

Recognition in feminist philosophy of religion¹

Abstract: G.W. F. Hegel's idea of recognition has become one of the central concepts of social and political philosophy and social theory. In feminist philosophy of religion recognition has also a prominent role. One problem which troubles philosophical discussions of recognition is the lack of adequate communication between different research traditions. This article describes briefly the original source of inspiration of contemporary discussions of recognition, Hegel's own idea of recognition as it is narratively depicted in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It also takes up Hegel's problematic views of women and the sphere of the family. The text tries to show how the Hegelian ideas have inspired three prominent feminist philosophers of religion: Luce Irigaray, Grace M. Jantzen and Pamela Sue Anderson. These philosophers are connected to the two ways of reading Hegel: the (predominantly) French tradition and the Critical Theory. It is argued that while Irigaray and Jantzen present important criticisms of the prevailing religious attitudes, they are unable to combine this criticism with a feminist view that would allow to take religion seriously. In this respect, Anderson's – still undeveloped – theory of recognition is a more promising attempt.

Keywords: recognition, feminist philosophy of religion, G. W. F. Hegel, Luce Irigaray, Pamela Sue Anderson

Introduction

G.W. F. Hegel's seminal idea of recognition (*Anerkennung*) has become one of the central concepts of social and political philosophy and social theory. Feminist theories are no exception. Hegel's theory of the complex relationship between the self and the Other has inspired many feminist thinkers since Simone de Beauvoir. Especially Hegel's fascinating description of the struggle for recognition between the master and the slave (found in Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*², later referred to as *PhS*) has inspired many feminists. In feminist philosophy of religion – a relatively new and still somewhat underdeveloped subject³ – recognition has also a prominent role.

One problem which often troubles philosophical discussions on recognition is the lack of adequate communication between different research traditions. Those using recognition mainly as a tool of social criticism – feminists and non-feminists – have often not been interested in religion. The contrast to Hegel's own thinking could hardly be greater: Hegel lectured regularly on religion, and religion has a prominent role in all his writings. For him, religion was, as science, philosophy and art, part of the Absolute Spirit, the highest sphere of human culture. The reason to this lack of interest is, of course, the general change in the philosophical landscape, but also the fact that most contemporary theorists of recognition are under the (conscious or unconscious) influence of the Marxist critique of religion. Whether we find this critique convincing or not, it does not,

¹ I wish to warmly thank Eerik Lagerspetz for fruitful discussions on the themes of this article and for reading and commenting this text while I was working on it. Discussions with Oili Pulkkinen on the themes of this article have been a great inspiration to me. This research has been done in the research project "Pathologies of Recognition", financed by The Academy of Finland. I am grateful to all my colleagues in this project for their inspiration and support.

² Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §178-§196.

³ Frankenberry, "Feminist Philosophy of Religion": "Feminist philosophy of religion (...) poses feminist questions about religious texts, traditions, and practices, often with the aim of critiquing, redefining, or reconstructing the entire field in light of gender studies. Feminist philosophy of religion is important to feminist and non-feminist philosophy alike for providing a critical understanding of various religious concepts, beliefs, and rituals, as well as of religion as a cultural institution that defines, sanctions, and sometimes challenges gender roles and gender-inflected representations. It is equally important for feminist theory, which frequently neglects the academic study of religion, as for analytic philosophy of religion, which seldom takes into account gender or race or class."

however, provide us a reason to ignore religion as a *phenomenon*. However, those whose main purpose is to interpret Hegel, and who sometimes have recognized the central role of religion in his works, have not, with some important exceptions, generally been interested in feminism.

Interestingly, Hegelian themes have had a strong impact on feminist philosophy of religion.⁴ Of importance are, for example, the ideas of equal possibility of all humans to take part in the social processes whereby the constitutive concepts, defining who they are, as well as social institutions, reflecting these constitutive concepts, are formed. Also the Hegelian concept of *desire* is a key concept for several feminist philosophers. In Hegel's theory, desire takes many different forms (i.e. desire for self-actualization and desire for recognition). Ultimately, desire is satisfied, at personal, social and epistemic levels, in communities of reciprocal recognition⁵. Hegel's ideas have been useful for feminist philosophers of religion, probably because they have seen a connection between women's status in religion and the enslaved self-consciousness, displayed by the figure of the slave in Hegel's famous depiction of the relationship between the master and the slave. However, feminist philosophers of religion have not analysed Hegel's own views in a systematic way. The problem is that Hegel himself was an ambivalent figure. While many of his ideas have been adopted by all kinds of radicals, some of his own views, especially about family and the role of women, were deeply conservative and patriarchal. Moreover, he, unlike some other male philosophers, did not just unreflectively accept the prejudices of his time, but actually tried to include them into his system. However, even those attempts of Hegel are not without interest. For also in his patriarchal theorizing religion has a central role: the essential difference between men and women is, for him, also visible in the religious sphere.

I have seen it necessary to start by going back to the original source of the main concept. Thus in the next chapter I will first explain very briefly Hegel's theory of the dialectics of recognition between the two self-consciousnesses (the self and the Other), as it is narratively depicted in *PhS*. Then I take up Hegel's views of women and the sphere of the family. I will shortly explain how Hegel's theory of recognition has been interpreted in feminist philosophical thought. There, I make a rough differentiation between the French tradition of interpretation and the interpretation represented by the Critical theory. Then, I try to show how the Hegelian ideas have inspired three prominent, contemporary feminist philosophers of religion: Luce Irigaray, Grace M. Jantzen and Pamela Sue Anderson.

The following interpretation of Hegel is based on my dissertation thesis *Striving for the Impossible. The Hegelian background of Judith Butler*.⁶ According to the interpretation presented here, the dialectics between the master and the slave does not – unlike in interpretations influenced by Marx – only describe historical development and conflicts between social and economical classes. The narrative in *PhS* depicts also a process taking place *internally*, inside individual consciousnesses. Hence, the process is multi-dimensional. It takes place simultaneously internally (inside individual consciousnesses, which pertains for example to self-attitudes) and externally (at an inter-subjective and various social and institutional levels), as well as conceptually, thus influencing socially constitutive concepts.⁷ I intend to present shortly the Hegelian thought (the origin of which is also in the theory of J.G. Fichte) of the reciprocal, or intersubjective, recognition as the most developed and interesting idea of equality.

⁴ Hegelian themes have entered feminist theology and feminist philosophy of religion often through thinkers who have been strongly influenced by Hegel's theory of recognition. Among those thinkers is American gender-theorist Judith Butler, see e.g. Isherwood, "Feminist Critique of Sexuality and Religion". On the Hegelian background of Judith Butler, see Roman-Lagerspetz, *Striving for the Impossible*.

⁵ I use the concepts "mutual recognition" and "reciprocal recognition" interchangeably in this text

⁶ Roman-Lagerspetz, *Striving for the Impossible*

⁷ An illuminating analysis of the multi-dimensionality of the phenomenon of recognition, see Ikäheimo, "Recognition, Identity and Subjectivity", forthcoming in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory*, edited by Thompson.

Hegel and recognition

For Hegel, self-consciousness – here in short, “self” - is a complex construction. The basic feature of the self is *thinking*. Thinking is situated: it is conditioned by time, place, cultural context and various individual and personal factors. Consequently, thinking makes up a limited, interpretative system, a *particular universe*. Thinking is a universalizing and generalizing activity. At the same time it is limited, because subjective particularity is one of its aspects. For Hegel, the most important feature of thinking is conceptualization. Through conceptualization, thinking can abstract from its subjective particularity and, most importantly, look at things from radically Other points of views. Through conceptual thinking the self can have a contact with the Other. Ultimately only the Other forms an outside for the self. Other objects, appearing for the self-consciousness in reality, are not in a similar way distinct, in their relation to the self, like the Other. Other objects do not present similar restrictions to the understanding or action of the self, nor do they interact and communicate with the self, like the Other does. The Other is, like the self, a complex construction: subjective particularity is one of its features. Like the self, the Other is an interpretative, meaning-giving system: a particular universe. A grounding idea in PhS is that with the Other – in other words, seeing things from the Others or, ideally, from a point of view which is constituted jointly, by the self and the Other- the self can go over its respective limits. The self cannot see itself from other points of view besides its own, except through the mirror of the Other. Unlike a mirror, however, the Other does not reflect objects passively; the self and the Other can “correct” their mirror-images in a reciprocal interaction. Through the Other, the self can reflect its respective particular limitedness. While the self can overcome any given limit, it cannot overcome *all* limits. Going over ones limits does not mean that we could reach an unlimited, absolute (“Godly”) view of ourselves or the world. When talking about the internal structure of the consciousness, Hegel applies an originally Aristotelian idea of the *internal differentiation of the human mind*. For Hegel, this means that human consciousness has the capacity to be conscious of itself and its own thinking. Human consciousness is (at least potentially) a *self-consciousness*. It can differentiate between the different elements of itself, e.g. reflect its particular limitedness, by reflecting itself from other points-of views. This capacity is essential in order for a shared field of rationality to be possible, in which ideas are mediated through the consciousnesses of others.⁸

In PhS Hegel shows, partly by way of a dialectically proceeding narration, why and how the self comes to understand that mutual recognition between itself and the Other is necessary for a free, satisfactory life. The process towards the recognition of the Other as an equal being, and mutual recognition between the self and the Other, involves also the self’s becoming aware of itself as an *internally* complex being. In other words, by becoming more and more internally free, the self becomes conscious of the various aspects constituting its own thinking. Basically, it is a *learning process*.

Along the narration towards enhanced internal and external (social, objective) freedom, the self realizes that it is a particular, historical, limited being. Nevertheless, it also comes to realize that there is more to it: it does not have to be reduced to its particular historical limits as it realizes that it is possible for it to see things from different and also contradicting points of views. However, in order for the self to realize these things it needs to confront an actual, living Other. In PhS, the confrontation between the self and the Other is not easy. It involves both internal conflicts, within the self, as well as social conflicts, between the selves.

At the beginning of the narration the self is described as a limitless hunger, a desire to determine and possess the world just by itself and to gain recognition from all others that just his world-view constitutes a universal truth. However, it confronts an object, another being like itself, which it cannot possess like other objects. Both of them - the self and the Other - resist each others

⁸ Hegel, *PhS*, §16-§19, §174-§184

attempts to gain power over the other and over the world. A struggle for recognition ensues.

The relationship between the self and the Other can be called a *radical difference*, or, *mutual otherness*. It might however be also called a *radical similarity*. The Other is, like the self, its own, self-determining, internally differentiated system of subject-object-relations. Paradoxically, the Other is radically different because it is essentially similar with the self, in the sense that it is, like the self, the center of its own universe. Consequently, both selves appear, from the point of view of the other, threatening. The freedom of the Other - the Other as a self-determining being and a universalizing thinker - appears as a threat for the self. The self and the Other threaten each others positions as the only sovereign masters of the universe. In the struggle for recognition both selves try to gain recognition for being the only sovereign powers of the universe. For the first, the struggle results into the domination of the other self (by the other self).⁹ The other self becomes a master and the other self a slave (inside the master's universe). This means one-sided recognition: only the other self manages to gain a position as a master over things which are *universal*. Things which concern all, such as socially constitutive concepts, institutions and law are determined by just one self. The other self is subordinated and instrumentalized.

However, one-sided recognition cannot satisfy the master any more than the slave. According to Hegel, the self strives for a contact with the Other because, ultimately, it wants to be *free*. Freedom includes various inter-related aspects such as epistemological freedom, inner freedom at a psychological level, and social freedom.¹⁰ For Hegel, the self can live a satisfactory life - at these various levels - only if it acknowledges the Other as its equal and enters into reciprocally recognizing relations with it. In recognizing the Other as an equal self, and reciprocally, recognizing itself as the Other's Other, the self is able to create such constitutive concepts together with the Other which enables it to reconcile contradictions at the before mentioned levels. For Hegel, freedom means, among other things, that people are able to reconcile contradictions, in such a way that the recognition of the Other is not compromised but retained and enhanced. Reconciling contradictions is an on-going process. In order for freedom to be *actual* (to assume concrete forms for example at inter-subjective, social, legal and epistemological levels) people need to become aware of themselves as well as Others as capable of recognition.

Hegel's epistemic theory includes an intersubjective aspect already present in Kant: one acquires relevant knowledge of the world only in equal relations with other people. Equality means for Hegel, much like for Kant, that persons are also epistemologically "ends in themselves", that is, subjects and producers of knowledge, not just objects or appliers of externally produced knowledge.¹¹ In contemporary psychoanalytic terms this same idea might be put in the following way: in order for the person to grasp an authentic and real view of the world, she needs to realize that the world is not just one's own projection. In order for the person to come up with this kind of authenticity, she must contact with other minds on an equal basis.¹²

Recognition entails also a *performative* aspect in the sense that statements, attitudes, and beliefs of objects are formative, or have an effect upon, the objects themselves.¹³ In Hegel's

⁹ Hegel, *PhS*, §178-§193.

¹⁰ Hegel, *PhS*, §80-§89

¹¹ Hegel, *PhS*, §178-196. I accept here the interpretations of e.g. Onora O'Neill and Pamela Sue Anderson, who see that not only with Hegel but also for Kant, knowledge is ultimately social. See e.g. O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, 3-27; Andrson and Bell, *Kant and Theology*.

¹² see e.g. Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 37

¹³ The term "performative" is modern, but it captures Hegel's idea that concepts become real when they are shared and understood. For example, Judith Butler describes the performative aspect of "gender" in the following way: "...gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 25.

words: free self-consciousness exists in actuality only when it is recognized as such.¹⁴ In his introductory lectures on the philosophy of history, Hegel says, preceding the Existentialists: only he is free, who knows that he is free.¹⁵ Even that the slave has an internal potential for universal, rational thinking and equality with other selves, he cannot become aware of it or actualize it without recognition, that is, without being taken and treated as a universal rational thinker and an equal being by others. Neither can these potentialities become part of collective, shared reality or contribute to it.¹⁶

Hegel and women¹⁷

Philosophy of Right (hereafter referred to as PR) continues the project which Hegel started in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to analyze how the Spirit objectifies itself in the world. One of the aims of this project is to resolve the tensions between desire and morality and ethical life as well as the tensions between individuality, particularity and universality. The human society develops historically – by overcoming its internal contradictions - towards rationality and freedom. The modern state – which Hegel outlines in PR – is meant to be rational and free. The constitutive aspects of the human mind and the constitutive ways in which humans relate to each others are meant to find expression in it.

In PR Hegel states that there is a *complementary* relation between the two sexes, based on *natural* differences between men and women. The modern state is subdivided into gender-specific spheres, the family (guarded by women) and the public, male spheres of civil society and the state. These distinct spheres express the distinct natures of women and men. The principle of subdivision and its natural basis are made clear in PR:

Thus one sex is spirit in its self-diremption into explicit personal self-subsistence and the knowledge and volition of free universality, i.e. the self-consciousness of conceptual thought and the volition of the objective final end. The other sex is spirit maintaining itself in unity as knowledge and volition of the substantive, but knowledge and volition in the form of concrete individuality and feeling. In relation to externality, the former is powerful and active, the latter passive and subjective. It follows that man has his actual substantive life in the state, in learning, and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world and with himself so that it is only out of his diremption that he fights his way to self-subsistent unity with himself. In the family he has a tranquil intuition of this unity, and there he lives a subjective ethical life on the plane of feeling. Woman on the other hand, has her substantive destiny in the family, and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind.¹⁸

In PR, as well as in PhS, Hegel describes the difference between the sexes in religious and ethical terms. Family embodies the feminine principle, the principle of immediate, undifferentiated unity and the divine ethical law.

¹⁴ Hegel, *PhS*, §178

¹⁵ For example, Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 48: “Natural objects do not exist for themselves; for this reason, they are not free. The spirit produces and realises itself in the light of its knowledge of itself; it acts in such a way that all its knowledge of itself is also realised. Thus everything depends on the spirit’s self-awareness; if the spirit knows that it is free, it is altogether different from what it would be without this knowledge. For if it does not know that it is free, it is in the position of a slave who is content with his slavery and does not know that his condition is an improper one”

¹⁶ Contemporary recognition-theorists who have been inspired by Hegel, like Axel Honneth, have developed further the idea that in order for the potential for recognition, as well as the different modes and aspects of recognition to become actualized, they must be practised and cultivated in different spheres of life. Pertaining to this, Honneth differentiates three modes of recognition (love, respect and esteem) and corresponding spheres of life where they can be cultivated (Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*; Honneth, *Freedom’s Right*). Different approaches within Critical Theory tradition (by Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser) are introduced and compared in detail in Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition*.

¹⁷ This chapter is based on my article “Women as Instruments in the Dialectics of the Nation”

¹⁸ Hegel, *PR* §166. Translation altered.

The law of the Family is an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains as an inner feeling and the divine element that is exempt from an existence in the real world. The woman is associated with these household gods (Penates) and beholds in them both her universal substance and her particular individuality.¹⁹

Of course, Hegel is not claiming that women remain as pagans. He uses the “Penates” as a symbol for particularity and the unconscious associated with the family. The word is carried by Hegel to illustrate the ethical nature of women and the family from the ancient pagan world up to the modern Christian world and the modern state. Hegel speaks of the female part of the spirit as the “Nether world”. This is the world of unconscious darkness and unreality, the realm of “sacred claims” and “pathos”. This feminine world opposes, and contrasts with, the rational world of men which Hegel also calls the upper world, rational reality, and the realm of the human law.²⁰ As beholders of the Penates, household gods who in the ancient mythology were thought to watch over a particular, singular household or community, women are drawn inside; they cannot see over the limits of their own particular families. Women cannot mediate in their thinking with contradicting differences or, for that reason, with the ethical principles of the public sphere. Hegel contrasts the necessary particularity of women’s ethical and religious life with the public, universalistic ethics and religion of men:

The Penates are inward gods, gods of the underworld; the mind of a nation (Athene) for instance is the divine, knowing and willing itself. Family piety is feeling, ethical behaviour directed by feeling; political virtue is the willing of the absolute end in terms of thought.²¹

Because women cannot acknowledge contradicting differences and because they thus cannot recognize the Other, the female family spirit remains alien and in a dualistic relation to the other spheres of life. This means, for example, that the male heads of their families have to represent, mediate and interpret the interests of their families in the public spheres of the community. The husband has the potential to see his family as a *particular* family, and the equal standing of other families, and thus take into consideration also the legitimate interests and contradicting claims of other families. The family forms a sort of ethical “unconscious” of the community. Nevertheless, it has a functional role in the rational system of the nation. Women’s role as the guardians of the family is functionally necessary for the rational state; at the same time, it condemns them to the sphere of the private.

It is difficult to square Hegel’s functional analysis of the family and the role of the women with his general theory of recognition. Feminists, starting from Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1980 [1948])²², have criticised Hegel for excluding women from the sphere of reciprocal recognition between free equals, and his way of consigning women to the sphere of “nature” and private life in the family. However, Hegel’s general theory of recognition has preserved its appeal even among the feminists

Two traditions of interpretation²³

Generally speaking, two distinctive lines of thought have been drawn from the philosophy of recognition started by Hegel and Fichte. Both of them have been influential for feminists, including feminist philosophers of religion. Briefly stated, the other line sees equal inter-subjective

¹⁹ Hegel, *PhS* §457

²⁰ *Ibid.*, §449-452, 474-475

²¹ Hegel, *PR* §257

²² de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 96-7.

²³ In my dissertation (*Striving for the Impossible*) I discuss the two traditions in detail.

recognition as possible if the people involved learn to acknowledge each others as equals as well as to mediate their individual desires and wishes through those of other people. Theorists like Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth represent this understanding of recognition.²⁴ The other line draws especially from Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of Hegel.²⁵ Kojève was a Russian-French thinker who introduced Hegelian thought in the 1930's to some of the most prominent French intellectuals like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Jacques Lacan.²⁶ This line of thought emphasizes the underlying, often unconscious repressive elements in inter-subjective relations. The central belief is that the structure of "subject" is built on the repression of the Other.²⁷

In his famous lectures (1933-39) Kojève focused on the theme of the birth of the self-consciousness in the midst of the dialectical struggle between the self and the Other, and, reciprocal recognition as the overcoming of this struggle. In Kojève's interpretation, the basic dialectical relation between the self and the Other became an interpretative key, not only to Hegel's idealist system as a whole, but also to the history and the politics of the humankind. According to Kojève, Hegel's historical vision resulted logically into what Kojève called the "end of history", a thoroughly rational, universal state, in which there would be no more conflicts or politics.²⁸ Although both academic Hegel-scholars and Kojève's philosophical disciples have quite unanimously rejected Kojève's interpretation as an erroneous and utopian one, it has had an enormous impact on the French postwar political and philosophical thought. Put in short, the post-War French thinkers – despite their many disagreements – adopted Kojève's understanding of the origin of the subject as the result of a conflict. The result was to accept the permanent conflict between the self and the other as something unavoidable, and, in effect, to reject the possibility of reciprocal recognition. Lacan sees that the repression of the Other is an essential feature of the structure of language itself. Language is built on the principle of the "Law of the Father" which represses the (feminine) Other and renders reciprocal recognition between the genders impossible.²⁹

Lacan has been an important source for feminists like French psychoanalyst and linguistic philosopher Luce Irigaray, who is also a prominent philosopher of religion, and British feminist philosopher of religion Grace Jantzen, who has been inspired by both Lacan and Irigaray. Feminists like Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, Allison Weir and Kimberly Hutchings³⁰ may be called as "Hegelian feminists"; they criticize Hegel's views of women, yet see his over-all theory of recognition as fruitful. Also psychoanalytically oriented feminist philosophers like Jessica Benjamin and Amy Allen are close to the tradition represented by the Critical Theorists like Axel Honneth.³¹ While highly critical of Hegel's theory of the complementary relation between the genders, both Benjamin and Allen emphasize the inter-subjective and recognition-based constitution of the human psyche. Of feminist philosophers of religion, Luce Irigaray and Grace Jantzen draw from the Kojévian tradition, while British Pamela Sue Anderson can be seen to draw from the tradition of the Critical Theory. The critical discussions between feminist philosophers of

²⁴ See e.g. Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* and Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*. A general introduction to this tradition is Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition*.

²⁵ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. On Kojève's influence generally, see Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, Weir, *Sacrificial Logics*, or Roman-Lagerspetz, *Striving for the Impossible*.

²⁶ See Schmidt, "Lordship and Bondage in Merleau-Ponty and Sartre"; Lundgren-Gothlin, "The Master-Slave Dialectic in *The Second Sex*"; ver Eecke, "Hegel as Lacan's Source for Necessity in Psychoanalytic Theory".

²⁷ See Weir, *Sacrificial Logics*, especially 14-42.

²⁸ Kojève, *Introduction*, 50, 76 158-9, 194, 237.

²⁹ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*.

³⁰ See e.g. Weir, *Sacrificial Logics*; Hutchings, *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy*.

³¹ See Benjamin, "Two-Way Streets: Recognition of Difference and the Intersubjective Third."; Benjamin *The Bonds of Love*; Allen, "Are We Driven? Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis Reconsidered", and Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 95-107.

religion (reflected e.g. in Anderson's criticism of Irigaray and Jantzen) can be thus also seen as an instance of the tension between the two ways to read Hegel..

Luce Irigaray and Hegel

Gendered binary oppositions and dualisms, seen by feminist thinkers as constitutive of western philosophy since Aristoteles, has been a major target of criticism. The French feminist Luce Irigaray has analyzed gendered dualisms especially in the thought of Hegel. Hegel is an important figure in Irigaray's feminist philosophy of religion; he is both a source of inspiration and a central target.³²

In *Sexes and Genealogies* (1993), which has become a classic text in feminist philosophy of religion, Irigaray says:

men have taken sole possession of the divine, of identity, and of kinship...God is being used by men to oppress women and...therefore, God must be questioned and not simply neutered in the current pseudoliberal way. Religion as a social phenomenon cannot be ignored.³³

She sees Hegel as an especially important philosopher because he explicates the constitution of the western society, based on gendered differentiation, including a theory of how God plays out as the base, ideal and "mirror" of gender. For Irigaray, Hegel's thought shows that both men and women need an ideal, transcendental mirror (a gendered God as an image of a gendered human being), in order to become full subjects and autonomous beings. She writes:"

Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine".³⁴

Irigaray interprets the western gendered religion, explicated in Hegel's theory, also through Hegel's radical pupil, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872).³⁵ Following the latter, she says: "God is the mirror of man". To avoid finiteness, man has sought out a unique, infinite *male* God, exemplified in the Christian trinity.³⁶ Male-God is the ideal for male gender. She writes:

Having a God and becoming one's gender go hand in hand. God is the other that we absolutely cannot be without. In order to *become*, we need some shadowy perception of achievement.. a cohesion and a horizon that assures us the passage between past and future. Every man (according to Feuerbach) and every woman who is not fated to remain a slave to the logic of the essence of man, must imagine a God,³⁷

Irigaray maintains that "it is essential to have a gender or an essence as horizon. Otherwise, becoming remains partial and subject to the subject".³⁸ By this, Irigaray appears to mean that if women do not have an infinite God as the ground for their infinite and universal subjectivity, they remain subject, that is, subjected to (subordinated to) an external universal subject.

Irigaray is one of the very few commentators who have paid attention to the role of religion in Hegel's gendered dualism. Hegel illustrates the gendered constitution of the society by the Greek tragedy of Antigone. He uses Antigone's story to describe the way the two genders differ

³² Hegel's importance to Irigaray has not always been noticed. Grace Jantzen, who builds her philosophy of religion on Irigaray, thinks that "Hegel has more influence on Irigaray than is often recognized by Anglo-American feminists". See Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 88.

³³ Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, v

³⁴ *ibid*, 62

³⁵ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*.

³⁶ Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 61-62

³⁷ *ibid*. 67

³⁸ *ibid*. 61

in their ethical and religious frame of mind.³⁹ Irigaray claims that western thinking is still derived from these gendered conceptions and ethical and moral codes and that the ancient mythology that underlies patriarchy has not changed. For women, the problem is, that women have no “infinite” and autonomous Godly image of their own which would be a base for their autonomy and infinity. Women’s frame of mind is still linked with rationally unmediated naturalness and “flesh”, consigning them to a “desubjectivized” social role, where the creativity and productive potentialities of women are denied. Women are not linked with transcendental, infinite God, yet with household gods, Penates, who are limited and restricted beings and watch only over one singular household. These limited household gods are subordinated to the unlimited, infinite God of men. Correspondingly, the capacity to be unlimited, to leave, or rise above, the private, singular sphere of the family and to enter the public spheres of the society, requiring the capacity of abstraction and rationality, is identified with men. In this system, men are, in the image of their gendered God, the creators are producers of language, symbols, social structures, knowledge, philosophy, law, religious dogmas and so forth, whereas women have their limited roles in singular households, fulfilling their functional role of reproduction and the maintenance of the natural base of society. Women provide the material, which is then named, formed, put in order and controlled by men.⁴⁰

Irigaray takes Hegel’s opposition between the gendered principles of “human law” (expressing the male principle) and “divine law” (expressing the female principle) as the point of departure in her critical philosophy of religion. She claims that this opposition presents us with a sort of gendered “lock”, which no one has yet managed to unlock, at least in any satisfactory way. Irigaray writes:

...the female has been buried together with the divine law in that woman presides over nature and gender, protects the family and respects the cult of the dead. But the practice of that law..already bears the stamp of the male universe.⁴¹

Irigaray says that in the society described by Hegel, women have a functional, instrumental role; they serve externally determined goals, not their own. Women aid men to incarnate in the image of, and develop in relation to their ideal self-image, Man-God. Women’s goals always come from outside. They are constituted from outside in relation to a social function, instead of to a female identity and autonomy.⁴² Women’s own incarnation (actualization) as autonomous subjects is impossible in this system, as women lack their own autonomous divinity. Women are deprived of the possibility to be autonomous subjects *for themselves*, and correspondingly, they cannot be autonomous subjects *for the Other*, either. There is no possibility for inter-subjective recognition, instead, the desubjectivized woman is subordinated to the male subject.⁴³

Irigaray’s solution to women’s lack of God and subjectivity is that they should create a God in their own image. This is important in order for them to be able to incarnate as subjects, to be subjects for themselves and for others. According to Irigaray, the female God should reflect the feminine features, which are radically and essentially different from male features. This God must not be a neuter. Women deny themselves if they try to be sexually neuter, in order to become equal

³⁹ In the introduction to *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray writes: “Hegel did take on the project of interpreting how a whole society or culture might function. His aim was to describe and work out how the *Geist* or spirit of man as individual and as citizen functioned. The weakest link in his system seems to lie in his interpretation of spirit and right within the family. Even though he consistently sought to break up undifferentiated units, Hegel is unable to think of the family as anything but a single substance within which particular individuals lose their rights. Except the right to life, perhaps” (ibid.,1).

⁴⁰ ibid, 2-3, 12-20,46, 114

⁴¹ ibid.110

⁴² ibid., 67,69,72

⁴³ ibid., 71

with men. If women pursue neutrality as equality, they submit themselves to the male order. Incarnate and actual human beings are never neuter, yet always sexed. Men have claimed their sexed subjectivity, their male-God and their language to be neuter, and hence objective and egalitarian. Irigaray maintains that this is an abstract fallacy. Equality as neutrality is a fallacy, laid down by one sex only, controlled by masculine gender, which is incapable to recognize its own roots in its sexed nature. It is also an imperialist quest, expressing an incapability of recognizing the female other and sexual difference. For Irigaray, men deny their connection to their own sexed nature, and live by the erroneous belief that they are neutral and thus represent equality.⁴⁴ These supposedly neutral and abstract “human laws” sacrifice the woman, but they also - albeit more covertly - sacrifice the man, too.⁴⁵ The male God is actually “sick” because it has doomed itself into abstract denial of its sexed nature. It has identified nature with un-godliness, limitedness, finiteness and filth and projected it into women. Irigaray wonders whether the male God is sick – in its abstract present mode – because, it never married and suffers from loneliness. Irigaray suggests that what is needed is something like a marriage, a coupling between two infinite Gods, male and female, who do not deny their sexed natures, but instead enjoy their spiritual and sensuous wholeness.⁴⁶

What, then, would these male and female Gods be like, that would act as satisfactory ideals for male and female subjectivity? Irigaray implies that both of them would be autonomous and infinite subjects, and consequently capable of inter-subjective recognition. These Gods would also reflect the essential gender-difference. What are feminine features for Irigaray? For example *love* is, for her, essentially a feminine feature.⁴⁷ Women are also “multiple” and “fluid” which means, among other things, that women do not try to “master” objects or draw separations between them. Nor do women draw a separating line between themselves as subjects and as objects like men do. Irigaray holds as a sort of essentialist fact that “the girl-subject does not have objects as the boy does.”⁴⁸ Because women have a different way of differentiating themselves (as subjects) from objects of thought, and also objects from other objects, their specific nature cannot be actualized in the present (male) language. Becoming a female subject, in the image of female God, women should also try to express their gendered difference in their own symbolism, in their own sort of language.⁴⁹

Irigaray’s analysis of the gendered constitution of religion, underpinning the gendered constitution of western subjectivity, philosophy and sociality, has inspired many feminists. Many feminists have also agreed with her critical analysis. Nevertheless, feminists have also criticized Irigaray’s gendered essentialism, the idealization of women (expressed e.g. in notions that love is essentially a female characteristic), and her theory of overcoming the gender dualisms.⁵⁰

It is paradoxical that while criticizing Hegel’s views of women Irigaray nevertheless seems to accept the basic dualism behind them. Moreover, Irigaray seems to accept the theory, ultimately coming from Kojève, that object-and identity-formation is in itself suppressive of the Other. On the basis of especially Lacan’s thought, she sees that this suppression takes place in the structure of language. Suppression of the Other is manifested in the western masculine way of thinking, as well as language and discourses, where clear differentiations are made between the subject and the object, in general between objects of thought. This thinking makes up its own universe, dominated by just one self. In order not to reproduce this logic, which would just lead to a new version of the suppression of the Other, the suppressed female Other cannot be determined by

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 173

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 111-112

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 70, 113

⁴⁷ “Love is in and by itself essentially feminine in its nature. The belief in the love of God is the belief in the feminine principle as divine” (*ibid.*, 70)

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 99

⁴⁹ For example: Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One*, 135.

⁵⁰ Weir, *Sacrificial Logics*, 90-111; Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 46-53.

the same linguistic logic, pervading masculine thought and language. Thus, the female “subject” is “fluid”, without borders, without specific determination. It is however unclear whether this wouldn't just, paradoxically, reproduce the traditional view of women, manifested in Hegel's views, i.e. those views that Irigaray criticizes in the first place. These questions are returned to in the following chapter of this article.

The views of Gace Jantzen, as expressed in her *Becoming Divine. Towards a feminist philosophy of religion* (1998) illustrate the continuous influence of Irigaray in the contemporary feminist philosophy of religion, also in the English-speaking world. Jantzen's work is largely based on the ideas expressed in Irigaray's *Sexes and Genealogies*. She accepts the Lacanian – ultimately, Kojévian – view of the painful birth of the human subject.⁵¹ Nevertheless, she wants to challenge Lacan's account of the necessary maleness of language.⁵² Jantzen fully agrees with Irigaray on that the idea of God is essential for the achievement of subjectivity.⁵³ She quotes Irigaray:

Divinity is what we need to become autonomous, sovereign. No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine. There comes a time for destruction. But, before destruction is possible, God or the Gods may exist.⁵⁴

Actually, by making Irigaray's position more clear, by translating it to less poetic language, Jantzen makes its problems more visible. Jantzen explicates the connection between Irigaray's philosophy of religion and Feuerbach's radical “left-Hegelian” critique of religion. For Feuerbach, all images of God or gods are *projections*. As Jantzen explains⁵⁵, in a Feuerbachian projection, the properties attributed to the divine being/beings are nothing but objectifications of the properties imperfectly possessed and valued by the believing subject. A projection is, for Feuerbach, always *untrue*. Consequently, there must be some unconscious psychological mechanism driving such projections. At some stage, projections may be necessary in the moral development of the human species. Ultimately, however, they are doomed to disappear. Instead of loving their fellow-beings because they love God, humans should learn to love each other without any mediation.⁵⁶

According to Jantzen's interpretation, Irigaray argues that women should deliberately project the divine according to their gender, consciously replace the traditional masculinist projection of God with their own image. Jantzen herself seems to subscribe to this view.⁵⁷ However, given the Feuerbachian concept of the projection, the view she ascribes to Irigaray appears as paradoxical in more than one sense. For a Feuerbachian projection cannot be a conscious creation. If people understand its real nature, they cease to believe in it. A “deliberate projection” is a contradictory concept.⁵⁸ Jantzen tries to make the idea more plausible by challenging the standard view that in religion cognitive beliefs and their truth or falsity are central issues. Rather, the most important aspect of religious images and religious faith are their action-guiding, desire-related roles in human lives. However, even if we accept this point and admit that the practical aspects of

⁵¹ Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 32-58.

⁵² *ibid*, 51.

⁵³ *ibid*, 12.

⁵⁴ Irigaray *Sexes and Genealogies*, 62.

⁵⁵ Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 88-9.

⁵⁶ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*. In this work, Feuerbach clearly accepts a Hegelian theory of recognition. For example (p. 158): “The other is my *thou* – the relation being reciprocal – my *alter ego*, man objective to me, the revelation of my own nature, the eye seeing itself. In another I first have the consciousness of humanity; through him I first learn, I first feel, that I am a man: in my love of him it is first clear that he belongs to me and I to him, that we two cannot be without each other, that only community constitutes humanity.”

⁵⁷ Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 15, 91, 265.

⁵⁸ As Anderson remarks: “[Feuerbach's] empirical argument that religion is based upon man's projection of his ideal attributes onto a divine being is not complete without the premise that the projection is an illusion.” Anderson, “Gender and the Infinite”, 194. Of course, even if a belief can be explained in psychological terms, it does not show that the belief in question is necessarily *untrue*.

religion are actually more important than its cognitive aspects, it is still not clear that religious faith can have those practical aspects without the cognitive aspects. In other words, it is not obvious that religion can have an important role in people's life if it is understood just as a conscious projection rather than as an external, independent truth. To sum, Jantzen and Irigaray have important insights about the gendered nature of the prevailing religious ideas. They argue, plausibly, that the real role of religion in our societies cannot be understood only at the level of religion's conscious beliefs and manifest functions. One has also to understand its unconscious effects – a path followed by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud in their critiques of religion, but already started by Hegel. However, their constructive alternative seems to be incompatible with *both* a genuine religious belief *and* the Feuerbachian critique of religion. Both are committed to the view that even in the sphere of religion, truth is relevant.

Pamela Sue Anderson: yearning for recognition

Pamela Sue Anderson is a prominent contemporary feminist philosopher.⁵⁹ In *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion. The Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief* (1998), she claims that Anglo-American philosophers of religion of the second half of the twentieth century have worked to revive empirical realist forms of theism, in a self-claimed gender-neutral way. Nevertheless, they have left their gender-biases mostly unreflected.⁶⁰ According to Anderson:

Anglo-American tradition of philosophy offers formally rational statements for or against theistic belief, calling upon experience, however, differently construed, to support justifications or guarantees of truth and falsehoods...I submit that a feminist philosopher will feel compelled to ask: Whose beliefs are these that are given warrant, rational proof or justification? For whom have these beliefs been constructed?⁶¹

Anderson takes on the challenge of answering her own question. She identifies herself as a feminist and describes what she means by the term:

By "feminist", I mean here a stance which would be against both sexed/gendered hierarchies, in which men as fathers are valued over women as mothers (or perhaps as dissenters), and gender-differentiation, whereby the privileged male is at the center of knowledge and belief. According to this stance, the feminist philosopher of religion would object that, when marginalized others are excluded from knowledge-construction, then the knowledge which is being justified tends to be the beliefs of those at the center; this renders claims to knowledge of reality partial and biased⁶²

For Anderson, the Aristotelian binary conception of the constitution of the human being sets the ground for the tradition of the western philosophical, political and religious thinking. Anderson acknowledges that this tradition is also present in Hegel's conception of women, despite his fruitful contributions to feminist thought and his general theory of recognition as the overcoming of this dualistic tradition. The problem is that the overcoming of dualism was not extended to a critical analysis of gendered dualism. Anderson maintains that Aristotle's value-laden account of female anatomy as that of a defective male led to St. Augustine's claims of the defilement of sex and the natural inferiority of female anatomy. These claims remain latent in philosophical history and theology, and they constitute also the gendered thinking of Thomas Aquinas.⁶³ In this Aristotelian-

⁵⁹ Coakley, "Feminism and Analytic Philosophy of Religion", 505-21; Frankenberry, "Feminist Philosophy of Religion".

⁶⁰ Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy*, 13-16

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 16

⁶² *ibid.*, 170

⁶³ *ibid.* 3-9

Christian thinking women lack the constituting features as “subjects” and as “humans”. The attributes, such as objectivity, rationality, critical self-consciousness, abstraction, creativity, activity and autonomy are supposed to constitute the subject and the human. They have been identified mainly with men. These same attributes are seen also as God’s attributes. For Anderson, like for Irigaray (and for Feuerbach), the male subject of Christian patriarchalism has projected his ideal attributes to God and takes them as the regulative ideals of his religious subjectivity. Women, on the other hand, are associated with the negative opposites of these features. Thus woman acts as a constitutive Other, a necessary (negative) regulative ideal: what the woman is, the man should not be, in order to be an ideal subject. Subjectivity (in the sense of an opposite to objectivity), emotionality, unconsciousness, immediacy, passivity and dependency are associated with women. These gendered distinctions constitute binary opposites, dichotomies that have a male (positive) pole, like “rationality”, “spirit” and “independence” and female (negative) pole like “emotionality”, “nature (or, flesh/body)” and “dependency”. The idea is not that men lack features like “flesh”, but that men should (by their God-like faculties) keep these internal “feminine” aspects in control, and rise above them. A socially grounding idea behind this thinking is that the party, identified with the positive pole of the binary is meant to master and control the party, identified with the negative pole. Normative social hierarchy thus corresponds to the ideal hierarchy inside the human psyche, in which the higher psychic faculties (reason, spirit) are meant to keep the lower faculties (emotions, impulses of the flesh etc.) in control. This dualism has been reflected in social hierarchies, between men and women, but also between other groups, e.g. between ethnic groups, socio-economical classes etc.

Following Irigaray’s (as well as other feminists, like Simone de Beauvoir’s and Judith Butler’s) interpretation of the enslavement of the female Other to the male master in western philosophical, political and Christian tradition, Anderson holds that sexual difference is erased in binary thinking: men and women are not different “as subjects” or as humans, because women are seen to lack the essential features rendering one a subject. Instead, women represent those features which the man pursues to take distance from, to abstract from, and to control (in himself, internally, as well as in the external world) in his quest to be a full human subject and to develop and practice his human potentialities. Female religious mysticism is accepted, yet, it must be kept under control by the higher doctrinal and spirit-differentiating capacities of male religious authorities.

Anderson accepts Irigaray’s basic criticism of the patriarchal Western thought in which women’s subjectivity is erased and women are reduced to a position described by Hegel as the enslaved Other. Anderson sees that this conception is manifested in the dominant mainstream philosophy of religion, as well as in Christian mythology. In Christian mythology, the enslavement of the female Other means that woman is seen as both subordinate and weak, as well as threatening, a danger, to the purity of Christian faith. Because women are incapable of critical self-consciousness they are easily lured into sin by the evil. This is manifested in the interpretations of the grounding narratives like the story of Adam and Eve and the Fall. Evil seduced the woman and because Adam did not keep the woman – and his own internal feminine features - under control, the paradise was lost. Grounding mythological narratives present an interpretation of how contradicting elements, constitutive of religious thinking (like spirit/flesh, sacred/profane, good/evil, infinite/finite) relate to each other. In traditional Christian thought, these relations are given a gendered interpretation. These gendered interpretations, instantiated in grounding narratives, have also a socially performative power.⁶⁴ They produce the relations they describe. Mythological

⁶⁴ ”Performativity” is not a concept that Anderson herself uses. Nevertheless, analyzing the logic of how constitutive beliefs, expressed in religious thought, especially in myths and mythological “grounding stories”, actualize themselves in lived sociality and materiality, in other words, turn into reality, or produce the states of affairs which they just claim to describe, is a major theme in all Anderson’s theories. Often Anderson uses the term “incarnation” when she talks about this phenomenon, i.e. how grounding mythologies have the tendency of producing such social reality, which

narratives create and maintain social constructions where women are kept away from “holy places” and authoritative positions within religious communities. Like Eve, women in general are seen as incapable to differentiate between the right dogma and heresies, as they lack the necessary critical consciousness and are way too much controlled by their emotions and earthly impulses. Women’s *desire* (women’s striving for sacred knowledge, truth, and justice) is considered as erratic, dangerous, and chaotic. The internal complexity of women is reduced into one-sidedness. This is manifested in actuality when women are restricted to functional and instrumental, reproductive roles as complementary “aids” to the male subject, thus manifesting the performative power of the narrative of Genesis. For Anderson, the Christian grounding narratives are based on the same gendered dualism as the philosophies of Aristoteles and Hegel.⁶⁵

Hegel’s ideas of recognition between the self and the Other, as well as different interpretations of Hegel, play a major role in Anderson’s feminist thought. As we have seen, Anderson accepts Irigaray’s and some other feminist’s critical analysis of the western philosophical-political-Christian patriarchalism, which dominates also the thought of Hegel. When Anderson analyzes women’s role in the western Christian philosophical tradition, she also refers to Hegel’s idea of the relation between the master and the slave. Women are both “internal, marginalized others” as well as socially marginalized others. As an internal other, women represent the lower aspects of the Western subject. Like the figure of the master in Hegel’s thought, the western male subject projects those parts of himself which he sees as threats to his subjectivity, into women. Women represent “the body” which is controlled, ordered and guided by the (male) head. Religious male-subject has rendered himself, in a way, bodiless, resulting into alienation from the material, bodily life. Anderson writes:

Hegel’s chapter on the master and the slave enacts the gradual specification of desire...Initially for the master, bodily life must be taken care of, but this can be done by another; for the body is not, at least not initially, part of his own project of identity. The master’s identity is essentially beyond the body; he gains illusory confirmation for this view by requiring the other to be the body that he attempts not to be.⁶⁶

For Anderson, the alienation of the Christian male-subject from his own body and bodily, material life in general is also performative. It assumes the form of ethical passivity, an alienation from real life ethical questions. In biblical terms, the equality between men and women, masters and slaves, Greeks and Romans is placed into a bodiless realm beyond the earth, transcendental world, heaven. Justice, equality, and the various supreme attributes identified with God, do not become actual, embodied (or, “incarnate”), but remain at an abstract level.⁶⁷ The privileged male subject of

reflect similar relations between men and women, which are present in the religious narratives. See e.g. Anderson, “Lost Confidence and Human Capability”

⁶⁵ In *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* Simo Knuuttila describes how Augustine differentiated between higher and lower parts of the human mind by gendered allegories: “Giving an allegorical interpretation to the biblical story of Adam, Eve, and the serpent, Augustine equates the serpent with temptations to sinful pleasures, Eve with the emotional level which tends to overestimate mundane things and to react positively to evil suggestions, and Adam with the highest rational and authoritative level of the soul. When the serpent makes a soul aware of sinful attraction, and one thinks about it with pleasure without an intention to act, the woman begins to eat the forbidden fruit. If this movement is not prevented by reason, the person can be said to consent to the pleasure of cogitation. If an intention to act follows, the man also eats the forbidden fruit – that is, there is a consent of reason... According to Augustine, the suggestion is not a sin, nor is the incipient pleasure of cogitation, provided that it is destroyed by the highest part as soon as it becomes aware of it” (170). In her dissertation *Gender and Defence of Women in Christine de Pizan’s Thought*, Ilse Paakkinen presents an illuminating analysis of the gendered conceptions of the human being in ancient and medieval philosophical, theological and literary traditions.

⁶⁶ Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, 89-90

⁶⁷ In “Life and Death” Anderson writes about the dangers of abstract notions of equality, as they have the tendency of excluding women from politics and public life (52).

traditional Christianity concentrates to analyze the attributes of God like those of justice and perfect goodness, while overlooking real life problems of injustice and evil.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, Anderson also draws from Hegel's conception of recognition when theorizing of what reciprocal recognition between the self and the Other would be like and how it would be actualized - *embodied*, become *incarnate* - at a personal, inter-subjective, social, epistemological, philosophical and linguistic levels of religion. The concept of "yearning for recognition"⁶⁹ is central for Anderson throughout her philosophy. She defines this notion to mean "the cognitive and political nature of a common passion for equalitarian reciprocity, which unites subjects across gender, sexual, racial and class divides". In Anderson's thought, this concept is applied as a critical tool, but also as a tool for developing new, more inclusive interpretations of mythological narratives and religious concepts.

Anderson develops her notion of recognition – to a large part – by analyzing critically "those contemporary 'French feminists of difference' who advocate sexual difference, female subjectivity and becoming divine (women)".⁷⁰ In her article "Life, Death and (Inter)subjectivity: Realism and Recognition in Continental Feminism"⁷¹, Anderson writes:

philosophically significant tension exists today in feminist philosophy of religion between those subjects who seek to become divine and those who seek their identity in mutual recognition...I turn to the distinctively French reading of the Hegelian struggle for recognition which have preoccupied Continental philosophers especially since the first half of the century. I explore the struggle for recognition between women and men who must face the reality of life and death in order to avoid the projection of their fear of mortality onto the other sex. This includes a critical look at Irigaray's account of subjectivity and divinity...the lesson from the Continent for philosophy of religion is that we must not stop yearning for recognition.⁷²

Thus, the tension between the two interpretations of recognition, mentioned earlier in this article, figure in Anderson's interpretation of the concept of recognition. For Anderson, "feminists of difference" relevant in the field of feminist philosophy of religion, include most notably Irigaray and Jantzen.⁷³ In her criticism she draws from the interpretations which emphasize the aspects of intersubjectivity and social justice, in short the *embodiment* of recognition (the concrete actualization in material ethical life, in Hegel's words, in the realm of objectivity or *Sittlichkeit*). Anderson draws from those interpretations of recognition which see inter-subjective recognition as possible at the conceptual and linguistic level. In this, she opposes Irigaray's idea of the radical difference between men and women as linguistic beings. She criticizes Irigaray's notion of the essential "fluidity" of women's language. Anderson remains unconvinced that the poetic imagery and fluidity could be straightforwardly good things. She questions whether a mystically divine, obscure language would actually help to enhance mutual understanding in real human societies, between women, or between men and women.⁷⁴

Anderson criticizes Irigaray's and Jantzen's ideas of the feminine divinity. She holds that neither men nor women should pursue to become "divine" in the sense explicated by these theorists. Pursuing idealizing self-projections (as evident in male projections of God and its social consequences) have the tendency of over-looking the complexity of human subjects living in complex social situations. In order for recognition to be actualized in real life, the human complexity as well as social complexity should instead be taken into careful consideration. She writes:

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 39-47

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 52

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² *ibid.*, 41

⁷³ *ibid.*, 52

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 49-50

the crucial philosophical task in a woman's search for identity is to recognize a common yearning for recognition. This yearning is evident in sexual desire, political rage, unavoidable grief and self-giving/self-creating love. Yet I will maintain that these gendered passions still do not indicate a woman's need for "divinity", if she is to become "free, autonomous, sovereign", or for "the help of the divine". Instead the urgent, however, difficult task is to recognize oneself and another in the inevitable risk of loss which characterizes intersubjectivity⁷⁵

While accepting much of Irigaray's basic theory of the enslavement of the female Other in western religious thought, Anderson is also critical of it. In her criticism, she claims that intersubjectivity, mutual recognition as well as realism are neglected in Irigaray's visions of the divinity of women. Realism becomes lost, when the aspect of critical mutual inter-subjectivity is neglected. There is the danger that women imprison themselves into an illusory world of their own, try to speak a language of their own instead of a language shared by the selves and the others together. There is the danger that this world would be also narcissistic: a world of a female religious mystic. The main problem is that women would cut themselves off from a mutually critical collectivity. There is still another problem: the risk of "becoming a nothingness in the eyes of the other". Woman recesses into an obscure divinity of her own (curiously resembling the "Nether world" of Hegel, even that Anderson does not herself make this comparison). Anderson sees that women should, instead, take the "risk of inter-subjectivity" and face the risk of a potential conflict involved in confronting the Other. Anderson writes about Irigaray's ideas:

Without a concrete goal of balancing equality and reciprocity between (male and female) subjects to ensure the justice of intersubjectivity, we can easily face the problems associated with a self-annihilating mysticism within patriarchal societies.⁷⁶

Anderson does not present explicated analyses of how the thought of the "French feminists of difference" have their background in Hegel. In some texts, she also appears to be somewhat frustrated with the multiple interpretations of Hegel's thought.⁷⁷ Neither does she present her own systematic interpretation of the concept or the phenomenon of recognition; these are not the main concerns of her theories. She rather applies various notions, coming from different theorists working with the concept and of recognition. She analyzes religious thinking and religious sociality through these conceptions as, evidently, she finds them extremely fruitful analytical tools in feminist philosophy of religion. The central thread, running through all her works, is to develop her own central feminist concept ("yearning for recognition") by gathering elements from various interpretations, centred on the notion of inter-subjective recognition between the self and the Other.⁷⁸ In this – and especially when stressing the aspects of equality and social justice as central elements of recognition - she relies heavily also on the thought of Kant.⁷⁹ It seems that Anderson does not find enough support from the interpretations of Hegel, or conceptions of recognition, for

⁷⁵ *ibid*, 44

⁷⁶ Anderson, "Life, Death, and (inter)subjectivity", 53

⁷⁷ see e.g. Anderson, "A Story of Love and Death",

⁷⁸ In addition to Anderson's texts already mentioned in this article, see also e.g. *Revisioning Gender*; "Gender and the Infinite" and "Divinity, Incarnation and Intersubjectivity"

⁷⁹ Anderson, "Life, Death", 56-57: "...account of intersubjectivity categorized by reciprocal equality differs markedly from Irigaray's search for divinity. In fact, it would seem closer to certain readings of Kant's autonomous reasoning which unites rational agents equally in a kingdom of ends. But I would also insist that we should avoid the equally damaging alternatives of a woman's choice between extreme narcissism and absolute altruism; the ethical norms of autonomy and altruism can easily be corrupted without the proper balance of self-and other-love...the real task for liberating the spiritual and practical dimensions of a woman's life demands the right balance of equality and reciprocity in dialogue with other women and men. This idea of balancing equality and reciprocity can aim to avoid either the totalization or the annihilation of a woman in the divine (other)". See also Anderson, *Revisioning Gender*; 108-111 and Anderson and Bell, *Kant and Theology*.

analyzing the aspects of justice and equality as elements of recognition. One reason for this might be that she has not made herself acquainted with the conceptions of recognition of the Critical Theory (those of Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth etc.). However, in some ways this is understandable, as the critical theorists do not seem to theorize the realm of religion as a sphere of life in which recognition is important or in which people should develop their potentialities of recognition.⁸⁰

Conclusion: Do women need help from “the divine” to be free?

Anderson holds in “Life, Death and (Inter)subjectivity”, in her criticism of Irigaray, that women do not need help from the divine as an ideal self-projection in order to be recognized as equal subjects. Nevertheless, in some other texts she writes that a sort of help from the divine is anyhow necessary. In “Gender and the Infinite” she warns of such aspirations for infinite which try to raise one’s own point of view on the infinite as the whole of reality. A corrupt aspiration to be infinite leads the subject to try to situate the infinite wholly within oneself, to own God only by oneself.⁸¹ In order to avoid corrupt conceptions of the infinite, the *political* nature of our relations to the infinite should be acknowledged. Does Anderson suggest that “God” should be “politicized”, rendered a sort of arena of negotiations, potential conflicts and (positively) political agreements? Is this the “help from the divine” that she has in mind? In some senses she appears to think just in this way. In this she echoes Hegel, as well as those theorists of recognition (like Axel Honneth) who see “struggle for recognition”, in the sense of struggle over the meaning of concepts, as necessary for the marginalized others to gain equal recognition. In order for the marginalized groups not be enslaved in the name of the infinite, they should claim their place as contributors to definitions of God. Anderson states that the aspect of power is present in all conceptions of God and claims about infinitude. Conceptions of God are power-laden, and this is shown in the social fact, that so many things (social arrangements etc.) are justified by referring to God. She writes:

Relations of power are infinite. The feminist philosopher who struggles for renewal of the field of philosophy of religion performs her writing again and again, in order to move beyond any nostalgia for a secure place. The goal is, then, to express the divine anew in a shared space and feeling of yearning that can transform all gendered forms of a corrupt aspiration into a mobile dance towards the infinite⁸²

In this article I have tried to show the impact and relevance of the concept of recognition in feminist philosophy of religion. It is revealed especially in the on-going discussions between different interpretations of – and reactions to - Hegel’s theory of the complex relation and dynamics between the self and the Other. These feminist discussions show, most of all, that religion is a realm of life (in addition to the realms of family, civil society and the state, using Hegel’s differentiation) in which recognition is strived and longed for and in which people suffer when recognition is denied. It should also be remembered that religion is not isolated from the other realms of life. Thus, if religious thinking includes gendered dichotomies, they influence and have an effect upon other spheres of life.

I wish to also shortly note that, outside feminist circles, also some other theologians have claimed that conceptions of God correspond to social arrangements, e.g. gender-hierarchies. Also these theologians have referred to Hegel’s ideas of recognition when theorizing how justice and equality (claimed to be God’s attributes) could be understood so that they would also be realized socially, instead of remaining empty abstractions. Prominent contemporary theologian Jürgen Moltmann has analyzed in his *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* how different conceptions of the Christian God, manifested in authorized writings of the Christian churches, have corresponded with social arrangements. He writes:

⁸⁰ Charles Taylor is an exception to this, see e.g. his work *Hegel*.

⁸¹ Anderson, “Gender and the Infinite”, 199

⁸² *ibid.*, 209

The notion of a divine monarchy in heaven and on earth, for its part, generally provides the justification for earthly domination – religious, moral, patriarchal or political domination – and makes it a hierarchy, a “holy rule”. The idea of the almighty ruler of the universe everywhere requires abject servitude, because it points to complete dependency in all spheres of life. Religiously motivated political monotheism has always been used in order to legitimate domination, from the emperor cults of the ancient world, Byzantium and the absolute ideologies of the seventeenth century, down to the dictatorships of the twentieth. The doctrine of the Trinity which, on the contrary, is developed as a theological doctrine of freedom must for its part point towards a community of men and women without supremacy and without subjection⁸³

Moltmann develops a conception of the Trinitarian God that would highlight justice and equality as elements of God's nature. Evidently, he is greatly inspired by Hegel's conception of mutual recognition between the self and the other. To conclude this chapter, I give a passage from him:

every divine Person exists in the light of the other and in the other. By virtue of the love they have for one another they exist totally in the other: the Father exists by virtue of his love, as himself entirely in the Son, the Son, by virtue of his self-surrender, exists as himself totally in the Father; and so on. Each Person finds his existence and joy in the other. Each Person receives the fullness of eternal life from the other. Hegel then picked up this idea and deepened it. It is a nature of the person to give himself entirely to a counterpart, and to find himself in the other most of all.⁸⁴

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⁸³ Moltmann, *The Trinity*, 191-192

⁸⁴ *ibid*, 173-4.

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