

The Family As The Embryonic Foundation of Political Rule in Western Philosophy:
A Comparative Analysis of Aristotle's *Politics* and Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*
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The family, in its modern form, must not be understood as a social, economic, and political structure of alliance that excludes or at least restrains sexuality. On the contrary, its role is to anchor sexuality and provide it with permanent support.

-Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol: I*

Today, the family is undergoing major transitions. It is estimated that over half of today's marriages will end up in divorce and there is a substantial rise in single-parent households. On the other hand, same-sex marriage, trans-gender rights and polygamy are becoming major political and legal issues in Western society. Although many nations, cultures, communities and individuals are taking different stances on these issues, the social tensions brought by the political debate over 'family values' seems to be equally shared by all of us. It is in this context that the academic study of the family as a legal, historical, and political institution is becoming incredibly important for today's scholars. While sociological and historical research can bring much light on how the family has developed over time, it is in the vein of political theory that many themes can be discovered about the anthropological importance of the family. This is especially true in its relationship to the political community and its form of governance.

For that reason, a canonical study of the family in Western philosophy not only increases our understanding of the role of this institution within the 'great books' tradition, it also enhances our own understanding of these thinkers' historical context, and how their observations on the family were relevant to the political issues of their time. While there have been many stances on the family since the rise of civilization, a comparative analysis of Aristotle and Hegel is a fruitful study because of their recognized role in largely defining the universal principles of both ancient and modern thought in Western civilization.

This paper argues that despite the almost incomparable differences in the historical context of their times, along with their very different approaches to the question of the 'family', they do in fact share a common stance on this institution. Besides the 'natural' (in Aristotelian terms), or 'rational' (in Hegelian terms) divisions of labor on gendered terms that many feminists have critically noted in their philosophies, along with the implications this circumstance holds for the 'domesticated' wife during Western history, there is a more purely *political* connection. The principle that both thinkers share is that the family is the particularized foundation in which the universalized rule of law is validated according to the political structure of the 'Polis' or 'State' itself, as defined by the specific philosophy of each thinker.

This composite whole or structure of society (Ancient Polis/Modern State) is the political 'end' of humanity for both philosophers, which in turn finds its primordial 'beginning' in the family. For Aristotle, it is in the 'Kingly' rule of the household that the property based distinction of citizenship is set for the aristocratic rule of his ideal Polis. For Hegel, it is in the erotic love affirmed through caring affection within the modern nuclear family that the dialectical framework for the individualized freedom of civil society, and the rational unity of a final congregational "spirit" in the State, finds its

foundation. For both Aristotle and Hegel, their concept of the family sets the legal and moral base for a political theory that defines citizenship in a manner that transcends the particularities of kin bonds.

However, the eventual definition of the Polis/State is integrally linked with the social framework of the primal ‘family’, as originally discussed and envisioned by them in their teleological approach to political philosophy. For both thinkers, the ‘part’, being the family, becomes the logically necessary but not completely defining element of the ‘whole’, whether it is the Polis for Aristotle, or the State for Hegel. However, for Aristotle, it is the assumption of what is “natural” that will determine the relationship between the heterosexual family household and the latent homoerotic opportunities for friendship that exist within the ancient Polis. Alternatively, it is the modern notion of “will” that defines Hegel’s understanding of the nuclear family as a unit of ‘romantic’ heterosexual activity, which has a determinative relationship to the rational congregationalism of the modern State.

This paper will explore the relationship between ancient and modern philosophy through a study of the family in both Aristotelian and Hegelian political theory, and how their ideas on this institution related to the socio-historical context of their times. From this study, the relationship between the family and the historical development of political theory will be further used in understanding how the family, or at least the *idea* of such an entity, as expressed in Western philosophy, has transformed during our passage from antiquity to modernity. This comparative analysis will reveal the vital sociological differences between both Aristotle and Hegel in their ‘telos’ approach to political philosophy. It will also reveal how important their approaches to the family were to the socio-political tensions of their own time, just as our own stances on family values are integrally related to today’s political issues.

Aristotle’s Ancient Household and The Greek Polis

Born in 384 B.C.E., Aristotle, as an Athenian educated Macedonian aristocrat, had the unique opportunity of studying under Plato. He then became intellectually predominant in Greece during the Macedonian conquest of the Peloponnesian peninsula under King Phillip, and the victorious Persian campaign of Phillip’s son, Alexander The Great. While aristocratically and ethnically situated outside the democratic impulses of the peasant-citizens, urban laborers, and the sailor-merchants of fourth century B.C.E. Athens, the time spent in southern Greece during his formative years (mainly Athens and Lesbos) should not be overlooked as an important influence on his view towards the ‘Good’ found in a diffused power over the Polis. This ‘good’ being actualized through the sharing of political offices among the “best men” possible within a community.

This ‘Southern Greek’ influence can be recognized because the political framework of the various Poleis were very different from the despotic rule found in the Macedonian monarchy and its royal “household”. This was due to the fact that unlike regions such as ancient Macedonia, in which power was concentrated in a royal household, or in a theocratic temple such as in Jerusalem, power within the southern Greek Poleis were diffused among citizens, especially in democratic Athens¹. However,

¹ E. Wood, *Peasant Citizen and Slave*, p. 106-7

there were many native-born critics of the Polis form of rule, especially among the aristocrats.

Plato, an aristocratic intellectual, was critical of his native Athens' democracy, or the polis-style governance. For Plato, only the economically and even socially liberated philosopher was a valid leader for the "just city". This theory was articulated through his assertion of metaphysical "forms" of truth discovered through the craft of philosophy, which resulted from a "leisurely private life". This in turn morally validated the rule of the Philosopher-King. This new 'great man' understood the metaphysical 'realities' that existed outside the "cave" of conventional socio-political life, and its reliance on sensory experience. This true knowledge was to be attained through a philosophical learning of the "Good" in its metaphysical form. In contrast to the more anti-social philosophy of Plato, Aristotle searched for a more realistically communal framework for his understanding of the "good life". As Aristotle states in *The Nicomachean Ethics*:

For while a philosopher, as well as a just man or one possessing any other virtue, needs the necessaries of life, when they are sufficiently equipped with things of that sort the just man needs people towards whom and with whom he shall act justly, and the temperate man, the brave man, and each of the others in the same case, but the philosopher, even when by himself, can contemplate truth, and the better the wiser he is; he can perhaps do better if he has fellow workers, but still he is the most self-sufficient. (Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 264)

"Self-sufficiency" is the key in understanding Aristotle's sense of virtue found in the philosophical life and its anti-democratic foundation, as connected to the Platonic tradition of the Athenian Academy.

However, it is in Aristotle's own approach to philosophy that not only is practical virtue found in social relations, but philosophical virtue can also be improved by 'thinking' with "fellow workers". It is in this sense that the communal nature of the Polis is to be largely understood. According to Aristotle, we are inextricably connected to our natural place within the Polis, which then allows us to become a necessary 'part' of our political and moral life as a "whole" (man is the "Zoon Politikon"). From the social dimension of practical wisdom to the "fellow worker" value of Aristotle's approach to the learning of philosophy, "self-sufficiency" becomes a teleological benchmark rather than an ideal "form", which was symbolically represented by Plato's philosopher-king. For Plato, this role model is best exemplified by the *philosopher-extradonaire* Socrates, who in turn played the heroic role in the Platonic dialogues. It must be noted that Aristotle's model philosopher is the "most self-sufficient", but not completely "self-sufficient", as found in the "private life" idealism of pure philosophy, which is the fundamental value of Platonic ethics.

This approach can be understood by recognizing Aristotle's defense of tragedy and its moral value to the community-shared sense of "pathos" experienced during the Dionysian rites, as expressed in *The Poetics*. The "cave" of social life is not to be abandoned but rather directed towards philosophical truth and its understanding of the "good", which is fostered through the virtues of philosophical reflection, political activity and artistic expression. Although the household is to be directed towards the most "self-sufficient" economy, the "nobility" of the political life is found in those specific social

activities that exist in Plato's "cave" (prizes for creating the most beautiful images, amusements, etc.). This in turn adheres to Aristotle's concept of a "good" being found in friendship. As Aristotle states:

It is clear then that a state is not a mere society, having a common place, established for the prevention of mutual crime and for the sake of exchange. These are conditions without which a state cannot exist;...Hence there arise in cities family connections, brotherhoods, common sacrifices, amusements which draw men together. But these are created by friendship, for to choose to live together is friendship. The end of the state is the good life, and these are the means towards it...Our conclusion, then is that political society exists for the sake of noble actions, and not of living together (Aristotle, The Politics, pp. 74-5)

As this caption reveals, it is in the enjoyment of social activities among fellow community dwellers that the good life, as established by the bonds of friendship, is pursued.

Aristotle states at the beginning of *The Politics* that despite the supreme value of "self-sufficiency" described throughout *The Nicomachean Ethics*, solitary life is possible for only those "above and below" humanity, not human beings. Only beasts and gods can leave the Platonic "cave" of social life. It is in this sense that the communal reality of Aristotle's "polis" is to be understood. However, it is in the philosophical value of "self-sufficiency" that the socio-economic framework of Aristotle's concept of the household (Oikos) is also validated. This is because "self-sufficiency" is the benchmark value for the happiest life. The "self-sufficient" life opens the door for philosophical reflection, which is how human potential is most developed in its understanding of the good life and its natural actualization. This is at least "true" from the perspective of an ancient Greek aristocrat who was also a practically minded and an empirically driven student of Plato as well.

Plato envisioned a city that became one family in-itself through the paternal direction of a "golden" philosopher-class or king, which found its moral validity in the hierarchy ordained by the artificially constructed "myth of the metals". Alternatively, Aristotle retained the particularized relationship of the historically *existing* single-family household in its relation to the Polis-as-whole. This was accomplished by granting a paternal and "kingly" rule to the husband/father himself within the domestic domain, which relies on the autonomous production capacities of the household for its livelihood. Unlike the urban and port-based Athenians who created political relations through their socio-economic exchange activities, the philosophical ideal of "self-sufficiency" in Aristotle's household was to fully limit market exchange. This was so that the most "naturally" virtuous household could be achieved as a viable political part of the most "naturally good" polis. This entire system was morally grounded in the high value that Aristotle placed on the leisure of a "self-sufficient" lifestyle in developing philosophically minded men. This noble approach to life exists for those "naturally" best suited for both the practical virtues of political life and the metaphysical wisdom found in the learning of philosophy, as dictated by the recognized virtues of their clan based households.

Wealth is an 'initial' but base good for Aristotle, and it should never be forgotten that the household based property structure of the self-controlled family was a driving

factor of peasant-citizen democracy in Athens. Specific households in Aristotle's political theory find economic limits established by their "naturally" suited livelihood. This was to occur in contrast to the actual trend of socially mobile wealth accumulation by non-aristocratic merchant families, as established through Athenian market exchange, which was criticized as being unnatural by Aristotle. This is due to the unlimited greed that exchange activities promote within one's moral character, which is in opposition to the virtue of wealth being established through the act of civic generosity in Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics*. For Aristotle, the greed of market exchange in Athens' political community critically follows along with the ethical problems that this state of moral character creates for people living in a Polis without a solid understanding of moderation. This state of moral balance is found in pursuit of an ethical "golden mean" between the deficiencies and overabundances of one's personal virtues.

Consequently, those engaged in market exchange for their livelihood are not able to grasp the happiness found in a "golden mean" between deficiency and overabundance, as discovered in Aristotle's own specific viewpoint that was attained through a "naturally" aristocratic and philosophically minded lifestyle. As Aristotle states:

There are two sorts of wealth-getting, as I have said; one is a part of household management, the other is retail trade: the former is necessary and honourable, while that which consists in exchange is justly censured; for it is unnatural, and a mode by which men gain from one another. (ibid, p. 25)

Aristotle argues for a political economy in which the goods of nature are best shared when they are justly distributed according to the naturally proportioned worth and contribution of each individual household, which is part of the all-encompassing polis or whole. Consequently, each family finds its proper productive and consumptive place within the "natural production" (agrarian) based economy of the polis, as established by the particular characteristics of each specific household. As stated earlier, for Aristotle, the naturally wealthy find their virtue in personal generosity and a sense of moderation in resisting the enjoyment of the sensual pleasures of life. It is through an ethical commitment towards moderation, as understood by the principle of the "golden mean", that the wealthy attain civic nobility and a heightened place in terms of political leadership.

Within this paradigm, exchange is merely limited to the bartering of surplus goods among households for a balance of the necessary goods for life, as proportionally deserved according to the natural value and contributive worth of each individual household. Consequently, access to goods is limited to the natural production capacity of the specific household itself. For the peasant-farmers of Athens, this means that they were to be limited in their economic capacities in comparison to those aristocratic families that have large landholdings and slave workforces, which is due to their natural position of wealth and status within the polis. For those without naturally self-sufficient land, such as artisan based producers or port based merchants, their market goods exist merely for the use of those who exist within the naturally best households, which in turn have the greatest potential of producing the "best men" for political rule in the Polis. According to Aristotle, those households integrally linked with market exchange are relegated to a position of functional servitude within the Polis. This is because of the

educational opportunities for political and philosophical leadership created by the leisurely based framework of aristocratic household management, which is reliant on Aristotle's own defense of slavery being a natural fact of life.

Despite his critique of wealth-accumulation through market exchange, which at first glance seems to be somewhat parallel with today's neo-Marxist critics of the free market, Aristotle still supports traditional economic stratification. Aristotle accomplishes this through his philosophical validation of the particularized household being limited by its natural production capacities. Although the independent household and its property rights were a basis of Athenian democracy, Aristotle showed that it could also be the framework of an aristocratic polity structured by mixed forms of community level governance. This is asserted by Aristotle's observations on the relationship between the various occupations and their compatibility with the various deficiencies and strengths of individual families (the laziness of the shepherd, the active lifestyle of the hunter, etc.). This system produces the goods of life that are shared according to the "proportional" value of worth described by Aristotle in his work on distributive justice within *The Nicomachean Ethics*.

Now that the philosophical relationship between the virtue of "self-sufficiency" and the economic structure of the household has been examined according to the aristocratic rule of Aristotle's political theory, the actual nature of the Athenian family needs to be explored both in relationship to Aristotle's philosophy and the social structure of his time. Although a feminist critique of the misogyny in Aristotle's notion of a 'Kingly' household may seem validated in today's era of modern feminism, it must be balanced with the sociological realities of his time and their relationship to the moral values of ancient Greece, especially Athens. Along with the economic connections described above, the social framework of the Athenian family itself is connected to the moral value of Aristotle's polis and its acceptance of a 'friendly cave', which in turn seeks the philosophical "good" through the principle of "self-sufficiency" being "preserved" by family life. This is "naturally" established along with the friendship and happiness found in the act of politically living in the polis and enjoying its communal activities, which is realized through the limitations on despotism asserted by the household family structure itself.

According to Aristotle, the household had its necessary parts that combined to construct a definable "whole", which in turn would be the necessarily particularized foundation of the Polis as a universal whole. For the Athenian husband, alongside the authoritarian relationship that he had with his slaves in household management (Aristotle states, "the poor have their oxen"), the husband-king also had a despotic relationship with his children as master, coalesced with a paternal superiority over his wife. According to Aristotle, due to the husband-king's "natural" authority over the wife, her "natural" position as queen sets forth an explicitly non-political role in "preservation" through "silence". This fully substantiates the "best" household, as it exists in the "naturally best" polis. According to Aristotle, the practical wisdom involved in household management sets out that one "plays" the flute while another "makes" the flute. "Natural" excellence for each sex is found in the establishment of a practically functional "whole", which is realized in the particularized household and its family relations. As Aristotle states:

For a man would be thought a coward if he had no more courage than a courageous women, and a women would be thought loquacious if she imposed no more restraint on her conversation than the good man; and indeed their part in the management of the household is different, for the duty of one is to acquire, and of the other to preserve....The excellence of the subject [comparable to wife] is certainly not wisdom, but only true opinion; he may be compared to the maker of the flute, while his [or wife's master-the husband] is like the flute-player or user of the flute. (ibid., p. 68.)

The political and economic inequalities of aristocratic rule were validated according to Aristotle's sense of a "natural" whole in the Polis, which is most just when it is ruled by the best men. This quality of political virtues was to be measured according to their "self-sufficiency" and philosophical sense of practical wisdom. His concept of a natural role of political silence for women sets forth the basis in which the household is constructed in whole. This is accomplished through the wife's "silent" role in "preserving" this "natural" political order through her particularly important role in establishing the household as an anchor on acquisitiveness. This is vitally important because of the limited scope of opportunities for aggression established by ancient monogamous marriage, and its essential relationship to the autonomous household economies of the Hellenic world.

Despite the "silence" of women as the wife-queen, their "natural" and essentially communal role becomes a necessary part in maintaining the political order of Aristotle's Polis-as-a-whole. According to Aristotle, the natural differences between the sexes warrant different labor roles. For him, the natural inclination of a male is to acquire and transform, while that of a woman is one of preservation. Without the balance offered by a social role of preservation through feminine attention to wifehood, the masculine nature of Greek political life would culminate into a despotic conflict between of chaotically aggressive citizens vying for power.² While the "silence" of Aristotle's wife-queen may seem at first sight to necessitate a non-political role for Greek women, it is in this community of shared political "silence" among Greek women and its ceremonial importance, that the communal foundation for the political life of the Polis is largely established.

In fact, it is here that Aristotle's aristocratic philosophy finds itself most compatible with the socio-political dimension of ancient Athenian life. Despite his continuous criticism of democracy, Aristotle is equally critical of the city-as-family idealism of Plato, as well as the sociological dimensions of Spartan life (communal sharing of meals, etc.). While an aristocratic rule based on Platonic standards was being envisioned in his own philosophy, the political subordination of women into a separate community socially situated away from men within Athenian democracy was still retained. This was done to ensure that the philosophical value of "self-sufficiency" was compatible with the existing peasant-citizen concern over "self-preservation" of their property. This was because the social role of the Athenian wife acted as an institutional guarantee of family property being conserved³.

² Mary Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle's Politics*, p. 31

³ E. Wood, p. 120.

Initially, we have examined the less idealistic concept of one transcending social life in Aristotle's philosophy and its contrast with Platonic metaphysical idealism, as exemplified in his assertion of a moral necessity of the Polis in its relationship to the "good" of friendship. This friendship was to be attained through political life. Then we have examined the aristocratic implications of a natural production based household and its role in deciding who are the "best men" for rule, as defined by the philosophical value of "self-sufficiency" and the recognition of a "limited" condition for various individuals in their potential of attaining happiness. Finally, we have discussed the "natural" role of women in their relationship to the Polis through domesticated "silence", which in turn 'anchors' the men of the polis from despotism. This is the most evident relation between Aristotle's political theory and the realities of Athenian life.

Clearly, these observations show that for Aristotle, the Athenian family as a 'particular' heterosexual household becomes the fundamental part of the 'political life' being directed towards the latently homo-erotic good of friendship and happiness. This allows philosophically minded men, and tradition-oriented women to participate in the "naturally" whole essence of human existence found outside of heterosexual relations. This teleological entity of communal socio-political existence is defined by Aristotle as the Polis. For Aristotle, it is outside the family that the male citizen progresses towards a better life through the natural need, and therefore "good" of latent homoerotic companionship through politics (as Aristotle states in his writings on the ethics of sodomy, "a citizen bends over for no one"). However, it is in the initial structure of the family, as envisioned by Aristotle and his relation to the sociological realities of Athenian life, that the teleological end for various individuals, whether they be male or female, find their "natural" base (as defined by Aristotle).

For Aristotle, this process realizes itself in a more aristocratic and philosophical vein than what would be probably valued among the various peasant-farmers and urban citizens of ancient Athens. For twenty-first century readers, the classically Greek misogyny of his thought is hard to deny either. Aristotle was an ancient philosopher dependent on imperial rule for his position, not a democrat or a feminist, whether it is in the ancient or modern sense of the word. Regardless of his gender issue shortcomings when compared to the generally agreed upon normative goals of today, the important role that Aristotle played in linking the sociological dimensions of the autonomous family with the political foundations of the community in Western philosophy can not be denied. How a similar but also very different philosopher arose during modernity now needs to be explored, especially in his relationship to the modern family and the political rule of his time.

Hegel's Nuclear Family and the 'Romantic' Spirit of the Modern State

For Hegel, who lived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the task at hand was to theoretically bridge the gap between the scientific perspective of his time and the Lutheran theology of his upbringing. As such, Hegel envisioned a "spiritual" end for modern humanity, as realized in the social union created by the modern political State. Within this new historical end, the "rational becomes real" for its citizens that are to be objectively united in political "spirit". However, the family as an autonomous unit

is as necessary for Hegel in his own modern project of constructing a rationally determined philosophy, as it was for Aristotle two thousand years earlier.

While many scholars have defined the French Revolution as being the basis of modern capitalism in European life, the bourgeois themes of Hegel's thought were more speculative in their philosophical nature, rather than realistic in their sociological value. In early nineteenth century 'German' society, bourgeois values were more to be found among academics such as Kant, Hegel and the Konigsberg school, whom in turn attempted to address the political effects of revolutionary France, and most importantly, the economically productive superiority of the most distinctly capitalist nation of the time, Great Britain. This was due to the British capacity to flood the German markets with their manufactured goods⁴. Within 'German' society, despite the social and political privileges enjoyed by nobility, the real sense of bourgeois class consciousness was held among those in positions of official authority, regardless of their relative lack of wealth. This would no doubt be the same for academics of the time such as Hegel, who were in fact employed by the State⁵. It is in this "involvement in the process of government" among bourgeois-minded scholars such as Hegel, that the basis of his understanding of the "spirit of the State" can be analyzed in its historical context.

For Hegel, it is through the determinate "spirit" of this modern State that human potentiality is at its most "rational", and therefore becomes "realized" in its modern potential. It is from the universal and non-particularized membership in the family that the spiritual base of humanity is to be actualized in its most rational form through the State. As one passes from the affective unity of the family into the particularized or subjective "will" needed to live in a post-feudal "civil society", the moral necessity of an objective human "spirit" necessarily becomes realized in the legal framework of the State itself. This in turn finalizes the end of human "spirit", as primordially experienced, but not yet rationally realized, in the affective unity of modern family life. From this experience, morality and formal right, as an abstracted ideal, become realized in the organic unity of an ethical system shared by all. However, the natural basis of the human "spirit" is primordially experienced in the realm of the family. As Hegel states:

The good is now the universal end, which is not to remain merely internal to me, but to realize itself...Morality, like formal right, is also an abstraction, whose truth is reached only in ethical observance. Hence ethical observance is the unity of the will of the individual or subject. The primary reality of ethical observance is in its turn natural, taking the form of love and feeling. This is the family. In it the individual has transcended his prudish personality, and finds himself with his consciousness in a totality. (Hegel, G.W.F., Philosophy of Right, p. 41.)

For Hegel, the "natural" basis of the State is found in the affective feeling of family life and the erotic unity of heterosexual love in modern marriage. This bond of love within the family finally realizes itself in its most rational and universal form through political membership in the State itself.

⁴ M. Kitchen, Political Economy of Germany: 1815-1914, p. 30.

⁵ Eda Saggara, *A Social History of Germany*, p. 254-5

After the primordial spiritual base of the family has been negated by the individualized “will” formations of civil society, which in turn creates the basis of the psychologically needed “final end” of communal union, the necessity of a modern State is created through dialectical development. Aristotle saw the transcendence of family life necessitated by the “natural” need for friendship. Alternatively, Hegel sets the good of companionship within the erotic and affective unity of the family, while it is in the contradictory movement towards the self-referential will power needed to cope with modern civil society, that the abstracted ideal of right becomes synthesized in the final rule of the State and its national “spirit”. For Hegel, under the modern political condition established by the anthropological development of civil society and the state, the modern family is now to be defined by its sense of love, rather than its natural necessity in reproduction, as it was expressed in the ancient philosophy of Aristotle.

It is in this heterosexual notion of modern family life that Hegel philosophically pronounces the fundamental value of love in modern marriage. Unlike the clan-based households of antiquity and feudalism, in which marriage was set according to contracts between different kin groups making business or political deals through reproductive and family estate endowments, Hegel asserts that the rationality of modern life is realized in the construction of nuclear families established by consented marriage. This new turn in sexual morality adheres to the spiritual need for affection among individuals living within the modern condition and its assertion of subjective existence. This contrasts very differently with the political and economic ties of clan based households that comprised ancient and medieval societies. The idea of subjective needs being attained through erotic affection with those who are of a pure “other” identity becomes the reproductive basis of a fully inclusive political order, which is established by the objective nature of the State in its absolute inclusion of all members.

This “final” institution finds its fundamental nature established through the primordial unity of love in the modern family. The nuclear family and its hyper-sexualized nature becomes the embryonic seed for the political affirmation of a united ‘people’ bonded by modern rationality. To paraphrase Foucault, Hegel articulates the major ethical distinction existing between traditional “families of alliances” and the modern “families of sexuality”⁶. As Hegel states:

Amongst nations where women are held in slight esteem, parents arrange the marriage of their children, without ever consulting them. The children submit, because the particularity of feeling as yet makes no claim at all. The maiden is simply to have a husband, the man a wife. In other circumstances, regard may be had to means, connections, political hopes... But in modern times, the subjective point of departure, i.e., being in love, is thought to be the only thing of consequence. In this it is taken for granted that each one must wait till his hour has struck, and that he can bestow his love upon one and only one individual. (ibid, p. 168)

For the households of the ancient and feudal era, in which love and friendship was found externally from the family, the ‘public’ pursuit of love generally occurred either in the polis and its relation to the homoerotic masculinity of the Greco-Roman

⁶ M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol I*, p. 106

gymnasium/militia groups and the pseudo-lesbian fertility rites and orgies, or during the medieval era, within the Christian Church and its celibate connection to the orgasmic ecstasy of mystical prayer. Under modernity, explicit heterosexual erotic union, as the core ethical principle behind the Hegelian household, sets the affective framework for the moral life of the modern individual in his or her general dealings with others.

However, for Hegel, the family is merely the beginning of our “spiritual” development. It is in the initial transition outside of the family for individuals through personal will, rather than the Aristotelian friendship of politics, that the distinctly modern aspect of Hegel’s philosophy can be fully revealed. Aristotle saw property rights as the basis of creating a specific framework of citizenship in which the “natural” production of the household and its “limits” restricted despotism, which therefore set the best possible order. For Hegel, it is in our determination to assert our own subjective individuality over external objects that the rational basis of a modern concept of property is to be understood. From the united affective base of the family, individual personality is realized externally from this erotic unity because of our attempt to assert control over material objects.

Unlike Aristotle, who criticized exchange as the basis of an “unnatural” life, Hegel’s modern appraisal of exchange ensures the subjective autonomy of the “personality” through our choice to relinquish certain goods, rather than our entire livelihood, as found in the hierarchical socio-economic systems established by ancient slavery or medieval feudalism. As Hegel states:

The use of single products of my particular physical endowments or mental capacities I may hand over to others for a limited time, since when a time limit is Recognized, these products may be said to have an external relation to my genuine and total being. If I were to dispose of my whole time, made concrete in work, and all my activity, I would be giving up the essence of my productions. My whole activity and reality, in short, my personality, would be the property of another. (ibid, p. 72)

It is through personal choice, as validated by one’s own ‘faith’ in the existence of a subjective will in civil society and its relationship to the voluntary exchange of our labor and property, that the modern bourgeois essence of Hegel’s philosophy can be revealed in its Lutheran context.

However, Hegel’s own concept of freedom and the distinction between subject (self) and object (other) also recognized the problem of alienation in modernity. As the “conquest” of material products by us as particularized individuals negates the affective unity found in the de-personalized family and its spirit of erotic love, alienation arises among individuals who lack their own sense of realization as a part of nature itself. From this distinction between family (thesis) and civil society (anti-thesis), the State (synthesis) arises as the final whole of human experience, which is defined by Hegel as the “rational spirit”. In fact, the sense of alienation created by our distinctly modern ‘dealings with each other’ is the psychological basis of our search for a rational form of “will” that unities us with others, as actualized in our own heightened sense of subjectivity within civil society. It is in the psychological need to connect the “subjectivity” of

particularized life in civil society with the affective unity of the modern family that the universal rationality of the State finds its necessarily moral foundations.

From this synthesis, there arises a positive freedom in which individuals become connected in their congregational unity through the rationality of “objective spirit”, rather than the social contract atomism found in classical liberal Anglo-American thought. This cultural difference exists along with classical Anglo-American liberalism’s theoretical dependence on the essentially interchangeable relationship between the State and civil society, as compared to Hegel’s more organic definition of socio-political life. As Hegel asserts:

The state, which is the realized substantive will, having its reality in the particular self-consciousness raised to the plane of the universal, is absolutely rational... Were the state to be considered as exchangeable with the civic society, and were its decisive features to be regarded as the security and protection of property and personal freedom, the interest of the individual as such would be the ultimate purpose of the social union... It would then be at one’s option to be a member of the state—But the state has a totally different relation to the individual. It is the objective spirit, and he has his truth, real existence, and ethical status only in being a member of it. (ibid, p. 240)

Hegel, as a true modernist writing after the utopian aspirations of the French Revolution, would assert that the limited potential of humanity in its unified whole would be rationally realized in all its aspects through the totalized spirit of the State. This modern whole of human existence, which was defined as the State, would be developed according to the dialectical relationship between the family and civil society acting as “spiritual” parts. In the end, freedom is ultimately shared by all individuals in their own psychological development within a unified rational whole, which is known as the State.

While Ancien-regime power was not dramatically dismantled in the ‘German’ states like it was in late eighteenth century France, legislative reforms were made during Hegel’s lifetime that transformed the long standing tradition of feudal relations, which were still strongly valued by many (the Prussian Edict of 1814)⁷. Consequently, power relations between ‘German’ classes would not seriously shift until well past Hegel’s lifetime. During this specific historical period, pre-existing medieval trade guilds began to have their power challenged and many artisan households began to be financially challenged due to the economic disruptions⁸. Resistance to the actual changes among the artisans was strong. Hegel’s view of the family was related to a crisis in family life caused by the economic transitions experienced by traditionally guild reliant artisans during the early nineteenth century..

The reason that affection was so important in Hegel’s concept of the family was not only because of its relation to the “spirit” of his ethical system, but also because divorce was becoming more prevalent in an era and geographical region facing new changes in its economic and political framework. From this situation, spousal abuse and divorce became ‘hot’ topics in the courtroom and its appraisal of its “*Code civil*”. This was because social transitions ripped apart families through violent struggles between husbands and wives over the control of the household, which traditionally found its order

⁷ M. Kitchen, p. 9

⁸ M. Kitchen, p. 18-22.

in the feudal structure, along with its sense of economic security through guild organization. From the legal reforms established by the 'Code Civil', artisan class women began to more and more take their husbands to court for divorce proceedings and protection against domestic violence. This happened in co-relation with greater assertions of domestic power by economically marginalized artisan husbands traditionally protected by the guilds⁹. Not only "spirit" cemented the 'German' nation, so did the nagging moral question of domestic violence. It is in the attempt to maintain civility within the family during this turbulent era of modernization, that Hegel's concept of the family plays such an important role in his knowledge of the "spirit" of the State, and its realization of a rational rule of law. It was Hegel's intention to define the modern family according to rationally understood terms, which are formatively applicable to the human 'spirit' as an actually determined entity in it self.

However, the contribution of early nineteenth century romanticism is revealed with his injection of consensual love into the institution of marriage. Through this shift towards the most "rational" and "spiritually" substantive marriage, the modern legal framework of divorce and gender rights is further developed as well. It is from the violence within the household of Hegel's time that the proposed affective unity in the modern nuclear family becomes an essential part of the development of a modern State-as-whole. This modern institution of the State is realizable in its post-medieval essence through the dialectical inclusion of civil society as a necessary, and therefore, essentially instrumental 'part'.

Despite Hegel's 'rational' defense of a domesticated wife, Western women's veil of silence, as traditionally asserted in Western political philosophy by Aristotle, is somewhat lifted in canonical through the modern allowance of greater access to divorce I Hegelian political theory. According to Hegel, this is a valid recourse when the irrationality of a non-united home becomes apparent to its members, which was a definite problem for nineteenth century Prussia. It is in Hegel's emphasis on erotic love being a necessarily consensual act of spiritual affection that the rational validation of autonomous control over the sexual activities of the female body becomes more fully articulated in Western thought. This is substantiated by Hegel's validation of divorce when affective unity becomes impossible for married individuals, which must be validated by the rational decision making power of the State as a 'third-body'.

This institution finds its moral legitimacy as judge through the fact that it is the primary end of the rational "spirit" in its political totality, and therefore is the basis for an establishment of an "ethical system". This system of moral conduct is to universally pervade all parts of human existence, including the family. As Hegel states:

Just as no one may be forced to marry, so there must be no positive legal bond to hold together persons, between whom have arisen hostile thoughts and acts. A third authority must, however intervene to hold intact the rights of marriage and the right of the ethical fabric against the inroads of mere opinion, and the accident of fleeting resolves. It must also distinguish between the effervescence of feeling and total alienation, and have proof of alienation before permitting divorce.
(Hegel, G., p. 179)

⁹ Lyn Abrams, 'Companionship and Conflict: The Negotiation of Marriage Relations in the Nineteenth Century', *Gender Relations in German History*, p.116

Although the subjective will of the individual is legally restricted in their seeking of divorce because of “fleeting resolves”, abuse and cruel intentions in the family must be negated by the ethical system (rule of law) of the ‘family-civil society-the state’ whole. This is developed by Hegel’s study of the “rational” State and its connection to a united “spirit”, which finds its primordial roots in the reproductive love of heterosexual marriage through personal consent.

It is in the subjective ‘right’ of choice that is universally experienced through an erotic “spirit” of heterosexual lovemaking within the institution of consensual marriage, that the family, as “rationally” regulated by the objective State’s own final “spirit” of congregational unity, finds its affective structure. Just as in Aristotle’s Polis, the ‘part’ is both defining and being defined by the ‘whole’. However, through the recognition of consensual marriage and the development of civil society as rationally needed part of modern life, very different sexual economies are being conceptualized.

Concluding Summary of Aristotle and Hegel on the Family

Although both thinkers have very different viewpoints on the role of the family as the necessary ‘part’ of their own developed political ‘whole’, they both declare that it is in the initial stage of the family as an autonomous unit that the Polis or State is actualized in its universalized nature. On the other hand, it is in the necessity of this normatively defined ‘end’ that the framework of their specific notion of the family is articulated. In essence, they both recognize the reproductive essence of the family but Aristotle merely defines it as a “natural necessity”, while Hegel asserts that family life is the primordial basis of affection, and therefore the initial stage of our human “spirit” in its rational totality.

In the structure of Aristotle’s thought, it is in the social activities performed outside of the family-based household and its economically productive ventures that ‘vocal’ men realize their “naturally limited” and socially “proportioned” end through the latent homoerotic ‘good’ of friendship; this is along with the benefit of learning practical and philosophical wisdom through male companionship. According to Hegel, it is in our dialectical passage from the affective and heterosexual unity of the family through the particularized will of the individualized personality in civil society and into the rational unity of the State, that the human “spirit” is realized in its universality. For Aristotle, the Polis-as-whole is institutionally determined by the political deliberation of men from clan-like families that are hierarchically structured by the “naturally” established household, which is limited by its own productive capacities. For Hegel, the modern family in its universal nature is constructed by the act of consented heterosexual love, which in turn sets the dialectical framework for an objective unity of love that is rationally realized through the national “spirit” of the State as a totalized entity.

Despite the historical and socio-cultural differences in context between Aristotle and Hegel, the defining contrast between these two teleological philosophers is their contribution to the developmental transition from “nature” to “will” within the history of Western thought and sexual morality. It is in this transitory relationship within political philosophy and its study of the family that we can best understand the sexual transitions occurring in the historical process separating antiquity and modernity. However, as the

main thrust of this paper has shown, within both classical and modern philosophy, the autonomous family, and its sexual economy, is essential in necessitating the needed order of a community in its actual, rather than ideal, political whole. This has been true whether the community has been defined as the Polis or the State during the history of Western thought.

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