

Sex and the City-State: Political Participation as Virility and the ‘Right of Desire’

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That the modern body politic is historically fashioned after only one of the possible gendered bodies of humankind has been convincingly shown by feminist political thinkers in the last two decades. Carole Pateman has argued that the movement from classical political theory to specifically modern contract theory is a switch in paternal patriarchy to fraternal patriarchy where the locus of patriarchal power is no longer in the father-son relationship, but in the husband’s rule over the wife. As the father-king is done away with political parricide and the liberty of the sons affirmed, the brothers-as-social-contractors’ rule over women is not seen as a political question. The rule of men over women is placed outside the political by Locke and Rousseau, and explicitly established as a precondition of men’s political rights by Sir Robert

Filmer¹. The basis for men's rule over female bodies and its powers of reproduction is seen to be in the man's 'natural superiority' in strength and ability, especially in the sphere of reason.

Although Pateman's argument is convincing in many respects, I think conceptualizing the birth of the modern political subject strictly through the division between male reason and female bodies and/or sentiment is – although a common enough strategy in feminist theory² – inadequate. While noting that in the idea of the social contract the fraternal individuals give birth to the body politic of civil society, Hobbes's 'Artificial Man', Rousseau's 'artificial and collective body' or Locke's 'one body politic', Pateman asserts that this birth is "an act of reason, with no analogue to a bodily act of procreation."³ She claims that like this new body politic, the individual of classical liberal thought has been presented for three hundred years as 'artificial', disembodied, "nothing more than a 'man of reason'."⁴

In this essay I want to provide a counterpoint to this classic feminist view by fleshing out the figure of the modern political subject. Instead of being disembodied, this political agent is very much in possession of a male body, and instead of being mainly a 'man of reason', he is a man of desire and of sexual virility. I argue that active sexual desire becomes connected to political participation in a new way in European philosophy around 1800. My claim is that when we deconstruct the concepts of 'state' and 'citizenship' as they are developed in eighteenth century European thought, we find within not only gender in the abstract sense, but in very concrete terms, sexual activity. Earlier research by e.g. Pateman, Scott, Hunt, Fraise and Laqueur has shown how the concept of the citizen is formed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the exclusion of women from the political sphere⁵. I am continuing this line of research to make a more specific claim about how exactly active sexual desire and virility are historically connected to active citizenship and political participation in the modern era.

¹ Pateman 2002, 122–3.

² "The separation of civil society from the familial sphere is also a division between men's reason and women's bodies...." Pateman 2002, 126. See also Elshtain *Public Man, Private Woman*, Caine & Sluga 2000, Lloyd 1993.

³ Pateman 2002, 127.

⁴ Pateman 2002, 127.

⁵ Pateman 1988 and 2002; Scott 1999 ; Laqueur 1990; Hunt 1992, Fraise 1994.

I will start by outlining the politics of virility as they developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century around the French revolution. In the latter part of the paper, I show how the politics of virility is constructed in philosophical texts, using Fichte and Hegel as my exemplars.

1 The politics of virility

Thomas Laqueur dates an important change in the conceptualization of gender to the long eighteenth century. He argues, based on a large body of medical writings, that from Greek natural philosophy up until the seventeenth century, male and female bodies were understood through a one-sex model that gave only one basic and basically male structure to the human body. In the earlier model, effective from Galen and Aristotle on, the genders are not seen as completely opposite but rather on a sliding scale of development: The female reproductive organs were thought to be the same as the male ones, but turned inside out, a lack of vital heat having caused the retention inside of the structures (penis, testicles, scrotum) that in the male are outwardly visible. In contrast, around 1700, the dominant paradigm began to shift from the one-sex model picturing the woman as a smaller, less developed male to the two-sex model in which woman and man were conceived of as incommensurable, opposite sexes in both physiology and character.⁶

Joan W. Scott has argued that the relation between the new conception of sex difference and the affirmation of separate spheres of activity for men and women in the eighteenth century should not be understood simplistically as the former being the cause of the latter. It was not that sexual difference was reflected on the level of the political division into spheres, it was rather *created* by this move of designating separate spheres for women and men. The political exclusion of women in connection with the French Revolution was not based on ‘natural’ sexual difference, as the opponents of women’s participation in government maintained. Rather, Scott asserts, women became visible in the sphere of politics only when they were barred from it on the grounds of their gender: “Sexual difference was, then, the effect, not the

⁶ Laqueur 1990.

cause of women's exclusion."⁷

The most important changes in conceptualizing gender difference in the long eighteenth century concern dichotomizations of bodies, spheres of action, and sexuality. First, a new biologizing concept of female bodies was constructed by medical writers. Females were now seen to form a coherent biological category of 'woman' beyond class, estate and marital status, and biology is also constructed as a reason for political exclusion. Laqueur quotes a number of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century French contexts in which the supposed biological differences between male and female bodies were used to support the ideology of two spheres. Rousseau and the other most prominent moral anthropologists of the French Revolution (Roussel, Moreau and Cabanis) argued that corporeal differences demanded social and legal differences. They construed women as creatures who, for various reasons, were incapable of assuming civic responsibility.⁸

Second, a large body of scholarship has concentrated on the new division between the family and political life that places women solely in the private sphere and simultaneously cuts off men from it. Part of the reason for this was a backlash against the increasing involvement of women in the intellectual life of the eighteenth century. The salon culture – a mix of 'private' and 'public' – meant that upper-class and bourgeois women were able to participate in Enlightenment debates on culture and politics. Increasing numbers of women were also writing and publishing their work as novelists, poets, historians, essayists and critics – women's literary activities sometimes arousing much the same hostility as their political involvement. Another reason for the backlash was the horror and revulsion the activity and involvement of Parisian women in revolutionary events aroused in many contemporaries. Despite the demand for the 'rights of women' by both female and male writers, the political symbols and political language that emerged victorious constructed 'the citizen' as masculine and insisted that women devote themselves to family and home.⁹

⁷ Scott 1999, 208.

⁸ Laqueur 1990, 194–207.

⁹ Caine & Sluga 2000, 7–8, 15–24.

The third new discourse concerns sexual desire which is now ascribed to one sex only. Rousseau and Fichte, among many others, argued that women were ‘naturally’ more modest, almost asexual beings who only responded to sexual overtures but never actively desired them. This was a novel view, as throughout the Middle Ages women had generally been considered the lusty sex, inherently more passionate and prone to moral and sexual error than men¹⁰. From the latter half of the eighteenth century on, a cultural transformation happens from regarding lechery and unbridled sexual lust as typically feminine weaknesses to constructing male desire as an implacable, powerful drive that required an outlet (in contrast to a reconceptualized female desirelessness and passivity focused on motherhood). This new emphasis could be seen in courts of law as a more tolerant attitude towards the violent advances of young men in cases of rape as well as in medical, moral and semi-pornographic literature and doggerel¹¹. The new emphasis is also evident in the sphere of literary culture: the faithful, chaste Tristan was replaced by Casanova and Don Juan as the mythical heroes of the age¹².

The new model of male desire and female desirelessness proved to be politically multivalent in the eighteenth century. On the one hand, feminist writers of the period used the notion of women’s ‘intrinsic moral purity’ resulting from their lack of sexual desire to construe them as morally superior to men and as a civilising influence within world history¹³. Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Wheeler, William Thompson and Sarah Ellis all argued that women’s passionlessness would also make them more just and moral than men as legislators and politicians. On the other hand, however, when male sexual energy and activity were associated with the political subject’s striving for independence, autonomy and freedom, women’s sexual passivity was directly linked to arguments that they were unsuited to political rights and full citizenship¹⁴.

I argue that the timing of this new conceptualization of female desirelessness is not

¹⁰ Coontz 2005, 159.

¹¹ Liliequist 2007, 69.

¹² Kuhn 1980, 307–8.

¹³ Laqueur 1990, 198–203.

¹⁴ Caine & Sluga 2000, 13.

accidental, but in fact is linked to what I call ‘politics of virility’, meaning the connection of active sexual desire and prowess to political participation and citizenship¹⁵. The most important event for the modern politics of virility is the French revolution of 1789.

The Rights of Man and ‘patriotic fuckers’ around 1789

Antoine de Baecque has argued in her fascinating study on the ‘body politic’ in the French revolution that corporeal images were at the very center of the metaphoric language used to describe the revolution in progress. The revolutionaries comprehended the human community through the figure of the human body, and the texts of the time – pamphlets, caricatures, fictional biographies of the king and queen – can be read as giving ‘a body to ideas and a physiognomy to history’. De Baecque shows how at the end of the eighteenth century, the metaphor of the body is used to narrate the condition of one political system, its death, and then the birth of another. The story tells first of the sterility and impotence which the state suffered, embodied by its king at the end of the ancien régime and then of the new fertility of the National Assembly in 1789, capable of giving birth to a new French national body.¹⁶

She notes that it has become a commonplace to understand the defeat of the body of the king as a major caesura in the French system of political representation. In the ancien régime, the bodily representation of the power of the king played a fundamental role: “One single body perpetuated itself from Bourbon king to king, embodying the continuity of the state, a body in which all subjects could recognize themselves and in which everyone recognized their sovereign.”¹⁷

However, she argues that placing the loss of power of the body of the king and the political and symbolic transfer of power in the execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793 risks compressing the process to an unexplained, abrupt moment. Instead, she argues, the transition

¹⁵ The expression “politics of virility” is to my knowledge first used in 1986 by Joan W. Scott in her book review of Robert Soucy’s *French Fascism. The First Wave, 1924-1933* and by Stephen G Salkever in an article from the same year.

¹⁶ de Baecque 1997, 1–5.

¹⁷ de Baecque 1997, 8.

of the sovereignty of the body from the king to the nation can be traced in a longer continuum of words and images that delineated the ‘impotence’ of Louis XVI, starting more than two decades earlier, with his marriage to Marie-Antoinette, Archduchess of Austria, in 1770. These multiple references to loss of royal virility show the political transfer of seminal power: “The king, incapable in licentious – and then political – imagination of fathering even one heir, and thus of engendering the state, leaves this power to the revolutionary *homo novus* who, by the intermediary of his representatives and of his ‘right’ as a man, creates laws and institutions, creates a sovereign nation.”¹⁸

The institution of monarchy is traditionally surrounded by symbols of fecundity. The imagery of the Bourbon family also abounds with emblems of fertility and abundance. The king procreates and nourishes: Father of family, the monarch becomes the father who feeds the kingdom¹⁹. From his birth, Louis XVI’s body was confronted with its procreative function, the primary function in a hereditary monarchy. His wedding ceremonies were surrounded by official and unofficial rituals, odes and symbols celebrating the bodily potency of the monarch:

The German and the French
Long ago
Killed each other for their kings;
Fighting is a rotten thing
Screwing is more pleasant.
The Frenchman and the German lady
Quite content
F----- together often;
They’re going to make it legal
To mate the lily with the eagle.²⁰

Or, even more directly:

¹⁸ de Baecque 1997, 8.

¹⁹ de Baecque 1997, 33.

²⁰ *Song on the wedding of His Royal Highness the Dauphin*, n.p., 1770. Bibliothèque Nationale: Ye 20763, quoted in de Baecque 1997, 36.

Down at Versailles
They're waiting for the Princess;
God makes the nuptials,
She'll get fucked and fucked some more;
And how her spouse
Will make her moan.²¹

However, the hopes for a heir to the throne began to dwindle as rumours about the king's impotence start to circulate in diplomatic circles and, eventually, all spheres of society. The marriage of May 1770 only became fully consummated in August 1777, and meanwhile satirist works depicting the feebleness and impotency of the king began to proliferate. Little by little a connection between the Dauphin's bodily weakness and his lack of character was established. An inability to 'govern' his wife in bed and engender a continuation to the hereditary throne was translated into an inability to govern and ensure the survival of France.²²

While Louis-Philippe was accused of impotence, the queen began to be accused of licentiousness and adultery in popular works. In 1779, *The Love Affairs of Charlot and Toinette* claimed the queen was having sex with the king's brother Comte d'Artois and that the latter was also the father of the first royal child. In 1781, the first part of *Historical Essays on the Life of Marie-Antoinette*, a biographical essay depicting a series of scenes of debauchery and vice, was published. From the beginning of the 1780's, the attacks became more ruthless. 'Fucking' replaced 'f—' in the pamphlets, pictures appeared, and the chronicling of scandals composed an alternative history of the glories of monarchy. In this way, pornographic attacks combined with the rewriting of history established the impotence of Louis XVI. Symbolically, the body of the king succumbed to its absolute defeat, the failure of his seminal power.²³

²¹ *Song in the wedding of His Royal Highness the Dauphin, by an invalid of the Hôtel-Dieu*, quoted in de Baecque 1997, 35.

²² de Baecque 1997, 48.

²³ de Baecque 1997, 50–1.

Before the revolution, this devirilization of the king's political body was still an undercurrent. The dominant image remained one of majesty and fertility: Louis XVI as the father-king, twice a father, 'multiplying his image' by means of his own progeny and simultaneously through his subjects 'loved like his own children.' By the advent of the revolution, however, the portrayal of the impotent king in all its dimensions – imbecile, weak, unaware, deceived – reappeared between 1789 and 1791. At first this image was not a central one, but later it was brought to the heart of the Revolution itself.²⁴

With the decline of the virility of the royal body, its counterpart, the vigorous revolutionary body appeared. Libertine writers constructed a character in every respect opposite to the royal weakness: the patriot, the healthy and vigorous "Herculean fucker" [*fouteur herculéen*]. In a print from the end of 1790, "Bravo, bravo! The queen is penetrated by the Fatherland," [*Bravo, bravo! La reine se pénètre de la Patrie*], he is also the first to make the king a cuckold.²⁵

This narrative of the Revolution presented in verse, prose and pictures the transfer of virility from the royal sex to the patriot sex. The power to procreate shifts: Bourbon fertility is seen as lost, corrupted, and finally eliminated by the sterile pleasures of the court. Now, as a last resort, only the seminal power of the patriot can cause a new national body, a new Constitution, to be born. This belief in a new birth is animated by an upsurge of energy, what the pamphlets call 'fuckative regeneration' [*régénération foutative*].²⁶

A discourse of seminal power also surrounded the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* (August 1789) and its adoption. Playing on the expression 'right of man', the Declaration became an expression of a new, powerful ability to have sex and procreate. This connection is explored via a series of pamphlets improvising on the tone of the Declaration, adopting particular

²⁴ de Baecque 1997, 51.

²⁵ Frontispiece of the pamphlet *Marie-Antoinette in a predicament* [*Marie-Antoinette dans l'embarras*], 1790, quoted in de Baecque 1997, 54.

²⁶ de Baecque 1997, 55.

articles such as the “seventeen rights of the patriot fucker”²⁷ or dedicating the preamble to “that legislative power placed in the hands of the best fuckers of the kingdom.”²⁸

In de Baecque’s words, “the declaration of the right of man becomes a kind of erotic talisman, on which the good patriot swears he will be as vigorous and faithful to the constitution as to his wife.” This ‘erotic talisman’ is honoured and exalted, as an at first glance innocuous engraving of September 1791 shows: it depicts a woman of the people, the “Democrat,” pressing against her bosom the Declaration of the Rights of Man rolled up like a manuscript²⁹. On a closer look, the manuscript is rolled up so as to resemble an erect penis. Man’s virility and man’s political rights are one. The female democrat does not just cherish the new rights of man: they form a political dildo for her, as de Baecque analyzes the engraving.³⁰



²⁷ *Portfolio of the patriot containing the Declaration of the Rights of Man, a great number of racy and little known anecdotes on the Court, the ministers, the clergy, the nobility, the parliaments, and on various other subjects that demonstrate how misjudged and despised the rights of man were until now, and how indispensable the present revolution was*, n.p., n.d. Bibliothèque Nationale: Lb39 7601.

²⁸ *Petition and decree in favour of whores, fuckers, madams, and friggers, in Cock-suckerie, and can be obtained from all national fuckers, the second year of the fuckative regeneration*. Bibliothèque Nationale: Enfer 762; de Baecque 1997, 55.

²⁹ This image, attributed to the radical republican artist Villeneuve, was often subtitled “Oh the good Degree” [*Ah l’bon decret*] and was published in several versions. See Landes 2001, 133–4 for her discussion of the same image.

³⁰ de Baecque 1997, 55–6.

Another example of this erotic fetishising of the Declaration is an illustration from September 1791 that refers ironically to the ceremonies that surrounded the act of Louis XVI accepting the Consitution and twist them to its own purposes. *The Triumph of the Right of Man* depicts a procession carrying the emptied symbols of the old world (a monk's frock, a parliamentary gown and nobleman's robes) and drawing along the new idol, the 'Right of Man' represented by an immense erect phallus.



In accordance with this equating of virility and the rights of man, the “new man” illustrated in descriptions of the taking of the Bastille is a being full of strength and virility. The revolutionary also becomes a dramatic hero for the “fuckative regeneration” the pornographic version of the revolution depicts³¹:

Married at the flower of her age, beautiful and virgin, what a celebration was the first wedding night for the young cunt of Mme Cunt-licked, who is anxious to immolate her scarcely blossomed virginity on the altars of the most lovable and grateful god! This memorable night, this delicious night was the one that followed the great day of the French Revolutionaries, on 14 July 1789. By uniting herself with a Frenchman on that day, one had to presume that she would marry a hero; and the night that followed that hymen, she had, for the same reason, to put in her queynt the burning, victorious tarse of a Hercules. [...] That at least is the ticklish idea that she conceived of a man

³¹ de Baecque 1997, 142.

who would enter her bed fresh from conquering the Bastille, and take her after having routed despotism; it is quite certain that regenerated men are hard-cocked demigods, and consequently more than ordinary men.³²

De Baecque thus concludes that between 1770 and 1791 an immense seminal transfer has been effected around the impotence of the king: the state's power of propagation has been moved from one body to another.³³

The German crisis in masculinity

The surge of virile masculinity in the French Revolution echoed all around Europe. In the German countries, the years around 1800 saw, in contrast to France, a serious crisis in the national masculinity. Transformations in German masculinity began to emerge during the 1780s, but a turning point in these discourses was the Prussian troops' defeat to Napoleon's forces in 1806 at Jena and Auerstedt. Reformers felt a new type of soldier was needed to confront Napoleonic troops – a warrior-citizen equal to the revolutionary spirit of French soldiers. Peter Uwe Hohendahl has described the changes as revolving around a cry for a reinstated virility: eighteenth-century masculinity was scrutinized and found wanting exactly in this respect. Under criticism came equally the aristocrat, the scholar who merely reads and writes as well as the merchant who focusses solely on making profit. All these professions were seen as lacking manliness in a situation of political and social crisis. Instead, a new type of manly subject was called for: one strongly motivated to act, but also responsible and self-restraining in his decision making.³⁴

A general discourse on the 'new man' had already emerged in the 1790s. Hohendahl points out that the writings of educators and intellectuals of the time show an urgency in this task of rebuilding a new masculinity that seems to result from genuine concern. Rather than

³² "The secret of Mme Cuntlicked", an anecdote reported in *The fuckomaniac echo, or collection of several lewd and libertine scenes*, A Démocratis, n.d. Bibliothèque Nationale: Enfer 70. English translation in de Baecque 1997, 142.

³³ de Baecque 1997, 56.

³⁴ Hohendahl 2008, 187.

defending the old regime, they see themselves as reformers working towards a better social order resulting from reconceptualizing man and manliness. The new masculinities were to assist with the transformation of the old society build on estates as well as the family order. The diffusion of established social roles, in particular the weakening of the patriarchal family model, necessitated a fundamental redefinition of masculinity. The central questions were seen to be ethical, but the redefinition of masculinity also concerned physical appearance and cultural education. The new man was supposed to have a broad and well-proportioned nature, neither overly specialized nor fixated on a particular goal. He was to be an autonomous agent moving easily in society.³⁵

The development of the new man around 1800 is a mirror image for the reconceptualization of women around that time. Whereas women were placed firmly in the realm of the family, men are now increasingly cut off from it, as the model of the man as mainly a family patriarch transforms. The public sphere becomes the primary space for the new man. It is there he is seen best to exercise his moral and physical attributes, while traditional patriarchal roles within the family and kinship system are no longer emphasized or even mentioned. In the works of educators of the time, manliness is measured in terms of public appearance and public actions related to the state or to civil society. This emphasis is clear in both discussions of male education in general and the new discourse on physical education that rises at this time.³⁶

In Germany, the debate on physical education first developed out of the educational theory and practice of the late Enlightenment known as *Philanthropinismus* and eventually turned into the gymnastics movement of the early nineteenth century³⁷. The central idea was extending education into the physical realm to transform the what was seen as the weakness and sickliness of a soft and untrained body. Gymnastics were linked to virtue, and for this reason it was seen to have a special place in the education of boys and young men. The German Educator J.C.F. Guts Muths, a central figure in the gymnastics movement and the

³⁵ Hohendahl 2008, 188.

³⁶ Hohendahl 2008, 189–97.

³⁷ Hohendahl 2008, 197.

author of the influential *Gymnastik für die Jugend* (1793 and 1804) and *Turnbuch für die Söhne der Vaterlandes* (1817), placed the need for physical education in a contrast between ‘the natural man’ of keen senses and physical force, and ‘the civilized man’ who has lost his physical stamina. The program of gymnastics Guths Muths proposes is meant to unite body and spirit into a harmonious, strong whole. He distinguishes three social classes which all are deficient in their own way to meet their obligations as citizens. The members of the working class are strong, but they are clumsy and unprepared for quick reactions. The second class consists of certain craftsmen and other physically oriented occupations that require some agility and come closer to the ideal balance of body and spirit. The third class which consists of professionals is in Guth Muths evaluation completely unprepared: they are weak, shivery and easily scared. All these classes suffer from a lack of virile manliness that results in their diminished usefulness to the state.³⁸

This physical approach to reinstating virility is only one thread of the German masculinity debates. For the rest of this essay I will concentrate on how active sexual virility is connected to political participation and citizenship in German philosophical texts around 1800.

2 Fichte and the natural law of woman

Fichte’s first appendix to the *Foundations of Natural Rights* [*Grundlage des Naturrechts*], “Outline of family right”, is his attempt to complement natural right by giving a deduction of marriage and the relations of husband and wife in addition to that of parents and children. Fichte wants to give ‘natural’ reasons to the different rights of women and men, but his reasoning is more complicated than that of many writers of the French revolution. He is not attempting to ground the lesser rights of women in their lesser understanding or moral qualities nor in their ‘natural’ function as mothers that would force them to stay in the private sphere. Rather, the reason for the gendered differentiation of political rights lies for him in sexual drive.

Fichte’s explanation for sexual differentiation is it being a necessary check for the endless

³⁸ Hohendahl 2008, 198.

fecundity of nature – a defence against a chaos of eternal flux that would ultimately threaten nature itself in a struggle of becoming. Nature’s highest power is that of regenerating itself, and, for Fichte, this power is unstoppable: it is necessarily operative whenever the conditions of its efficacy are given.

Now if those conditions were always given, nature would be in the state of perpetual flux from one shape to another, and no shape would ever remain the same. There would be eternal becoming, but never any being; and then even flux would be impossible, since nothing would actually be that could pass over into something else; this is unthinkable and self-contradictory thought. [...] Under these conditions nature is impossible.³⁹

Thus, nothing less serious as the existence of the natural world hinges on sexual difference. Although Fichte calls the sexes “two perfectly matching halves”, there is an important differentiation in them for him: “in the satisfaction of the sexual drive or in the promotion of nature’s end (in the actual act of procreation), the one sex is entirely active, the other entirely passive.”⁴⁰ This separation between complete activity in the male and complete passivity in the female as regards sexual desire is not mere contingency for him, but the central tenet on which his whole deduction of marriage and family right hinges. Again, this is not all that is at stake: if the first, active “moving principle” of regeneration were not separated from the regenerative system contained in female bodies, nature would not have any lasting shape: it would be in constant amorphous state of becoming, birth and flux.

This ‘natural’ separation of activity and passivity into male and female bodies is not enough for Fichte, however, but he has to add reason to the picture to explain why “the second sex” cannot logically aim at the satisfaction of its sexual drive.

The character of reason is absolute self-activity: mere passivity for its own sake contradicts reason and completely annuls it. Thus, it is not at all contrary to reason for the first sex to have as an end the satisfaction of its sexual drive, for it can be satisfied through activity: but it is absolutely contrary to reason for the second sex to have the satisfaction of its sexual drive as an end, for it would then have mere passivity as its

³⁹ § 1, FNR 265.

⁴⁰ § 2, FNR 266.

end. [...] the second sex can never have the satisfaction of its sexual drive as an end. Reason and such an end completely annul each other.⁴¹

Reason as well as nature would, then, be under threat from women's active sexual desire. The man can acknowledge his sexual desire and seek to satisfy it without giving up his dignity. The woman cannot. Fichte states unequivocally that "This one difference between the sexes is the basis of every other difference between them."⁴²

Because women are rational creatures to Fichte, they cannot 'surrender to sexual desire' for the sake of satisfying their own drive. However, because they nevertheless must surrender themselves for nature's purpose to be fulfilled, there must be a specific form of this giving of themselves that circumvents the problem of their desire. Thus Fichte claims that the sexual drive in the woman can be none other than the drive to satisfy the man. In this act she becomes the means for the end of another – an affront to Kantian dignity – but the solution to this is 'love', freely making herself into a means. Love is a form of drive that according to Fichte is innate only to woman and that men can only learn and develop in connection with a loving woman. 'Love' is then defined by Fichte as "woman's natural drive to satisfy a man."⁴³

It is, to be sure, a drive that urgently demands to be satisfied. Its satisfaction, however, does not consist in the woman's sensual satisfaction, but in the man's; for the woman, the only satisfaction is of the heart.⁴⁴

Love is the only natural, given, original drive possible to woman. Fichte admits that it is not impossible for women to either sink beneath their nature or to raise themselves above it – but these are equally severe errors. A woman *can* degrade herself to a condition of irrationality in finding in herself the sexual drive proper as it is present to the man in its true form. Equally, she *can* raise herself above her nature if she understands the satisfaction of her sexual desire as a means towards another end – becoming a 'Mrs' and attaining secure livelihood, or wanting children. Fichte sees both these aberrations from woman's true nature as leading to

⁴¹ § 3, FNR 266.

⁴² § 3, FNR 268.

⁴³ § 4, FNR 269.

⁴⁴ § 4, FNR 269.

severe loss of self-respect and rationality for the woman.⁴⁵

What, then, are the political and legal consequences of this differentiation between active sexual drive and the desire to satisfy the desire of the man that Fichte calls love? He writes that it might seem laughable even to pose the question whether the woman has the same rights in the state as the man: “For if reason and freedom are the only ground of a person’s capability to have rights, how could there be any difference in the rights of the two sexes, which possess the same reason and freedom?”⁴⁶ However, as long as human beings have existed, the female sex seems to have been universally treated as inferior to the male sex in the exercise of her rights. Fichte acknowledges that such universal agreement must have a deep-seated reason and that in his time there is present a pressing need to discover that reason.

To ground this inequality of rights, he makes a complicated argument based on both the illusoriness of women’s supposedly lesser rights and on the convenient impossibility of women to even will to exercise all their rights. Fichte points out that as a virgin, a woman stands under her father’s authority as does an unmarried man, and that in this, the two sexes are perfectly equal – both are set free by marriage. Thus, the possible inequality only rises in marriage. Fichte maintains that by first making herself into a means to satisfy a man – according to her natural desire to only desire the satisfaction of a man – the woman has given up her personality. She can regain her personality and all of her dignity only by having surrendered herself out of love for this one man.⁴⁷ Thus, once the woman is married, Fichte claims that her own dignity depends on her being and appearing to be completely subjected to her husband: “she is subjected through her own enduring, necessary wish to be subjected, and this wish is the condition of her morality. She may well take back her freedom, if she *willed* to do so; but that is the very point: she cannot rationally *will* to do so.”⁴⁸

Thus, it is a consequence of the woman’s own necessary will that the husband is the

⁴⁵ § 3, FNR 267.

⁴⁶ § 32, FNR 297.

⁴⁷ § 5, FNR 270.

⁴⁸ § 34, FNR 299.

administrator of all her rights and her ‘natural’ representative in the state and society. She wills her rights to be asserted and exercised only insofar as the husband wills them to be. Fichte is quick to add a categorical impossibility for the woman to do otherwise: “She cannot even think about exercising her rights directly on her own.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Fichte claims that wives are citizens, too, and that in states where the citizens have a vote concerning public affairs, the husband should not vote without having discussed the matter with his wife and having modified his opinion as a result of this. Thus women actually do exercise their right to vote in a manner concordant with their female dignity. In a remark, Fichte rebukes demands for a direct vote to women, claiming that women actually are most fully in possession of rights and in asking for anything more, they can only be after outer appearance, fame and vainglory: “they cannot even raise such complaints without having renounced all their womanly merit.” Vanity and the thirst for glory are contemptible in a man, but in a woman they destroy that modesty and devoted spousal love on which her entire dignity depends.⁵⁰

Significantly, however, there is a route to rights for women, too. Fichte sees absolutely no reason why widows, divorced women and women who never married but nevertheless do not stand under paternal authority should not exercise all civil rights, as men do. They should have the right to cast their vote in the republic, appear in a court without representation, possess property and manage it herself in accordance with her own will, and pursue any agricultural or commercial trade. Single women thus have the full spectrum of rights available to them in Fichte’s scheme as men – almost. The only thing forbidden to them is holding public office. Fichte’s reasoning is that public officials must be completely free and thoroughly accountable to the state. A woman, however, is completely free and depended only on herself as long as she is unmarried. The state cannot rationally demand a promise from a woman not to marry, because “love arises in a woman on its own, independent of her free will.” If a female public official married, she either could not subject herself fully to her husband with respect to her official business which would, once again, be contrary to her female dignity, or she would subject in which case the office would become the husband’s by marriage, like all the rest of the wife’s property and rights – something that the state could not

⁴⁹ § 34, FNR 299.

⁵⁰ § 34 Remark, FNR 300.

tolerate.⁵¹

Thus, for Fichte, it is the sentimental bonds of passive sexual drive expressing itself as love and marriage that prevent women from acting in the state, not any physical or mental weakness. The worst handicap for women for reaching full citizenship is their subjection in marriage, which in its part results from the solely passive sexual drive that demands that women must surrender completely in order to make themselves the object and means of the satisfaction of active sexual drive proper that men possess along with full rights of the citizen.

3 Hegel on the ‘right of desire’

For Hegel as for Fichte the disparity of male and female desire is a part of the reason for their differentiated spheres of life. In Hegel’s early, unpublished manuscripts *System der Sittlichkeit* or *System of Ethical Life* from 1802/03, and *First Philosophy of Spirit* from 1803/04, desire, love and work form the basis of the notion of the family, the fundamental unit of ethical life. Hegel claims that ‘natural desire’ is transformed into ‘love’ with the appearance of the concept of *work*. This happens because labour makes the two sexes into self-consciousnesses for one another. More specifically, it frees the woman from being an object of desire – desire, that is for Hegel inherently masculine. Through shared labour, the woman comes to be “a being on her own account for the man” and ceases to be an object of his desire.⁵² Thus, being an object of desire and being a self-consciousness for the other are posited by Hegel as mutually exclusive options.⁵³

The emergence of gender differentiation in Hegel’s early Jena work coincides with his separation of the female from the male drive. He expressed this differentiation explicitly as a difference in sexuality: “The male has desire, drive; the female drive is far more aimed at being the object of desire, to *excite*, to arouse drive and to allow the male drive (or the man)

⁵¹ § 35–7, FNR 301–2.

⁵² JR1, 318n1; FPS, 231.

⁵³ Cf. Kojève’s reading of recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the ‘desire for the desire of the other’ – an unlucky reading that ignores the fact that being an object for desire is never conceived of as a position really worth seeking for Hegel.

to satisfy itself in her.”⁵⁴

This early differentiation between active and inactive sexual desire in men and women has interesting echoes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In that work, love and desire are presented as clearly problematic for ethical life. Hegel claims that the natural relation of desire makes mutual recognition in marriage problematic: the relationship between husband and wife is basically “one in which one consciousness immediately recognizes itself in another, and one in which there is knowledge of this mutual recognition.”⁵⁵ However, it is mixed with “natural relation and with feeling,” and therefore is not a purely ethical relation. More specifically, Hegel claims that it is the particularity of the husband’s desire that makes the marriage relationship ‘natural’ and not fully universal. It is because of this desire that the woman’s only choice for recognition is in her brother, because “the recognition of herself in him is pure and unmixed with any natural desire. — [T]he moment of the individual self, recognizing and being recognized, can here assert its right, because it is linked to the equilibrium of the blood and is a relation devoid of desire.”⁵⁶

If desire makes recognition impossible and vice versa, is there, then, any possibility at all for female desire and a relationship in which female desire could be recognised and affirmed? One obvious candidate would be her relation to the household gods, but Hegel is quick to point out that this is not the case:

The woman is associated with these household gods and beholds in them both her universal substance and her particular individuality, yet in such a way that this relation of her individuality to them is at the same time not the natural one of desire.⁵⁷

Neither is there room for female desire in the woman’s relation to her husband. Hegel contends that “The difference between the ethical life of the woman and that of the man

⁵⁴ JRP, 221; JLPS, 105n16, translation modified.

⁵⁵ W3, 335–6; PS, 273.

⁵⁶ W3, 337–8; PS, 275.

⁵⁷ W3, 337; PS, 274. The reason why Hegel wanted to emphasise this could have been his need to distinguish the gods of the hearth from Dionysus and the frenzied female followers of Dionysic cults. On Bacchantes, see W1, 437–8; MW, 98; W3, 527; PS, 437–8.

consists just in this, that in her vocation as an individual and in her pleasure, her interest is centred on the universal and remains alien to the particularity of desire.”⁵⁸ While in other places in *Phenomenology*, the ‘female’ and ‘family’ are defined as particular, and ‘male’ and ‘state’ as universal, here the moment of desire is defined as clearly particular and clearly assigned to males. Hegel comments cryptically that the husband acquires “the right of desire” [*das Recht der Begierde*] because as a citizen he possesses “the self-conscious power of universality,” and because in him the two sides of vocation or determination [*Bestimmung*] and pleasure [*Lust*] are separated.⁵⁹ Although he does not explicate this statement further, it follows along the lines of Fichte’s connection between active, masculine desire and the political subject’s rights. Thus, women’s alleged sexual passivity is linked to their political exclusion, and is at the same time used to define them as morally or ethically ‘purer’.

When we consider this absolute denial of both love and desire as motivating women’s action in the *Phenomenology*’s description of the original ethical life of ancient Greece, something slightly surprising happens as we move on to Hegel’s political thought concerning his contemporary society. In the *Philosophy of Right* (1821), Hegel constructs the category ‘woman’ – *Frau* precisely through feeling. He defines ‘man’ as spirit that *divides* itself into personal self-sufficiency and the knowledge and volition of free universality. Hegel states that a man lives and acts substantively in the state, in learning, labour and struggle with the external world and with himself. ‘Woman’, on the other hand, is defined as spirit *maintaining itself in unity* in the knowledge and volition of concrete singularity and feeling. She is passive and subjective in her external relations and has her substantial determination [*Bestimmung*] in the family.

Although ethical marital love is prescribed to both the husband and the wife in *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel builds a contrast between the attitudes of a man and a woman to love. He claims that ‘a girl’ loves a man because the man will make her a *Frau* – a notable double play on both meanings of the German word, ‘wife’ and ‘adult woman’. It is through marrying a man, by becoming his wife [*Ehefrau*], that a girl will “receive her dignity, value, joy and

⁵⁸ W3, 337; PS, 274–5.

⁵⁹ W3, 337; PS, 275.

happiness” as an adult woman [*Frau*]⁶⁰. In contrast, a man is and remains a man even without a wife, so does not need a wife to give him status as a ‘man’. Hegel says that because of this greater independence and self-will outside marriage, the man is more interested in the particular qualities of a girl. Since a girl can only attain wife- and womanhood through a man, her desire is not for the man as such, but for the status he can give her. The girl’s experience of love only happens through her feeling the man’s interest in her⁶¹.

In the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel particularly attacks the Romantic view of the time that the marriage ceremony is superfluous to the unity brought about by love and “physical surrender”. He calls this an argument “with which seducers are not unfamiliar” and claims that the positions of a man and a girl, that is an unmarried woman, are not equal: in the act of ‘physical surrender’, the girl loses her honour but the man does not. His explanation for this difference is that the man has a field of ethical activity in the state whereas the girl’s ethical life takes place essentially in the relation of marriage.⁶² Consequently, Hegel ties the act of sexual love outside marriage expressly to the woman’s shame, and it is the woman’s honour that makes a love relationship asymmetrical. Thus, it is the shame and honour connected with sexual love that make marriage essential for the girl’s determination or identity in *Philosophy of Right*.

When *Phenomenology* and *Philosophy of Right* are read together, Hegel’s description of ‘woman’ as the gender determined by feeling appears quite surprising. His determination of the ‘ethical love’ of marriage does not involve any differentiation between the spouses. However, when he does mention any differences in feeling between male and female individuals, it is always the man who is considered actively loving and desiring, and the female only reflecting this active desire. The difference he points to in *Philosophy of Right* concerning the consequences of premarital sex for a man and a girl is, however, tied not to the shame of the man’s illicit active desire but to shame of the girl’s ‘losing honour’. Although Hegel determines ‘women’ as feeling, *Empfindung*, in fact their relation to the feelings of

⁶⁰ Handwritten notes to §162 (not in PR).

⁶¹ Handwritten notes to §162 (not in PR); W7, 312.

⁶² Zusatz and handwritten notes (not in PR) to §164, W7, 317–318; PR, 164.

love and desire are utterly passive. A girl is dependent on a man's feeling of love towards her for gaining her full mature self-consciousness as a 'woman', which necessarily also mean 'wife'.

I think that behind this ambivalence about which gender actually is the one connected to love and desire lies a complicated and unacknowledged connection between political participation, citizenship and erotic desire. From the perspective of political philosophy and *Phenomenology of Spirit* the separation into the active desire of husband-citizens and the passive non-loving relations of wives is central. The husband's desire and the wife's indifference to his particularity seem to make recognition impossible in marriage, leaving only the brother as a possible source of equal recognition for the woman. Desire is something that interferes with *Sittlichkeit*. At the same time, it is clear from *Phenomenology of Spirit's* description of the 'right of desire' that the husband achieves through his active life in the state that Hegel connects active sexual desire with political participation. Without sexual desire and fulfilled sexual union, the penetration of the sphere of state and public life is impossible for women.

Hegel's dialectics of self-consciousness actually demand the structures of self-diremption, opposition, and negation. The position of man as citizen and his 'right of desire' is determined in terms of his inner and outer negativity, struggle and differentiation. In contrast, Hegel associates women's 'staying in unity' with lack of desire, the undifferentiation of spirit, the incapacity for active self-differentiation and torn self-consciousness. While the unreflective unity of women and Greek ethical life may be found beautiful, it cannot hold and cannot be recreated in the modern world, as the nature of spirit is to divide and create oppositions to find itself in them. A torn world is the only possible world of spirit as substance and self-conscious subject – a modern world of masculine citizens.

4 Conclusion

It is important to notice that the picture of the ideal of a manly life is by no means uniform throughout history. There is nothing ahistorical and uncontested in the view of either

disembodied reasoning or active virility and life in the state as the highest good for a man. Even though the ideal of active political virility is present already in Periclean Greece, both Plato's Socrates and Aristotle present opposite views of what the proper sphere of man's actions should be and in which way he should go about acting⁶³. Although Macchiavelli's political virtue, *vir*, is conceptually a direct translation of the Greek virtue of *andreia*, 'manliness' or 'virility', it is by no means the only conception of renaissance political thought. Equally, in the eighteenth century, there are voices seeing the family and not the state as the proper sphere for men's most ethical life⁶⁴. There is thus nothing 'natural' in the gendered division between the spheres of family and state and 'the private' versus 'the public', although it must, of course, be noted that whenever the split is made in the history of European thought, women are never placed solely on the side of the political and men solely on the side of the private. There is much more oscillation in assigning greater sexual desire (or lustfulness, or lechery) to one gender or the other and greater decency, self-control and morality on one or the other.

Hegel's somewhat mysterious claim in the *Sittlichkeit* chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that men gain the "right of desire" through their active participation and life in the state (whereas women's desire seems to remain an impossibility) becomes more understandable when we look at it against the historical background. Around 1800 in Western Europe, men's political activity in the state is connected to their active sexual desire and virility. At first glance, this does not seem to be a specifically modern idea. On the contrary, Ancient Greek culture, as Foucault and Lacqueur have noted, made divisions between people on the basis of active penetrating and passive receiving; kings and citizens and men all being on the first side of the divide and people with no political rights – slaves, women, young boys – on the other side. So, what could be really new and modern about the connection of "active desire" or penetrating sexual practice and political participation?

There is a reflective, modern dialectic at play in Hegel's intertwining of active desire with political action. For Hegel, there has to be something non-natural and reflective about this

⁶³ Salkever 1986.

⁶⁴ *** missing reference

unity that in modernity can no longer be the effortless unity of the Ancient Greek way of life. The political desire at work in *Phenomenology of Spirit* and especially the *Philosophy of Right* is tamed, sublated active sexual desire that can be compared to the desire of the bondsman transformed in the service of a master – still penetrating, but now *aufgehoben* through the delay of pleasure and gratification. The active political and sexual desire of the male citizen represents the active desire of the bondsman who is bound to the land and has learned to cultivate it instead of the desire of the lord and master who can only rashly conquer, rape or kill.

My understanding is that a similar dichotomy between sexual activity and passivity and political activity and passivity is still at work in modern political thought as it was in Ancient Greece. However, in modernity this is a more reflexive, transformed process that Hegel conceptualizes through his idea of agriculture and monogamous marriage being the necessary conditions for the birth of the state. For the Greek citizen, being monogamously married would mean little regarding his political status as an active citizen. In modernity, however, with the breakup of the older patriarchal family father model and the reconceptualization of masculinity as something belonging above all to the public sphere, the familial and the virile need to be reconciled in new ways – something that happens only slowly during the nineteenth century.

Abbreviations

Fichte

FNR: *Foundations of natural right*. Cambridge texts in the history of philosophy. Tr. F. Neuhauser. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hegel

FPS: *First Philosophy of Spirit in System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*. Tr. H.S. Harris. Albany: SUNY Press 1979, 205–50.

JLPS: *Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805/06)* in Rauch, Leo (ed. and tr.): *Hegel and the Human Spirit*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1983, 83–183.

JR1: *Ausarbeitungen zur Geistesphilosophie von 1803/04 (Jenenser Realphilosophie I)* in Göhler, Gerhard (ed.): *Hegels frühe politische Systeme*. Frankfurt am Main & Berlin & Wien: Ullstein 1974, 291–335.

JRP: *Jenaer Realphilosophie (1805/06)* in Göhler, Gerhard (ed.): *Hegels frühe politische Systeme*. Frankfurt am Main & Berlin & Wien: Ullstein 1974, 201–89.

PR: *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Tr. H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991.

PS: *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Tr. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977.

SdS: *System der Sittlichkeit* in Göhler, Gerhard (ed.): *Hegels frühe politische Systeme*. Frankfurt am Main & Berlin & Wien: Ullstein 1974, 13–102.

SEL: *System of Ethical Life* in *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*. Tr. H.S. Harris & T.M. Knox. Albany: SUNY Press 1979, 97–177.

W3: *Phänomenologie des Geistes (Werke in 20 Bänden 3)*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1986.

W7: *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts (Werke in 20 Bänden 7)*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1986.

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