

Article

# Repression and Return of Nature in Hegel and Beyond

Marina Marren 

Department of Cognitive Sciences, United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain 15551, United Arab Emirates; mmarren@uaeu.ac.ae

**Abstract:** Taking its departure from the destruction of ethicality (*Sittlichkeit*), as envisioned by Hegel in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (PG §443–475), this paper constructs a concept of a contemporary subject whose self-reliant autonomy fractures in the face of the truth. This truth is revealed as an upsurge of nature, whose role and significance has been denied in favor of comfort and security of the subject. The move to yoke and subdue nature by placing science—as Bacon saw fit—in service of technology, and by placing technology in service of human comfort and safety, proved to bear fruit. However, this subjugation, and also the abuse of nature, in one and the same move, results in a subjugation and a denigration of the human self.

**Keywords:** Anthropocene; environment; ethical community; fractured subjectivity; gender; self-consciousness

## 1. Introduction

In order to show how it is the case that nature and human consciousness belong together, I rely on Hegel's analyses of consciousness and self-consciousness [1,2] (PG §166–196). I depart from Hegel's presentation, which ultimately unfolds into a unity of subject and world as a self-transparency of Spirit. I argue that, in fact, we can trace the branch of the development of subjectivity along the line of the destruction of the ethical world. Thereby, subjectivity that is always indebted to the negativity of the Divine Law (negativity understood as the non-subject or the non-self), became impoverished and self-deceptive in its illusory view of the world as a nexus of natural forces, which are supposedly utterly free from the Divine. In this way, nature became emptied of its sacredness and its spiritual significance and lost as a bearer of sacred life (i.e., life that is not meant for manipulation and consumption)<sup>1</sup>. Through this emptying out, the human self acquired a false sense of certainty of its power and freedom from belonging to the world of living nature or nature as a bearer of spiritual life. The fact that human consciousness and nature are entwined for Hegel, comes out of the larger project of German Idealism. We can think about this entwinement as Fichte's and Schelling's thinking about the all-encompassing, but internally variegated, One or the *hen kai pan*. In Fichte's case, this "One" is the Ego; the "das Ich" that posits its own "not" or the "nicht Ich" and thereby sets into motion the development of the entire *Doctrine of Science*. Or this "One" could be thought with Schelling as the groundless ground—the *Abgrund*—that grounds itself and from the darkness of its own groundlessness delivers the world unto the light. This deliverance is the genesis of the divine, for Schelling. I argue that also for Hegel there is a continuity between the natural world and consciousness—a relationship which can only be set aside in a precarious gesture of repression and forgetfulness. Forgetful of this belonging to nature, the subject is manifesting as a fissured consciousness, which as I explain, is already inscribed in Hegel's own repression of nature in the *Phenomenology*.

The contemporary subject loses itself in self-deception while the catastrophe that looms as the return of nature is imminent. It is a fractured subject that sees itself as self-reliant, or independent, or even in some instances responsible for the disastrous state of nature that it understands as the environment or the natural world. However, all of these modes



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of assessing itself, including the claims to responsibility, are to a large extent, indicative of a deficient, confused manner of situating the problem. The latter has to do with the fact that in so far as we *continue to deny* ourselves a deep belonging to the negativity of “*der bewußtlose Geist*” (PG §463), this negativity (understood as the determining opposite of the givenness of the human self) will keep on deforming our projects, interests, and understanding of things<sup>2</sup>. Drawing on feminist and psychoanalytic literature, I critically reconstruct Hegel’s assessment of consciousness and the unconscious Spirit in order to show why the negativity of the unconscious, Divine Law, can never be completely unearthed or made fully self-conscious in a human subject<sup>3</sup>. However, it must be allowed its rightful place as sacred nature and as self-aware nature of the contemporary subject.

In a broader context, the analyses in this paper touch on such topics in continental thought as the role of Negativity, negation, and non-Being as far as these situate and ground conscious life. My assessment of the oppressive character of self-assured and self-centered subjectivity and its destructive effect upon both nature and on itself, can be put in conversation with contemporary accounts of nature, masculinity, femininity, and anthropocentrism in feminist philosophy as well as critical and psychoanalytic theory. In the paper, I keep primarily to Hegel, contemporary feminist, and psychoanalytic theory on these questions. Nonetheless, a wider horizon unto which the paper pans out reaches to the ideas taken up and developed by Henri Bergson, Lou-Andreas Salomé, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Lacan, among others<sup>4</sup>. In terms of the contemporary accounts, this paper follows the direction laid out by the discourses that articulate the importance of recovering the primacy of nature—its sacredness—for the continuation of life; both biological life and the life of spirit (which as this paper indicates are thoroughly entwined).

## 2. Natural Belonging or the Structure of Consciousness as Constituted by Lifeworld

The *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft* account in Hegel’s *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (PG §178–196) is usually interpreted as a struggle between two different self-consciousnesses<sup>5</sup>. At the end, and on a traditional interpretation, this opposition leads to a diminishment of the Lord consciousness and the opening up of the way toward independence and self-actualization for the Bondsman consciousness. Although the latter, i.e., the self-actualization, independence, and eventually real existence in the world are all in line with my take on the *Phenomenology*, I think that the former, i.e., a reading that renders the Lordship and Bondage section as dealing with two self-consciousnesses, is amiss. My analysis of Lordship and Bondage appears elsewhere and I will not revisit it in detail here. However, it repositions the dynamic of the opposition between the Lord and the Bondsman and places it within a unitary self-consciousness [19]<sup>6</sup>.

The reason why it is important to see this reworking of subjectivity as a unitary self-consciousness is because on this interpretation, the struggle is within a self, and it is between the world of nature-oriented consciousness and the self- or the “I”-oriented consciousness. The *agon*, so to say, is between consciousness of the natural world and consciousness of the self. The point is *not* to show how one self-consciousness overcomes the other. The point is to see the openness unto and the thoroughgoing belonging to the world of nature that self-consciousness gains in the end. This openness and belonging come in lieu of a solipsistic self-enclosure.

There are at least two other critical points that emerge from seeing the Lord and the Bondsman as two elements of one self-consciousness. The first is the fact that consciousness of the natural world, which the self-centered consciousness initially dominates, only sets out on the path toward freedom after having reckoned with the dread of utter annihilation (PG §196)<sup>7</sup>. The second thing is that although the world of nature constitutes all stages of self-conscious individuality, the latter, nonetheless, is equally liable to shift the focus onto its power-seeking, self-consciousness privileging attitude (which is all too recognizable in the contemporary subjectivity)<sup>8</sup>. The reason why this is the case is because consciousness of the world of nature does not part ways with its initially dominant counterpart, i.e., con-

consciousness of the self. Instead, in so far as the natural consciousness and consciousness of the self are two elements of *one and the same* consciousness, the receding of the Lord does not make for a complete “victory” of the Bondsman (who then transforms into a real, independent, actual self-consciousness). Instead, the Lord is dormant for a moment, but, nonetheless, is always ready to reorient the focus and to shift the perspective of the consciousness in such a way that the world of nature appears in the self-centered light.

I argue that to treat the self as disconnected from the natural world, and the natural self that inhabits it, is at the core of the catastrophic degradation of nature. Instead of naming the apocalyptic scenarios and enumerating the life-threatening problems here, I will put it in the words of Vicki Kirby for whom there is an “imperative that summons us to acknowledge the apocalyptic force of climate change and the role that humans have played in the accelerated pace of environmental degradation and species loss. Most scientists are persuaded that anthropogenic causes explain the ‘sixth mass extinction’ of both plants and animals. Indeed”, she continues, “the impact of human activity on the environment over several hundred years or, arguably, even millennia represents a break from the previous order of such legible significance that the official naming of the current geological epoch is mooted to become the ‘Anthropocene’”[20]<sup>9</sup>. Domination and destruction of nature by the human subject is palpable. However, the focus on and the obsession with the preferential treatment of the human self is not a mere passing fancy as it lies deep within the structure of human self-consciousness.

In Hegel’s terms, this self-obsession is part and parcel of a productive opposition between the self-centered consciousness and consciousness of nature. Effectively, self-consciousness as desire aims at consuming, but ends up uncovering, the essential otherness of the object at which self-consciousness as consciousness of the lifeworld is directed. It does so by attempting to utterly undo, destroy, and gobble up the object. We see this in §174–175 when self-certain consciousness desires the life-object (that was produced in consciousness as sense-certainty and perception) and wants to supersede it because of its apparent otherness and non-essentiality. The destruction initially was meant to guarantee the truth of self-certain consciousness. This truth, moreover, becomes the kind of certainty for self-consciousness that, according to Hegel, presents “itself in an *objective manner*” [1] (§174) [2] (158). This idea that in order to become constituted with objective certainty, self-certain consciousness must first attempt to undo life (understood here as lifeworld-oriented consciousness); it carries over into the Lord and Bondsman section and resurfaces anew with the arrival of Spirit.

Simon Lumsden argues against seeing Hegel as re-entrenching subjective solipsism. Nonetheless, Lumsden admits that it is possible to see what “Derrida has described . . . as [Hegel’s subject] governed by an all consuming *aufhebung* and a self-present subject. The way Derrida describes the nature of Hegelian subjectivity sees it imposing itself on the object world and excluding genuine otherness”[27]<sup>10</sup>. This self-consciousness-centered position is, indeed, a moment in the initial opposition between the lifeworld and the self-oriented consciousness. However, this opposition is mediated on the side of life when the Lord consciousness recognizes the Bondsman. All the same, Hegel himself sets aside this critical entwinement of the self-consciousness with nature at the outset and then throughout the Spirit chapter in order to assert the ethical life of human self-conscious subjectivity. Nature remains othered and suppressed and divine order takes the place of an explicit opposite to the human world.

Regarding the interplay of life, self-consciousness, and community, Karen Ng holds that to become actualized in truth and to “to fully become objective to itself”, it is insufficient for self-consciousness to find life as the other of itself [28]<sup>11</sup>. Instead, what is needed is that self-consciousness find itself by facing another self-consciousness<sup>12</sup>. This relationship, Ng writes, “culminates in an entire cultural and ethical world that knows itself to varying degrees which Hegel calls spirit (*Geist*)”<sup>13</sup>. Specifically, then, what self-consciousness discovers in desiring, but being unable to forever undo its object, is that the independent, objective otherness that it attempted to negate is “a living self-consciousness” [1] (§175) [2] (160)<sup>14</sup>.

Hegel sets out for himself a task of showing that self-oriented consciousness, too, must realize its essence as living. The task for us is to show that our subjectivity is beholden to life, but is forgetful of it; preferring to set itself up as lording it over living nature and reaching for some otherworldly power.

To sum up, and in Ng's terms, "self-consciousness requires a first object with which it both immediately identifies and misidentifies, in which it finds immediate satisfaction and yet also necessary dissatisfaction", which according to Ng "is crucial for understanding the subsequent satisfactions and dissatisfactions that self-consciousness faces in its communal life with other doubly constituted self-conscious beings" [28]<sup>15</sup>. In agreement with Ng on these points, I only add two more things. First, the "first object", as Ng calls it, is also required for the eventual openness of the initially self-oriented consciousness unto life without which communal life is unthinkable. Second, given the analysis of the life-dependent constitution of self-consciousness, it is not only with the other "doubly constituted self-conscious beings" that self-consciousness ends up being dissatisfied in a community, but also with its own life (and this still is the case past Hegel's discussion of the Unhappy Consciousness [1] §206–216). The fractures, anxieties, and guilt in the constitution of the subject become all the more pronounced when a self-conscious individual attempts to overcome this dissatisfaction by an overreliance on the desires that arise out of the self-centered view of nature and life.

In aiming to absolutely destroy and consume the object, self-consciousness fails to recognize that it aims to destroy itself. In not recognizing how a destruction of nature is a destruction of the life principle of consciousness, self-consciousness unwittingly effects its own demise in the destruction of nature. Or it tries to mediate through conservation efforts, without giving up its fixation on itself as essential. But it fails either way to achieve that which only nature can achieve in being self-conscious.

### 3. Suppression and Othering of Nature in the Ethical Community

Whereas, in the Self-Consciousness section, the opposition that Hegel sets up is between Desire (*Begierde*) or the self-oriented self-consciousness and Life (*Leben*) or the lifeworld-oriented self-consciousness, with the opening of the Ethical Community, the opposition develops between Life or, more precisely, between ethical life (*sittliche Leben*, [1] §440) and Nature (*der Natur*, e.g., [1] §451)<sup>16</sup>. However, unlike the mutually constitutive relationship that unfolds through the *agon* of life and desire in self-consciousness, nature—and I will now work to show this—is pushed outside of the ethical life. On my analysis of the Ethical Community, nature remains suppressed. Hegel's text shows a suppression of nature and a relegation of it to a position from which nature cannot be seen as decisively constitutive of the ethical life of a self-conscious individual. In other words, Hegel too succumbs to folding the self-destructive destruction of nature into the overall fabric of the system. However, and significantly, this suppression of nature is also historical, in a sense that a human subject chooses—time and again—to perceive nature as something to be overcome, used, subdued, or appeased and pacified. Yet in this attitude, we forget that our self-consciousness is determined by the consciousness of the lifeworld—the very world of nature—without which there is no consciousness as such<sup>17</sup>.

Furthermore, Hegel's analysis elevates the "living ethical world [which] is Spirit in its truth" [1] (§441) at the expense of nature. The latter is presented as a force of disintegration of individuality that, after a person's death, dissolves into an irrational (*Unvernünftiges*) immediacy (*Unmittelbarkeit* [1] §451). Hegel wishes to assert a self-conscious and rational individuality, which as communal being dwells in Spirit. He claims that in the act of burial, which instills remembrance and reinserts the departed back into the world of the ethical community, the individual is rescued from destruction (*Zerstörung* [1] §451). In Hegel's words, "the relative by blood expands, then, the abstract natural movement through the addition of the movement of consciousness. This disrupts the work of nature and wrests the blood relation from destruction" ([1] §451, [2] 394). We can say that here Hegel underscores

a necessary and observable distinction between the world of mere beings and a human world, which is lawful, communal, ethical, and spiritual<sup>18</sup>.

Hegel's juxtaposition between nature and conscious life at the outset of the Spirit chapters in the *Phenomenology* allows him to elevate the community of self-conscious individuals and make it positively opposed to the Divine Law. Thereby, Hegel offers for us a subjectivity, which claims to come into its own—into the shared world of ethical, spiritual beings—at the expense of stripping nature of consciousness and setting it as the necessarily diminished other of ethical human life<sup>19</sup>. Human subjectivity transpires as a developed form of subjecting or suppressing the non-I or the non-self-conscious otherness. This suppression in the *Phenomenology* is carried out as a largely silent othering of nature. What Hegel does announce, however, is the opposition between the human and the divine orders as well as between family and public life. The former is aligned with the female and her unconscious grasp of the divine. The latter, i.e., public life, is placed on the side of the male and his self-conscious being in the open—in the public, communal world.

In Hegel's words, "the feminine, as the sister, has the highest *intuition* [*Ahndung*] of ethical essence; this [intuition] does not arrive at consciousness and reality, because the law of the family that is the *in-itself inner* being, does not lie in the day of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling and the reality of the freed divine" element ([1] §457, [2] 399). Thus, it is within the woman in her role as a sister—as a woman who is not desirous of man—that Hegel situates a deep, concealed, unconscious, and intuitive connection with the divine world, which is set as the opposite of the conscious and revealed human world. The divine, nonetheless, upholds and supports the human world; without the divine, and without the respect paid to it through the burial rites, the human ceases to be properly self-consciously ethical.

For the purposes of showing how it is the case that this alignment in the *Phenomenology* undermines the entire project of establishing a human, self-conscious individuality and subjectivity, I will draw on Kelly Oliver's provocative claims in "Antigone's Ghost: Undoing Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*" [37]<sup>20</sup>. Oliver states that "[a]lthough some philosophers (e.g., Chanter 1994; Irigaray 1985, 1993; Willett 1990, 1994) have commented on the questionable and contradictory role of women and the feminine in the section 'The Ethical Order' . . . none has shown how this section undermines Hegel's entire project in the *Phenomenology*" [37]<sup>21</sup>. According to Oliver it is, precisely, the Ethical Order or the Ethical Community section that jeopardizes the entire unfolding of the *Phenomenology*. As Oliver sees it, for Hegel, philosophy's task is to give to itself a meaning and articulation that is all but indistinguishable from the meaning of consciousness [37]<sup>22</sup>. However, and as Oliver holds, if this task is carried out then everything is brought into the open; everything is expressed in conscious, conceptualized language and thought [37]<sup>23</sup>. On this schema, the rational and the real are identical and, furthermore, "only what can be conceptualized is real and . . . everything real can be conceptualized" [37]<sup>24</sup>. The rational, revealed, conceptualized element rests with the man who also leads a public life that is available to and that unfolds from his actions [37]<sup>25</sup>.

In the world-historical arena, this fixation on the power of the mind—on rationality in its ability to comprehend, predict, plan, and manipulate nature—translates into seeing nature as a mere interaction of inert, unconscious matter. The forces of nature are reduced to their calculable elements. Nature is stripped of consciousness. It is seen as raw material, as a stock of natural resources, as something to take from and change for the sake of our advantage<sup>26</sup>. Nature is divested from its divinity and "divine nature"—if the moniker survives at all in the secular world—gets pinned on the transcendent divinity, on the God of monotheism<sup>27</sup>. Interestingly, this is true both of Hegel's system and of our own history (at least in the West and in the Post-Colonial World affected by the Western paradigms of social life, economy, politics, and religion). In this way, nature becomes emptied of its sacredness and its spiritual significance. It is lost as a bearer of sacred life—i.e., of life that is not meant for manipulation and consumption. Through this emptying out, the human



self acquires a false sense of certainty of its power. On Hegel's presentation, and given my analysis here, the post-modern subject suffers from exposure to the light of reason, whereby everything is supposedly under its control, and nothing must remain forever hidden in the sacred recesses to which only the intuitive consciousness might reach. To put it in familiar terms, contemporary human life still—and even in the face of the environmental catastrophe—unfolds under the publicly anointed domination of the phallic signifier<sup>28</sup>.

In the *Phenomenology*, as far as the ethical community is concerned, the woman, the family, and the divinities remain opposed to the man, the public life, and the human order. It is the woman who pays due respect to the divine. As Oliver interestingly notes, “[n]ature is associated with unconscious, abstract elements that manifest themselves as unconscious ethical relations in the family. The family is associated with this unconscious, abstract, sensuous nature. The family is associated with the body. But, as it turns out, it is primarily woman . . . who is identified with these unconscious and irrational aspects of the family” [37]<sup>29</sup>. The private world of the family is aligned with the body, with the divine, and the unconscious, but also with female nature and with nature as such. It is as if the lifeworld-oriented consciousness that became the Bondsman in the earlier stages and through which self-consciousness already became mediated with itself on the side of life, now emerges again as the opposed, and even unconscious, other. The caveat is that because the explicit opposition in the Ethical Community is between the human and the divine as well as between the private and public orders, nature remains thoroughly unconscious or, as I already stated, nature remains suppressed.

Hegel himself, however, in §464 claims that it is “nature, and not chance or circumstance or choice, that divides the gender [assigning] one to one law; the other to another. Or conversely, both ethical powers bestow unto themselves the two genders, actualizing themselves [in this way] in the two genders and giving to themselves their individual existence” [1]. The ethical power of the divine actualizes as feminine nature. The ethical power of the human—as masculine. These are self-conscious individuals in the ethical world. One, through her very nature, ends up intuiting the unconscious power that supports the conscious life as well as commemorating the individual being of the other. And yet, both nature and natural consciousness—lifeworld-oriented consciousness—necessarily constitute both the female and the male, which represent, respectively, the intuitive-unconscious and the revealed-conscious attitudes toward ethical communal life.

Nature is now said to be unconscious, and yet it is decisive for the very manifestation of the difference between the two genders; the difference that supports the self-conscious individuality in human subjectivity. In place of nature, which is suppressed, the role of the explicit unconscious is given to the female and to her intuition of the divine.

As Oliver sees it, this relegation of nature to the inner sanctum of the family, which is the woman's place, destabilizes the unfolding of Hegel's project. The reason why this is the case, according to Oliver, is because, on the one hand, women remain within the private domain, and keep to the natural places they have as “as wives, mothers, and sisters” [37]<sup>30</sup>. However, on the other hand, men's conscious, public life takes women and their work as its ground [37]<sup>31</sup>. The result is that consciousness is indebted to and dependent on the unconscious; the concept of consciousness is grounded in the “unconceptualizable, unconscious, feminine, law” [37]<sup>32</sup>. The latter simply does not rise to consciousness in and of itself, but only serves as the basis for the transformation of the irrational nature into rational, masculine culture [37]<sup>33</sup>. This transformation happens “through the work of the feminine, which in principle cannot be conceptualized. . . . the feminine element”, Oliver concludes, “remains unconscious and unconceptualizable. Hegel's *Phenomenology* is a phenomenology of masculine consciousness that is possible only by setting up feminine ‘consciousness’ as the negation of masculine consciousness and then suppressing the feminine” [37]<sup>34</sup>.

As I see it, Oliver and other feminist accounts show one aspect of the suppression by focusing on the role of the female<sup>35</sup>. However, the deepest suppression that Hegel carries out in his constitution of the ethical world of self-conscious individuality is the

suppression of nature, which returns to haunt the modern and the post-modern subjectivity. This subjectivity, whether male or female, largely sees itself as a rational agent whose future lies in its capacity to make conscious rational plans. These include plans about the use and rescue, management, or preservation of the natural world. What they, by-and-large, do not include is an ethos of acknowledging that there is an un-circumscribable sacred power within nature that no conscious planning and no master science can display.

On Hegel's own presentation, the opposition between the two genders that represent the human and the divine laws is a rift within nature. Therefore, the opposition should have been articulated *not* as that between divine and human, but as that between the divine *nature* and human *nature*. However, in order to uphold a certain vision of human subjectivity, Hegel needs to oppose the human self-conscious subjectivity to mere nature, which he places on the side of the unconscious. The consciously opposed orders, in Hegel, are those of the human and the divine law. Therefore, what returns to haunt the ethical community in the end—what leads to its destruction—is not only that individual who has “suffered the wrong” and whose “simple Spirit” has become the power of the non-human world in its search for vengeance [1] (§461). What returns to haunt us in Hegel's text and in our world is the power that flees the light of day [1] (§468), and that is, indeed, divine power. Although Hegel does not present it as such, in the next section, I will show that it is the return of that power as *nature* that is so destructive to the ethical world or to the community of self-conscious subjects<sup>36</sup>. This is the case because the sacred power of nature is always already active within and constitutive of the human world, consciousness, and subjectivity. I am thinking here not only of the physical devastation wrought by natural disasters, but more so of the emptying out of meaning in human life in the wake of the denigration of nature. Self-consciousness sets out on a path of lifeless, spiritless, meaningless isolation. This is the aftermath of relating to nature as lifeless, unconscious, fungible stuff fit for human consumption and enjoyment.

#### 4. Return of Suppressed Nature as Fractured Subjectivity and Guilt

Drawing on Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, Hegel exposes the undoing of the ethical community; the undoing which comes about because of the subject's transgression against one of the orders, i.e., the human or the divine laws [1] (§466–475). Hegel articulates this transgression as a necessary action whereby, “the son does not recognize the father in the offender whom he kills, nor his mother in the queen he marries. In this way the power that shuns the light of day seizes the ethical self-consciousness and comes forth when the action is brought forth. The accomplished action”, Hegel continues, “is the sublated opposition of the knowing self and the actuality that stands against this self. The committed crime cannot be denied. The action is such”, Hegel concludes, “that . . . it binds together the unconscious with the conscious and the non-being with being. In this truth the action comes into the light of the sun—such that the conscious is bound up with the unconscious, and one's own with the alien; as a fractured being that experiences the other side of consciousness as its very own, but injured power incited to hostility” [1] (§468). On this presentation, the subject is *necessarily* fractured because of the opposition between the conscious and the unconscious or the human and the divine ethical orders and the simultaneous impossibility of inaction in the face of actuality, in the face of the unfolding of life<sup>37</sup>. The action, however, brings about an uneasy mediation between the two orders, but with the result that the subject remains forever *guilty*. The subject is predestined to be guilty by the very opposition of being and non-being and their unfolding as becoming.

I will now indicate a deeper fracture within the subject that denied to itself a conscious belonging to divine nature; the subject that opposed itself to nature conceived of as unconscious so as to assert itself as a human, ethical self-consciousness<sup>38</sup>. Such a subject ends up being guilty and divided, and its inherent guilt becomes constitutive of the modern and contemporary subjectivity. That this is the case is best explained by Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen who engages with Freud and takes up the problem of the unconscious guilt and its role in our ethics as well as our (often deeply troubled) deference to political authority.

According to Borch-Jacobsen, “Freud insistently emphasizes . . . in *Civilization and Its Discontents* [that], guilt feeling is not social anxiety (*soziale Angst*), the commonplace fear of being punished by some external power or censor. It is moral anxiety (or anxiety of conscience: *Gewissenangst*) . . . It is . . . moral authority [to which] . . . the subject submits . . . by himself, autonomously—that Freud has earlier described as the ‘voice of conscience’ (*Stimme des Gewissens*) . . . And it is in place of that ego ideal”, Borch-Jacobsen continues “that he will set up the *Führer* of *Group Psychology*, finally indicating that the essence of the community is ‘ethical’ before being ‘political’. What creates the community is not principally the fusional and loving participation of a collective Super-Subject or ‘Superman’, but the always singular interpellation of a Super-ego that is strictly, rigorously, no one. . . . Far from feeling guilt because of some anteriorally known and established law (which brings us back to the status of *soziale Angst*), his murderers become aware of the law of the Father—inexplicably, out of terror—through the sense of sin (through *Gewissenangst*). . . . The Father”, Borch-Jacobsen concludes, “emerges from his own death, the law from its own absence—literally *ex nihilo*”[10]<sup>39</sup>. We can see in this analysis the very structure of Hegelian presentation.

The self-oriented self-consciousness ends up dominating the life of the subject, drenching the individual in guilt, pivoting the focus—through the force of guilt—away from the lifeworld and always toward the non-existent, unconscious, but looming and overpowering element. In Hegel, this element emerges as the revenge of the divine order that—through the subject’s guilty action—is mediated with the self-conscious individual; a mediation that eventuates in an uneasy recognition. This recognition is the realization that the self is always already guilty, and that the only way to remain innocent is not to act at all [1] (§467), but that is impossible<sup>40</sup>. In Hegel, the transgression is against the unconscious divine order. On Borch-Jacobsen’s presentation of Freud, it is not the divine, but the Super-ego, which is “strictly, rigorously, no one” that binds self-conscious subjectivity to guilt and to the dread of punishment in the face of transgression. The overbearing power of the Father (for Freud) or of the menacing Divinities (for Hegel) emerges out of the nothingness of death. For both, Hegel and Freud, then, the self-conscious subject aiming to act out of self-affirming and apparently justice-seeking and community-installing (self)righteousness finds itself confronted with the otherness of death—from which comes the ultimate law that both structures and undoes the human community.

However, and as I see it, the ultimate transgression of the subject that leaves it antecedently guilty, fractured, and ever-anxious—the transgression that necessarily and time and again undoes the communal belonging of self-conscious individuals—is the transgression against nature. Nature constitutes the subject who turns away from it and is guided by the self- and ego-centered consciousness. The latter recognizes as constitutive for itself the divinities that become established as the menacing other. As Hegel himself finally and clearly admits, the “self-certainty and self-confidence of a people” [1] (§473) is undone when the “body . . . was not given its due and was not raised into the unconscious universality by being returned to the elemental individuality [of the earth], but was left above the earth in the open realm of actuality, having acquired the force of the divine law” [1] (§473). It is the rites of the earth—of returning the body to the elemental divinity of nature—that have been transgressed against. For us, the post-modern subjects, this transgression largely entails the conscious denial of the sacredness of nature. This denial allows us to see nature as a mere piling-up of resources or of fungible stuff. This precludes us from intuiting the sacred life of nature—life that courses also within ourselves—and from realizing that it can never be completely subjugated, displayed, revealed, and consciously managed to our advantage. Nature returns in its sacred wrathfulness as ecological disaster looms large, pressing upon our self-certain subjectivity, and placing us before the undeniable truth of our thoroughgoing belonging to nature. To deny this and to deny the sacredness to nature is to deny ourselves our lives (and I do not mean only our future lives or lives of the future generations).



## 5. Conclusions

Spurning the sacred rites of the divine elementality of nature destroys the ethical community and leaves the subject unabsolved, guilty, and fissured. As such, the ordinary transgression is against the self—against the subject who denies the power of nature, sets it as the merely unconscious ground, and refuses to intuit within nature the awesome depth without which there is no conscious surface. The subject prefers to turn its gaze toward the supra-human, the unreachable divine. But the wrathful divinities return as the upsurge of nature that has been deemed secondary; as non-essentially opposed; as merely supportive of the human world. The fracture of the subject can only be undone if nature is seen—once more—as sacred, as divine, and life-sustaining power that constitutes us. This recognition holds a promise of an ethos through which shines forth all future life on earth; life whose possibility is threatened by the catastrophe that looms on the horizon as the wrathful return of nature that has not been paid its due.

As I see it, the possibilities of hearkening to the return of nature—the violent, raging return as we have witnessed it in the sublimity of engorging fires and ravishing hurricanes; in the desolating droughts and unstoppable floods; in the diminution of meaning in our lives—lie in recovering the sense of sacredness of nature. Within and without—and the two are mutually constitutive opposites—nature seeks to reinstall its power. What we have forgotten is that this power *is* the power of the divine, but not of a monotheistic order and not of the order that seeks, in the end, to privilege the human being and the human view. In this insistence that the anthropocentric or even “Anthropocenic” outlook must be set aside, I differ from Sean McGrath for whom it is possible and needful to reposition our relationship with nature through (heavily Christianized) contemplation that joins “Marxist critique of ideology with a Christian trust in being” [50]<sup>41</sup>. The simple reason that this will not work is that since nature’s divinity is breaking through repression and suppression that we have installed upon it, it is not yet within our conscious life. Therefore, we are ill-advised to insist on any already known, specific religious faith and name it as the way of nature. Instead of self-assuredly claiming that we know that way, we may be best served and best serve nature by hearkening to its divinity such as it may be. In this, we welcome the heretofore uncharted possibilities of its return. With this yet undefined return of sacred nature, divinity may then announce its life in us; but we cannot pre-tell the exact shape of this announcement. Less certain of the state of affairs than McGrath, for whom “nature is now able to survive the extinction of one or another of its senses” [50]<sup>42</sup>, I wonder whether—given the reign of *anthropos tyrannos*—nature is able to survive extinction at all?

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The notion of divinity in nature, as far as Hegel’s philosophical milieu and his interlocutors are concerned, appears in Friedrich W. J. Schelling’s *Philosophical Investigations into the Nature of Human Freedom* (1809) [3]. As Dieter Wandschneider writes, Schelling, “[t]he protagonist of the romantic philosophy formulated the matter in complete conformity with “*hen kai pan*” (oneness of all), the motto of the three friends—Schelling, Hegel, Hölderlin—studying in the Tübingen Stift: ‘the whole of nature [is] connected to a universal organism’, and in ‘that being, which the most ancient philosophy [had considered] the common soul of nature’ (2:569) Schelling saw the ‘world-soul’” (2:369). “Nature” Wandschneider continues, “is thus also an appearance of the absolute; matter is ‘nothing other than the unconscious part of God’ (7:435), ‘the extinguished spirit’, as it were (3:182; 453), ‘the embodiment of divine forces and the first image of the universe’ (7:210); nature in its entirety is ‘the visible spirit’, and spirit conversely is ‘the invisible nature’ (2:56)” [4] (80). Schelling’s ideas are further taken up by Martin Heidegger in *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* (1936) [5]. See also a recent article that addresses both Schelling’s and Heidegger’s accounts by Marina Marren, “Analysis of Evil in Schelling’s *Freiheitsschrift* Through Heidegger’s Account of Dissemblance and *Αλήθεια*” [6] (97–115). On

temporalization and historicization of the Absolute in Hegel, including in relation to Schelling's view of divinity, see Nerijus Stasiulis, "Heidegger: German Idealism and Ecstatic Temporality" [7] (24–32). On the role of Hegel in relation to ontotheology in the history of philosophy, see Jussi Backman, *Complicated Presence: Heidegger and the Postmetaphysical Unity of Being* [8] (esp., 54–68).

I use the German edition of *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* throughout. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes. Werke 3* [1] and I also rely on Terry Pinkard's text, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit* [2]. Where translations of the *Phenomenology* differ from the Pinkard's edition, they are by the author.

In respect of my focus on the suppression of nature in the *Phenomenology*, and especially in self-consciousness sections, see recent feminist and psychoanalytical studies of the subject, including in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, by Karin de Boer, "Hegel's *Antigone* and the Tragedy of Cultural Difference" [9] (31–45); Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, "The Freudian Subject, from Politics to Ethics" [10] (109–127). Hereafter, "The Freudian Subject"; Luce Irigaray, "Love Between Us" [11] (180–190); Anna Mudde, "Risky Subjectivity: *Antigone*, Action, and Universal Trespass" [12] (183–200); Tuija Pulkkinen, "Differing Spirits: Reflections on Hegelian Inspiration in Feminist Theory" [13] (19–37). See also Jacques Derrida's account of Hegel's examination of *Antigone* in *Glas* [14]. See further an analysis of Derrida's account by Tina Chanter, "Does *Antigone* Stand or Fall in Relation to Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic: A Response to Derrida's *Glas*" [15] (202–219).

See, for example, Andrew Cutrofello, *Continental Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* [16]. He traces out some of these historical continuities e.g., 58, 147, 172–173.

However, see John MacDowell who argues against the orthodox view in "The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self: Towards a Heterodox Reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*" [17] (1–16). See further, Matthew Peters, "The Self-Sublation of Empirical Consciousness: Developing McDowell's Heterodox Interpretation of Hegel's Lord/Bondsman Dialectic" [18] (56–92). See also Kevin Marren and Marina Marren, "Doubling Consciousness in Fichte and Hegel" [19] (124–153). Hereafter, "Doubling Consciousness".

"Doubling Consciousness" [19].

In the face of the global environmental degradation and increasingly alarming environmental crises, we simply do not have this luxury now of playing out the dynamic between the Lord and Bondsman consciousness on the global scale. We cannot expect to consciously recognize our belonging to nature only in the face of the imminent annihilation. Thus, denying to ourselves the fact that there is a deep interplay between consciousness and nature, as well as between self-consciousness and life, necessarily is bound to lead to the utter destruction of life, including human life.

This latter dynamic is the case up to and including the Ethical Community (PG §443), but it is present also in the subsequent sections.

"Un/Limited Ecologies" [20] (121–140, 121). On the question of ecological catastrophe, as it is addressed by continental philosophy thinkers, see other essays in the same volume. See also a collection edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself (Sunny Series in Environmental Philosophy and Ethics)* [21]. On the Anthropocene and the destruction of the human and the non-human world, see Christine Cuomo, "Against the Idea of an Anthropocene Epoch: Ethical, Political and Scientific Concerns" [22] (4–8); Christophe Bonneuil, Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us* [23]; Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* [24]; Jason M. Wirth, *Mountains, Rivers, and the Great Earth: Reading Gary Snyder and Dōgen in an Age of Ecological Crisis* [25]; Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* [26].

"Hegel, Derrida and the Subject" [27] (32–50, 45).

"Life, Self-Consciousness, Negativity: Understanding Hegel's Speculative Identity Thesis" [28] (33–67, 50). Hereafter, "Life, Self-Consciousness, Negativity".

[28] (50).

[28] (50).

A thorough assessment of the Truth of Self-Certainty section appears in Scott Jenkin's essay, "Hegel's Concept of Desire", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* [29] (103–130). Jenkins takes up McDowell's, Pippin's, and Pinkard's positions and then offers his own reading of Desire in the *Phenomenology*, which traces out Hegel's indebtedness to Fichte. Jenkins sets up his discussion by pointing out a dilemma in Hegel's presentation. Namely, the presentation "in which consciousness relates to objects as independent and essentially other, . . . and one in which consciousness sees this difference between itself and its objects as one without being (*der an sich kein Sein hat*) (§167). These two moments of consciousness", Jenkins continues, "are *prima facie* incompatible. One and the same subject, it would seem, cannot relate to objects both as independent and as nothing more than appearances for it. But", as Jenkins concludes, "the observed consciousness has by this point in the *Phenomenology* discovered that these two points of view are essential to it. . . . This revelation might be regarded as motivating the task of constructing a self-conception that enables the observed consciousness to see these two moments of consciousness as compatible" [29] (105). In my view, not only are these two moments compatible, but they are mutually constitutive of subjectivity. This becomes clear especially if we realize that Jenkins somewhat overplays the stark contrast between appearance and objective otherness.

[28] (51).

Italics are in the original.

- 17 If Hegel were to insist on complete and utter separation of consciousness from nature, then the division that he himself criticizes would be reintroduced in his philosophy. Namely, the division that Hegel observes in Kant—the rift between the cognizing subject and the world that is free from this consciousness. Given his accounts of the self-determination of nature and nature’s manifestation in living conscious beings, Hegel is not insisting on such a separation throughout his oeuvre. On Hegel’s view of nature as self-determining, see, for example, Sebastian Rand, “Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature” [30] (384–406). Contrary to my view, Kirill Chepurin claims that the relationship between Spirit and Nature in Hegel is such that nature is only properly conceived from within Spirit. See his article entitled, “Nature, Spirit, and Revolution: Situating Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature” [31] (302–314). However, see Nicholas Mowad, who argues against a strict division between the human and the natural world in Hegel. See his “The Natural World of Spirit: Hegel on the Value of Nature” [32] (47–66). On the entwinement of nature and Spirit, see Angelica Nuzzo, “Anthropology, Geist, and the Soul-Body Relation: The Systematic Beginning of Hegel’s Philosophy of Spirit” [33] (1–17). On the tendency to anthropomorphize nature to make it serve the idea of historical progress in one of Hegel’s key predecessors (i.e., Immanuel Kant), see Zachary Biondi, “Kant’s Hermeneutics of Progress” [34] (76–93).
- 18 In the *Differenzschrift*, in the section on “Transcendental Intuition”, Hegel establishes a productive opposition between intelligence/consciousness, on the one side, and nature/unconscious, on the other, then showing that this opposition no longer holds in philosophical knowledge. *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy in Connection with the First Fascicle of Reinhold’s “Contributions to a Mere Convenient Survey of the State of Philosophy at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century”* (1801) [35] (109–111).
- 19 Such subjectivity suppresses nature, which, as Arthur Kok sees it, the individual must do in order to “maintain itself”. See his analysis of the interplay between self-conscious subjectivity and nature in “Metaphysics of Recognition: On Hegel’s Concept of Self-Consciousness in the Phenomenology of Spirit” [36] (67–98, 93).
- 20 [37] (67–90).
- 21 [37] (69).
- 22 [37] (70).
- 23 [37] (70).
- 24 [37] (70).
- 25 See also Andrew Cutrofello’s *The Owl at Dawn: The Sequel to Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* where he examines the division of genders in the *Phenomenology* through the psychoanalytic lens [38] (136 ff).
- 26 See Martin Heidegger’s analyses of nature as a “standing reserve” (*Bestand*) in *The Question Concerning Technology* [39].
- 27 On emptying out of the divine character of nature, see, for example, Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* [40] (esp. 222–224). As far as the various philosophical attempts to reintroduce divinity into nature, see Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* [41] (90 and ff). See further Kearney’s novel, *Salvage*, which traces out the relationship of nature and the divine [42].
- 28 On the “phallic signifier”, see Jacques Lacan, who develops the concept in *The Formations of the Unconscious 1957–1958, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book V* [43]. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* [44]; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [45]; See further, Page duBois, “Phallogocentrism and Its Subversion in Plato’s ‘Phaedrus’” [46] (91–103); Allison Weir, “The Subversion of Identity: Luce Irigaray and the Critique of Phallogocentrism” [47] (160–178).
- 29 [37] (71).
- 30 [37] (84).
- 31 [37] (84).
- 32 [37] (84).
- 33 [37] (84).
- 34 [37] (84).
- 35 E.g., Irigaray [11], De Boer [9], Mudde [12], Tuija Pulkkinen [13].
- 36 On the return of nature in ancient Greek philosophy, see John Sallis, *The Return of Nature: Coming as if From Nowhere* [48].
- 37 On fractured subjectivity in Hegel’s philosophy see, for example, Nigel Clark and Bron Szerszynski, “Rifted Subjects, Fractured Earth: ‘Progress’ as Learning to Live on a Self-transforming Planet” [49] (385–401).
- 38 By “divine nature” I do not mean a transcendent supra-natural Christological nature. My meaning is closer to the ancient Greek sense of divinity that indwells in the natural world and manifests as the surging up and the unfolding of *phusis*.
- 39 [10] (73).
- 40 “Hence, innocence amounts to non-action, like the being of a stone and not even like that of a child” [1] (§467), [2] (410).
- 41 *Thinking Nature: An Essay in Negative Ecology. New Perspectives in Ontology* [50] (145).
- 42 [50] (20).

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