neuter genus.

This critique does not imply that Hegel is mistaken in claiming that the individual is inadequate to the universal genus, which in both pure logic and the philosophy of nature marks the conceptual limit of life and its transition to spirit. Yet, even if we preserved the deficiency of the individual, we need not reduce the individual to its negation or dissolution into the genus.

While Hegel considers sexual difference as if it were a tool for perpetuating the genus, the logical and natural significance of sex may be expanded to include the cultivation of a sexed being's living singularity. When we conceive death as the fundamental limit of life, we fail to consider sex as a living limit through which we can reconfigure ourselves and our relations to the (sexed) other and to our environments. According to Irigaray, whose critique of Heidegger on death is apropos of Hegel's analysis of life, the relational structure of sexual difference 'solves the question of [...] finiteness without necessarily having to resort to death' (Irigaray 2017: 3). The sex of the living individual is a mark—at least one of the marks—of its being the not-all of the genus. For the human being, who may take up this sexed finiteness in its free projects, sexual difference might thus mark the return to self in the recognition of our limit and the cultivation of a relation to another subject through that limit, which Irigaray labels 'self-affection' and 'hetero-affection' respectively.[33] For Irigaray, attentiveness to our own sexed finitude or not-all of the genus might prepare us to relate to sexed others in their

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sensuous presence, beyond any external purposiveness or drive for domination, as irreducible and inexhaustible partners of desire. In contrast, despite discussing ethical love and a gendered division of social labour, Hegel does not detail how one might form relations with oneself and others considering the sexed potentialities of the body. In other words, what is apparently missing in Hegel's analysis is how sexual difference might be cultivated or experienced beyond natural or social reproduction. The sense of sex for Hegel remains tied to the transcending of sexual difference rather than a directedness of the individual toward its own sex or the sex of the other beyond a reproductive logic.

The restrictive focus on reproduction also grounds the metaphysical closure of the rational universal to women (Brauer 2007: 129). As Simone de Beauvoir claims, Hegel's mistake is 'to argue from significance to necessity [...] Man gives significance to the sexes and their relations through sexual activity, just as he gives sense and value to all the functions that he exercises; but sexual activity is not necessarily implied in the nature of the human being' (de Beauvoir 1989: 7).[34] Hegel's discussion of male and female sexes not only reduces them to their roles in reproduction but also interprets these roles spuriously. Is it surprising that Hegel does not notice the excitation of the clitoris when he thinks of copulation not in terms of pleasure but in terms of reproductive function? Do we not also see the potential for this excitation, for this activity and effusion of blood, in that sexual act? Is it surprising that Hegel thinks the male sex to be differentiated and oppositional thanks to the visibility of the penis from flaccid to erect? Yet, what justifies characterizing male sexuality as active with this shift in excitation? Might we not instead conceive the copulative act in terms of the engulfing of the penis by the vagina? Why would the erect penis justify the oppositional characterization of male activity and female passivity? Does he think the uterus as the undifferentiated site for reproduction, as a receptacle for male activity, because he imagines it as empty, as a lack? Does he not see how the uterus can become a differentiated interval for nourishing life? Is the problem a matter of visibility—what is visible, that is, to *him*?[35]

These questions challenge the passivity-activity binary Hegel overlays on the male-female binary. The deconstruction of this binary has already been enacted in some contemporary feminist philosophy, with both masculine and feminine sexuality being recognized as multiple and dynamic, with different sites of the body having active and passive functions, including beyond its restrictively copulative functions.[36] As feminist cultural critics have long recognized, the classical narrative of the copulative process as one of male activity and female passivity mirrors entrenched gender stereotypes. The active role of the egg in fertilization is easily erased when historically entrenched social roles between the sexes are projected onto the process (Martin 1991). We may also consider how certain expressions of sex and sexuality, both human and non-human, do

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not conform to Hegel's binary characterizations of male and female, to which Hegel gives only rudimentary voice in his discussions of Ackermann and the 'transitional sex' (*Uebergangsgeschlecht*).[37] Indeed, part of the problem of Hegel's otherwise generally binary account of sex is whether the wide diversity of sexual expressions across life fit into it and how we might recategorize sexes considering our ethical, political, and scientific investments.[38]

What might be most jarring about Hegel's account of sexual difference as a hierarchal difference might be, however, the metaphysical closure of the rational universal to women *as such*. The conflation of significance with necessity requires not only the erasure of the historical accomplishments of women but the denial of future possibilities for gender roles. On this question, with Hegel's univocity on the inaccessibility of the rational universal to women, there seems to be no waiting for Minerva's owl to fly. Instead, understanding gender both in terms of individual identity and social recognition, we may recognize the sexed facticity of the body as sublated in our spiritual projects, infused with meaning, and itself open to transformation. This is not to say that corporeity has no role in structuring subjectivity, at least possibly so, but simply that what it means to live with our sex cannot be determined prior to our experience of it.

Despite this metaphysical closure, Rawlinson notes that, in recognizing the unique contributions of women to human sociality, Hegel opens us to considering the essential role of women's labour in it (Rawlinson 2021: 127–29). As she writes, 'neither women's labor, nor maternal thinking, nor the complex dramas of family life are afforded any serious phenomenological analysis' by Hegel (Rawlinson 2021: 127). Yet, Hegel points to the necessity of these aspects of human sociality, historically coded feminine, as they undergird civil society. When we de-ontologize the hierarchal aspects in Hegel's analysis of sexual difference, recognizing them instead as contingent configurations, we may better reckon with the rational justifications undergirding this gendered division of labour between family and civil society, particularly the need to care for the body and sensuous individuality against our reduction to abstract citizens or 'someones'. The historical inheritance of this division of labour and its subsequent weakening may inform our understanding of contemporary forms of human sociality and their dialectics. Indeed, considering this historical inheritance, we might better understand continued disparities between sexes and the continued influence of gender roles in structuring the relations of private and public. As the division falls away without adequate replacement by new social forms capable of addressing care of the body and family, we might also inform our understanding of contemporary problems concerning social alienation or disintegration. We might also ask how best to think a sexually differentiated civil society, namely, whether the difference between sexes is entirely indifferent to the work of the rational universal or whether difference should be recognized

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in policies like sexed rights. In other words, the question today is whether the rational universal, as the work of different sexes, hence sexually differentiated in that regard, might itself be indifferent to sexual difference.

Before critically reappropriating Hegel to conceive a rational universal no longer built on a sexual hierarchy, the natural and rational universal must be critiqued. In this article, I have sought only to open space for this critique against the teleological reductionism in Hegel's account of sexual difference. Still more is to be done to think through the rational universal beyond this reductionism. It might be easy enough for feminist thinkers to forego the critique and offer an account of nature and spirit without reference to Hegel. Yet, Hegel might still provide resources for thinking through the ontological nature of sexual difference. And these paths *must* be thought for those of us still invested in Hegelian philosophy and its promise of the universal.

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Notes

[1] For Hegel, gendered categories are (problematically) tied to natural sex. This is one reason I prefer speaking of *sexual difference* rather than *sex difference*. In my use of it, sexual difference can encompass an analysis of natural sex and also a consideration of how sex is lived through in social contexts.

[2] See, for example, (de Beauvoir 1989: 7), (Brauer 2007: 129), (O'Brien 1996), (Polish 2014), (Stone 2010: 224–25) and (Werner 2010: 202–205).

[3] Given this encyclopaedic focus, I will leave aside any extended analysis of men and women in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or a critique of the Ancient Greek mode of family life. Still, I follow Jessica Polish's suggestion that readings of these texts may be enriched with a more systematic reading of sexual difference, grasped logically and in its natural and spiritual aspects, in the mature system (Polish 2014: 74). Engagements with Hegel's mature systematic account of sexual difference continue to be sparse, as Polish notes, although recent attention has been paid to this question, as I discuss. Others with whom I do not engage at length but who have discussed this systematic significance include Bockenheimer (2013: 205–12) and Lettow (2013: 124–26).

[4] English quotations come from the translations below. Abbreviations used:
EL = Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991).

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GW = Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968–).
LNR = Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science*, trans. J. M. Stewart and P. C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
PhG = Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
PM = Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).
PN = Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. M. J. Petry (New York: Humanities Press, 1970).
PR = Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
SL = Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[5] Why not consider, as Luce Irigaray for instance does, sexes as themselves universals? As Irigaray writes, 'this universal that is *in* her or him: woman or man' (1996: 48). As if speaking directly to Hegel, she explains that 'my part of the universal is *within me*, and I do not have to go out of myself or renounce my nature in order to attain it' (1996: 144). In fact, I think we could on Hegelian grounds call the sexes universals viz-à-viz the particular sexed beings falling under them. But sexes are particulars as compared to the genus common to them.

[6] Even in dioecious plants, Hegel claims, those plants lack the developed principle of individuality, sexual parts remain quasi-independent (*PN*: §348A).

[7] See also Hegel's discussion of the hermaphroditism of lower animals in his lectures from 1819–20 (*GW*: 24/1, 173).

[8] Although not all sexed individuals actually reproduce, the contradiction with their genus persists in them while others do reproduce; the aspects of Hegel's account would still hold. The account might even encompass evolutionary divergences if the universality of the genus is understood in broader terms.

[9] Note that Hegel does not imply that all individuals literally die immediately after the act of copulation.

[10] Although she discusses the 'polarity' of sexes (2014), we do not find an analysis of chemism in Stone's discussion. Polish, in contrast, discusses this logic, although she does not underscore how the sexed poles are negated into a neutral product (2014: 27–30).

[11] I will follow Hegel's technical use of the term 'hermaphrodite', although it is important to underscore the antiquated nature of the term in contemporary discourse about intersexuality.

[12] In his lectures from 1819–20, Hegel articulates this bad infinity as the 'tedious cycle from sex to sex [den langweiligen Kreislauf von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht]' (*GW*: 24/1, 173).

[13] Although one might be tempted to understand Hegel's analysis of sexual difference in exclusively Aristotelian terms, Yuka Okazaki convincingly contextualizes Hegel's comments in terms of contemporaries like Jacob Ackermann, Lorenz Oken, Johann Friedrich Meckel and Friedrich Tiedemann (Okazaki 2022).

[14] 'The animal, unlike the plant, is a *subject*. This means that rather than being wholly externally determined by environment, animals preserve themselves inwardly, forming a mediated

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unity that allows for the emergence of self-determination and autonomous action. Hegel finds animal life to be a concrete (that is, differentiated) unity that is *relatively* free from the externality that dominates nature as such. Somewhat unencumbered by natural forces, the animal exhibits individuality emerging from under the domination of the environment and even of the species' (Mussett 2017: 398).

[15] Hegel's other comments on sexual difference across the lectures only confirm this continuity, underscoring for instance the activity of the male in contrast to the passivity of the female, the unity of the sexes in the asexuality of the genus, and so on.

[16] Hegel makes this point no more clearly than his early Jena lectures on spirit: 'The *sexes* are plainly in a [hierarchical] relation to one another, one the universal, the other the particular; they are not absolutely equal' (Hegel in Stone 2010: 228). O'Brien (1996: 182–83) discusses this passage at length in her analysis, somewhat confusingly, although she does not refer to Hegel's mature system in expounding its significance.

[17] I will leave aside further comments on the complexities of Hegel's account of love. Note only that the natural sexual drive is indeed involved in marriage but spiritualized, thus dignified ethically, at least when a properly ethical family is established (*PR*: §161). There is, of course, also a *not capricious* love and sexual desire in humans.

[18] Conversely, particularly considering Hegel's views on race, the door of rational universality is not *open* to all men, despite their natural inclinations, even if it is the unfolding of spirit's truth that *at least some men* do.

[19] This connection between women and plants occurs also in the work of Oken, as Okazaki explains (2022: 203).

[20] While women have made careers in science, 'they never penetrated deeply or made any discoveries'; while they have made careers in art, 'its ideal, plastic element is beyond the scope of their action' (*LNR*: §77).

[21] See (Inwood 1992: 112) for an account of different senses of freedom.

[22] Henceforth, my discussion of the spiritual or rational universal concerns this sense of universality, and I leave aside other possible senses in which Hegel speaks of universality in the context of spirit.

[23] Hegel's discussion of the 'ages of man' in the *Philosophy of Mind*, traces this development toward the universal from the initial inquietudes of boyhood toward the family, or an incipient drive to differentiate from it, to the integration into civil society in adulthood. Men enter civil society and labour in the world to reflect the world back to themselves as agents. There is not, and would not be, an 'ages of woman' directed toward this same realization of rational individuality. For an excellent discussion of the ages of man and the lack thereof of woman, see Polish (2014: 79–86).

[24] The family needs a head because it is treated as a singularity, thus calling for a representative in civil society (*PR*: §158). Wood claims that Hegel can preserve a division between family and civil society without a gendered division of labour (1990: 245f.). But I ask: does the rationality of these structures not itself depend on the particular natures of its citizens, their sensuous

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needs, and gendered capabilities? For Hegel, must men be the heads of the family precisely because women are incapable of the task?

[25] Note that Rawlinson analyses the family in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, although this point applies to the rest of Hegel's corpus on the family and sexual difference.

[26] It is not the case, as O'Brien claims it is (1996: 181), that Hegel denies reproductive labour as distinct from natural labour to women. It is, like everything natural in the spiritual realm, sublated. Women have a role in the family and are not simply natural beings. Their supposed 'impotence' in historical developments, in the cultivation of our transcendent 'second nature' (1996: 188), arises precisely because their *social standing* is restricted to the family.

[27] Note, however, that Hegel does not *reduce* the purpose of the family to raising children, nor does he claim that all couples must have children to have an ethical familial relation (see *LNR*: §78, §80). The care of the body for social reproduction does seem to be an essential role of the family, however.

[28] For an excellent discussion of the leaving behind of the sister by the brother, see Rawlinson (2016: 89; 2021: 127).

[29] As Rawlinson writes, 'if man "leaves behind" the mother and the sister, he nonetheless remains dependent on women's labor to care for the body and respiritualize the dead' (2021: 125).

[30] I have written about these ontological dimensions of sexual difference in the context of Irigaray, whose account of negativity is influenced by Hegel. See Sares (2023).

[31] Note that I am neither endorsing an essentialist view of masculine or feminine subjectivities nor attempting to determine what 'masculine' or 'feminine' as a style of being must imply. See further below for comments on challenging essentialism through the concept of sublating facticity. In any case, the ontological nature of sexual difference discussed above does not depend on any such attempt to define these forms of subjectivity.

[32] See the citations of Irigaray above. See also Grosz (2011) for some of her clearest discussions of the ontological significance of sexual difference.

[33] These terms appear across Irigaray's work. See, for example, Irigaray (2017: 17).

[34] For further consideration of Hegel's influence on de Beauvoir's conception of nature and sexual difference, see Mussett (2017: 400).

[35] See Irigaray (1985: 214–26).

[36] In the feminist literature, some of the most interesting discussions of the passivity and activity of the sexed body, and the significance these have for subjectivity, dialogue with Irigaray. For recent discussions of this for male and female sexes, respectively, see Anemtoaicei (2023) and Carter (2023).

[37] For discussion of Hegel and the problematic nature of classifying sexes given hermaphroditism, which Hegel discusses briefly in his 1828 lectures, see Okazaki (2022: 211–14). Okazaki explains how, following his critique of natural classifications, Hegel rejects 'the strict sex distinction'. Hegel does not develop this point at length.

[38] I cannot do justice to issues concerning trans, intersex and queer identities in this article. However, I note only that the possible recategorization of sexes would not contradict the

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senses of ontological negativity operative here so long as one recognizes the existence of sexes in relation to the reproductive logic of the genus. The confirmation of that existence, or the genus itself, requires nothing more, I would argue, than the adequation of being to our concepts.

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