

## *American Antigone: Hegelian Reflections on the Sheehan-Bush Conflict*

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Now that she has retired from public life, philosophers can begin to understand the cultural phenomenon that was Cindy Sheehan, the generally recognized (and self-professed) “‘Face’ of the American anti-war movement.”<sup>1</sup> Why did the Iraq War produce domestic resistance led by someone whose moral credentials consisted solely in being a mother? Why was the cartoon-cowboy masculinity of the war president opposed by the equally hyperbolic familial femininity of the “eternally grieving mother of Casey Sheehan”?

In what follows, I seek to comprehend the emergence of both the Iraq War and the “face” of its opposition through the most notorious account of gender and war in the history of philosophy: Hegel’s analysis of Antigone.<sup>2</sup> I contend that this conflict reflects a return to social forms whose origin, essential contradictions and destructive destiny Hegel diagnosed two hundred years ago. This analysis will demonstrate the poverty of an anti-war movement that opposes the essential goodness of families to the essential evil of governments that send children to war, and it will use the Sheehan-Bush debacle as a revealing foil to a Hegelian approach to opposing war.

1. Cindy Sheehan, “‘Good Riddance Attention Whore’,” Daily Kos website, May 27, 2008, <http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2007/5/28/12530/1525>. While there were assuredly doves whose actions against the war bore little relation to Sheehan’s, my focus is the mainstream opposition that Sheehan symbolized.

2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). Further references will be documented parenthetically within the text and will use paragraph numbers. This analysis has been subject to potent feminist critiques, many of which are now collected in Patricia Jagentiwicz Mills, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel* (University Park, PA: Penn State UP, 1996). I will not be addressing the many (often valid) concerns regarding Hegel’s comments on women. Rather, I will use Hegel’s account to grasp the conditions under which patriarchal views regarding gender come to dominate social and political discourse.

### *9/11 and Immediate Spirit*

Hegel's analysis of "Spirit" articulates the historical development of the relations between individuals and their community. Hegel begins by examining the least developed, most immediate form that this relationship could take, i.e., that wherein all citizens immediately identify with their community. In "immediate Spirit," each "individual [simply] is [their] world" (441), i.e., each counts as self-conscious (for both themselves and others) only through determinate identification with the universal, communal substance. While Hegel identifies this ethical relation with the Greek *polis*, we must grasp how American democracy, from its highly complex state, regressed to this form.

We are almost too far removed from 9/11 to recall its immediate impact on American society. However, as the *New York Times* declared the day after the attack, it was widely and instantly recognized as "one of those moments in which history splits, and we define the world as 'before' and 'after'." Of course, as President Bush noted in his official statements that day,<sup>3</sup> the "substance" of American life had not changed: its Spiritual foundation was untouched, government activities continued uninterrupted, and, infamously, America remained open for business. Rather, what had fundamentally changed was the ethical self-consciousness of citizens. Rudy Giuliani arose as the "Mayor of America" under whose leadership all Americans were "simultaneously, collectively, thunderously, united."<sup>4</sup> Congressional leaders appeared on the Capitol steps to sing "God Bless America," a phrase, alongside "We are all New Yorkers" and "United We Stand," that was placed on car bumpers throughout the nation. Candlelight vigils filled stadiums, donations of money and volunteer-hours were overwhelming, and civil servants were hailed as heroes.<sup>5</sup> Former press gadfly Dan Rather appeared on the eventually anti-war *Late Show with David Letterman* to declare: "George Bush is the president, he makes the decisions, and, you know, as just one American, wherever he wants me to line up, just tell me where," challenging all to demonstrate their commitment to the nation that the president embodies.<sup>6</sup> Of course, there also arose civil strife, directed against those (falsely) perceived to be "outside the community." These incidents, however, were widely condemned by politicians and celebrities, who declared that all citizens were vital to the nation. In short, the

3. George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President Upon Arrival at Barksdale Air Force Base," September 11, 2001, transcript available online at the White House website, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-1.html>.

4. Ellen Goodman, "All In This Together," *Boston Globe*, September 23, 2001.

5. For polling data on national unity after the attacks, see the information collected at the PollingReport.com website, <http://www.pollingreport.com/terror10.htm>.

6. Dan Rather, interview by David Letterman, *Late Show with David Letterman*, September 17, 2001, transcript reproduced at the New York Jewish Times website, <http://www.nyjtimes.com/cover/terror/DaveandDan.htm>.

trauma of the attacks largely transformed formerly isolated individuals into self-conscious “Americans,” united in support of the nation and its principles.

Of course, a nation is not truly unified unless its members determinately actualize their unity with it through their actions. Thus, immediate Spirit poses the question: what action “brings into existence the unity of [particular] self and [universal] substance” (444)?

The most obvious answer would appear to be one that upholds the laws of the land, for these posit the formal institutions of the whole community. Hegel unifies these publicly recognized, institutional laws under the heading “Human Law” (448). While there are many branches of civil service that work to uphold the human law (e.g., the military, police forces, fire brigades, etc.), Hegel claims that it is chiefly represented by “the government” (455). Government is, after all, the official body through which laws are not only created, but (through the direction of the civil service) enforced. Thus, issuing and enforcing governmental directives is ethically acting for the universal community by actualizing the institutions required for the communal whole to function.

However, as Bush acknowledged in his post-attack address to Congress, such actions are not the only, or even the primary, way to unify universal Spirit: “Americans are asking: What is expected of us? I ask you to live your lives and hug your children.”<sup>7</sup> This is not simply one more of Bush’s clumsy attempts at being folksy, for the human law essentially brings the immediate, “unconscious” lived content of social life into deliberate, institutional, “conscious” form (e.g., land that families inhabit by custom is secured through publicly recognized property rights; concern one customarily has for the safety of their loved ones is secured through laws prohibiting assault). The human law alone cannot ground social ties, for this would amount to unlawful dictatorship. In democracies, it is the lived behavior of the majority of individuals—what Hegel calls the “Divine Law” (450)—that both founds the human law and is secured through it.<sup>8</sup>

While there are assuredly many actions that create these “divine laws,” Hegel rightly notes that the most immediate, and important, of such actions promote the flourishing of the family (450). The tie one has to family is an immediate, unconscious bond within which individual members identify their ethical self-consciousness with the good of the family as a group. Acting for the good of other family members constitutes an ethical act; however, the immediacy of the family bond places one’s particular family above the social collective. Thus, while

7. George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” September 20, 2001, transcript available at the White House website, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

8. See the rewarding discussion of the divine/human relation in H. S. Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder II: The Odyssey of Spirit* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), pp. 171–77.

actions for the family are ethical (i.e., universal) actions, they are also marked by personal (i.e., particular) prejudice.

Of course, in their immediately lived ethical behavior, the families of post-9/11 America presume access to property, safety, goods, services, and, above all, the natural resources and national security necessary to secure all of the above. Because most individuals immediately act to ensure that their particular family is rich in the above qualities, the governmental mandate is focused on acquiring and maintaining security and resources. Thus, when Bush, during a speech concerning government actions undertaken to provide security, asks people to live their lives (i.e., to act upon the prevailing ethical customs from which human laws arise) and hug their children (i.e., to reinforce the fundamental “divine” bond with the family), he is acknowledging, even if unconsciously, that “human law proceeds . . . from the divine” (460). Reciprocally, however, without the unifying, universalizing function of the government, the immediate customs of family life could not exist.

Thus, while distinct, “[n]either of the two [laws] is by itself absolutely valid” (460), for the divine law justifies the human law, while the human law preserves the divine law. As such, it is only as long as neither individual families nor the government who unifies them forgets this necessary intertwining of laws, that immediate Spirit remains “a stable equilibrium of all the parts” (462). The strength of Hegel’s analysis, however, lies in its revelation of the tensions that ultimately destroy this peaceful whole.

### ***Choosing (and Sexing) One’s Law***

We have seen that individuals in immediate Spirit only have ethical self-consciousness if they are determinately identified with the communal universal through action; and we have posited two ethical laws that express this substance (the divine, unconscious family ties and the human, governmental institutions). Thus, in order to count as ethically self-conscious, all individuals must choose to act for one of these laws.

However, because all must act for the universal in a manner that is “immediate, unwavering, without contradiction,” etc. (465), all are compelled to act in accordance with their most immediate understanding of universal law. Each individual, then, (usually) chooses the law with which they are most immediately familiar, i.e., each “knows what it has to do [because it] has already decided whether to belong to the divine or the human law” (465). Of course, some individuals choose the law from which they are relatively distant, as when officials retire to spend more time with family or when parents abandon their family for the sake of public service. This explains Hegel’s focus on individual decision rather than nature. However, the circumstances that demand this decision strip it of its deliberative character. In a sense, we decide as though we were not deciding, i.e., as though we

were simply expressing our preexistent character. In Hegel's formulation, because the "immediate firmness of [this] decision is something implicit, [it] therefore has at the same time the significance of a natural being" (465).

This unconscious, yet firm, decision to act as if from nature has two consequences. First, the law for which one decides becomes identical with the self-consciousness of the actor, i.e., for the ethical "consciousness [there is] essentially only one law" (466). As such, when one locates duty in service to the family, one inevitably suppresses their knowledge of the ethical role that government plays in ensuring the flourishing of all families, as well as the effects that the lived behavior of families has on government policy. Therefore, the sacrifices families are called upon to make by government are widely seen as the arbitrary "violence of human caprice" (466), rather than the expression of communal duty. Similarly, in choosing the human law, governmental actors inevitably ignore the sacrifices that policy decisions demand of individual families, and understand popular dissent as "only the self-will and disobedience of the individual who insists on being his own authority" (466).

Thus, through the actions of individuals, immediate Spirit essentially breaks into two distinct and opposed groups: those who act for the divine law and thus ignore the effects that their actions have upon the policy of their government; and those who act for the human one and thus ignore the sacrifices that their actions demand of individual families. A split develops between the lived actions of individuals and their explicit self-knowledge, and those acting for one law fail to grasp the ethical nature of those on the other side. Thus, "the opposition between them appears as an *unfortunate* [i.e., unnecessary] collision of duty merely with a reality which possesses no rights of its own" (466). In sum, the first consequence of ethical action is that the laws fall into opposition in the form of polarized social groups who are no longer conscious of the role that they play in producing the very actions they decry.

Second, and more controversially, because the decision is understood as the expression of natural character, Hegel argues that the laws themselves become identified with natural categories. Specifically, because there are two laws, they become identified with the most immediately graspable natural duality, i.e., "the two ethical powers [i.e., laws]...actualize themselves in the two sexes" (465). Nothing in this argument, however, indicates that women actually are naturally familial or men naturally governmental (although Hegel may have personally held this to be true). To the contrary, one chooses a law, and the freedom implied by choice rules out the possibility of "natural" ethics. Even within the play that Hegel cites, Antigone is the female symbol of the divine law despite having a sister who rejects family to obey State commands,<sup>9</sup> and Creon embodies the masculine State

9. This curious fact is noted in Patricia Jagentiwicz Mills, "Hegel's Antigone," in Mills, *Feminist Interpretations*, pp. 59–88.

despite punishing Polynices for betraying Thebes. The lack of uniformity across a single sex that results inevitably from choice should warn us against necessarily connecting laws with sexes.

As Hegel draws upon the dramatization of a myth cycle, his account might best be read as explaining how patriarchal views regarding the ethical characters of the sexes come to dominate a political discourse that opposes government and family, i.e., as an account of the *social symbolization* of the laws through the sexes, “as if by their nature.” On this reading, the claim would be that it is not accidental, but (almost) inevitable that this opposition is socially symbolized through the universal familialism of women (or, more precisely, a woman who symbolizes the duty to family in opposition to the government) and the universal abstract will of men (or, more precisely, a man who symbolizes the duty to government that stands against the family).

Admittedly, the patriarchal association of the sexes with their particular laws remains one of the least-defended (and, if read as an account of their “ethical natures,” defensible) points in all of Hegel. However, if it is read as an account of social symbolization, we can appeal to mainstream political discourse as it manifests itself historically. On this reading, it is not accidental, for example, that Michael Moore dedicated much of his anti-Bush film to a grieving *mother*, or that “Fort Qualls,” the “patriotic” camp erected by pro-Bush forces in reaction Camp Casey, was led by the *father* of a fallen soldier. While there is no necessity in individuals of either sex choosing either law, social representation of the conflict tends to follow the division between “woman/divine” and “man/human.” Hegel’s account, then, can be read not so much an apology for patriarchal culture but as an account of how a patriarchal interpretation of the natural difference between the sexes comes to dominate the ethical self-representation of the community.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, immediate Spirit produces a social order wherein two valid ethical laws come into conflict through social groups that lack full consciousness of the effects of their actions and whose ethical characters are socially represented by members of the two sexes. We must now grasp (a) why this opposition specifically arose after 9/11, and (b) why it led both to an aggressive war in Iraq and to the rise of an “American Antigone.”<sup>11</sup>

10. Cf., John Russon, *The Self and its Body in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1997): “As character-types . . . ‘man’ and ‘woman’ clearly are ethical categories, not natural ones. . . . This is not, however, apparent to the members of the ethical community [for whom] the identification of these roles with the natural sex division seems to be not a mapping on, but just a specification of the natural determination itself” (p. 165n24).

11. Understanding apparently little of the play’s nuance, Jan Harman positively compares the two for “speaking truth to power,” in “Cindy Sheehan: American Antigone,” CommonDreams.org website, August 18, 2005, <http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0818-21.htm>.

### *The March to War and the Rise of Camp Casey*

We began by describing a post-9/11 America wherein all individuals identify with their communal substance. As Bush's words demonstrated, within this Spiritual form, government "does indeed allow the Family [to become] an enduring being and being-for-self of its own" (455), encouraging individuals to act ethically for "Ends which are in the first instance particular Ends" (455). These ends are, of course, varied, and it would be senseless to list, let alone rank, them. What we must grasp are the overarching demands that these lived actions place on governmental policy. As suggested above, in post-9/11 America, all actions taken to protect and promote particular families require and presuppose two essential "universal" goods: security against the threat of terror and access to cheap oil. The former allows for the mere existence of families, while the latter facilitates the production of most of the goods and services required within the American economy.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, the post-attack actions of the government focused on bolstering national security and ensuring access to energy reserves. However, as per the above analysis regarding the self-knowledge of those that act for the human law, governmental policy in these areas has often reflected a lack of concern for the actual well-being of citizens. For those in government, ensuring national security and resources alone constitute ethical action, and thus their ethical actions inevitably take on an autocratic cast. This trend is reflected not only in the adoption of formal institutions concerned solely with security at the expense of the particular interests of families (e.g., the Patriot Act, warrantless wiretapping), but also in the self-understanding of the government (as when the president moves from being the "uniter" to the "decider"). Moreover, in accordance with our analysis of social representation, the president has come to be identified more closely with his sex, both by his critics (e.g., the frequent epithets of "cowboy" or "frat boy") and by himself (the brush-cutting, the cowboy hats and jeans, the "dead or alive" warnings, etc.). Thus, as Hegel would expect, the customs of the post-9/11 populace implicitly demanded that the government act to protect the national security and resources necessary for the flourishing of families. In acting, however, the government increasingly abstracted itself from the lived experience of its citizens, developing an isolated and autocratic character that has come to be socially symbolized by the cocksure masculinity of the president.

On the other side, choosing to act for the "special and independent associations" (455) of immediate family life has lead individuals to suppress their knowledge of the role that their actions play in producing the governmental

12. On the once-conscious post-9/11 demand for more security, see, e.g., the Harris poll from September 2001, available at <http://www.pollingreport.com/terror9.htm>. On the role that the "American way of life" plays in increasing oil demands, see Gregory Greene's film *The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream* (2004).

mandate. As such, it is not surprising that—while initially most Americans backed legislation such as the Patriot Act and institutions such as the Department of Homeland Security, and overwhelmingly supported the “revenge” war in Afghanistan—over time the populace has increasingly come to view their government as an authoritarian institution run by and for elites. Rather than considering the role their own oil consumption plays in determining foreign policy, many contend that the administration’s fixation on petroleum reflects private, rather than public, interests (e.g., the increasing public scorn toward the Halliburton/Cheney connection, the apparently un-ironic proliferation of “No Blood for Oil” bumper stickers).<sup>13</sup> Over time, the populace gradually disrupts the immediate unity of Spirit by calling into question the ethicality of the government whose actions transform particular families and citizens into a constant threat to national unity.

When popular support slips away, the chief interest of the government lies in retrieving the unity that has been lost. Thus, Hegel argues, that

in order not to let [families] become rooted and set in [their] isolation, thereby breaking up the whole and letting [communal] spirit evaporate, government has from time to time to shake them to the core by war. (455)

War, of course, is the governmental action *par excellence*, for it places the collective human, monetary, and material resources of the community under centralized authority for reasons of national interest. War forcibly draws back into the fold individuals who have drifted from unity with their government. As such, the fragmentation of immediate Spirit leads to aggressive wars, through which government “violates [the family’s] right to independence,” “checks [its] tendency to fall away from the ethical order,” and “shows [government] to be the real power of the community and force of its self-preservation” (455).

However, government is not the real power of the community unless its war also serves the human law. Given the context, such a war would have to be launched against a nation that (a) was a sponsor of international terrorism and thus a risk to security, and (b) was in possession of significant oil reserves. Thus, Iraq constituted a perfect target<sup>14</sup> for an aggressive war, both to reinstate popular

13. Thus, although polling can help in determining the one-sided self-knowledge of the population, Noam Chomsky’s *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy* (New York: Metropolitan, 2006) is wrong to locate a “democracy deficit” in the split between expressed opinion and policy. There is no more reason to believe that the public statements of citizens are indicative of their actual, lived priorities than there is for those of the Bush administration.

14. A false connection between Iraq and 9/11 was, of course, implied by various administration officials. However, the Hussein regime long supported terrorists both within Iraq’s borders (Nidal, Yassin, Zarqawi) and without (payments to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers, involvement in the nuclear black market, etc.).



support for the government and to fulfill the government's self-understood obligation to the populace. In other words, given the unconsciously lived customs of the populace, a security- and oil-obsessed, autocratic administration, and the need for an aggressive war to re-unify American Spirit, war with (a country like) Iraq became historically inevitable.

What sacrifices does such a war demand of families? There are assuredly many, from further restrictions upon civil liberties to tax increases or spending cuts to cover the war costs and beyond. However, war serves primarily to remind the people, in Hegel's slightly unhelpful formulation, of "the task laid on them by their lord and master, death" (455). There is no war without casualties, and thus the inevitable, and most deeply felt, sacrifice imposed upon families by their government is the death of particular family members.

Thus, the unity produced by war in Iraq was destined to have a limited life-span, for the state called upon families to make a sacrifice that violates in the worst way the law with which most individuals immediately identify. As such, it was only to be expected that (a) a domestic anti-war movement would arise, decrying the war as a manifestation of the arbitrary will of an autocratic elite; (b) this opposition would focus on the sacrifices made by individual families, in particular, the ultimate sacrifice demanded by war—the death of a family member;<sup>15</sup> and (c) that this opposition and the law that it breaks would come to be socially represented by a woman whose family had made it. In other words, it is historically necessary that the anti-war movement found its "face" in (someone like) Cindy Sheehan.

In fact, what is most striking about the Sheehan-led opposition is its embrace of the patriarchal association of woman with family service. It is nearly impossible to find a defense of her work that does not focus on her parental role, and often her maternity alone is invoked as granting her moral superiority.<sup>16</sup> Sheehan herself has called into question the very femininity of women who supported the war.<sup>17</sup> Thus, just as Bush's autocracy seems a match for his cowboy act, the divine opposition to it seems to demand Sheehan's patriarchal maternity.

15. Of course, Hegel offers a complex account of why the divine law is connected with burial. See *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pars. 451–54.

16. Maureen Dowd, in "Why No Tea and Sympathy," *New York Times*, August 10, 2005, chastises Bush and his backers for failing to "understand that the moral authority of parents who bury children killed in Iraq is absolute." One presumes she would not side with the moral stance of the grieving father who erected "Camp Qualls," and thus we are probably safe in reading "parent" as "mother."

17. In "Supporting Hillary," a message posted on Michael Moore's website, Sheehan argues that "many American moms" oppose Clinton's presidential campaign, because she is not a "passionate" woman but rather "a political animal who believes she has to be a war hawk to keep up with the big boys," and expressed her disdain at pro-war "Gold Star Mothers" as follows: "I don't want our loved ones to be used as political pawns to justify the killing spree in Iraq. *I can't believe any mother who has had her heart and soul torn*

### *Guilt, Destiny, and Self-Criticism*

The historical trajectory of immediate Spirit is essentially determined by the fact that (a) both sides act for a law that is ethically valid for the community; and (b) each side suppresses its knowledge of the ethicality of the other, and thus has only a one-sided grasp of the whole. As such, the actualization of this

undivided attitude towards the law...*qua* action, turns this one-sidedness into guilt by seizing on only one side of the [whole Spiritual] essence, and adopting a negative attitude towards the other, i.e., violating it. (468)

All who act (consciously) in immediate identity with one law act against another law that they (unconsciously) justify, and as such they are (by the standard set by their own ethical behavior) guilty. Moreover, because one acts in specific opposition to another (equally valid) law, supported by another (equally one-sided) group, each side “calls [the other side] forth as a violated and now hostile entity demanding revenge” (469). Thus, the unconscious guilt of actors on each side inevitably leads to the reciprocal and hostile condemnation of the actions of others as evil and selfish, explaining why, e.g., mainstream political discourse in America has slid to the level of mere *ad hominem* attacks (Coulter, Moore, et al.) and occasionally degraded to vengeful violence. The reciprocal violence is justified, however, because neither side has the ethical right over the other.

Drawing upon the myth cycle, Hegel suggests that this cycle of mutual guilt and revenge might lead to “the removal of the antithesis between the knowing self and the actuality confronting it” (469), thus bringing both aspects of individual behavior—“the conscious... bound up with the unconscious” (469)—into the knowledge of all actors. At least presently, however, this seems unlikely. On the one hand, as the war surges forward, the administration appears increasingly indifferent to the sacrifices that families (American and Iraqi) must make in the abstract pursuit of security and oil; and on the other, despite increasing anti-war sentiment (to say nothing of increasing petroleum prices), domestic energy consumption shows no signs of decreasing and is increasingly accompanied by the belief in a 9/11 conspiracy, which mainly testifies to the public’s strong presumption of national security as a “natural” given (“there couldn’t have been a real attack; they don’t happen here”). Moreover, neither side can ethically resolve the opposition by simply winning victory for its “immediate” law, for neither has right over the other. Ultimately, then, immediate Spirit is internally and essentially bound to collapse. Immediate Spirit divided against itself cannot stand, and yet its unity is always bound to fragment; thus, if nothing within American Spirit

*out would wish that on another mother*” (emphasis mine). Available at Michael Moore’s website, <http://www.michaelmoore.com/mustread/index.php?id=519>.

changes, its future will be determined by a “negative power which engulfs both sides, that is, omnipotent and righteous Destiny” (472).

Those who know Hegel know how this destiny unfolds. The guilt and hypocrisy rampant on both sides will reveal that the social structures of both government and family derive not from right but from the social power won by contingent individuals. No law (private or public) will be able to unify the populace in duty, and no successful ethical actors (governmental or grassroots) will be treated as anything more than singular personages who secured social power or determined social policy through contingent effort and sheer luck. With no ethical principle, law, institution, or symbolic personality to ethically unify Spirit, the community will be “shattered into a multitude of separate atoms” (476), whose only “duty” is service to themselves. Thus, we can expect a rise in greed and individualism and a drop in solidarity and activism. Widespread social and political apathy (to say nothing of potential future wars to “reunify Spirit”) is the destiny of an America whose mainstream political movements are populated and led by hypocrites who persist in seeing guilt only in others.

There is, of course, another path that America can take.<sup>18</sup> Each side is as guilty as the other of breaking and condemning a law that it unconsciously validates, and thus each side is essentially hypocritical: regardless of their actions against the government, families still demand cheap oil and tight security, and even as they act to stifle domestic dissent, government directives still require popular support. As such, neither side can expect the other to change just because it has been condemned by guilty hypocrites, for each is actualizing the ethical laws of the community.

Thus, the collective guilt that destines American Spirit for ruin can only be exposed if actors on both sides voluntarily grasp the one-sidedness of their own ethical self-consciousness, i.e., if all actors freely confess their own hypocrisy. All must freely engage in the self-criticism<sup>19</sup> requisite to becoming conscious of their implicit ethical justification for the actions they condemn. This self-criticism is not required for mere self-consistency or to secure the moral high-ground. It is a matter of recognizing that (a) one’s unconscious behavior ethically authorizes the laws and actions of one’s opponents; (b) therefore, one’s opponents are not simply selfishly “evil” but dutiful actors who seek to perform the good as they grasp it within the social conditions that both sides help create; and (c) as such, one can only hope to bring others to alter their actions by both confessing one’s own guilt

18. This concluding sketch draws upon Hegel’s later discussion of forgiveness in “Morality” (661–71). This path is open to America because it can learn from Spirit’s previous historical developments and thus can avoid the pitfalls of earlier nations.

19. I owe the term “self-criticism” to Heidi M. Ravven, “Has Hegel Anything to Say to Feminists?” in Mills, *Feminist Interpretations*, pp. 225–52.

for (part of) their actions and acting to bring one's own unconscious behavior in line with their conscious moral claims, thus inducing the other to do the same. Political apathy and potential future wars can only be avoided, then, through self-critical confession and action directed toward others whose dutifulness (as well as guilt) is admitted.

On the side of the government, this would clearly begin with admitting that the actions undertaken to acquire oil and security have both endangered and harmed those meant to be served by them. Oil must be publicly acknowledged as one of the motives for the war, the full extent of the torture and detention programs must be detailed, the manipulation of intelligence and public opinion must be confessed, etc., for only this full disclosure allows the populace to decide if they are content to continue to (implicitly) justify these actions. However, as few readers are likely to join the Bush administration, we should close by focusing on a few self-critical tasks for the mainstream anti-war movement.

First, we must recognize the demands placed upon governmental policy by our energy consumption. When wars are fought for oil, it is not simply to raise profit margins for elites, but also to cheaply fill our cars with gas, to bring our families goods and services, etc. If we are horrified at the actions undertaken to secure our lifestyle, as we should be, then there must be an extensive alteration of lived customs in the West. Such an alteration is only deferred indefinitely by obsessing over Cheney's oil cronies.

Second, in demanding the reinstatement of civil liberties, we must accept whatever increase in the risk of terror (however small or great) this will produce. While we are right to charge that government policy increases terror's likelihood, we should not be misled into thinking that policy alterations will eliminate it. If we condemn the extreme measures undertaken to provide security, as we no doubt should, then we must consciously accept the enhanced risks that a more open society entails, and expressly forgive our government for leaving us open to them, both in the past and future.

Third, we must acknowledge that all government actions have an ethical as well as a guilty side, and thus we must forgive the government of its past evils, for we too bear partial responsibility for the social circumstances that have made security and oil overriding political duties. We only defer our own confessions and embolden the autocratic resolve of the government by embracing the increasingly popular "Bush=Hitler" style of protest. Self-criticism must not mislead us into craving "moral piety," i.e., into striving to cleanse ourselves of the guilt that will finally belong only to others; we must rather appeal to the dutiful side of the Bush administration—however distasteful that might be—for we have been, and are, as hypocritical as them.

Finally, we should condemn all sexual representation of ethical laws. While the Iraq war has occasioned the strongest opposition since Vietnam, the Sheehan-

led movement eagerly embraced sexual stereotypes whose critique was part and parcel of that previous, endlessly self-critical opposition.<sup>20</sup> Self-critical opposition can only be launched by condemning the expression of moral claims through the cheap, visceral appeal of a “cowboy” joke or a weeping mother in a Michael Moore close-up.

Of course, nothing in such a confession implies that the government actually *will* reciprocate. All guilty actors live in one-sided ignorance, and no particular confession necessitates that others will join in self-criticism. Moreover, while our actions (implicitly and only partially) justified the Iraq War, confessions and reformed actions may not stop it or prevent future ones. Ethical action, grounded in freedom, has no guarantees.

However, no genuine pressure to change the human law will arise unless the populace alters the divine law that justifies it, and no government will admit its hypocrisy unless it is recognized as dutiful. Thus, in order to avoid future wars for security and resources as well as the political apathy of an individualistic populace, we must begin the endless and laborious process of self-criticism, confession, and change of custom. Only then do we have any hope of forgiving the autocratic hawks in power for the horrors we have helped them to put us through.

20. Whatever one may think of his implausible defense of the war (to say nothing of his incomprehensible take on women and humor), Christopher Hitchens is to be credited with drawing our attention to the creeping sexism directed at Shaha Ali Riza during the Wolfowitz/World Bank scandal (e.g., the frequent dismissal of her as his “girlfriend” or even “mistress” instead of “partner” in the anti-war press; the absence of any discussion of the role sex played in her dismissal, etc.). See, Christopher Hitchens, interview by Virginia Trioli, *Lateline* (Australia Broadcasting Corp.), May 18, 2007, transcript available online at <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2007/s1927334.htm>.