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'In Nature's Good Old College': Sexual Politics and the Long Shadow of Hegel

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Abstract

Although his positions on gender were neither particularly radical nor particularly representative of his age, Hegel proved counterintuitively central to early German philosophers elaborating openly feminist positions. The Young Hegelians' critique of religion offered a readymade way to critique traditional modes of grounding and vindicating gender roles. But it also, especially among more materialist thinkers like Ludwig Feuerbach, tended to rely on supposedly "natural" bases for gender inequality. This article traces a line of women thinkers beginning in Hegel's age, stretching through the immediate aftermath of Hegel's death, all the way to the fin-de-siècle, who sought to destabilize the very idea of nature that lay behind both Hegelian and Young Hegelian accounts. Thinkers like Bettina Brentano-von Arnim (1785–1859), Louise Dittmar (1807–1884), and Helene von Druskowitz (1856–1918) charted a path between Hegel himself, Hegel's critics, renewers, and overcomers, to arrive at strikingly modern position. In particular von Druskowitz, critic of Feuerbach and Comte, interlocutor to Nietzsche and Hartmann, ended up with a philosophical position on nature that was nearly identical to the most radical feminist proposals of the 1960s: the end of human nature, even if it meant the end of the species.

> A year or two's an age when rightly spent,
> And Zoe spent hers, as most women do,
> In gaining all that useful sort of knowledge
> Which is acquired in Nature's good old college.
> Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto II

When Helene von Druskowitz (1856–1918) published her *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* in 1905, she was a woman resolutely out of step with her age. She had at one point been only the second woman ever to have received her doctorate at a German-speaking university, she had been an interlocutor to Nietzsche and Hartmann, she had lived relatively openly with her partner, the soprano Therese Malten (1855–1930) at a time when few lesbian relationships were lived in public.

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Pessimistische Kardinalsätze, by contrast, was written while its author, after a long descent into alcoholism and drug addiction, was committed to the psychiatric clinic in Mauer-Öhling in Lower Austria and, unlike her previous work, received little attention at the time. But in its gender politics the little book anticipated ideas that would be considered radical when Valerie Solanas semi-seriously proposed them before shooting Andy Warhol in 1968. And by anticipating a distant, radical future, the book also illuminated a tradition-line that stretched from Hegel via Feuerbach and the Young Hegelians to the most radical elements of the women's movement.

In six short sections, *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* stake out a philosophical position of striking extremity. Unlike Druskowitz's earlier works, the book largely eschewed overt references to philosophical forebears, even though the echoes of Druskowitz's usual philosophical interlocutors, from Hegel, via Schopenhauer to Friedrich Nietzsche, are clear throughout. Druskowitz begins with a gesture that, by 1905 could feel fairly traditional: much like mid-century Hegelianism, she attacks the anthropocentric understanding of God; but she takes this critique in a direction the Young Hegelians, even at their most radical, had not anticipated. The problem with anthropomorphic divinity is less that God is imagined as human, but rather that He is traditionally imagined as male, which is 'the main explanation for the contradictions and the dishonesty in the common idea of God' (*PK*: 7).[1] The illogic and contradictions in the idea of God are the illogic and contradictions of the philosophical concept of masculinity.

The 'normal mind', we are told, is 'atheistic', but given that the idea of God is so imbued with the backwardness of what we might today call the human sex-gender system, the atheist has to oppose herself to far more than just to the idea of God: She 'has to be disposed ironically and skeptically towards the material world in general', in particular 'be an enemy of blind and stupid multiplication [of the species] and marriages' (*PK*: 11). If what lies behind the idea of God, in other words, is ultimately but human hubris, abandoning the idea of God requires also abandoning a belief in the value of the human being.

In fact, Druskowitz writes, we can of course imagine a sphere of 'superdivinity', which would be characterized by 'the utter absence of all human qualities' (*PK*: 13). It would be free of anthropomorphic projections, it would be free of the distortions of masculinity. But while all of nature strives towards this self-transcendence, it can never actually succeed in it. The material world is characterized by a striving towards this sphere, but 'the human is [...] the product of the lack of' all the predicates that attach to this sphere. Druskowitz thus seems to agree with generations of (male) philosophers who self-confidently associated the human (and whatever features like reason that set human beings apart from the rest of nature)[2] with masculinity; she simply thinks that this ultimately dooms humanity. 'Accordingly, the material world is to be understood *eo ipso* pessimistically and in the most tragic form' (*PK*: 17).

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Consciousness is the material world raised to its highest possible power and thus gives a view of just how inhospitable the material world is to consciousness. Pessimism is the most objective analysis possible for such consciousness, and the most clarifying application of such pessimism, the best path towards understanding what the material world is really like, is the 'criticizing-apart [*Niederkritisierung*] of the male' (*PK*: 18). As Gillian Rose has pointed out, the question of whether women could be raised to a 'universal' viewpoint from the supposed particularity of their ('natural') condition was an important one throughout the nineteenth century (1992: 192). Druskowitz's answer seems to be that only someone who is not masculine is truly capable of seeing the whole in all of its awfulness. Taking this universal standpoint does also mean embracing the ultimate upshot of the aforementioned pessimism, however: for as the ultimate consequence of the critique beckons the realization that the sexual relationship is a profound mistake and the only sensible consequence available to consciousness is the end of the human species.

To call Druskowitz's philosophy eccentric within the range of philosophical approaches philosophers of the fin-de-siècle would be an understatement. The second half of the nineteenth century may have been rich in metaphysical speculations around sexuality, gender and eroticism—from Schopenhauer and his readers, via post-Nietzscheans like Ludwig Klages, via the bizarre gender theory of Otto Weininger, all the way to the early psychoanalytic movement.[3] But such speculation seemed to be largely a male province. It also tended to claim, as Londa Schiebinger has pointed out, to 'reveal women's place in the cosmic and social order' (2004: 38), amounting in essence to a naturalized theodicy of heterosexuality. And even in its Schopenhauerian or post-Nietzschean guise its pessimism seemed to be mostly about resigning the human being to suffering, not (as in Druskowitz's text) resigning the human species to extinction. Women philosophers in particular had sought to link the 'woman question' to a faith in progress, to the project of enlightenment, of democratization, and, in the case of Germany, of political unification (see Case 2020: 228). In the middle of 'life-philosophy' and Nietzsche-inspired life-affirmation, Druskowitz's semi-serious catechism for ending the species was almost tauntingly out of step (see Albert 1995: 92).

And yet, for all their extremism, Druskowitz's stark conclusions had their roots in earlier nineteenth century engagements with the nature of gender and what nature had to say about the future of women. While Druskowitz's work is almost entirely in direct dialogue with male thinkers—from Rousseau, via Lord Byron via Feuerbach all the way to Nietzsche—her eccentric final work makes clear that her thought evolved in implicit dialogue with several generations of women philosophers in the German Idealist tradition. These thinkers had long grappled with the status of nature in a project of women's liberation. Two thinkers of earlier generations with whose work Druskowitz may have been familiar (but whom she, if she was, never cited) will here stand in for many others who struggled

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with the same question. The argument is not that Druskowitz drew on Bettina Brentano von Arnim or Louise von Dittmar in crafting her 1905 text; but rather that the radicality of her semi-serious solution drew on difficulties that they had navigated fifty years before her.

I. Hegelian echoes

It may seem strange that in the latter half of the nineteenth century several women philosophers would grapple with this issue in the context of their relationship to Hegel and his followers. Hegel's picture of the sexual relationship was neither particularly progressive, nor were characterizations of women as 'plantlike', as 'passive', or 'subjective' particularly perceptive.[4] Nevertheless, Hegel hovers as an important interlocutor behind Druskowitz's strange late text. While the most obvious target of her critique was Feuerbach (especially when she opened her *Kardinalsätze* with a critique of anthropomorphization of divinity), the picture of a human being consistently impelled towards a transcendence that it is ultimately incapable of is explicitly targeted at Hegelian monism, in which self-transcendence dynamizes what would otherwise be stark and (as Druskowitz puts it) 'tragic' dualisms.

In this, Druskowitz's text stood in its own kind of tradition, although it is unclear whether Druskowitz would have been aware of this lineage. The philosophical foundations of the women's movement in Germany were oddly entwined with Hegelianism. That is not to say that Hegel straightforwardly inspired feminist thought. Rather, women thinkers and activists starting in the 1840s began to articulate their positions within the lacunae of the Hegelian system, and within the fissures of what was usually called (far more monolithically than reality warranted) the 'Hegel-School' (Daub 2020: 96). Sometimes, women intervened into philosophical debates around Hegel's legacy as guardians. Bettina Brentano von Arnim (1785–1859) exchanged letters with Heinrich Bernhard Oppenheim (1819–80), seeking to emphasize continuity within Hegelian philosophy over Hegel's adherents' oft-asserted disagreements.

Some of this had to do with Hegelianism's unique position vis-a-vis the university. There was broad agreement among Hegelians that philosophy had culminated in Hegel's system, and that whatever the historically necessary next steps were, they were to be taken outside of the university. The Left ('Young') Hegelians increasingly found themselves at odds with the university system, above all in increasingly repressive Prussia. Deprived of academic posts for their political radicalism, they relied on the press and periodicals to make their impact. Turning Hegel from his head onto his feet, as Marx would put it, involved expanding the public for dialectical thinking far beyond what Hegel's thought had been able to reach. In a way, Hegelianism had moved from an implicit address to

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intellectuals of the 'universal estate' to an appeal to 'Proletarians of all nations' within a span of about eighteen years. It made sense for women philosophers—shut out from the university and scholarly publishing, but increasingly visible in a wider public—to seek to attach themselves to this expansion. And in many respects it almost did not matter whether they attached themselves in the role of faithful explicators, careful modernizers, or forceful critics.

Druskowitz followed in their footsteps by situating her interventions largely vis-a-vis thinkers who had public resonance beyond the gates of the university: from Feuerbach and Schopenhauer, so much more beloved by artists than by their peers in philosophy departments, via Auguste Comte and Eugen Dühring, to Eduard von Hartmann and Friedrich Nietzsche. In her book on George, Lord Byron, Druskowitz sought to explicate and defend the scandalous effects of Byron's satirical epic *Don Juan*. In her book on *Moderne Versuche eines Religionsersatzes* (1886), she raised a question the Young Hegelians had struggled with: if religion was an important feature of the ethical life of a nation, how were critiques of that religion most effectively to be communicated to those who were not themselves critical philosophers? Druskowitz, in other words, was consistently engaged with the question of how speculative, radical philosophy could be, or was made to resonate within a wider public. In the *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* she would continue this practice, offering a 'Women's Catechism' that boiled down her reflections on gender and culture into a stark set of rules: separate yourselves from men, refuse the sexual relationship, end the species.

Nevertheless, there was a philosophical reason for their interest as well. For women activists and thinkers interested in women's liberation in the 1840s, Hegel's legacy would have mattered primarily for the critique of religion, especially when it became entwined with another category, that of nature. For while Hegel's descriptions of the sexual relationship could sound like recapitulations of traditional gender roles, associating femininity with nature and masculinity with spirit, Hegel's inveterate tendency to 'work away' nature in his systematic writings suggested to them that gender roles, gender complementarity and the social organization of the family were 'second' rather than 'first' nature. The fact that gender inequality for Hegel was concerned with *Geist* (even if he identified it as one moment of transition where nature became *Geist*) suggested to them avenues of critique that would no longer have to credit as natural the exact gender stereotypes that Hegel elsewhere indulged.

The *Science of Logic*, for instance, admitted life only as the 'Idea of Life', an objectivity 'shot through with the concept [*schlechthin durchdrungen*]' (1834: 247)—nature rarely mattered as brute, unreflected given. It mattered only as mattering to human social life. Hegel's most direct invocation of gender complementarity likewise deliberately moved the sexual relationship out of the realm of nature and into the sphere of 'second' nature. Fichte's *Foundations of Natural Right*, Schelling's *First Outline of a System of a Philosophy of Nature* and Franz von Baader's *On the*

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Pythagorean Square in Nature (all 1797 and 1798) claimed for complementarity a biological, even a metaphysical status; Schelling and Baader continued to carry this line of thinking well into the nineteenth century. Hegel, by contrast, was clear that this complementarity was entirely concerned with objective spirit, and indeed concerned the very relationship of the individual to the spirit *qua* universal itself. Rather than nature subdividing itself into two complementary wholes, it was Spirit which opposed itself in such a way.

One sex, he claimed in the *Elements of a Philosophy of Right*, 'is therefore spirituality which divides itself up into personal self-sufficiency and the knowledge and volition of free universality', while the other 'is spirituality which maintains itself in unity as knowledge and volition of the substantial in the form of concrete individuality and feeling' (1990: 206, §166). Under the premises of the Hegelian system, in other words, Hegel ends up with an account of complementary genders in terms of 'knowledge' (in-itself vs. for-itself), in terms of 'feeling' (whether the feeling is directed to the particular family or the universal concept of life), with one gender 'powerful and active', and the other 'passive and subjective' (1990: 206, §166). But they were so in the social world, not in nature.

Furthermore, rather than claim that the way men and women were referred to by one another within the family was reflected in the larger civil society, Hegel posited the family as a miniature society, the structure and mutual dependence of which would eventually expand into the 'ethical' (*sittlich*) state, if only by negating the former. In the necessary dissolution of the family towards a broader social horizon, 'the moments which are bound together in the unity of the family, as the ethical idea which is still in its concept, must be released from the concept to [attain] self-sufficiency' (1990: 181, §219). Here too Druskowitz's late text describes almost a nightmare-version of Hegel's picture. The book addresses itself to the 'freest of spirits', and what the freedom of those spirits allows them to see is simply this: since masculinity is both incapable of divorcing itself from nature and simultaneously has convinced humanity that it alone represents reason and logic, humanity is doomed to be caught in a conceptual hall of mirrors.

II. Nature and gender in Bettina Brentano von Arnim

While Hegel's own considerations on gender, the sexual relationship and marriage remained relatively marginal for emerging feminist thought in the German-speaking world, his critique of religion proved absolutely central. In particular it was Ludwig Feuerbach who (a) centred the critique of the anthropocentric concepts of theology and metaphysics, and who (b) emphasized the contingent, anthropogenic origins of school philosophy, thus inspiring a number of women philosophers and activists. But Feuerbach was an ambivalent resource for

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women looking to critique their station in society in the 1840s and beyond: while his views on love and marriage were far more liberal than those of Hegel, and his views on religion downright radical, his critique in both spheres foregrounded what Hegel's conception of gender had successfully banished: unmediated 'first' nature.

How feminist philosophers made use of this shift can be seen in the thought of Bettina Brentano von Arnim (1785–1859), who throughout her oeuvre drew on supposedly 'natural' facts to ground her theories of knowledge, affect and politics, but whose nature tended to arrive pre-reflected by human sense-making activity. Brentano von Arnim was a strange and complicated fellow traveller for the Hegelian left. As Heinz Härtl has noted, the period of Brentano von Arnim's most famous publications coincided with the great interventions of Bruno Bauer, Feuerbach and others. And the Prussian state, and the Prussian reactionaries certainly associated her with the radicals (Härtl 1995: 148).

Among the radical Hegelians themselves, Brentano von Arnim was a topic of much debate—David Friedrich Strauß praised her and regarded her as an ally, while critics like Arnold Ruge saw in her a Romantic and mystic, unsuited to the 'scientific' standpoint taken up by the Hegelian left. To be sure, at a moment when the Young Turks of German philosophy raced to be done with anything Romantic and Idealist, Brentano von Arnim seemed staunchly and proudly both. And at a moment where the critique of all religion was understood as the main line of attack against the Prussian state, Brentano von Arnim could sound strikingly religious.

Brentano von Arnim was not an explicit feminist. In fact, her genius was one of dissimulation: her work finds her almost compulsively explaining what she is not, among them not being a philosopher. The work for which she was most famous at the time were the epistolary novels pretending to be (and partly based on) exchanges of letters with famous contemporaries—Goethe (*Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde* (1835)), her brother Clemens (*Clemens Brentano's Frühlingskranz* (1844)) and most famously the poet Caroline von Günderrode (*Die Günderode* (1840)). In these texts she usually positioned herself as a passive reflector for the creativity of others. In her fictions, she was not the poet, she was not the philosopher, she was not the genius. Likewise, she was careful to pretend that her—occasionally truly audacious—political interventions were not really political.

All of this was pretence, of course: her supposed documentary collections of letters were in fact finely wrought and philosophically ambitious works of art. Behind her dreamy fairy tale collections and high romantic imagery lurked a radical political program. And above all there was of course a political program around gender inherent in the shape and content of her public interventions—which, while it did not match the fervour and explicitness of the protagonists of the incipient women's movement, nevertheless spoke powerfully to the role of women in

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public discourse, and, more pointedly, rejected some of the common tropes around women's expression that many fellow Romantics, including women Romantics, had embraced.

Prime among them was the ideology of gender complementarity. Brentano von Arnim was classically Romantic in tethering the 'natural' union between two people to the coming-together (or cohesion) of larger political communities. But it is noticeable that the binary relationships she uses in this way are never traditionally gendered, or indeed complementary. Nature guided all relationships in her writings, and nature seemed to inform their broader political implications. But nature did so in a deeply unstraightforward way. Whether it is the paternal relationship between her and Goethe, the strange mix of supplication and bluntness of her letters and writings addressed to the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, the sibling relationship with Clemens Brentano, or the homoerotically tinged friendship with her friend Karoline von Günderrode: Brentano von Arnim seems intent on portraying complicated bi-directional relationships whose social ramifications accordingly refract in far more complicated directions than they had in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's, or even Hegel's hands.

The spirituality of her texts connects Aristophanic narratives of unification with another person to visions of overcoming broader social alienation. 'Oh, Günderrode', Brentano von Arnim writes in *Die Günderode*, 'I know what that is, the World Soul. I have often thought, when I sit alone in the midday sun and the wind is roaring, and the roaring gets stronger: this is my Lover, who sits with me under the linden tree and in the evening wind. The Holy Spirit is the World Soul' (Bettina von Arnim 1959: 1: 245). Brentano von Arnim constantly plays with scale: she can frame her relationship to the totality of Spirit (*Geistesallheit*) as one between two lovers sitting beneath a linden tree, and conversely can expand her attachment to a single person into a feeling of cosmic oneness. Not perhaps coincidentally, Brentano von Arnim repeatedly invokes the Platonic dialogues in these letters: 'I will invent loving nicknames for you', she writes in a letter in *Die Günderode*, 'I will call you Swan, as Socrates called you, and you will call me Dion' (1959: 1: 245).

Throughout her work, Bettina Brentano von Arnim turned to nature as a ground for social and political claims. But throughout her work, this manner of recourse left the ground strangely destabilized. In the fairy tale *Das Leben der Hochgräfin Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns* (*The Life of the High Countess Gritta von Ratsinourhouse*), which Bettina co-wrote with her daughter Gisela, a noble bloodline endures with the support of an unseen army of rats that nurse young Gritta and literally sustain her crumbling ancestral castle, as well a mad tangle of machines. Whatever family structure Bettina's contemporaries would have recognized as 'natural', exists in Brentano-von Arnim's story only as intermixed with other species, with processes of decomposition, with technological entities. In other words,

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whatever 'nature' grounds her characters' inclinations and knowledge are an altogether strange and unstable thing.

Bettina opens what was to become her most controversial work, the explicitly political *Dies Buch gehört dem König* (*The King's Book* (1843)), with a sly fairy tale in an openly Young Hegelian mode: A family lives in the middle of a deep dark forest, but just because they live in nature does not mean that they understand nature. For most of what makes nature beautiful and comprehensible never makes it into their isolation: 'No rose bloomed in their area. The secrets of nature, in which nature's magic reveals itself as well as its pleasures never penetrated into their lonely wilderness' (1959: 3: 6). When the family's father brings an apple into their seclusion, his son is transfixed. Upon dying and coming before God's throne he 'recognized in the Creator of all Majesties nothing more than the creator of his apple' (1959: 3: 7)—and decides to return the apple to its creator, who sets it aside with a puzzled glance. After all, he has made it and therefore knows it well. The little tale is about what nature can teach us, and the fact that what it teaches us is always partial: because the human being sees in nature 'nothing more than the creator of his apple'.

As Härtl points out, it was surely not lost on the Young Hegelians that there was a critique of religion entailed in these moments (1995: 151). Precisely because religious experience was in texts like *Die Günderode* (a) multiple, free-flowing and dynamic in scope, (b) present and lived rather than transmitted from the distant past by dogma, and (c) emancipated from power structures and radically egalitarian, *Die Günderode* seemed to partake in a similar critique as had been levelled by David Friedrich Strauß's *Die christliche Glaubenslehre* (*Christian Dogmatics*). As Moritz Carrière wrote in a review in the *Hallesches Jahrbuch*, main organ of the Young Hegelians: far from indulging nostalgia, 'Bettina's Romanticism is the Romanticism of the future' (Härtl 1995: 153). At the same time, the Young Hegelians seemed to largely repress that this future Romanticism was female—that the experiences of religiosity in *Die Günderode* that so strongly harmonized with their own demands for spirituality occurred between two young women.

The very malleability of this figure in Brentano von Arnim's work renders difficult any readings in terms of binary gender. Again and again, Bettina's texts, through their overriding affective charge, their convoluted allusions, and their epistolary address destabilize the very relationships that are supposed to vouch for the text's broader political implications. Take for instance one of the letters in *Die Günderode*: Bettina begins by saying that she 'is not a poet like you, Günderrode', but claims she can 'speak with nature when I am alone with it' (1959: 1: 245). Günderrode thus makes an appearance at a moment of aloneness with nature—seemingly undercutting the very premise of Bettina's ability to converse with nature if left alone. When Bettina gives an example of communion with nature, it soon turns out to be a memory of cohabiting with Günderrode.

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That cohabitation introduces another ambiguity: not only do aloneness (with nature) and togetherness (with Günderrode) tend to collapse into one another in this letter; it is unclear what the relationship to Günderrode is. Much has been written about the obvious homoeroticism of the relationship Bettina describes.[5] But in this context it is perhaps less important that there are definite lesbian dimensions to the relationship, and more important that the relationship is difficult to pin down at a moment where it needs to be clear whether Günderrode is a friend, a love object, or a fellow subject. 'Let's put our beds close together', Bettina writes, 'and we chat the entire night away. And then the wind rattles through the rickety roof, then come the mice and drink all the oil from our lamp, and we two philosophers [*Philosophen*] carry on [...] great deep-thinking speculations that will burst the old world from its rusty hinges, if it doesn't entirely flip on its axis' (1959: 1: 246).

Part of what makes these relationships so explosive is that they combine—at least according to Bettina herself—profound political implications for a broader community with an inherent internal instability. When Feuerbach, by contrast, sought to use the concept of love to structure and guide broader political association, he was able to say quite clearly what kind of love could serve as such a guide. In *The Essence of Christianity* (*Das Wesen des Christenthums*, 1840), Feuerbach writes that 'the "you" between man and woman has an entirely different sound than the monotone "you" between two friends' (1843: 136). This is the kind of surety Brentano von Arnim does not permit herself or her reader: any kind of relationship might prove generative of a broader community, and no relationship can be so easily boiled down as to make straightforward transfers from it. Nature, in other words, has a way of teaching us how to structure second nature—but its lessons are complex, ambiguous and counterintuitive.

III. 'The End of the World': Louise von Dittmar considers the future of liberation

Brentano von Arnim's more radical (and somewhat younger) contemporaries tended to treat Young Hegelianism in much the same way.[6] The work of Louise Dittmar (1807–84) was emblematic in linking Feuerbach's critique of religion to feminist politics.[7] Dittmar's philosophical interventions of the 1840s in particular seize upon the revolutionary thrust of Left Hegelian critique and redirect it towards received notions around gender. Bauer, Feuerbach, Stirner and others were busy demonstrating how theological superstition survived in the very concepts of philosophical critique. Dittmar sought to show that this was doubly true of matters of gender: 'How much confusion of concepts' dominated thinking about sexuality in her day, Dittmar lamented, 'what surfeit of opinions, how many rote ideas, how much indifference to origins, how much devotion to old habits, how much

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fanaticism for human artifacts' (Dittmar 1845: 87). And 'whose life conditions are more closely tied to the iron chains of prejudice than those of women!' (1845: 87).

While at various points she traces her project back to Spinoza, Lessing and Hegel, Feuerbach is her clearest and most repeatedly invoked philosophical lodestar. In an 1847 book Dittmar montaged passages from Lessing and Feuerbach with her own political observations, explaining this mode of presentation as follows: 'The new researchers strive, since the development of philosophy, to abstract from all religious positing, and to think from a purely human standpoint about the essence of that positing. This striving has found, in our estimation, its highest expression in Feuerbach'. 'We have therefore,' she adds, 'endeavored to express our own convictions in his terminology and at times in his words' (Dittmar 1847: ii). At the same time, part of expressing her convictions in his words consisted of correcting Feuerbach, radicalizing him, turning him back upon himself, much as the Young Hegelians sought to do to Hegel.

Centrally, Dittmar's critique goes beyond the attempt to expand the notion of 'the human' deployed by her male contemporaries to emphatically include women. Rather than deconstructing 'femininity' as a deeply problematic concept, she focuses on 'masculinity' as a far more powerful fiction about nature (1845). In the end, she returns again and again to the way in which these two fictions are maintained in a reciprocal relationship, a fiction relating fictions.

'I am leery', she writes in an essay, 'of any characterization of woman, which depends on woman's antipode, man'. She singles out how frequently 'woman is supposed to be comprehended through one single aspect [of her personality], which is then traced into everything and found everywhere' (1845: 93). Clearly, Dittmar has in mind the kinds of complementary accounts so popular in German philosophy from the 1790s onward—pitting male activity against female receptivity, for instance, or male aggression against the calming effects of femininity. Dittmar professes scepticism at any account of what women or men are supposedly 'naturally' like. 'Only what goes against the nature of a particular being is truly unnatural, and besides that everything that exists is natural. Whether it goes against demands imposed from the outside, has nothing to do with its inner legitimacy' (1845: 96).

But perhaps the most interesting link Dittmar's essays make is one we have encountered in Bettina Brentano-von Arnim's 'Romanticism of the future': between a fractured, ambiguous, mysterious nature and the teleology of the human race. For Dittmar takes the talk of the potential damages wrought by 'unnaturalness' around supposedly 'unfeminine' behaviour quite seriously. In one short *Glosse*, she takes seriously that upsetting traditional gender hierarchies might entail the end of the world. The punchline of the short essay is: would that be so bad? 'If the material [of human history] were surveyed, one could indeed say that, if the world can continue only on under the condition of the absoluteness

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of poor judgment, we will never have to worry about the end of the world' (Dittmar 1845: 120). She rings the bell faintly, but she rings it nonetheless: if the sexual relationship as described even by the most radical Young Hegelians were to be fated, implicit in human nature itself, then what women's liberation would mean, in the final analysis, an end to nature.

Like many feminist writers of her generation, Dittmar can sound at once profoundly radical and profoundly traditional. When she attacks the ideology of love in Feuerbach and others, and warns 'a time could come, in which more than one woman renounced this love, to dedicate herself to a higher love' (1845: 91), she seems on the verge of saying something far more radical than she is. When she deconstructs gender roles, she means in the end rules around attire and social habit (such as wearing trousers in public or smoking), and seems willing to stipulate that women 'as such' are more inclined towards feelings of tenderness or care. However, the basic intuition behind her essays is indeed absolutely radical: She (1) distrusts pictures of gender that characterize one gender by negating the other. She (2) suggests that any picture of gender complementarity serves to naturalize inequalities, including the political inequalities that the revolutionaries of her day were bent on destroying. In a mischievous turn in her copious writings on the French Revolution, Dittmar suggests that if history had made man 'the Prince' of the family, who were the social reformers of her day to inveigle against monarchy, when they were so busy defending it within the household?[8]

And finally, (3) Dittmar suggests that if some of the inequalities that characterize her gender's station in her society are indeed owed to natural rather than social facts, then—to purloin a phrase from Hegel—so much the worse for nature. This, rather than any injunction to lesbianism, lies behind Dittmar writing that 'a time could come' when women would rededicate themselves to a 'higher' form of love. Of course, Druskowitz's more explicit endorsement of gender separatism, ultimately takes aim at a similar problem: the yoking of gender to what the critic Lee Edelman has called 'reproductive futurism' (Edelman, 2004: 21). Dittmar, like Druskowitz later, seems to follow the trajectory of Young Hegelian secularizing critique. Both thinkers are critical of the notion that a supposed gender complementarity somehow points to how a human polity can be organically interrelated. And they extend this critique to their male philosophical contemporaries who, while submitting so much of the old romantic conceptual arsenal to scrutiny, held on to the notion (or doubled down on it) that only a dimorphous relationship can secure the future of the species.

IV. The desert called society: Druskowitz reads *Don Juan*

Helene von Druskowitz's first published work was her inaugural dissertation, written under the direction of Andreas Ludwig Kym and published in 1879. In what

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was only the second dissertation by a woman in the German-speaking world, Druskowitz offered a philosophical reading of Lord Byron's seventeen-canto satirical epic *Don Juan*. Druskowitz frames the infamous eroticism of Byron's verse epic as ultimately the expression of an abiding pessimism about the potential of the human being. Far from celebrating the human in the guise of human physicality and sensuality, Druskowitz's Byron through sex throws a spotlight on 'the impotence and weakness of the human being' (von Druskowitz 1879: 25). 'Nature is tender and divine and perfect, but man is not divine, is raw [*roh*] and imperfect' (von Druskowitz 1879: 25). At the same time, Druskowitz points out that Byron was not therefore pessimistic: Byron's satire relates to human foibles ultimately affirmatively, as an index of human autonomy. For Druskowitz, Byron possesses an 'idealism which finds even the egotistical and lowly in man sublime' (von Druskowitz 1879: 34). Byron mediates between a realist and idealist position.

Druskowitz's 'literary-aesthetic treatise', as the subtitle calls the study, is primarily concerned with one, albeit rich and complex, epic poem. Compared to her later work, the *Inauguraldissertation* can seem narrow and feuilletonistic. But while she is sparing with making broader philosophical points, there are hints scattered throughout of two investments that seem to frame her interest in Lord Byron: The first concerns the history of philosophy, the second the framing of gender. In defending Byron's 'idealism', Druskowitz asks whether 'showing the impure drives of man […] means denigrating God in the human being' (von Druskowitz 1879: 34). This is an interesting question to pose, in so far as the Christian answer to it almost certainly would have to be yes. But Druskowitz has a different picture of God and human being in mind. She reads Byron as a Feuerbachian *avant la lettre*.

As Feuerbach had made clear, his 'new philosophy' had to make the human being 'with the inclusion of nature' the 'only, universal, and highest subject of philosophy' (Feuerbach 1904: 2: 317). Rather than centre philosophy on 'substance that is also subject', 'God's thoughts at the moment of creation', or the supra-individual subjectivity of *Geist*, philosophy had to treat the human being, as Druskowitz put it, 'as anything but isolated from nature, but in most intimate interconnection with it' (von Druskowitz 1886: 36). But where Feuerbach erred, according to Druskowitz, was that he regarded the human being 'as the highest type' (von Druskowitz 1886: 37), and the expression of an innermost humanity as the species' highest calling. Her early work on Byron makes clear why Druskowitz parted company with Feuerbach on this point: she had a profoundly pessimistic view of human nature. In her book, she translates Byron's line 'A bird's-eye view of that wild, Society' into the far more scathing 'Ein Panorama von der Wüstenei "Gesellschaft"'. What for Byron was simply another natural wilderness, to her appeared a 'desert' (von Druskowitz 1879: 26).

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But Druskowitz's pessimism always also had a futurist dimension: Feuerbach's centring of the human overestimated humanity's present, and more importantly it also sold short its future—could not, asks Druskowitz, 'mankind itself one day transcend into a higher order' (1886: 36)? Druskowitz's anthropology always considered the possibility of humanity's end, which lent her concept of nature a far more oscillatory quality. The women of *Don Juan* are passionate, 'full of consuming eros [*Liebesglut*]' (von Druskowitz 1879: 43). They are, as has frequently been noted, usually the seducers—in Byron's hands, the Great Seducer finds himself instead again and again the object of women's lust. They are 'no longer', as Druskowitz puts it, 'surrendering themselves' in love, but are rather 'saucy, voluptuous, even lustful' (von Druskowitz 1879: 43).

As Susan J. Wolfson and others have noted, *Don Juan* refuses the kind of gender complementarity that Romanticism still frequently operated with (1987). Druskowitz's reading goes even further, however: she does not see Byron denaturing gender so much as denaturing nature. By juxtaposing 'raw' human nature and 'perfect' nature, she severs a link that had likewise dominated Romantic thought in Germany—the notion that Woman was closer to Nature. She drew, in other words, on the work of Brentano von Arnim and Dittmar, and more generally among German women writers associated, at times uneasily, with Romanticism and Idealism. Brentano von Arnim, however, had insisted on a kind of spirituality in a Young Hegelian vein, one that destabilized what nature tells us, but took guidance from nature nevertheless. A few decades later, Druskowitz enunciated a feminist critique of even this kind of residual, pan- or atheistic faith.

V. Denaturing Feuerbach and Comte: Druskowitz and the Hegelian legacy

Pessimistische Kardinalsätze is a profoundly atheist text, but atheist in a way that seems informed by a whole lineage of earlier thinkers, many of them Hegelians. Much like Ludwig Feuerbach, Druskowitz understands most religious concepts as anthropomorphisms, metaphors of which we have forgotten that they are metaphors, to speak with Nietzsche. Much like Max Stirner she believes that the traditional philosophical terminology consists simply of rebranded theological concepts—that ultimately 'our atheists are pious people' (Stirner 1882: 189). Like Søren Kierkegaard, she believes that in Hegel the Concept detracts from the 'lazy existenz' of human existence and human frailty in favour of a mania for teleology and a hope for future 'sublation':

> The normal spirit is atheistic. [...] In its ethical [*ethischen*] actions it is always guided by an innermost feeling, partly through a consciousness of morality [*sittliches Bewußtsein*], which has become

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> concretized over time. The atheist is the true philosopher. He holds the key to that wisdom and freedom, he manages to push thinking to its ultimate consequences, and judge in the final instance about things that determine life and death. He can be holy only through his own self and without any ceremony, for the simple reason that he banishes the brute and childish notion of 'God' entirely from his mind. (*PK*: 10)

What she adds to each thinker's critique is gender: the *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* almost tell the story of Hegelianism as a gradual coming-to-itself of toxic masculinity. Religion consists of anthropomorphisms dreamed up by men—God 'is nothing but a masculine phantasm rife with fallacy and error' (*PK*: 43). The reason philosophy finds it so hard to break with religion's conceptual arsenal is that men are too invested in vindicating the course of world history to truly critically comprehend it. And—most strikingly—she believes that the inability to look at human history without illusions amounts to a masculine refusal to acknowledge that in order for all human beings to be free, humanity would have to end.

Druskowitz thus takes Hegelianism's most optimistic gestures to drive them towards a truly staggeringly pessimistic conclusion. Humanity develops greater self-consciousness and autonomy (or realizes that the two are the same), and then uses the self-consciousness to realize that humanity (or at least the male half of it) is the problem and its autonomy to commit essentially species-suicide. How she gets to this remarkable position can be traced in a work Druskowitz wrote some twenty years earlier—a book-length essay entitled *Moderne Versuche eines Religionsersatzes* (1886). While she is also responding to more recent works, for instance the Young Hegelian Friedrich David Strauss's *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (1872), the text largely deals with two philosophers of atheism who nevertheless were attuned to the role of secularized ritual in modern society. They were also two of the most optimistic thinkers in nineteenth-century philosophy—Feuerbach and Comte (von Druskowitz 1885: 37).

Druskowitz's choice of targets is significant, since both Feuerbach's and Comte's interventions were deeply generative for early feminist thought, and above all in integrating progress in terms of gender in a broader narrative of historical change.[9] At the same time, the way nature, and above all the idea of sexual complementarity survived their eviscerating critiques of theological androcentrism seems to have been a main and abiding target for Druskowitz. This is particularly pronounced in Feuerbach, whose decisive break with the literal sacred cows of traditional theology seemed almost premised on a lack of critique of one particular sacred cow—the sexual relationship. In *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (1841), Feuerbach had famously argued that any predicates of the divine were really projections of our own anthropomorphism. Gender enters into his discussion

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through the issue of traditional understandings of divine power, in particular the controversy around the personhood of god.[10]

In attacking the idea of a personal God, Feuerbach points out that the ability to effect changes in reality, that to have the power to do something, 'you do it through your arms and your fists' (1843: 134). Nature without a body is an empty abstraction. Attributing to something a personality—for instance to the God of Christian dogma—means attributing to it a body. 'Only through spatial exclusion [*Ausschließung*] personality proves itself to be real' (Feuerbach 1843: 135). Part of this physical determination by negation (being what, who and where one is by not being somewhere else or other things) is 'the oxygen of sexual difference' (Feuerbach 1843: 135).

And thus, in trying to assail the idea of a personal god who has no flesh, no blood, no physical location, Feuerbach's invectives quickly move into a naturalization and intensification of traditional notions of sexual difference. Feuerbach needs men and women to be referred to one another biologically in order to be a material corrective to false idealism, and therefore needs them to coincide with specific notions of binary gender. 'What is more pathological, more disgusting, more unnatural than a person without sex or a person, who in their character, their customs [*Sitten*], their feelings denies their sex?' (Feuerbach 1840: 136).

Druskowitz's reply likewise is not about gender, but makes explicit the gendered values that subtended Feuerbach's critique of religion. Her essay is premised on the idea that a 'mere negation' of religion (or even a 'mere liberation' from it) must be insufficient. 'Neither art, nor science, nor the cult of nature, nor philanthropic work are able to replace the realm of religion'. (von Druskowitz, 1889: 3) But above all she takes issue with an idea shared by Ludwig Feuerbach and Auguste Comte: what would take the place of religion would have to be an atheistic set of ritual practices. At its simplest, Druskowitz's critique aims to show that these secular religions maintain traditional religion's mistreatment of women. 'By clothing himself in the dignity of a high priest of a new religion', Druskowitz writes about Comte, 'he immediately became an all-violating [*alles vergewaltigender*] *pontifex*, who thought himself infallible' (von Druskowitz 1885: 11). Between the lines, however, Druskowitz goes far beyond critiquing a residual missionary zeal among the male authors of atheist catechisms, however. Rather than fault them for having an outmoded picture of the sexual relationship, she explains why they necessarily have to have such an outmoded picture—because of what they need it to do.

Positive education, for Comte, is intended to 'familiarize us thoroughly with the idea of our complete dependence on Humanity' (Comte 1858: 308). Rationality can only access the constitutive selfishness of human communal life. A reflection that could see the intrinsic value in the sublimation of the individual into an 'être-suprême' has to be guided by emotion rather than rationality. That means, as Comte himself acknowledges, that while positivism proceeds by subordinating

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affect to the intellect, it can become politically realized only by doing the opposite, subordinating the intellect to emotions. Women are the hinge by which this switch is accomplished: 'As the *sexe affectif* they are the highest representatives of the supreme principle of the new religion' (von Druskowitz 1885: 18).

Druskowitz's critique of Comte anticipates one that Simone de Beauvoir levels in *The Second Sex* almost fifty years later: that Comte 'mythologizes' Woman, and thereby proposes as natural a position that he elsewhere is perfectly aware is socially constructed (de Beauvoir 1989: 255). Positivism somehow needs to teach the great masses that 'our harmony as moral beings is impossible on any other foundation but altruism' (Comte 1858: 310). The love relation, as consecrated in marriage, according to Comte has as its 'object the mutual improvement of both sexes' (1858: 320). But of course, Comte thinks that one sex has a far more innate sense of 'the pleasures of devotedness' (1858: 311). And not just because society has forced this sense upon her, but rather due to her 'natural' constitution: 'the selfish instincts are less intense in the woman, especially the lower ones' (1858: 320). As the priest-figure tells his female interlocutor in the *Catechism*: 'Your sex improves mine by disciplining the mere animal desire which is necessary for man' (1858: 320).

Comte thus revives the sexual metaphysics of sexual complementarity that run from Rousseau to Hegel: On the one hand, both sexes are supposed to shed their specificity, to build towards 'mutual improvement' in and through marriage. On the other hand, men and women have to be 'naturally' different, because that difference makes one sex necessary for the completion of the other. As Druskowitz notes, Comte's 'new era is meant to consist of the founding of republican mores on the basis of "knightly" feelings' (*PK*: 18). Another way of putting this critique is that Comte's modern egalitarianism requires a *de facto* inequality. And in so far as woman is supposed to model the 'altruistic character' of communal life (1858: 319), 'a voluntary obedience to rules of our own creation' (1858: 312), her very value in the new society preserves and reifies her subordinate status in the old one.

Given this critique of both Feuerbach and Comte, it is noticeable that in her 1905 text, Druskowitz maintains a stark theory of sexual difference, but reverses its relationship to progress. In both Feuerbach and Comte a true modernization of society, of religion, of consciousness seemed to reify and naturalize starkly traditional gender roles. Druskowitz agrees that the sexes are naturally different—but she proposes that this renders them fundamentally incompatible, and that this in turn means that progress for the human species ultimately means extinction.

VI. Druskowitz's modest proposal

While the obvious influences and interlocutors are different ones—above all Feuerbach and Schopenhauer—Druskowitz's *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* (1905)

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can be read as a belated rejection of Hegelianism. While her immediate target are yet again religious ideas, which are anthropogenic and thus fashioned by men to oppress women, she reserves additional criticism for 'the philosophical monism which takes the intellect as its basis' (*PK*: 9). This monism, she claims, 'lumps together all the good and the bad into One, and puts on, when you enumerate all the errors in the overall constitution of the world, when you point to the most disgraceful cases, an old and wise face' (*PK*: 9–10). It is not difficult to guess that this remark is meant to take aim at Hegel. In her book on Dühring, Druskowitz praises the philosopher as 'free of religion as few other philosophers' (von Druskowitz 1889: 14). However, she warns, 'in a few of his presentations, in particular in the field of the philosophy of nature, he gets himself in trouble'—in particular when he 'gets dangerously close to the standpoint of the metaphysicians, indeed at times doesn't keep a sufficient berth even from Hegel' (von Druskowitz 1889: 14).

What exactly was so deleterious about metaphysics, especially when applied to nature? The answer given in the *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* is that it elevates the human male into the centre of existence, when in fact the human male deserves no such position. He is in fact a half-animal, cursed by 'excessive development of his genitals', and 'impossible to accommodate within a world of rationality' (*PK*: 18). All of the errors of metaphysics are due to this anthropomorphism of the male imagination, meaning here specifically that *man* rather than *woman* becomes the source of the concepts. Theology and philosophy are nothing but 'wretched, male-made cock-up full of noxiousness, in particular for the world of women, whose development it has hampered for eons' (*PK*: 9–10). Druskowitz's list will remind many readers of Valerie Solanas's 1967 *SCUM Manifesto*. Like Solanas's text, Druskowitz's invective about men seems to be largely tongue-in-cheek, but played entirely straight—a full-on reversal of traditional androcentric value judgments. While the individual claims seem satirical, however, the style of argumentation is—at least for the turn of the twentieth century—entirely recognizable: Druskowitz presents masculinity as close to nature and therefore incapable of certain forms of sublimation that alone account for culture.

But Druskowitz makes explicit something that Dittmar could only gesture towards: that these 'essential' sex roles seemed to make a negative claim on humanity's future; that far from securing the continuation of the species (as Schopenhauer, for instance, had argued) gender complementarity gave occasion to absolute pessimism. Just like her male interlocutors, Druskowitz's account of the sexual relationship centres the man—but not because, as in Feuerbach, he embodies the plenitude of human potential, but rather because he is the reason for pessimism. 'A view on the man constitutes the centre of gravity of pessimism. Criticizing the man to bits is the culmination of the only true and correct elucidation of the world' (*PK*: 18). That is because masculinity is for Druskowitz not

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simply deleterious or underdeveloped. Rather it undoes the very promise that had subtended the complementary reading of the sexual relationship since Rousseau: that the sexual relationship might make a broader community possible. Druskowitz, by contrast, declares the man an 'ethical impossibility' (*PK*:19).

This framing of man 'as logical and ethical [*sittliche*] impossibility' seems to aim squarely at Hegel's attempt to anchor *Sittlichkeit* in a sublation of the sexual relationship. To be sure, Druskowitz never explicitly glosses *sittlich* as being connected to ethical life. In Druskowitz's inaugural dissertation on Byron's *Don Juan*, 'unsittlich' still seems to mean simply immoral. But even there, the target of her description is Byron's extreme subjectivism as much as the poem's lack of morality. And in her essay on George Eliot, she uses 'sittlich' in relation to the novelist's relation to Feuerbach (von Druskowitz 1885: 169). In other words, her conception of *Sitte* does not seem to be about what is proper and what is not, but rather about the ability to function in a social totality—something far closer to Hegel's understanding of the term. The last two sections of the *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* consist of two parodic catechisms, one addressed to women and one to men, suggesting that her frequent target Comte was on her mind here. Comte's *Catéchisme positiviste* held up the ideal of an 'état synthétique', in which the whole 'regulates each personal existence' and harnesses 'the diverse individualities' (Comte 1858: 42). This is the state that the *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* are intended to question.

In fact, her claim that 'the man is in his constitution unworthy of his companion, an impediment to marriage rather than a binding element' (*seiner Beschaffenheit zufolge ist der Mann seiner Gefährtin unwürdig, ein Ehehindernis und nicht ein Bindeglied*) takes aim at a tradition of thought that thinks the marriage relation as one of complementarity. In this line of thinking, men and women are constitutionally different such that one perfectly complements the other; and, in a second step, this complementarity is thought to model social cohesion more broadly. Rather than an analogous relation among perfect equals, society emerges as a system of unequal but complementary interdependencies. While this idea is as old as Aristotle, it re-emerged in German philosophy with Rousseau—and found perhaps its clearest expression in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, where the complementarity of the elements of the family explicitly models the relations of the 'estates' (*Stände*) in the *sittlich* state.

Gender complementarity came in for a great deal of criticism in the early nineteenth century: late Enlightenment *Popularphilosophen* and others opposed the organicism it implied, political liberals suspected that it was secretly (or not-so-secretly) incompatible with any account of universally shared and constitutionally guaranteed rights. And women philosophers and writers lambasted its tendency to enshrine femininity as necessarily subaltern and inert. None of them, however, critiqued gender complementarity from the direction Druskowitz chose

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in the *Kardinalsätze*: Druskowitz suggests that complementary relations in society are absolutely possible; intimate relations can indeed model for broader civic associations; love may well guide how we live interdependently with others in a broader community. So far, so Rousseauist. But by adding the wrinkle that men are simply incapable of this, she shatters the one link that the Romantics and the Hegelians had unproblematically assumed: that it had to be the heterosexual relationship that either could or could not model a broader sociality.

Famously, the *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze* derive from this picture of the sexual non-relationship a demand for sexual separation. Men will always be deleterious to women's health, safety and genius, women ought to insist on being only among other women. As she writes in her catechism for women, a parody of Comte's text, towards the end of her strange book: 'Demand the separation of cities according to sex and the concentration of all female activity on the women's half of the city, which of course shall also contain the cemeteries for this sex' (*PK*: 45). Only separation ensures access to all spheres of life, all professions and all rights. What is interesting to note is that Druskowitz chooses to mount this argument most explicitly in the 'Frauentafel', that is to say a set of rules of behaviour. Not only does Druskowitz demand sex separation, she thinks it is a woman's duty to demand it. Just as Kant stressed the need of making use of one's mental facility without 'without direction from another' (Kant 1999: 17), so Druskowitz proposes woman cannot vindicate her rational nature with men around. For, in the end, 'the end of your species [*Geschlechtes*] is preferable to you to remaining in sin and ignominy, in mental weakness and a total dullness of the senses and of taste' (*PK*: 45).

Conclusion

Throughout the twentieth century the idea of breaking the apparent biological imperative that made heterosexuality inevitable never really went away. There was the asceticism of the symbolist poets, which withdrew into homoeroticism and coupled it with a reactionary politics of resignation. There was Valerie Solanas's gleeful fantasies of gender separatism in her 'SCUM Manifesto' (1967). There were fantasies around reproductive technologies making mixed-gender environments unnecessary, from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) to Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1978). And there was Lee Edelman's rejection of 'reproductive futurism' and embrace of queerness as a terminus for the human species in *No Future* (2004).

Edelman proposed that 'the image of the child'—the one whose future we are all working to safeguard, the one whose security we all put front and centre—'coercively shapes the structures within which the "political" can be thought' (1998: 19).

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What would it take, he asked, to take, or even just to posit, 'the other side', the position no right-thinking person could take issue with. Druskowitz, in a thoroughly Nietzschean spirit of destruction, seems to be striving to articulate a similar position: the position that women's lives and worth warrant the potential discontinuation of the species. How serious is she in proposing this? Likely not altogether serious. But her invective seems to proceed from an intuition similar to Edelman's. 'Politics', Edelman wrote, 'however radical the means by which some of its practitioners seek to effect a more desirable social order, is conservative, insofar as it necessarily works to affirm a social order, defining various strategies aimed at actualizing social reality, and transmitting it into the future it aims to bequeath to its inner child' (1998: 19).

And here, Druskowitz's self-consciously outrageous text indeed continues a long line of feminist thinkers in the German tradition: while neither Bettina Brentano von Arnim nor Louise Dittmar would have ever entertained a modest proposal to separate German cities (and graveyards!) by a gender-based Iron Curtain, they did sense the same danger Druskowitz (and Edelman) do. That the very idea of inheritance, of continuity, of something to bequeath to future generation may be incompatible with a change as radical as setting free fully one half of humanity from a millennia-long tradition of bondage. And that, at that moment, taking the outrageous, the impossible position may be the only way to truly liberate thinking. No wonder the Young Hegelians with their infatuation with breaks, ruptures, revolutions in thought, with standing Hegel from his head onto his feet, functioned as ideal interlocutors. They had rebelled, after all, against a story of inheritance and continuity in apparent discontinuity—the Right Hegelians had made inheritance and continuity their theoretical North Star, and had kept faith with it throughout the tumultuous 1840s.[11] It was a configuration that, precisely in its disordered, ambiguous aspects, would resonate far longer through the nineteenth century than the 'Hegel-School' itself ever could.

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Notes

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[1] Abbreviation used:

PK = von Druskowitz, *Pessimistische Kardinalsätze: Ein Vademekum für die freiesten Geister* (Wittenberg: Herrosé und Zimsen, 1905).

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[2] See Lloyd (2002).
[3] See Furness (2000).
[4] See Lonzi (1996).
[5] See Steidele (2003: 263–64).
[6] See Joeres (1989).
[7] See Herzog (1990).
[8] See Daub (2020: 105).
[9] See, for example, Caldwell (2009) and Pedersen (2001).
[10] See Breckman (1999: 36).
[11] See Daub (2020: 95).

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