Beyond Mutual Recognition – Hegel's Neglected Dark Side of Modern Family

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Abstract: Hegel is renowned for his view that in family members are fully recognised and the master and slave relationship does not exist in it. Among the problems of the modern society, Hegel devoted more attention to poverty, crime and alienation in the economic sense. Hegel rarely discussed problems which are commonly found in modern society despite his anthropologically nuanced philosophy, which treats the family, civil society and the state as the three highest moments in *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*). For Hegel, the family performs the functions of realisation of individual subjective freedom, performing deeds for the death, and the establishment and maintenance of morality on a collective level. This paper aims to move beyond Hegel's discussions by exploring problems related to the family as a social institution, and proposes that family problems in modern society are caused by the conflicts between family as based on feelings and rationalisation based on ethical objectivity, tensions between the family and civil society, master and slave dialectic in marriage, and realisation of individual freedom through private property. Measures on alleviating family problems are suggested, and they include positive enhancement of bonds among family members through morality, re-discovery of unreflective feelings, deployment of family property, and extension of scope of Corporation to directly intervene in family problems.

Keywords: Hegel, family, ethical life, morality, Philosophy of Right

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Introduction

As described in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right (PhR)*, which describes the manifestation of Objective Spirit into the objective realm in the forms of law, morality and ethical life in the real world,[2] family is one of the social realms in which the Spirit unfolds itself from the subjective will to the objective universal duties and to achieve freedom.[3] Hegel is renowned for his view that in a family its members are fully recognised and in which master and slave relationship does not exist. He holds a positive view on the family, that marriage is based on love and involves a commitment. Marriage is the beginning of family, involves free wills, and is the purest form of familial ethicality,[4] and in family relations one cares about each other. Family relations contain ethical bonds, the most basic form of human relationships, and is more important than our identity in occupation.[5] Hegel is at the same time widely attacked on his infamous view of the inferiority of woman, that he compares women to plants, regarded women as unfit for participating in public life and higher pursuits such as philosophy, and are by nature tied to the private family.[6] However, Moyer viewed that Hegel's bias on women as originated from his account of the division of labour between husband and wife in the family, and the roles he assigned to husband and wife are not as rigid as widely believed. Hegel discussed family from an institutional perspective, that a family must be treated in relation to other families.[7] Solomon contended that Hegel prescribes husband-wife, parents-children, and brothers-sisters as the three family relationships that fall under the divine law.[8] Divine law, which is universal in nature, is to be distinguished from human law, which regulates the life of all as a community.[9]

Among the problems of modern society, Hegel devoted more attention to poverty and crime, and rarely discussed problems which are commonly found in modern society. This is despite his anthropologically nuanced philosophy, which treats the family, civil society and the state as the three highest moments in *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*). This paper aims to move beyond Hegel's discussions by exploring problems related to the family as a social unit. Among the various problems, family violence, child abuse, divorce, and disharmony among family members are common in modern society. How family problems in modern society can be informed by Hegelian philosophy and possible solutions from the Hegelian perspective are introduced in this paper.

The increasing extent of rationalisation and sophisticated development of contemporary society coupled with increasing variety and intensity of family problems have become a perennial issue

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[2] Jean-Francois Kervégan, *The Actual and the Rational Hegel and Objective Spirit*, trans. Daniela Ginsburg and Martin Shuster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[3] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. Thomas Malcolm Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953).

[4] David Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious in Hegel's Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009).

[5] Thom Brooks, *Hegel's Political Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

[6] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*.

[7] Dean Moyer, *Hegel's Conscience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[8] Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G. W. F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[9] Quentin Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993).

discussed among academics[10] and supranational organisations[11] in diverse disciplines for over decades. Given its long history, the Hegelian philosophy may be regarded as being no longer tenable and is unable to account for the problems happening in contemporary family. This paper holds the view that an extension of Hegelian philosophy enables it to not only account for family problems but also offers viable solutions to these problems.

In fact, the Hegelian commentator Landes argues that the Hegelian conception of the family is characterised by contradictions, and some of the contradictions concur with the proposals made in this paper. She stated that there are internal contradictions between family and property, between family and love, regarding the roles of women and the transformed roles of family from the pre-industrial society to industrial capitalism.[12] The contradictory quality of the family is also re-iterated by Jackson.[13] This paper shares a similar view, that one feature of modern family is its internal contradictions, which is the cause having been overlooked in the discussions on family to date.

This paper is divided into six parts. After introducing Hegel's well-known institutional roles of family in modern civil society, the scant account of family made by Hegel, mainly in terms of system of needs and morality,[14] is summarised. This is followed by discussions on the causes of family problems from a Hegelian perspective. The causes for family problems proposed in this paper are conflicts between family being based on feelings and rationalisation based on ethical objectivity, tensions between the family and civil society, the master and slave dialectic that lingers in marriage, and the realisation of individual freedom through private property. Finally, measures on relieving and solving contemporary family problems are offered.

The nature and roles of family in modern society

In Hegel's philosophy, the family, civil society and the state are the three highest moments in *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*), a state in which the good is identical with the subjective will, and "is a subjective disposition, but one imbued with what is inherently right." [15] *Ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*) is also freedom realised:

> Ethical life is the Idea of freedom in that on the one hand it is the good become alive — the good endowed in self-consciousness with knowing and willing and actualized by self-conscious action — while on the other hand self-consciousness has in the ethical realm its absolute foundation and the end which actuates its effort. Thus, ethical life is the

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[10] For example, Vandhana Choenni, Alice Hammink, and Dike van de Mheen, "Association between Substance Use and the Perpetration of Family Violence in Industrialized Countries: A Systematic Review," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 18(2017): 37–50. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838015589253. Joel Kovel discussed the rationalization of modern society from a psychoanalytic perspective highlighted the alienating nature of rationalized life on individuals. He concluded that life in advanced capitalistic society as psychotic and family serves the function of meeting the physical and affective needs for individuals. Joel Kovel, "Rationalization and the Family," *Telos* 37(1978): 5–21. https://doi.org/10.3817/0978037005

[11] United Nations, *Effects of Modernization, Industrialization of Families among Issues Discussed in Commission on Status of Women*. 1996. https://press.un.org/en/1996/19960318.wom914.html/

[12] Joan B. Landes, "Hegel's Conception of the Family," *Polity* 14(1981): 5–28.

[13] Jeff Jackson, "The Resolution of Poverty in Hegel's 'Actual' State," *Polity* 46(2014): 331–53. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24540215/

[14] As will be explained in subsequent part of this paper, morality (*Moralität*) should be distinguished from *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*) in Hegel's philosophy.

[15] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, pp. 103–4.

concept of freedom developed into the existing world and the nature of self-consciousness.[16]

The modern family is an ethical root of the state, and has organic interconnections with two other moments of *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*), namely, the civil society and the state. Family, together with these other two moments of *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*), is united in a totality in the constitution of the state.[17] For Hegel, the family is completed in three phases. The first is the formation of family through marriage. This is followed by the external embodiment of concept via the acquisition and maintenance of family property and capital. The last phase is the education of children and the dissolution of the family.[18] As individuals in modern family throughout these stages are characterised by internal contradictions, the family problems discussed in this paper cover problems which may occur in any one of these three phases.

The roles and functions played by family in civil society as envisaged by Hegel are introduced in this section. As the focus of this paper is the dark side of family, the institutional roles of family in modern society will only be introduced briefly, and readers are encouraged to refer to more detailed accounts given by commentators such as Landes and Wood.[19]

Realisation of individual subjective freedom

In commenting on the first phase of family, marriage, Hegel indicated that the seemingly self-restriction of individuals in marriage is in fact a liberation.[20] It is because the couple attains its substantive self-consciousness in marriage. Marriage also results in the reflective thought of individuals and ethical duty, especially through the free surrender of two individuals of their personality.[21] Hegel expressed that the family is an ethical order that enables individuals to achieve freedom in the civil society, and subjective freedom of individuals can only be realised when it is in an ethical order:

> The right of individuals to be subjectively destined to freedom is fulfilled when they belong to an actual ethical order, because their conviction of their freedom finds its truth in such an objective order, and it is in an ethical order that they are actually in possession of their own essence of their own inner universality.[22]

Moyer highlighted Hegel's view that marriage is an entrée for family, and marriage should be based of love and free choice of spouse. Arranged marriage, which is either based on blood relations, calculation of benefits, or embedded in collective objectivity (and not on individual subjectivity), should be avoided.[23] In the same vein, marriage ceremony, which is based on the collective objectivity of customs and is imposed upon individuals, is an external constraint for individuals. Despite emphasising the romantic element of marriage as Kant, Hegel defended the essentiality of the legality of marriage. Since Hegel focused on the subjectivity of individuals in marriage, divorce is permitted when the subjective disposition breaks down and

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[16] Ibid., p. 105.

[17] Jackson, "The Resolution of Poverty in Hegel's 'Actual' State."

[18] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*.

[19] Landes, "Hegel's Conception of the Family"; Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[20] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §161, p. 111.

[21] Ibid., §168, p. 115.

[22] Ibid., §153, p. 109.

[23] Moyer, *Hegel's Conscience*.

the couple experiences estrangement and alienation. However, after divorce children may become less connected in their moral-spiritual ties with their parents which exist based on blood relationship.[24] Similarly, because of his emphasis on subjectivity on the individual level, Hegel strongly opposes treating children as family property and keeping children to the family sphere.

Individuals have the subjective freedom to create their own families, and those who create their families have at the same time created a private space which law cannot intrude as the case of occupational choice.[25] From the Hegelian perspective, modern family is also both an expression of and an obstacle to freedom. As depicted by Hegel, the family involves the sacrifice of personality.[26] For an individual, being in a family is substantially co-habiting and is an experience of a particular group of other selves, and is a matter of participating in meaning-articulation in a total system.[27] Despite the family is a manifestation of freedom, family alone cannot realise freedom, and participation in public life (particularly the Estates) is required for individuals to realise their freedom in the modern civil society.[28]

Family property has an important role to play in the realisation of freedom for individuals. Property is the first embodiment of freedom, and family property enables individual to realise their subjective freedom. In Hegel's words, "… from the standpoint of freedom, property is the first embodiment of freedom and so is in itself a substantive end."[29] Family property makes family autonomous internally, makes individuals' rights to property legally recognised externally in the larger society, and enables the family to manifest itself.[30] Mankind has achieved advancement in the realisation of subjective freedom historically, especially through family property.

Performing deeds for the death

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*PhS*), Hegel assigned a special role for the family in the death of its members. *PhS* has a different purpose from *PhR*, that it describes how consciousness unfolds itself to reach the final stage Absolute Knowledge, thus freedom, through a series of dialectical stages involving sublation.[31] In his discussions on the "deed" of ethical actions to the family,[32] Hegel pointed out that the family in its universal form is free from the particularity of individual members, and the family performs its deed not for the living but the dead. As stated by Hegel,

> The deed no longer concerns the living but the dead, the individual who, after a long succession of separate disconnected experiences, concentrates himself into a single completed shape, and has raised himself out the unrest of the accidents of life into the

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[24] Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*.

[25] Brooks, *Hegel's Political Philosophy*.

[26] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §40, p. 39.

[27] Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious in Hegel's Philosophy*.

[28] Jackson, "The Resolution of Poverty in Hegel's 'Actual' State."

[29] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §45, p. 42.

[30] Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious in Hegel's Philosophy*.

[31] Solomon (1983) views Absolute Knowledge as "knowledge that is unbiased, undistorted, unqualified, all-encompassing, free from counter-examples and internal inconsistencies. Opposed to: relative, qualified, conditioned, abstract, partial.... It means having an adequate conception of knowledge and the Absolute, and understanding that there is no separation or 'epistemological gap' between them." (p. 274). Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G.W.F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[32] Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 181.

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calm of simple universality … This universality which the individual as such attains is pure being, death; it is a state which has been reached immediately, in the course of Nature, not the result of an action consciously done … death is the fulfillment and the supreme 'work' which the individual as such undertakes on its behalf.[33]

Hegel treats the family as a site of death.[34] Individuals are not only born into families but also die as a family member. The cult of the dead is the only ethical act that is not political, as it is devoted to the entire family. In death, the natural is raised to the ethical. One important function of the family is to remember its ancestry and to respect the dead.[35] Duties toward the dead belong uniquely to the family, and care of the dead is a familial responsibility.[36]

Performing deeds for the death enables family members to strengthen their spiritual unity, which are interdependent on one another. The funeral rite is particularly important for the family to transform the alienating natural world to a spiritual and ethical one. Funeral rite also has an embodying nature, that it allows family members to embody their singular relation to the deceased.

There has been a shift in the centre and management of death from the family to the public sphere since the 19th century.[37] Despite this shift, Hegel's philosophy suggesting death being a family deed means that the family has an irreplaceable role in death. The family has an important task of ensuring the dead is immersed in the universal, a task which is equally valid in modern society as human society because of its ethical nature. This can allow the Spirit to realise itself. The deeds of the family for the death of its members allows the ethical community to remain intact.

Maintaining morality through fulfilment of pure duty

In his *PhS*, Hegel stated that family in modern society, as in pre-industralised society, plays a key role in preserving and maintaining universal morality. The morality discussed by Hegel is a higher form compared to the morality (*Moralität*) proposed by Kant, which Hegel criticised heavily as being empty in content. The morality Hegel has in mind is based on *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*) which is not only individualistically but also collectively nuanced.

Morality can only be in- and for-itself in another being, and pure duty has validity only with the existence of another being:

Pure duty has also in point of fact validity only in another being, not in the morality consciousness. Although to the latter it seems that pure morality alone has validity, the position must be put in another way, for it is at the same time a natural consciousness.[38]

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[33] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold Vincent Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §451–2, p. 270.

[34] Tereza Matějčková, "Hegel's Philosophy of the Modern Family: Fatal Families?" In Jiří Chotaš and Tereza Matějčková, eds., *An Ethical Modernity? Hegel's Concept of Ethical Life Today* (Boston: Brill, 2020), pp. 118–38. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004432581_008

[35] Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*. See also Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 181.

[36] Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*.

[37] Robert Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, and Human Experience*, 8th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2004); Ines Testoni, Claudia Cordioli, Elisa Nodari, Eva Zsak, Gaia Luisa Marinoni, Daniele Venturini, and Andrea Maccarini, "Language Re-discovered: A Death Education Intervention in the Net between Kindergarten, Family and Territory," *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education* 11(2019): 331–46. https://doi.org/10.14658/pupj- ijse-2019-1-16

[38] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §627, p. 380.

Although Hegel did not focus the above account specifically on family, it has indicated that the importance of others cannot be neglected in morality. As described by Landes, "according to Hegel, at the level of the family social morality appears to us in the form of something natural."[39] As part of nature in the development of collective human entity, the family involves morality: "[T]here are certainly ought to be action, absolute duty ought to be expressed in the whole of Nature, and the moral law to become natural law."[40] This implies that pure duty, the key element of morality and is objective in nature in *ethical life (Sittlichkeit),*[41] is a pre-requisite for family ethicality. For Lauer, morality (*Moralität*) from the Hegelian perspective "is a more sophisticated attitude of rational reflection either on traditional norms or on the demands of reason as such."[42] His idea is that Hegel paid special attention to moral (vs natural) relationship in a family, that is, a relationship of duty.

The feature of morality being internal in nature renders it highly suitable for being cultivated by family experience:

> Morality is the "in-itself", the purely implicit element; if it is to be actual, the final purpose of the world cannot be fulfilled; rather the moral consciousness must exist on its own account and find itself confronted by a nature opposed to it … Moral self-consciousness asserts that its purpose is pure, is independent of inclinations and impulses, which implies that it has eliminated within itself sensuous purposes.[43]

Hegel advocated acting out and fulfilling pure duty through influencing the actual world in morality:

> … in the Notion of the moral self-consciousness the two aspects, pure duty and actuality, are explicitly joined in a single unity, and consequently the one, like the other, is expressly without a being of its own, but is only a moment, or is superseded … [consciousness] places pure duty in a being other than itself, i.e. it posits pure duty in a being other than itself, i.e. it posits pure duty partly as something existing only in thought, partly as something that is not valid in and for itself; rather it is the non-moral [consciousness] that is held to be perfect. Equally, it gives itself the character of a consciousness whose actuality, not being in conformity with duty, is superseded and qua superseded, or in the idea of absolute Being, no longer contradicts morality.[44]

Pure duty is the self of consciousness, which is being and actuality, viz pure knowing,[45] and is the simple selfhood and self-identity.[46] Many Hegelian commentators emphasise the importance of taking action to fulfill pure duty.[47] Rose regarded Hegel's moral theory as action-

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[39] Landes, "Hegel's Conception of the Family," p. 17.

[40] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §619, p. 375. Russon also highlighted that for Hegel the experience of "we" has an important role to play in morality as a form of consciousness: Russon, John. *Reading Hegel's Phenomenology* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

[41] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §164, p. 114.

[42] Lauer, A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, p. 180.

[43] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §622, p. 377.

[44] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §610, p. 371.

[45] Ibid., §632, p. 384.

[46] Ibid., §646, p. 393.

[47] For example, Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*; Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*; Russon, *Reading Hegel's Phenomenology*.

oriented, and the "highest" right for morality is subjective social freedom or moral conscience of the citizen.[48]

However, despite the above constructive functions of family, as pointed out at the outset there are tensions involved in family's maintenance of universal morality. The discrepancies and contradictions between morality and reality or duty and actuality respectively resulted in self-consciousness's struggles for in its progression to Absolute Knowing.[49] The contradictions between the moral view of the world, which exist in the relation between the absoluteness of morality, and the absoluteness of Nature[50] is "contradiction of a task which is to remain a task and yet ought to be fulfilled."[51] In addition to contradictions between morality and Nature, another widely known gap exists between the divine law and the family law, which is captured in the famous metaphor of Antigone. As many excellent accounts are available,[52] details are not given in this paper.

In addition to performing moral functions, family also serves religious functions for its members. According to Hyppolite, from an Hegelian perspective the family is a religious rather than a natural association. Based on his death-nuanced philosophy, Hyppolite argues that the family community as appears in the ethical world gives meaning to death, functions "to restore to death its true meaning, to remove it from nature and to make of it's a spiritual action."[53] Wu, in adopting a Hegelian perspective in his discussions on forgiveness, views that the family can take up all the cognitive, religious and emotional aspects of forgiveness education.[54] This is another perspective from which the family can perform morality functions.

To recapitulate, Hegel treats the family as one highest moment in *ethical life (Sittlichkeit)* among civil society and the state. It enables individuals to realise their freedom through self-sacrifice in marriage formation and family property. Family also functions to perform deeds for the death, an ethical act to maintain family bonding and achieve universality for the individual and the family. Finally, civil society achieves morality through individuals' awareness of others and acting out pure duty to others.

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[48] David Rose, "Hegel's Theory of Moral Action, its Place in his System and the 'Highest' Right of the Subject". In Paul Ashton, Toula Nicolacopoulos, and George Vassilacopoulos, eds., *The Spirit of the Age: Hegel and the Fate of Thinking* (Melbourne: re.press, 2008), pp. 52–71.

[49] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §526, p. 320.

[50] Ibid., §600, p. 365.

[51] Ibid., §603, p. 369.

[52] For example, Ewa Majewska, "The Slave, Antigone and the Housewife: Hegel's Dialectics of the Weak," *Praktyka teoretyczna*, 1(2022): 177–97.; Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, "Hegel's Antigone," *The Owl of Minerva* 17(1986): 131–52; Mohaddeseh Rabbaninia, "Hegel's Reading of Antigone Tragedy," *Wisdom and Philosophy* 16(2020): 35–64. Allen Speight, '"Heroism Without Fate, Self-Consciousness Without Alienation": Antigone, Trust and the Narrative Structure of Spirit.' In *Interpreting Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Ivan Boldyrev and Sebastian Stein (pp. 152–168). New York: Routledge.

[53] Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 343.

[54] Manfred Man-fat Wu, "Forgiveness Education from an Hegelian Perspective," *Journal of Peace Education* 18(2021): 92–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2021.1873757

Dark side of family in modern society

This section focuses on the causes for various problems such as family violence, child abuse, divorce, disharmony among family members from a Hegelian perspective. Details are given below.

Conflicts between family based on feelings and rationalisation

As Hegel described in his *PhR*, intersubjectivity is substantiated through the family, by.[55] Instead of discovering their own self-consciousness, individual in marriage embodies their protean conscious identity. The practice of marriage creates a sense of belonging through the mutual recognition of the participants (i.e., husband and wife) in two forms. The first form is the unity of two independent self-consciousnesses without annihilating the otherness of each other and the recognition of the rights of others in entering into marriage (a form of expression of reciprocal love). However, Lauer remarked that the mutual recognition between husband and wife is not based on rationality but on feeling and love, which are regulated by nature and is not *Sittlich*.[56]

The second form is the recognition of the universality of marriage by the community. Resonating Hegel, Ciavatta emphasises the importance of others for an individual to achieve objectivity, for example, through knowing from others of other perspectives.[57] Ciavatta believes that intersubjective recognition is the key to the formation and maintenance of self-identity.

Despite the important ethical functions performed by the family, civil society tears the individual from his family ties, estranges

> the members of the family from one another, and recognizes them as self–subsistent persons. Further, for the paternal soil and the external inorganic resources of nature from which the individual formerly derived his livelihood, it substitutes its own soil and subjects the permanent existence of even the entire family to dependence on itself and to contingency. Thus, the individual becomes a son of civil society which has as many claims upon him as he has rights against it.[58]

Participating in a family involves unconscious unreflected force and ties.[59] This creates obstacles for individual to participate effectively in the public life. An example is sacrifice for family in choosing further studies or searching for jobs. Increasing rationalisation of family is reflected in the increasingly utilitarian and organic relationships among family members. Ciavatta added that the gap between family's affectively-based experience of itself and its own need to actualise or "objectify" this experience for the realisation of will creates tensions for its members in their endeavours for freedom. The conflicts between the private and public family deeds members are required to fulfill result in the family being an unstable institution in modern society.[60]

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[55] Paul Redding, "Embodiment, Conceptuality and Intersubjectivity in Idealist and Pragmatist Approaches to Judgment," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 15(2001): 257–71. https://doi.org/10.1353/jsp.2001.0040

[56] Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 182.

[57] Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious in Hegel's Philosophy*.

[58] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §238, p. 148.

[59] Ciavatta, Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious in Hegel's Philosophy.

[60] Ibid.

Rationalisation of the modern society[61] places unprecedented heavy demands on individuals. In modern society, Spirit manifests itself through the process of rationalisation, and being "absolutely rational" the state is the representative institution. This process of rationalisation takes place ubiquitously in various aspects of life may creates conflicts with the family, whose nature is largely characterised by feelings, love, intimacy and recognition.[62]

Tensions between family as a private sphere and public life in civil society

In both his *PhS* and *PhR*,[63] Hegel underscored the tensions between the family laws and state laws in his description of Antigone. This metaphor shows the recognition of the divine origin of the other. It represents a sacrificial attitude, recognition of life via death. A similar attempt has been made by Russon discussing how Antigone and master and slave dialectic share two core themes of embodiment and language in Hegel's philosophical system.[64]

Customs and traditions represent a culture's dead past, and therefore consist of advice and practices that are hardly rational at all.[65] At the same time, *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*) manifests itself in a rational order through the family. For Hegel, there are conflicts between the subjective side, self-consciousness and disposition of individuals with the objective side, the social order.[66] Morality, which involves customs and values, is only a primitive form of *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*) and needs to unfold itself dialectically to reach full rationality.

In civil society, the abstract right of individuals "are given real embodiment through modern social institutions." As Wood suggested, "(e)thical life aims at the right and the well-being of individuals (the good), and achieves this aim through actions of individuals that are themselves right and constitute part of the well-being of the agents who perform them."[67] The family, being a private sphere, can hardly be protected completely and will suffer from the negative influences of the social institutions, especially by the market economy.

The *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*) has the capacity for enabling individuals to actualise themselves, achieve freedom, satisfaction, well-being, or happiness through membership of social order and social solidarity because of being public in nature. It is a separate sphere from that of the family despite family is among civil society and the state a moment of *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*).[68] Hegel stated that "since the family is the ethical Idea still in its concept, [the moments bound together in the unity of the family] must be released from the concept to self-subsistent objective reality."[69] Therefore, gaps and conflicts in the fulfilment of duties between these two spheres emerged. Given this, Hegel recommended subjective reflection of individuals for fostering an

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[61] George Di Giovanni, "Hegel, Nature and the Rationalization of Experience: On Allen Wood's Hegel's Ethical Thought," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review / Revue Canadienne De Philosophie* 32(1993): 783–94. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217300011422.

[62] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §258, p. 155.

[63] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*; Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*.

[64] John Russon, "Reading and the body in Hegel," *Clio* 22(1993): 321–36.

[65] Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*.

[66] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*; Sebastian Stein, "Absolute Idealism: Hegel." In John Shand, ed., *A Companion to Nineteenth-century Philosophy* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), pp. 83–116.

[67] Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, p. 199. Russon also pointed out that *PhS* states that conscience knowns that it needs to act, 2004, p. 157. Lauer (1976) shares the same view, that it is only through taking action can one's duty to family be fulfilled, and he advocates action taking to solve family problems.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §181, p. 122.

ethical attitude (*Gesinnung*). Reflection does not necessarily result in undermining ethical disposition but facilitates moral conscience, "since the truthful conscience is nothing but the subjective disposition to will what is objectively good."[70] However, Wood remarked that there is a danger that reflection may in the long run exposes the limitations of and undermine every ethical order.

Marriage and Corporation belonging to the private and public spheres respectively are the two major sojourns for individuals in civil society, that "[T]he sanctity of marriage and the dignity of Corporation membership are the two fixed points round which the unorganized atoms of civil society revolve."[71] One possible outcome for this is that there are conflicting demands from these two institutions, which results in dilemmas for individuals, especially the family head, who represents the family unit in its participation in civil society.

As introduced in the last section, Hegel highlighted the tensions experienced by individuals in being treated as self-subsistent in civil society.[72] This contributes to the tensions between the state which is rational in nature and the family, which is affective in nature. Instead of relying on the market economy for the arrangement of production, Hegel attributes a key role of the Corporation managed by the state in decisions on job engagement of its citizens based on a rational basis.[73]

Freedom for children in civil society is achieved through two means: Love from the family which is private and education which is supported by the public. Conflict appears when children's education is treated arbitrarily by parents.[74] School equips individuals the necessary capacities to transit smoothly from the family to the society.[75] Conflicts between family and the public in terms of education may create difficulties on the development of children, thus hinder the realisation of their freedom. Hegel described the possible tension between parents and the civil society in the following paragraph:

> In its character as a universal family, civil society has the right and duty of superintending and influencing education, inasmuch as education bears upon the child's capacity to become a member of society. Society's right here is paramount over the arbitrary and contingent preferences of parents, particularly in cases where education is to be completed not by the parents but by others. To the same end, society must provide public educational facilities so far as is practicable.[76]

Master and slave dialectic in marriage

The following explicit account of the role of women in the family in relation to man, which has been attracting considerable attention, is given by Hegel in his *PhR*:

> Thus one sex is mind 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 mind maintaining

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[70] Ibid., p. 218.

[71] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §255, Zusätz, p. 154.

[72] Ibid., §238, p. 148.

[73] Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*.

[74] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*.

[75] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit 1827–8*, trans. Robert R. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[76] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §239, p. 148.

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 substantial 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 substantial destiny in the family, and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind.[77]

Hegel further stated that "[t]he family as a legal entity in relation to others must be represented by the husband as its head. Further, it is his prerogative to go out and work for its living, to attend to its needs, and to control and administer its capital."[78] As women are excluded from the civil society and public life and are economically dependent on men, they experience domination by the male adult. Given the above, it is not surprising that the most common criticism of Hegel's philosophy of family by the feminists is that it is patriarchal and gender-biased.[79]

In her discussions on how the master and slave dialectic is related to marriage, Aboulafia contended that women as slave enable the dominants, i.e., husband.[80] Similarly, Pateman suggested the relationship between man husband and wife is the same as that of the master and slave: The husband is the master, and the wife is the slave. Feloj appreciated the attempt made by de Beauvoir in harnessing feminism with the master-and-slave dialectic.[81]

Others offer a less feministic view as those given in the introductory section, that Hegel attributed different roles to husband and wife as Moyer described, rather than wife being inferior to husband.[82] For example, Hegel is depicted as offering a non-economic and almost transsexual definition of woman, viewing marriage as a form of partnership.[83] Both genders enjoy equal status and their differences are caused by a biological division of labour.[84] It has also been suggested that it is the biological sex that determines the divine laws.[85] Both Feloj and Majewska highlighted the master-and-slave dialectic in the feminist debate. Their view is that the master-and-slave dialectic was intended to focus on relationship between two men, without taking into consideration women, and therefore unrelated to women's liberation.[86]

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[77] Ibid., §166, p. 114.

[78] Ibid., §170, p. 116.

[79] For example, John Haldane, "Family Matters," *Philosophy* 81(2006): 581–93; see also Brooks, *Hegel's Political Philosophy*.

[80] Mitchell Aboulafia, "What if Hegel's Master and Slave were Women?" In *Transcendence* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 136–56. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804775106-011; Carole Pateman, "Hegel, Marriage, and the Standpoint of Contract." In Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Pres, 1996), pp. 209–23

[81] Feloj, "Hegel's Master and Servant Dialectics in the Feminist Debate."

[82] See Brooks, *Hegel's Political Philosophy*.

[83] Landes, "Hegel's Conception of the Family."

[84] Matějčková, "Hegel's Philosophy of the Modern Family."

[85] Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*.

[86] Serena Feloj, "Hegel's Master and Servant Dialectics in the Feminist Debate." In Stefania Achella, Francesca Iannelli, Gabriella Baptist, Serena Feloj, Fiorinda Li Vigni, and Claudia Melica, eds., *The Owl's Flight: Hegel's Legacy to Contemporary Philosophy* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2022), pp. 141–49. https://doi.org/10.1515.9783110709278-030. Teixeira shares the view that women are simply "excluded" from the

However, what complicates the discussions is that Hegel at the same time pointed out that woman is the everlasting irony of the community.[87]

Despite the diverse perspectives described above, this paper argues that the master and slave relationship exists in marriage. Marriage constitutes both a renunciation of self and being in a new joint relationship. This sacrifice of personality results in the need for the establishment of a new relationship, in the manner as the struggle for recognition of the mater and slave.[88] The establishment of the master and slave relationship is exacerbated by the subjugation of the female by male in patriarchal tradition resulting in unequal power between husband and wife, which is comparable to the master and slave dialectic.

Realisation of individual freedom through private property

As mentioned earlier, in Hegel's philosophy, objective freedom of individuals can only be realised through property. As remarked by Hegel, property which is external allows the family to sustain itself:

> The right of the family properly consists in the fact that its substantiality should have determinate existence. Thus it is a right against externality and against secessions from the unity. On the other hand, to repeat, love is a feeling, something subjective against which unit cannot make itself effective. The demand for unity can be sustained, then, only in relation to such things as are by nature external and not conditioned by feeling.[89]

In addition to depicting the contradictions involved in common property in Paragraph 62, Hegel in his *PhR* provides an example of the tensions caused by common property of family:

> This [family] capital is common property so that, while no member of the family has property of his own, each has his right in the common stock. This right, however, may come into collision with the head of the family's right of administration owing to the fact that the ethical temper of the family is still only at the level of immediacy (see Paragraph 158) and so is exposed to partition and contingency.[90]

Property right as a source of freedom is at the same time a source of conflict and inequality in family. Despite in contemporary society many couples have joint ownership in their property, laws still follow the traditional custom, that priority is given to male descendants in inheritance of property (e.g., in the case of accidental death of parents) in many societies. Wood delineated the difficulty of private property in relation to family in civil society, that the father has no right to dispose property outside the nuclear family.[91] Yeomans revealed that in modern society laws on inheritance are results of intersection of family structure, individual property rights and the economic structure of society, which are very often in conflict with each other.[92] He suggested

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master and slave relationship, that women is the "absolute other" and do not do what the slave did. Mariana Teixeira, "Masters, Slaves, and Us: The Ongoing Allure of the Struggle for Recognition." In Ivan Boldyrev and Sebastian Stein, eds., Interpreting Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit (New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 74–95. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429030192-5

[87] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §159, Addition, p. 262.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*.

[92] Christopher Yeomans, "Property in the Tension between Family and Civil Society: Inheritance According to G. W. F. Hegel and Eduard Gans." In Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch, Daniel Halliday, and Thomas Gutmann,

that family is a source for economic inequality and class structure, and there is a need to balance the needs of family and civil society in terms of personal property and economic resources. Morgan re-iterated the tensions between love and property relations.[93]

Conflicts and lawsuits between couples and among siblings are not uncommon in contemporary society, and this is one dark side of family in modern civil society. In modern society, there are always contradictions between love and the considerations of property.[94] Given the scant attention Hegel paid to the conflicts between the individual and his family, this area needs to be further explored.

Suggested solutions to contemporary family problems

The four causes of family problems introduced in the previous sections seem to have adumbrated a grim picture that in modern society family suffers from and has little power to relieve poverty. This paper attempts to contribute to ameliorate this situation by extending the proposals informed by the Hegelian perspective. Four recommendations are made, and they are namely positive enhancement of bonds among family members through morality, re-discovery of unreflective feelings, deployment of family property, and extension of the scope of the Corporation. Details are given below.

Positive enhancement of bonds among family members through morality

Marriage is ethical in nature.[95] Therefore, enhancement of a sense of familial piety and ethical duty to other family members contributes to the spiritual well-being of family. This can be done by reviewing and reflecting one's roles in the family, taking practical actions to improve the family situations, recognise the ethical duties to other family members, and most importantly acting out pure duty as described earlier. From the perspective of *PhS*, these suggestions facilitate consciousness to unfold itself in the realm of family to objective universality and finally to Absolute Knowing and freedom. From the perspective of *PhR*, these measures can enhance the functioning of family as one of the moments in ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) among the two other moments in the successful realisation of the subjective spirit to the objective reality.

As pointed out earlier, Hegel expressed that civil society tears individuals from their family and deprives them from benefitting from the original functions performed by the family, such as assisting individuals to earn their living or maintaining subsistence in the event of suffering a disability.[96] Re-strengthening family bonds to a certain extent revives the traditional roles of the family. This can be done by maintaining, preserving and reviving family customs, which can be simple acts such as family rituals and family dinners. As underscored in the second section of this paper, one important function of family is performing deeds for the death, which enables the dead family members, other family members, and the family as an institution to be immersed in the universal. With the trend of shifting the centre and management of death to the

eds., *Inheritance and the Right to Bequeath* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 181–97. https://doi.org/1.04324/9781003318477-11

[93] Brandon L. Morgan, "Love as the Logic of Reconciliation in Hegel," *Philosophy & Theology* 30(2018): 59–78. https://doi.org/10.5840/philtheol201882796

[94] Landes, "Hegel's Conception of the Family."

[95] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §155, p. 110.

[96] Ibid., §238, p.149.

public sphere described earlier in this paper, the family can regain some roles, with examples such as rituals in memory of the dead family members and ancestors.

Forgiveness is moral in nature, and mediates between individual consciousness with the divine and others, especially family members.[97] In fact, a feature of marriage as self-sacrifice shares commonness with the self-renunciation feature of forgiveness. Another commonness between marriage (and family relations) and forgiveness is that they are both based on love.[98] Therefore, education on forgiveness especially in terms of family cannot be overlooked. A function of forgiveness is that it plays a recognitive function, that it results in mutual recognition, intersubjectivity and shared meanings among individuals.[99] This function is particularly useful for alleviating family problems caused by alienation in modern civil society, in which individuals are torn off from their family and are treated as self-subsistent individual entity.[100] Forgiveness enables family as a social institution to universalise and make actual contacts with the public sphere. Through forgiveness education, individuals learn the importance and how to respect and protect the rights of others, thus enhancing their morality.[101]

Re-discovery of unreflective feelings

Unreflective feelings is a term which may have negative connotation for individuals in modern society.[102] The (over-)rationalisation of modern life may be a cause for the suppression and annihilation of unreflective feelings, which are basic elements for proper functioning of family and its members. Therefore, there is an urgent need for re-discovering and re-affirming the importance of unreflective feelings for family, in order that many family malfunctions can be resolved or at least relieved.

Concurring with the stance taken by this paper, Ciavatta acknowledged that many social problems such as mental illness has its root in family, especially in terms of feelings and recognition among family members.[103] Hegel regarded mutual love as the basis for marriage.[104] Ongoing maintenance of love between couples for experiencing love from each other contributes positively to the problems involving marriage relations such as divorce, master and slave in marriage, and family poverty described above.[105] Love, which is emphasised more by Hegel in his early works, is a powerful weapon for destroying opposites,[106] a quality that many family problems shares. In his *Early Theological Writings*, Hegel offered the following view:

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[97] Ibid.; Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

[98] Stephen Houglate, "Religion, Morality and Forgiveness in Hegel's Philosophy." In William Desmond, Ernst-Otto Onnasch, and Paul Cruysberghs, eds., *Philosophy and Religion in German Idealism* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), pp. 81–110. https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-2325-1_5

[99] Wu, "Forgiveness Education from an Hegelian Perspective."

[100] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §238, p. 148.

[101] Liz Disley, *Hegel, Love and Forgiveness: Positive Recognition in German Idealism* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2015); Wu, "Forgiveness Education from an Hegelian Perspective." Jarosław Horowski and Marek Jeziorański; Forgiveness and its value from the perspective of educational relationship, *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 45(2024): 603–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2023.2207150

[102] Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious in Hegel's Philosophy*.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §161, p. 111.

[105] Hegel, The Philosophy of Right, §40, p. 39.

[106] Morgan, "Love as the Logic of Reconciliation in Hegel."

True union, or love proper, exists only between living beings who are alike in power and thus in one another's eyes living beings from every point of view; in no respect is either dead for the other … This genuine love excludes all oppositions ... Love neither restricts nor is restricted; it is not finite at all … finally, love completely destroys objectivity and thereby annuls and transcends reflection, deprives man's opposite of all foreign character, and discovers life itself without any further defect.[107]

Deployment of family property

As briefly mentioned in the last section, family property is able to provide reliefs for individuals who suffer from temporary personal misfortunes. Since poverty is a state of mind,[108] the mutual recognition an individual received in family is an excellent means for preventing and overcoming alienation. Family relation is able to change the state of mind of being alienated, especially through providing a home, an embodied shared concrete space for household.[109]

Family property is also a good form of education for children, because parents, in modelling a certain orientation toward family property which is collectively owned and indivisible. Family property can also "enable their children gradually to make the move from natural forms of engagement with things to forms of engagement that are inherently mediated by spiritual forms of recognition."[110]

For Hegel, it is the possession of property that contributes to freedom, not what and how much: "What and how much I possess, therefore, is a matter of indifference so far as rights are concerned."[111] In alleviating poverty, he promotes ownership entitlement and occupancy so that individuals and family can have mastery of external possession and recognition from others, thus realising their freedom.[112] Through repeated use of property, the exercise of rights to the property is transformed to universal.[113] This allows subjective spirit to transform itself to the objective realm.

Extension of Scope of Corporation

Corporation provides a stable basis for the family, that

[i]n the Corporation, the family has its stable basis in the sense that its livelihood is assured there, conditionally upon capability, i.e. it has a stable capital (see Paragraph 170). In addition, this nexus of capability and livelihood is a recognized fact, with the result that the Corporation member needs no external marks beyond his own membership as evidence of his skills and his regular income and subsistence, i.e. as evidence that he is a somebody. It is also recognized that he belongs to a whole which is itself an organ of the entire society, and that he is actively concerned in promoting the comparatively

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[107] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. Thomas Malcolm Knox (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1971), pp. 304–5.

[108] Thom Brooks, "Hegel and the Problem of Poverty," *Kilikya Journal of Philosophy* 2(1) 2015: 1–9.; Matt S. Whitt, "The Problem of Poverty and the Limits of Freedom in Hegel's Theory of the Ethical State," *Political Theory* 41(2013): 257–84.

[109] Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious in Hegel's Philosophy*.

[110] Ibid., p. 181.

[111] Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §49, p. 44.

[112] Ibid., §51–5; p. 45–7.

[113] Ibid., §60, p. 49.

disinterested end of his whole. Thus, he commands the respect due to one in his social position.[114]

Hegel contended that the Corporation should be distinguished from guild, as it is a second family for individuals. Corporation should play the roles of assistance provider for the poor in times of temporal unemployment due to illness and personal circumstances:

> As the family was the first, so the Corporation is the second ethical root of the state, the one planted in civil society. The former contains the moments of subjective particularity and objective universality in a substantial unity. But these moments are sundered in civil society to begin with; on the one side there is the particularity of need and satisfaction, reflected into itself, and on the other side the universality of abstract rights. In the Corporation these moments are united in an inward fashion, so that in this union particular welfare is present as a right and is actualized.[115]

Given the above description, the Corporation should extend its scope to intrude to the family sphere for problems such as family poverty and family crises, for family is Spirit unfolded to the objective sphere as suggested in *PhS*. Connecting to Corporation not only enables the working members of the family to have their right protected but universal recognition for them as a member of the society provided.

Hegel emphasised the duty of civil society to its citizens in terms of poverty.[116] According to him, poverty and the rabble mentality, which is characterised by the loss of a sense of right and wrong, are intimately related. Therefore, Hegel proposes the restoration of the lost sense of right and wrong of the rabble through honesty and self-respect.[117] These recommendations are equally applicable for the family problems which have been described in this paper as many family problems are intimately related to poverty.

In addition to direct interventions, which can take the form of collaborating with government and non-government welfare organisations for the provisions of assistance to family experiencing problems, this paper proposes the provision of *Bildung* by the civil society. *Bildung* is preferable on the education of the younger generations and on raising consciousness on the causes and solutions of family problems for the public at large especially in the context of modern society. Formal and social education on family can be provided by the government (or in Hegelian term Public Authority), the Corporation, and schools. One function of the Corporation Hegel prescribed is the provision of education for potential members.[118]

Conclusion

This paper begins with highlighting the relatively lack of attention given by Hegel and Hegelian commentators on problems related to family in civil society. This is followed by introducing the causes of these family problems from a Hegelian perspective. The solutions which have been offered by Hegelian commentators are also introduced. This paper contributes to Hegelian scholarship to date on this topic by extending Hegel's proposals to date. The unique recommendations made in this paper are positive enhancement of bonds among family

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114 Ibid., §253, p. 153.

115 Ibid., §255, p. 154.

116 Ibid., §240, Additions, p. 277.

117 Ibid., §244, p. 150.

118 Ibid., §252, p.152–3.

members through morality, re-discovery of unreflective feelings, deployment of family property, and the extension of scope of Corporation.

It is hoped that the preliminary discussions embarked in this paper will raise the awareness of the significance of family problems in modern society among Hegelian commentators. This, in turn, can generate more discussions, and most importantly, proposals on solving and relieving these problems. At the same time, further discussions on this area can contribute to empowering Hegel's philosophy in understanding and resolving problems experienced by modern family. As the family unit is the building block of civil society and one of the three highest moments of *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*), its intactness is the key to consciousness's development and Spirit unfolding itself to human collectivity thus realisation of freedom on a collective level.

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