Embodiment and Vulnerability in Fichte and Hegel

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ABSTRACT: This article uses Fichte and Hegel to explore the argument that vulnerability is valuable because it is what we all share as embodied beings in the world, and thus contributes to our connection with others. Further, recognition of one's own vulnerability promotes self-knowledge. Their philosophies are then contrasted to show that Fichte's system leads him to the attempt to overcome and control vulnerability, whereas Hegel's describes an interplay of freedom and determination that allows us to be reconciled to our vulnerable, embodied state.

RÉSUMÉ : À partir de Fichte et Hegel, ce texte explore l'argument selon lequel la vulnérabilité est importante parce que, partagée par tous les êtres incarnés, elle contribue à nous lier avec les autres. La reconnaissance de notre vulnérabilité contribue aussi à la connaissance de soi. Leurs philosophies sont comparées pour démontrer que le système de Fichte l'incite à essayer de contrôler la vulnérabilité, tandis que celui de Hegel décrit une interaction entre la liberté et la détermination qui nous permet de nous réconcilier avec notre état de vulnérabilité.

Both J.G. Fichte and G.W.F. Hegel develop accounts of human selfhood that foreground human interdependency and vulnerability. Their differing treatments of such vulnerability are rooted in their underlying metaphysics, and have implications for their responses to such things as poverty and illness. Whereas Fichte's approach throughout is premised on the need to overcome vulnerability with control, Hegel's is premised on reconciliation with it: this allows a more fruitful understanding of our embodied freedom.

Analyzing this historical contrast is useful since today it is becoming more common to argue that the open acknowledgement of human vulnerability

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provides an important counterpoint to traditional conceptions of autonomy.[1] Briefly, the argument runs as follows: vulnerability is an important part of humanity insofar as it is something that we all share, as embodied beings in the world. While there are many different kinds of vulnerability and ways to be vulnerable,[2] the specific form of vulnerability in question here is the fact that we have physical bodies that break down, that are subject to harm, that have needs that cannot be met in isolation. Recognizing this vulnerability promotes our self-knowledge, and thus increases our ability to assess our values, commitments, and plans. It can also help draw attention to our interdependence with others, and allow us to more adequately assess the ways in which our social ties, relationships, and environment shape our identity and our decisions. Recognizing that this vulnerability is shared can help to promote our empathy and identification with others, and to increase our attentiveness to others' needs.[3] Recognition of this vulnerability also helps combat the temptation to stigmatize those who are perceived as weaker, since it means that they are not held up to an artificial standard of independence and self-reliance.

Acknowledging our vulnerability can suggest two possible responses: to attempt to overcome it, or to be reconciled with it. The former has grave consequences. Within the context of disability and illness, Susan Wendell has described a "myth of control," which is the idea that as long as we eat the right things, exercise in the appropriate ways, and lead the correct lifestyle, then our health and well-being are ultimately under our control.[4] With this myth in place, we risk casting vulnerability as a weakness that we blame agents for failing to overcome; if instead we understand vulnerability as an essential characteristic of the human condition, we can formulate more appropriate assessments of ourselves and of others. This vulnerability is an inescapable consequence of our embodied state, which partly explains why the body has been so maligned through the history of philosophy. In rethinking the value of vulnerability, we also rethink our stance on embodiment. Theories of relational autonomy as developed over the last twenty years have increasingly suggested that our theories of autonomy should incorporate this understanding of the role of vulnerability, rather than trying to overcome or deny it.[5]

Not all are convinced of this move, however. In his 2004 book, *Therapy Culture*, sociologist and cultural commentator Frank Furedi argues that the contemporary emphasis within society on the acknowledgement of human vulnerability leads to a sense of powerlessness and a decreased sense of responsibility, which corresponds with decreased autonomy. As he writes, "contemporary culture answers these questions [about illness and trauma] by stating that everyone needs help and everyone needs support. That is why ideals of independence and self-sufficiency have given way to a culturally sanctioned state of dependency."[6] While Furedi acknowledges that "we all live in circumstances over which we can exercise little control," he argues that "if we renounce the possibility of having some choice over the direction of our life then we risk diminishing the meaning of our humanity."[7] He lays the blame for

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this development on therapists, identity politics (particularly identity politics connected to disability or illness[8], including "the learning disability lobby"[9]), trade unions,[10] and so forth.

On a similar note, Alain Badiou argues that contemporary ethics built on human rights ends up defining humans as victims, rather than as active subjects, and thus reduces humans to their animal selves. He argues that rights-based ethics wrongly persuade us to think of humans simply in terms of their suffering and death, so that we end up treating them as subhuman, and we do not perceive their real possibilities of overcoming their contingent circumstances and establishing something new.[11]

The attempt to understand how vulnerability and autonomy coexist is not simply a product of contemporary ethics. We can find it as well in the work of German idealists J.G. Fichte and G.W.F. Hegel, both of whom are deeply concerned with human freedom, not surprisingly in the aftermath of Kant's philosophy. With the development of scientific and deterministic accounts of the human animal's place in nature, and the temptation of Spinozism, the need to preserve human freedom and agency without rejecting scientific advances seemed acute. Their concerns have clear modern parallels today.

One reason these figures are not usually invoked in the contemporary discussion may be because, at first glance, it seems that they would endorse something like the myth of control wholeheartedly. Both seem to presume that our bodies, which they describe as the external or objective manifestation of our free agency, flawlessly carry out the dictates of our rational choices. There is little acknowledgement within their political theories of illness or disability, and that not all bodies work the same way or have the same needs. On further investigation, however, they both also assign important roles to vulnerability in helping to further develop our humanity. This becomes apparent when we trace out the connections, for both, between the vulnerability inherent in being embodied, and the measures that society must take to help ameliorate that vulnerability. These measures are not merely optional extras, but actually help form and create attachments between individual vulnerable humans, creating a sense of community that both Fichte and Hegel laud as a key goal of humanity as such. The risk of harm to our vulnerable bodies, in other words, is not merely a contingent feature of our particular world, but a key part of understanding what it is to be human. My task here is to contrast their arguments and to show how this reveals viable theoretical options for understanding the compatibility of autonomy and vulnerability. Specifically, I will argue that whereas Fichte argues that it is our duty to strive for perfection in all things, Hegel allows for certain things to be beyond our control as human beings. Hegel's approach does not absolve us of responsibility, but removes false assumptions about our ability to master our circumstances. As I will show, tracing the effect of these differences is an occasion to draw our attention to our own underlying assumptions.

A note of caution is required here. It can be argued that a universalism based on the idea of shared vulnerability – as is being suggested here – overlooks the

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power differences between different members of a society. Dependency and vulnerability are experienced quite differently by different people; as Jenny Morris points out, "to depend on others for assistance in intimate tasks is not the same as depending on a mechanic to service your car."[12] Further, an overemphasis on the role of dependency and vulnerability might risk suggesting a highly passive recipient, or that those who are dependent or vulnerable in any particular respect are therefore incompetent. It is important not to romanticize vulnerability or to get carried away with a notion of 'helping' which reinforces the subordinate status of the one being helped.

These criticisms are fair and require us to be attentive to how vulnerability is invoked, and here is where Fichte and Hegel are of special interest. Both Fichte and Hegel measure a society by how well it helps all of its members develop, which development, they argue, requires mutual recognition and respect for each other. Despite ways in which their own particular suggestions might fall short of that in various ways (such as their understanding of the role and abilities of women[13]), their broader theories display an insightful understanding of how recognition of vulnerability may be linked to autonomy for all.

Kant's philosophy set the stage both for the development of German idealism and also one of its main challenges. In order to preserve both human freedom and the integrity of natural causality, Kant proposed a split between the phenomenal world, of things as they can be experienced and sensed, and the noumenal world, of things as they are in themselves. Within the phenomenal world, everything that occurs is determined by a prior cause. Freedom, or the power spontaneously to initiate a new sequence of events, could only be compatible with the noumenal world. This means that human beings can be thought of from two standpoints: the standpoint of the phenomenal world, in which the self is entirely determined and unfree, and the standpoint of the noumenal world, in which the self can be thought of as free. This means that our own freedom can never show up to experience. For Kant, we must have faith that we are free, even though we can never have knowledge of it, if we are to make sense of moral responsibility and preserve the dignity of humanity.

Philosophers inspired and encouraged by Kant's preservation of human freedom nonetheless criticized his bifurcation of the self, and both Fichte and Hegel attempt to overcome this split. Fichte thought that the unity of the self would best be established through unity at a systematic level, with a single starting point for philosophizing. In one of Fichte's introductions to his philosophical system, he describes a choice between two ways that philosophy can proceed: starting from the point of view of the human as subject, or as object. If we begin from the human being as an object for our analysis, we may develop a full, detailed, and consistent account of the world, but it will not include human freedom, since this will never show up to observation; this option he labels 'dogmatism'. The only way that we can include human freedom, Fichte argues, is if we begin with it: if our starting point in philosophy is the free self. This is the route that he takes, of course, and labels 'idealism'.[14]

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Therefore, Fichte's system begins with the activity of the free I which posits itself. This activity of the free I is initially outward-directed. In order to become self-conscious, something must bring about the occasion for it to reflect back upon itself. This occasion is the not-I, which provides a check on the free activity of the I.[15] In the earliest versions of Fichte's philosophy, the not-I is an object; by the time Fichte produces the *Foundations of Natural Right* and the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, it is another self, who recognizes us as free and summons us.[16] To act freely involves acting toward a goal that we will. Until we are aware of our own freedom, however, we are not aware of our ability to set goals, and the external world does not present the concept of a goal on its own. In order to come to be aware of our own freedom, we must be summoned to free activity by another who recognizes us as the type of being capable of freedom.[17] In our response to the summons, we inaugurate our free activity. Fichte's argument here is an early instance of the recognition argument found in Hegel and in the work of later philosophers such as Sartre. It is significant in its making my own ability to act freely dependent upon another's recognition of me, irrevocably linking freedom and our connection to others.

Because the philosophical basis of the system is the free activity of the self-positing I, the world needs to be philosophically accounted for on the basis of our own free activity. Fichte distinguishes between the empirical I, which is changeable and experiences the objects around it as independent, and the pure I, which is the transcendental condition for the possibility of the empirical I. The pure I is unchanging, free, and rational, much like the noumenal self in Kant's philosophy.[18] Our imperative, as human beings, is to act in such a way as to bring our empirical self as much as possible into harmony with the pure self through acting in accordance with the moral law. As such, we ought to be determined as much as possible by our own free reason, not by the determinations of the natural world. It is not possible to completely overcome determination by our environment, and consequently Fichte characterizes us as perpetually *striving,* as our freedom and independence are an infinite goal, never to be fully realized: "My goal lies in infinity, because my dependence is finite."[19] Our goal is not merely to make ourselves over, but also to overcome nature entirely, in order to make the world over as a tool for reason. Fichte writes:

> As has often been pointed out, self-sufficiency, which is our ultimate goal, consists in everything depending on me and my not depending on anything, in everything that I will to occur in my entire sensible world occurring purely and simply because I will for it to occur – just as happens in my body, which is the starting point of my absolute causality. The world must become for me what my body is. This goal is of course unreachable; but I am nevertheless supposed to draw constantly nearer to it, and thus I am supposed to fashion everything in the sensible world so that it can serve as a means for achieving my final end. This process of drawing ever nearer to my final end is my finite end.[20]

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Anything merely natural in us must be made over. This means, however, that despite Fichte's valiant attempt to overcome Kantian dualism by accounting for the world on the basis of the self-positing I, he has fallen into the trap of reinscribing a dualism between reason and nature. While both have the same ultimate source, they are opposed in all of our experience.

This criticism of Fichte was developed early on by Hegel. In his 1801 text, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, Hegel points out that by structuring his understanding of humanity in this way, Fichte has split us in two, and made the rational part of us a tyrant over the natural part of us.[21] Hegel's system, on the other hand, attempts to overcome dualisms by means of dialectical reconciliation[22] and exploring the relationship between different movements of thought. Things that initially appear to be opposites are found to depend on each other, or to be implicated in each other. In reconciliation, the self returns to itself through the other, but changed and altered through that interaction in ways beyond its initial control. For Hegel, in our process of coming to know the world and ourselves, we apprehend that everything is part of a whole; our task as philosophers is to try to discern the rationality within the system.[23] While his priority throughout is on expanding consciousness, this does not follow the same structure as Fichte's striving to reshape the world. There is reason within nature, and nature is part of the unfolding of the whole,[24] and so we do not need to try to make it over completely. In his account of how we develop as selves, he weaves in influences from our geographical origins, our family heritage, our particular physical and mental idiosyncrasies and temperament, and so forth;[25] the various natural influences on us are not to be resolutely ignored or denied, but appropriated by us as we take self-reflective ownership of ourselves.

In the course of doing so, he distinguishes between the natural body, which is the pre-conscious physical body as determined by various influences, and the spiritual body, which is the body as appropriated by us through the formation of habits and training, its natural quirks and idiosyncrasies made over by upbringing and development. The spiritual body, accessible to me in pursuit of my goals, is one that I have pervaded with my will and taken possession of.[26] Some aspect of our natural bodiliness remains even after the development of the soul, however. One of the additions to the text, drawn from Hegel's lectures, states:

> The soul's pervasion of its bodiliness considered in the two previous Paragraphs is not *absolute* ... Something of bodiliness remains, therefore, purely organic and consequently withdrawn from the power of the soul, so that the soul's pervasion of its body is only one side of the body. The soul, when it comes to feel this limitation of its power, reflects itself into itself and expels bodiliness from itself as something *alien* to it.[27]

This process of reflection initiated by the relation between the soul and what remains of bodiliness contributes to the development of our self consciousness,

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and is not characterized as a failure of the will or of reason. Hegel still thinks that we should try to cultivate ourselves and our bodies – for example, in our manner or gait,[28] and by following the general norms of our culture. But, in contrast to Fichte, this does not require striving for complete and perfect rational mastery over what is natural for us.

This difference will come into play later, when assessing their approaches to human vulnerability. In other respects, however, the two are on the same page. Fichte and Hegel have relatively similar conceptions of the body's importance for our freedom and its recognition as such by others. Fichte's emphasis on the overcoming of nature by reason does not lead to a denigration of the body; on the contrary, the body is identified with our freedom:

> My body (insofar as it is articulated) is what I am able to control simply by my power of free choice, {where I need to do no more than will. Note: I have control over my body only insofar as it is articulated, not as an organic system}. The transcendental concept of the body is as follows: My body is my original willing, assimilated to the form of outer intuition. "My body and I"— "my mind and I": these expressions mean the same thing. Insofar as I intuit myself, I am my body. Insofar as I think of myself, I am my mind. But neither of these can exist without the other, and this constitutes the union of mind with the body.[29]

This is stated even more succinctly in an additional note to one of the sets of the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* lecture notes: "I am my body and my mind: all are one … They are distinguished merely as different aspects."[30]

Our bodies are recognized by others as the site of our free activity.[31] This leads Fichte to argue that we thus perceive human bodies as inherently deserving of respect without having to be taught or habituated to do so. There is a Lévinasian overtone to Fichte's argument, particularly in statements such as "the human shape is necessarily sacred to the human being."[32] In the *System of Ethics* he notes that since the free human body is required for carrying out the moral law in the sensible world, therefore "just as soon as anyone catches sight of a human body, the moral law issues to him as a command regarding this determinate body."[33]

Hegel's description of the body repeats this identification of free action with the body. As he remarks, "In so far as I am alive, my soul ... and my body are not separated; my body is the existence [*Dasein*] of freedom, and I feel through it."[34] Again, similarly to Fichte, my body is the way that I am recognized as me by others; as Nuzzo summarizes, "my body is the existence of freedom not only for myself but also for the others."[35] This linkage of freedom to the body is what makes us essentially vulnerable, since bodies are heir to any number of harms.

Both Fichte and Hegel make a distinction between the natural or organic body (which is not generally subject to my will, and is often unconscious, such as the activity of our inner organs), and the body as site of our free action in the

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world. Despite this distinction, they identify our selves with our bodies as a whole. Similarly, for both, the body, which is the site of our freedom, is also the site of possible harm – and this harm is conceived of as harm to *us*, not merely as harm to something belonging to us, or harm to a tool. Hegel points out that, if someone tries to do violence to me, or to put me in chains, I can (stoically) will to retreat into myself, but as I show up to others, I am my body: "Violence done to *my body* by others is violence done to me."[36] Fichte, similarly, writes that in the sensible world, the body "is the I itself" and "must be regarded as a person"; because my body is my freedom in the world, we have an original right that it not be violated or coerced. [37] This vulnerability to harm turns out to work in our favour, since it means that in order to compensate for it, we need others to help us. Both Fichte and Hegel celebrate the resulting interdependency as a good, and conceive of human community as an organic whole.

In the *Foundations of Natural Right*, Fichte explicitly connects the summons to freedom and self-consciousness with human upbringing and human community, arguing that "All individuals must be brought up to be human beings, otherwise they would not be human beings."[38] He points out that humans are quite vulnerable and helpless when first born, and need a lot of assistance from the other humans around them.[39] On the one hand, this means that nature has less influence in forming the human creature, which leaves more scope for the work of reason; as Angelica Nuzzo summarizes, "thus, the body is a sphere of freedom left to the person's own choice."[40] On the other, this means that the human creature's developing freedom is also deeply intertwined with being influenced, reared and educated by other humans who welcome the new human into their midst. This taking care of each other helps bind generations together, each to each: "In this way, reason produces itself, and only in this way is reason's progress toward perfection possible. In this way, the generations are linked to one another, and every future generation preserves the spiritual achievements of all previous ones."[41] Our physical vulnerability leads to our sense of belonging to a community, and to the species. This echoes a 1795 lecture of Fichte's, in which he argues that our various strengths and weaknesses serve a good, as they oblige us both to help and to be helped in return, which serves to bind all humans closer together.[42] Reason unites and universalizes what nature has divided and particularized. In this way, free and rational human activity overcomes the vicissitudes of nature.

This carries on at the political level. Fichte argues that persons are free and "dependent solely on their will", and yet persons are also together "in a state of mutual influence" and not "dependent solely on themselves"; the system of right exists to articulate how these two principles can coexist.[43] For Fichte, this "is possible only insofar as *each free being makes it a law for himself to limit his freedom through the concept of the freedom of all others*."[44] In order to facilitate this structurally, he develops a series of three inter-nested social contracts in which citizens agree to mutually protect each other's freedom. While Fichte does not always spell it out, all three of the contracts link back to the

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body, which Nuzzo describes as "the principal source of human *vulnerability* and fundamental *insecurity.*"[45]

This vulnerability of the body extends past the body itself, since the free activity of our body in the world requires property to act upon and to manifest itself.[46] Fichte argues that humans' destiny to be engaged in free activity is supported through our need to satisfy the pains of hunger and thirst; we need to labour in order to live. Thus, in a rational state, "everyone ought to be able to live from his labor."[47] Beyond this, though, we need the results of our labour to be protected in order to safeguard our efficacy in the world. Consequently, the first contract aims to do so, and requires that everyone pledge their property as a guarantee not to violate anyone else's. Property on its own is vulnerable, as is the body, and thus to protect against harm to self or property, everyone promises to help protect others'.[48] This protection contract goes quite some way; for example, everyone has, not just a moral duty, but a civic obligation to respond to any cry for help.[49] This is insufficient on its own; Fichte argues that until my rights have been violated, I may not feel a compulsion to protect yours. The justification for the third contract requires us to feel our own vulnerability, thus believing that we have something at stake in the maintenance of the social contract. In this third contract, each individual agrees to enter a unified state, handing over right of punishment to the state, and making a contribution to that state.[50] Fichte argues that by not knowing who is to be protected by the unification contract, we imagine it could be us, or anyone, and "this indeterminacy, this uncertainty as to which individual will first be transgressed against – therefore this *oscillation* in the imagination – is the real bond that unites the different individuals."[51] He goes on to describe this whole as an organic whole, similar to a tree, in which the parts are mutually interdependent. In the same way that, in the 1795 lecture, our strengths and weaknesses serve the good of drawing us closer together, similarly the interweaving of the social contracts leads us into representing ourselves as part of a whole.

Like Fichte, Hegel describes society as constituting an organic whole. We learn to recognize ourselves as part of this whole at least in part because of the needs of our bodies. These force us to go beyond the intimate circle of our families to develop skills and trades so that we can exchange with others. What Hegel terms the "system of needs," the reciprocal pattern of trade caused by the various skills and needs of the citizens, provides not only our food, shelter, and clothing, but also the feeling of being part of a community, and of turning our attention to something larger than just our own family's particular concerns.[52] Our attention is drawn from the particular to the universal. Art, religion, and philosophy can also help us to develop broader outlooks, but Hegel considers the system of needs to be our first step, and these needs concern property.

For Hegel, property is not merely a means to an end, but also an end in itself insofar as it reveals our freedom in the world.[53] It is an extension of our body's externalization of our free activity. As Avineri writes, "property is thus an

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objectification of the self which raises it from the realm of pure subjectivity into the sphere of external existence."[54] Others' respect for our property is a way of showing their recognition of our existence as persons, as having a place within society.

Here is where the difference in approach between Fichte and Hegel bears fruit. The problem of how to address the vulnerability of those without property illustrates one of the effects of Fichte's striving for perfection contrasted with Hegel's acknowledgement of the limits of control. For Fichte, with the achievement of an ideal society, poverty is eradicated; for Hegel, poverty remains a perpetual problem.

Fichte's solution to the problem of poverty rests in his idea of rights as connected to the binding together of citizens into an interconnected whole. The right to property only exists in relation to others; I only have a right to my property on the condition that those around me have enough to get by, and the poor have an absolute right of coercion to assistance.[55] In order to ensure that everyone is likely to have enough, citizens must declare their occupations to the state. Occupations, after all, are subject to the contingency of demand; as Fichte points out, "In a nation where everyone goes naked, the right to work as a tailor would be no right."[56] As long as the state oversees occupations, it can protect everyone. For Fichte, the source of evil within ordinary states is disorder; his commitment to order leads him to establish police laws that cut down on the possibility of any disorder.[57]

Hegel is less optimistic, and he thinks Fichte's response to poverty is deeply problematic. He criticizes Fichte for micro-managing the state, arguing that a society based on the attempt to impose rational order in such a way "is not an organization at all, but a machine; and the people is not the organic body of a communal and rich life, but an atomistic, life-impoverished multitude."[58] For Hegel, "community is not simply a restriction or limitation on freedom, it is a condition and enhancement of life," and he decries Fichte's system as an oppressive one in which "freedom must suspend itself in order to be freedom."[59]

Hegel acknowledges that poverty will always occur within a living society, since it is the structural result of the processes of civil society, including industrialization and mechanization, which Hegel describes in some detail in a number of his writings.[60] Poverty is not merely an economic problem; as Avineri notes, "since property is basic to Hegel's view of the person, poverty becomes for him not merely the plight of people deprived of their physical needs, but of human beings deprived of their personality and humanity as well."[61]

Hegel does not offer solutions. He does argue that the welfare of individuals is a right to be secured, and one that should be overseen by "the public authority."[62] Even with the public authority, however, the deeper problem remains. He argues that since self-respect is connected to having a place in society, being given handouts does not suffice to restore it, and finding additional make-work projects would further contribute to overproduction, which exacerbates the problem.[63] But not having a solution within his system to the

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problem of poverty does not mean that Hegel believes society can simply wash its hands of the poor. In one of his lectures from 1817/1818, he notes the contingencies involved in an individual's place in society, and that individual's consequent vulnerability:

> The first contingency is that involved in the individual's participation in the general resources, since this participation presupposes health, capital [*Kapital*], and so on, and also a major conjunction of factors far removed from the individual's own orbit. As born within civil society, individuals are [dependent] on these resources for the actualization of their right to live [and] have to accept them as the inorganic nature and external conditions governing such right. The whole community [*das Allgemeine*] must therefore make provision for the *poor*, in regard both to what they lack and to the idle, malevolent disposition and the feeling of the wrong they have suffered.[64]

One of the additions to the text of the *Philosophy of Right*, drawn from his 1824/1825 lectures, notes "the important question of how poverty can be remedied is one which agitates and torments modern societies especially."[65] Here Hegel might well agree with Margaret Walker's claim that "*responsibilities outrun control*."[66]

A similar pattern – in which Fichte argues for greater control, and Hegel backs off – plays out for the two philosophers in the consideration of our vulnerability to illness and disease. Fichte, in the popular text *The Vocation of Man*, lists the natural evils that occur to humanity, and suggests that these even befall "the industrious and prudent man."[67] One of the arguments of *The Vocation of Man*, however, is that we have a mission to transform nature and develop our technology such that these natural evils will be overcome. Meanwhile, in the *System of Ethics*, Fichte argues that while harm may befall the body, it is part of our moral imperative to develop our body so as to be more resistant to those ills. He prohibits activities (fasting, gluttony, and sexual depravity) which may weaken the body, and encourages the proper cultivation, maintenance and strengthening of both mind and body.[68] As he writes, since my body is my means of action in the world, "a condition for all morality – is therefore the preservation and maximal perfection of the body. … The sole end of all my care for my body absolutely ought to be and must be to transform this body into a suitable instrument of morality and to preserve it as such."[69] In other words, the body is to be subject to my rational control, whether through technology and ingenuity (in *The Vocation of Man*) or through proper diet, exercise, and so forth (in *The System of Ethics*). The cure to our vulnerability to harm is increased control.

For Hegel, on the other hand, disease is not something that can be eradicated but is rather an inevitable part of our finite existence, even if any particular disease will be the result of a particular combination of internal and external factors.[70] As Hegel writes, "the organism can recover from disease; but disease is in its very nature, and herein lies the necessity of death, i.e., of this dissolution

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in which the series of processes becomes the empty process which does not return into itself."[71] Certainly medicine can attempt to provide cures (Hegel notes its track record is mixed), and we can try to develop health-promoting habits, but ultimately degeneration, disease, and death are all part of what it is to be the type of thing we are. It is not something we can overcome with ingenuity or willpower, but must be reconciled with. John Burbidge describes Hegel's procedure in his philosophy of nature as "organizing the material systematically but not presuming to tell nature what it must be like."[72] This approach is consonant with Hegel's strategy throughout.

Both of these examples – the treatment of poverty and of illness – point to the differences between Fichte and Hegel on the nature of our control over our embodied state, and the inescapability of our vulnerability. Much of this is traceable to their basic metaphysical assumptions outlined above. Fichte's assumption about the way our freedom works precludes genuine vulnerability; within his system of idealism, the self cannot be determined by anything except itself, lest one revert to dogmatism, or treating the self as object. Any passivity of the self is hard to reconcile with the self's original freedom. Despite arguing that the members of a society are interdependent, he is thus also led to argue that other free beings "are limited by me; I am not limited by them."[73] He maintains this stance even at the risk of having to bite some metaphysical bullets: for example, in the *System of Ethics*, in trying to account for how we may exert influence on each other and act on each other, while still maintaining our own freedom, he suggests a predestination and harmony of all actions rather than admitting any determination or loosening of self-control.[74]

Hegel does not have this conundrum – interdependency is possible since his metaphysics already permits of the incorporation of otherness within the self, and thus his selves can be genuinely vulnerable and genuinely affected by each other. In an early fragment on love, Hegel writes quite succinctly, "In fact, nothing is unconditioned; nothing carries the root of its own being in itself."[75] This is something that must be accepted. After all, in his logic he criticizes the strategy of trying to flee something ("the person who flees is not yet free, for in fleeing, he is still determined by the very thing from which he is fleeing"), in favour of "remaining at home with itself in its other, or ... in coming to itself in its other."[76] His strategy is not control, but reconciliation. As Michael Hardimon writes, "Reconciliation is not a matter of thinking that everything is wonderful," but rather of finding "satisfaction in the present," in which people perceive that "the fact that their unreasonable expectations were not fulfilled does not constitute a real loss at all."[77] It is unreasonable to think that we can be impervious to harm, unaffected by contingency. We can be reconciled to this not only as a necessity, but also as a good that turns our attention to how we care for ourselves and others.

This is not to argue that Hegel's philosophy as a whole is faultless from our vantage point. Hegel's privileging of landowners over others due to, amongst other things, their decreased vulnerability,[78] would seem to work to enshrine

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inequality. Further, his eventual account of how individuals are integrated into the state as a whole lauds the self-sacrifice entailed by war as a way of transforming death from necessity into something willed.[79] This may seem initially to be an acceptance of vulnerability ("*willed* evanescence"), but it emerges as a form of state-exercised control.[80] Vulnerability can obviously be abused. Still, the basic approach that Hegel articulates is one that can be helpful to our thinking, particularly in contrast with Fichte's.

In Fichte and Hegel we have two instances of attempting to philosophize the importance of our vulnerable embodiment in understanding the type of freedom we have in the world. Both argue for our interdependency and understanding ourselves as part of a greater whole. The difference between Fichte and Hegel helps us better appreciate what is at stake. Hegel's system acknowledges and finds a place for impurities and the parts of life that cannot be easily fixed. For Fichte, freedom is deeply intertwined with the desire to control, not just one's own freely-chosen actions, but also one's environment. It is part of Fichte's vocation of humanity that reason should overcome nature, and that human beings should strive to become perfect. This ties into all of our everyday actions, and Fichte considers anything that does not contribute to the goal of perfection to be working against it. In other words, despite his seeming endorsement of vulnerability, Fichte still believes we have a duty to try to control what befalls us, including what befalls our bodies.

We might view Fichte's philosophy as a last gasp of Enlightenment optimism, but its lingering attraction is apparent today. In discussing the "myth of control," Susan Wendell writes,

> Most people are deeply reluctant to believe that bad things happen to people who do not deserve them, or seek them, or risk them, or fail to take care of themselves. To believe this as a general proposition is to acknowledge the fragility of one's own life; to realize it relation to someone one knows is to become acutely aware of one's own vulnerability.[81]

There are many examples of this. Wendell cites Susan Brison writing about the aftermath of her rape and of a conversation with a victims' assistance coordinator who suggested that Brison "would benefit from the experience by learning not to be so trusting of people and to take basic safety precautions."[82] Examples can also be found in health care debates: being healthy is readily represented within public discourse as a matter of personal responsibility. [83] In these examples, we can recognize the temptation to control, to think, like Furedi, that to "renounce the possibility of having some choice over the direction of our life" means that "we risk diminishing the meaning of our humanity." The worry is that, once we cede some control over something important to us, we have given up the fight, lost ourselves somehow.

In an article on embodied autonomy (particularly in the face of chronic illness), Jennifer Nedelsky argues that, rather than focusing on control, "What

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we need instead is a stance of receptivity, acceptance, attentiveness and creative responsiveness."[84] This is consonant with the best aspects of Hegel's philosophy. Hegel's text does not give us a ready-made solution to the problem of dealing with inequalities and differences in vulnerability, but his account can help us focus on how doing so might promote human dignity, not its denial as Furedi and Badiou fear. Unlike Fichte, he does not have a moral imperative to seek control that then works against him when the times comes to try to promote trust and interdependency. Hegel's approach provides a model for acknowledging that not everything can be brought under our control, while allowing us to focus on how we can develop what we do have. A Hegelian approach better positions us to navigate the interconnection of vulnerability, embodiment, and freedom.

Notes

1 See for example Fineman (2008), especially pp. 11-12, Turner (2006). This argument also has its resonance in Nussbaum (1986) and Macintyre (1999).
2 For example, within research ethics, "vulnerability" refers to the circumstances of a population that might not adequately be able to advocate for itself, or might require extra protection. See the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2010: 9-10, 23, 52).
3 Campbell (2009: 91). Harbin (2012).
4 Wendell (1996).
5 See Nedelsky (1989), Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000), and Friedman (2003).
6 Furedi (2004: 103).
7 Furedi (2004: 194).
8 Furedi (2004: 97).
9 Furedi (2004: 188).
10 Furedi, (2004: 139-140).
11 Badiou (2001: 10-13).
12 Morris (2001: 13).
13 For Fichte on women, see Frischmann (2006) and Archard (2001). For an example of recent work on Hegel and women, see the essays in Hutchings and Pulkinnen (2010).
14 Fichte (1994: 12-20).
15 Fichte (1982: 189-91).
16 For discussion of the relation between the not-I as 'check' and the summons, see Williams (1992: 56-60) and Breazeale (1999: 104 n.22).
17 Fichte (1992: 350-2, 2000: 29-37).
18 Fichte (1994: 61).
19 Fichte (2005: 143).
20 Fichte (2005: 217).
21 Hegel (1977: 137-42).
22 See Hardimon (1994: 84-123).

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23 Hegel (1991a: 20-22).
24 See Stone (2005: 57-84).
25 Hegel (2007: §§391-396).
26 Hegel (1991a: §§47-48).
27 Hegel (2007: §412A).
28 Hegel (2005: §411A).
29 Fichte (1992: 321).
30 Fichte (1992: 321).
31 Fichte (2000: 74-75, 112).
32 Fichte (2000: 79). For comparisons on this front, see Scribner (2000) and Lumsden (2000).
33 Fichte (2005: 264).
34 Hegel (1991a: §48R).
35 Nuzzo (2001: 122).
36 Hegel (1991a: §48R).
37 Fichte (2000: 104-8).
38 Fichte (2000: 38).
39 Fichte (2000: 76).
40 Nuzzo (2006: 85).
41 Fichte (2000: 76).
42 Fichte (1998: 164-5).
43 Fichte (2000: 79).
44 Fichte (2000: 85).
45 Nuzzo (2006: 79).
46 Fichte (2000: 106). See Patten (1999: 152-3).
47 Fichte (2000: 184-5).
48 Fichte (2000: 170-2).
49 Fichte (2000: 219-20).
50 Fichte (2000: 174-9).
51 Fichte (2000: 176). This type of argument, supposing equal vulnerability in the justification of a social contract, is present in Rawls and in that context is criticized by Eva Feder Kittay, who points out that "Vulnerability originating in dependency is not a condition in which all are *equally* vulnerable, but one in which some are *especially* vulnerable" (Kittay 1999: 84). Given that Fichte's contracts go on to mandate support and help for all, it is unclear whether recognition of difference at this stage of the argument could have provoked a stronger mandate for adequate care of its most vulnerable citizens. For more on the argument about "oscillation in the imagination," see Kinlaw (2006).
52 Hegel (1991a: §§207-208).
53 Hegel (1991a: §45R).
54 Avineri (1972: 136).
55 Fichte (2000: 186).
56 Fichte (2000: 185).
57 Fichte (2000: 254-263).

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58 Hegel (1977: 149).
59 Hegel (1977: 144).
60 In addition to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel treats this problem in his early Jena lectures and in the later lectures on the Philosophy of Right. See Avineri (1972: 98-101, 136) and (1985: 204); Avineri has also translated the passages on civil society and poverty in Hegel's 1819/1820 Berlin lectures (1985: 205-208).
61 Avineri (1972: 136).
62 Hegel (1991a: §§230, 235, 241).
63 Hegel (1991a: §245).
64 Hegel (1995: 208-9).
65 Hegel (1991a: §244A).
66 Walker (1993: 241).
67 Fichte (1987: 82).
68 Fichte (2005: 205, 250-1, 257).
69 Fichte (2005: 205).
70 Hegel (1970: §371A).
71 Hegel (1970: §375A).
72 Burbidge (2006: 179).
73 Fichte (2005: 218).
74 Fichte (2005: 215-7).
75 Hegel (1998: 31).
76 Hegel (1991b: §94A).
77 Hardimon (1994: 89).
78 Hegel (1991a: §306).
79 Hegel (1991a: §§324-328).
80 Hegel (1991a: §§323-4).
81 Wendell (1996: 106-109).
82 Brison (1993: 11), cited in Wendell (1996: 107).
83 For discussion, see for instance Steinbrook (2006). For a recent example, see Leung (2012).
84 Nedelsky (1995: 165).

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