

# Reflections on the Me Too Movement and Its Philosophy

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The importance of the Harvey Weinstein case far exceeds the outbreak of emotion that it provoked. In truth it concerns the general representation of sexual relations. In short, a paradigm change originated from it. The Me Too movement is both a consequence and a symptom of that change.

## *1) The Origin and Structure of the Me Too Movement*

There have been many sexual scandals in the history of Hollywood. But they have been considered violations of a generally accepted standard of conduct. In an indirect way, they confirmed that rape was not the rule but an all too frequent exception. In the Weinstein case, on the contrary, the scandal was not that the rule had been infringed upon, but that the rule itself had been reversed. Rape was the rule, not the exception. Moreover, that situation was not considered a singularity of the film industry; it followed from the very structure of the sexual act. It revealed the true nature of what goes on between human beings whenever they engage in sexual activity: not only in Hollywood, not only in the United States, but everywhere. The “Me Too” label is in itself significant: the word *too* implies a mechanism of indefinite addition. It means that every human being may in the past have

been or may in the future become a victim of the same sexual rule that allowed Harvey Weinstein and others to act as they did.

Although the Weinstein case and the Me Too movement are of universal significance, it is not surprising that they should take place in the United States. U.S. history began with a struggle against what the European-born immigrants considered to be savagery. Nature was to be domesticated; the natives were quickly identified as savages and exterminated as such. Yet when those tasks had been accomplished, it appeared in the twentieth century that there remained one dark area where savagery still prevailed: sexual life. If U.S. society wanted to remain faithful to its founding principles, it needed to civilize that last remainder of brutal animality. Complete equality between men and women, political correctness in everyday practices, prohibition of microaggressions — such a program seemed both necessary and sufficient to reduce sexual savagery.

Western Europe was somehow slow on the uptake. For a long time, it was convinced that it had already perfected a definitive model of civilization; what had begun with Quattrocento Humanism had reached its peak at the beginning of the twentieth century. Admittedly, the two world wars destroyed most of its achievements. Yet nothing essential needed to be added to the model itself, especially in sexual matters. The task was merely to restore what had been lost. U.S. society, on the contrary, conceived of civilization as a work in progress. The European model was only a point of departure, especially in sexual matters. For that reason, sexual reformation became one of the main concerns of U.S. theoretical and practical reflection. Society thus remained faithful to the creed to which it had adhered since the beginnings of its history: savagery must be reduced not only at a collective level, but also between individuals and even in the mind of every individual. In this domain, U.S. thinkers took the lead starting in the 1960s; European culture had to follow.

Yet the Weinstein case showed also that political correctness and the banishment of microaggressions had failed. The liberal and

feminist activists had not adequately considered the continuing reality of macroaggressions. In fact, far from being a continuation of feminism, Me Too implies a harsh criticism of its main tenets and a veiled contempt for its figureheads. The Weinstein case, in particular, seemed to establish that the ideology of political correctness had been just that: an ideology, which proved radically ineffective against the reality of sexual savagery. The insistence on microaggressions had led to the neglect of macroaggressions. The question to be raised did not concern the collateral effects of sexual life or its surface structure; rather, it involved the deep structure of sexual life and the core of its structure, namely coitus. Although such discussions had already taken place in feminist literature, they had been confined to academic circles. According to Me Too, the decisive battlefield was no longer the campus; it was, rather, public opinion. The utility of clever articles and brilliant books belonged to the past. Mass media and social networks were more important. The question of coitus needed to be raised bluntly; in order to do that, uneducated lesser celebrities of the Internet were preferable to the icons of Women's Studies.

In truth, the Me Too movement seemed almost immediately to oscillate between two conceptions. At first, the center of the scandal was sexual violence *per se*. Admittedly, Harvey Weinstein had the power to promote or destroy the careers of the women whom he used, but that fact was the auxiliary condition enabling him to exert a constraint without ever fearing to be caught or denounced. It was not the defining factor. In a second period, it appeared that the central fact was, on the contrary, the way Harvey Weinstein misused the professional position he occupied; while his almost unlimited power was deemed acceptable as long as it benefited the film industry, it became shameful once it became the means to satisfy personal sexual appetites. The sexual dimension added, of course, to the gravity of the crime; but the real scandal lay in the infringement of a professional rule.

In fact, there are two faces of the movement. One could be called the sexual Me Too movement; the other could be called

the “professionalist” Me Too movement. It is the first that had an almost universal echo around the world, as well as followers in countries where the professional structures are completely different from those prevailing in the U.S. Yet the second movement seems to have gained recent prominence in the U.S., thereby forsaking the universality of its beginnings.<sup>1</sup>

Precisely on account of its universal appeal, the sexual Me Too movement deserves a special attention. I shall focus my examination on its intellectual implications. Whatever may have happened afterwards, one novelty is undeniable: with unprecedented intensity, the movement has publicly and extensively raised the question of coitus.

## *2) Historical Data about the Sexual Act's Conceptions*

Historically, coitus had been conceived in two different ways: either as the fusion of two bodies into one or as the use of one body by another. The main difference between the two models resides in the status of unity and duality. Fusion demands that two bodies become one, if only for an instant; use allows two bodies to remain, until the end, separate and distinct.<sup>2</sup> A common example of fusion is the incorporation of food; once digested, bread or water becomes an element in the eater's or drinker's body. Two become One. On the other hand, the user of a tool and the tool itself are equally separate at the beginning as at the end of the process. Duality is irreducible.

Plato adopted the paradigm of fusion but had to devise a stratagem to deal with it, since he was convinced that the fusion of two bodies was impossible; thus, he substituted souls for bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Prof. Daniel Heller-Roazen for having pointed out to me the importance of the “professionalist” approach.

<sup>2</sup> A more detailed study is to be found in Milner 2018.

The fusion of souls was supposed to overcome the defects of the physical act. The Latin poet and philosopher Lucretius was also convinced of the essential impossibility of sexual fusion; but as an Epicurean he rejected Plato's strategy of substitution. In the fourth book of the *De Rerum Natura*, written in the first century before the Christian era, he expounds the darkest possible doctrine of coitus. Its imaginary goal is fusion, but this goal cannot be reached; sexual partners' moans and physical efforts prove that they are lost in the pursuit of an illusion. Because the most obvious example of a successful fusion is the incorporation of food, the partners seek to bite each other's flesh or to drink each other's fluids; but they immediately grasp that such tactics never succeed. Lucretius concludes that there is no such thing as sexual pleasure; even between the most beautiful and loving bodies, coitus results in suffering and disappointment. In the fruitless quest for the impossible, it cannot avoid the constant risk of brutality, savagery even.

Lucretius's poem must have shocked its contemporary readers. That may explain why it was lost until the Renaissance. Even after the text had been rediscovered, its doctrine of coitus was not often taken into account. Kant is a major exception. Although he does not quote Lucretius's name, he adopts his views. Moreover, he renders explicit the Latin poet's underlying axiom: in 1798, Kant states openly: "carnal enjoyment is *cannibalistic* in principle (even if not always in effect)" (Kant 1996, p. 127).<sup>3</sup>

In Lucretius as in Kant, the relation is symmetrical. Each partner is as brutal and animalistic as the other. There is no difference, in this respect, between male and female. While the two approaches share this essential similarity, they differ, however,

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<sup>3</sup> The statement belongs to an appendix to the *Doctrine of Right*, Remark 3, added in 1798 to the second edition of *The Metaphysics of Morals*; the first edition had been published in 1796. It should be kept in mind that *The Metaphysics of Morals* is divided into two parts, the *Doctrine of Right* and the *Doctrine of Virtue*.

on one crucial issue. Lucretius adheres to one paradigm and one alone, namely the fusion of two bodies into one: there is no overcoming its impossibility; there is no remedy for the radical savagery and eventual dissatisfaction of coitus. Kant, on the contrary, combines the two paradigms of fusion and of use; moreover, the latter is conceived as a solution to the cannibalistic tendency of the former.

According to Kant, the male partner uses some parts of the female's body and the female partner uses some parts of the male's body (*The Doctrine of Right*, §§ 22–27; *ibid.* pp. 69–70). Although Kant does not consider homosexual relations, his analysis could easily be extended to them. Cannibalism is avoided because the user does not seek the destruction of the tool that he or she is using. There is, however, a price to pay. Each partner negates his or her own humanity. For two reasons: a) each partner treats himself or herself and the other as a mere thing; b) each partner lowers himself or herself and the other to the position of user of another human being. Each partner negates their own humanity by negating the humanity of the other.

The solution to this difficulty lies in the contractual form. Each partner gives his or her explicit consent; both give it freely and simultaneously. Each of the partners acts as a free subject at the very moment when a part of their body is put to use; each of them treats the other as a free subject at the very moment when they use the other's body. Both partners agree to be treated simultaneously and symmetrically as passive things and as free moral subjects. Provided neither of them forgets the terms of the contract, the radical savagery of coitus is successfully overcome.

Many commentators have considered these views as hopelessly obsolete or even laughable. But in present day reality, many countries have revived the Kantian approach. The only significant modification involves marriage. Kant held that free consent should be given once and for all; thus, he argued that the sole institution that materializes it adequately is monogamous marriage. Today,

marriage is deemed neither necessary nor sufficient; free consent should be given explicitly by both partners—whether married or not—before *every* single action viewed as sexual, be it coitus, a simple kiss, or even a glance. The Scandinavian countries, in particular, have much confidence in this type of social regulation. In the absence of a document signed by both parties, all types of sexual action should be considered as attempted rape.

### *3) Marx's Criticism of the Contractual Form in General*

Such confidence in contractual form cannot be considered self-evident. Marx, for instance, raised radical objections against it. The first book of *Capital* is devoted to a close analysis of the labor contract. It endeavors to show that such a contract only appears to be symmetrical; in reality, it is based on irreducible asymmetry. The worker may seem free to sell his labor time in the same way the employer is free to hire the worker. Yet there is a difference: the worker has to sell his labor-power in order to survive, while the employer reckons only with the question of profit. Survival and profit cannot be considered symmetrical. Although Marx emphasized the specificity of the labor contract—that is, surplus value—his approach far exceeds the sphere of labor.<sup>4</sup> It raises a general question: Is a contract between human beings ever symmetrical?

Curiously, Kant himself provides an example that validates Marx's doubts. After having pointed to the cannibalistic nature of sexual intercourse, he adds: "Whether something is *consumed* by mouth and teeth, or whether the woman is consumed by

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<sup>4</sup> I am leaving aside the details of the theory of surplus value, although I am adhering to it. The notion of surplus value belongs to the specific analysis of human labor, while my purpose here is to consider only the general notions of contract and of usage.

pregnancy and the perhaps fatal delivery resulting from it, or the man by exhaustion of his sexual capacity from the woman's frequent demands upon it, the difference is merely in the manner of enjoyment" (Kant 1996, p. 127). Obviously, both men and women are considered "equally" at risk. No one would deny the accuracy of Kant's assessment of the mortal dangers of pregnancy and childbirth. But the man's "exhaustion of his sexual capacity from the woman's frequent demands upon it" does not lay claim to such certainty. The modern reader can hardly suppress a smile; but it is interesting to note that in the nineteenth century, reactions must have been similar. For instance, when *The Metaphysics of Morals* was partially published in English under the title *The Philosophy of Law*, the translator conveniently suppressed these lines (Kant 1887, p. 239). They are not only subject to ridicule; they also reveal the impossibility of equating the dangers that women and men undergo. Exactly as with workers and employers, there is no common measure. What is at stake for women is a matter of life and death (this was especially true in 1798, but it remains true today); what is at stake for men is, at most, a matter of comfort and longevity.

Kant relied on contractual form because it enabled him to regulate the use-model. Marx criticized the contractual form, but he also analyzed the use-relation itself. His conception of use-value must be taken into account.<sup>5</sup> To make use of a knife, the user must master the knife; this much holds for all types of tools. It also holds for the use of a human being's body by another human being. As long as they make use of somebody or something, users master those or that which they use. But then the relevant relation is nothing but domination. Whenever use is involved, domination is at stake. The labor contract is a case in

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<sup>5</sup> The essential passages are to be found in the opening chapters of *Capital*, Vol. 1. Cf. the section entitled "The Two Factors of the Commodity: Use-Value and Value" (Marx 1990, pp. 125–31).

point. It is unequal in two distinct ways: a) it is unequal because it is a contract, and all contracts are asymmetrical; b) it is also unequal because it involves use, and use always entails domination. Between a user and an inanimate tool, domination may not necessarily imply social domination of the user over the tool; it need not be expressed in terms of power. But between two human beings, domination immediately takes on a social character, opposing a socially (and sometimes physically) stronger being to a socially weaker being.

From this point of view, Kant's solution becomes irrelevant, because there is no such thing as a reciprocal domination. No one may be both strong and weak from the same point of view and at a single time. Of course, there may be successive periods where dominance changes its orientation. The former master may become the servant and the former servant may become the master; but it is impossible to conceive of a simultaneous combination of opposite roles. Analogously, an individual may dominate another in one respect, while he or she is dominated in another. But in the Kantian conception, opposite roles must be defined in exactly the same terms at the same moment. That requirement is crucial; and, according to Marx's analysis, it is impossible to fulfill.

Consequently, Kant's approach is weakened on two accounts. First, Kant's belief in the symmetrical nature of contracts is rejected as an illusion. No contract is symmetrical, because what is at stake for one party and what is at stake for the other always differ radically; but in a social context (and a contract between human beings is immediately social), difference entails inequality. In all contracts, one partner loses (or wins) more than the other. Second, the relation of use in itself implies a certain type of domination. Between two human beings, domination is the domination of the weaker by the stronger.

Of course, Marx's approach does not mention the sexual act, yet, although it was conceived as a criticism of political economy, its relevance is much wider. Many discussions of the sexual act

are in fact based on claims easily translatable into Marxian terms. The protests following the Weinstein case are a prime example. Admittedly, Marx's theory does not seem to have been a source of inspiration for the leaders of the Me Too movement, but that does not affect the logical analogy of the arguments.

#### 4) *The Weinstein Case and the Theory of Contract*

One must not underestimate the situation that prevailed at the end of the twentieth century. After a long struggle, the liberal conception of society had achieved an almost complete victory. In Western societies, it was generally acknowledged that mutual consent offers the best possible basis for human relationships, not only from an ethical point of view, but also in terms of material success. The most adequate expression of mutual consent was thought to be contract, rather than law. Even among intellectuals, where the Marxian objections had been taken into account for a long time, the liberal approach began to be accepted as an undisputed point of departure. In the U.S. especially, the primacy of mutual consent seemed beyond doubt, especially in sexual matters. All types of asymmetry between stronger and weaker human beings could thus be resolved.

The Weinstein case exploded these beliefs. In the very country where mutual consent defined the ultimate rule, it appeared that its social effectiveness was next to nil where sexual relations were concerned. For these relations are *always* based on inequality. That structure is so general that mutual consent loses any significance. Admittedly, most of Weinstein's victims had not given their consent; but some of them had done so. When their testimony was challenged, they explained that their so-called acceptance followed from the risks that they ran if they refused. In more general terms, even if the weaker party gives his or her consent, that acceptance does not compensate for his or her relative weakness. In the labor

contract, the workers may seem to give their free consent; their structural weakness, however, remains the determining factor for their acceptance. The same is true of the so-called sexual contract.

It is legitimate to draw general conclusions from the Weinstein case. The sexual act constitutes the material basis of existence for all types of human societies. If it is essentially unequal, then that inequality may extend to all types of relationships in a given society. A general analysis of social inequality can then be developed; it will be analogous to Marx's analysis, except that it will find its point of departure in the sexual relation rather than the labor contract. This type of analysis did not begin with the Weinstein case. During the 1960s, it was widespread among intellectuals; but in that period Marxist theory was well known. Its approach could easily be applied to the analysis of sexual relationships. Such an approach was conceived as an extension of Marxism.

With the Weinstein case, we have the reverse: the reflection begins with sexual inequality and social analysis is no more than an extension of it. Moreover, reflection about sexual relations is not confined to intellectual circles; on the contrary, it started as a massive reaction of the so-called silent majority, which suddenly ceased to remain silent. Consequently, it would be imprudent to suppose that the analogies with Marx's doctrine were common knowledge among the followers of the Me Too movement. Even the rejection of the contractual model is not always explicit. Instead, the reference to patriarchy is deemed sufficient to characterize the type of society that allowed Weinstein and others to act as they did.

Me Too is indeed a mass phenomenon. While the creation of an academic field of Women's Studies could be considered an important victory for feminism, the consequences of the Weinstein case exceeded the limits of what could be called the intellectual *bourgeoisie*. Some icons of earlier feminism are rather severe with Me Too; the Me Too movement, for its part, is quite indifferent to their criticisms and generally does not seek justification in theoretical works by earlier feminists. But that does not mean that there

are no conceptual claims in the movement. On the contrary, even though they may not be explicit, these claims can be specified. They may be combined to form a doctrine, or rather a *philosophy*.

### 5) *The Philosophy of the Sexual Me Too Movement*

The most important of these claims concerns the opposition between the weak and the strong. First of all, the reason for which the contractual form is ineffective lies in the fact that there is no just contract where one party is weaker than the other. Such is the case in sexual relations. Second, weakness and strength are not descriptive qualities; they are, rather, structural. It may happen that the structurally weaker party appears, from a descriptive point of view, stronger than the structurally stronger party. That does not affect the effectiveness of the structure. Third, in sexual relations, the woman is structurally weaker than the man. It is irrelevant to check whether a particular woman is more powerful, more influential, richer or even physically stronger than the man. These are descriptive features; they are of no consequence when compared to the structural fact that woman as such is the weaker party.

This entails an overturning of the usual representations. For a long time, female weakness was thought of either in descriptive or in machist terms. The feminist program either denied this fact or sought to compensate for it by various achievements, in terms of intellectual competence, social power, professional success, and so on. Machism repeatedly derided these achievements by going back to the simplest physical level. Since the Me Too movement, the machist argument has been reversed; instead of justifying a general inferiority of women, women's structural weakness legitimates the necessity of specific women's rights. Obviously, the importance of intellectual or social achievements is maintained; but it has no bearing on the structure of coitus. Even in Western societies, where women have made decisive progress in terms of

social power, every single woman is powerless when threatened by the risk of rape. There is no need to investigate a woman's bank account or measure her physical force to prove that this risk exists. It is a question of structure; and that structure depends on the sexual relation itself, as shown in coitus. Where a specific risk exists, a specific protection is required.

Consequently, every sexual act between a man and a woman is a potential rape, regardless of whether she initially gave her consent, took the initiative, or experienced pleasure. It may even happen that a woman retrospectively feels that she has been subjected to some kind of psychological or physical violence; although she did not feel it during the act, her belated grievance is justified. Until now, a difference of kind separated legitimate coitus from rape; since the Weinstein case, according to the philosophy of Me Too, the difference is simply one of degree. The criterion resides in the woman's sensitivity, not in consent. If before, during, or after (even long after) coitus, she feels the slightest trace of violence, she has been raped. Since rape is a crime against humanity, it ought to be imprescriptible.

According to this doctrine, it is irrelevant to argue that a feeling is subjective by nature; it is irrelevant to argue that recollections may be misleading. What is relevant is that the woman, here and now, feels herself to have experienced her own weakness. That feeling is not *per se* subjective; it reflects the objective structure governing coitus. After all, many linguists hold that native speakers' intuitive feeling about their own language is the most reliable evidence about that language. Why? Because it directly reflects the objective structure of the grammar. The same is true of the woman's feelings about the coitus in which she participated.

Once again, Marx's approach presents a fruitful analogy. According to his doctrine, it may happen, in some exceptional cases, that a labor contract is equitable. This does not reduce the inequity that characterizes the capitalist relation between employer and worker. Even when a labor contract successfully passes all legal

and economic tests, its deep structure is nothing but fraud. Between an honest employer and a crook, the difference is one of degree, not kind. The employer-thief reveals the true nature of legitimate employment. Without any explicit reference to *Capital*, the Me Too philosophy thus conceives of the link of ordinary coitus to rape. The latter reveals the true nature of the former.

In the Preamble of the French *Declaration of Rights* of 1789, the crucial sentence is the following: *les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits*, “men are born and remain free and equal in rights.” As soon as it was published, some women objected to the exclusive character of the noun *hommes* (men). But even if the noun is understood in an inclusive way, as referring to both men and women, the *Declaration’s* founding principle cannot be sanctioned by the philosophy of Me Too. In its extreme form, that philosophy would deny that men and women are born equal in terms of strength, while also rejecting Simone de Beauvoir’s motto: “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (de Beauvoir 2010, p. 283). But in all its versions, it would certainly deny that men and women *remain* equal. That negative conclusion may seem to go back to the oldest machist stereotypes; it needs, however, to be understood in a new way: if men and women were to be treated by society as perfectly equal in *all* respects, in such an ideal world a fundamental inequality would still prevail. Its basis lies in the sexual relation and in its central materialization, namely, coitus.

Given such a structural and constant inequality, the question of rights must be considered anew. It is now impossible to be satisfied with the abstract notion of equality summarized in the statement “human beings are born equal in rights.” A new notion of rights must be defined: rights have as their essential mission to protect the weaker against the stronger. If the essence of rights is the protection of the weaker, a consequence immediately follows: only the weaker should have *real* rights. Given the thesis “Women are the structurally weaker party in the sexual relation,” the consequence entails that only women have rights in all matters that involve the sexual relation and especially coitus. In other words,

the notion of *human rights* is an illusion, since it presupposes a core of rights common to the weaker and the stronger.

That is what happens today in the judiciary domain. Whenever sexual relations are involved, there is no place for a fair trial. It is deemed improper to invoke the notion of “reasonable doubt.” In any case, no doubt should benefit a man accused of sexual abuse of any sort. In short, the gravity of the accusation should suffice to validate the accusation itself. In extreme cases, the individual identity of the culprit may not be established with certainty. Considering the nature of monarchy, Saint-Just declared during Louis XVI’s trial: “No one can reign innocently.” The philosophy of Me Too likewise implies that no male can act innocently in coitus. In other words, men have no rights in the domain of sexual relations.

There is an argument often advanced to justify the irrelevance of the classical conception of rights. For a long period of time, men benefitted from unfair advantages, especially when women accused them of misbehavior, brutalities, or rape; given such a tradition of injustice and neglect, it is a matter of simple compensation that, in some cases, the balance should be reversed. However, the philosophy of Me Too goes further than this; it holds that the only effective weapon against inequity is inequity itself, provided that it systematically reverse the former inequity’s orientation. When Harvey Weinstein’s lawyers complain about the way their client will be tried, they have a point, but they do not take into account what is at stake, namely a total change of paradigm.

#### *6) Four Questions about the Philosophy of Me Too*

The philosophy of the sexual Me Too movement deserves to be considered carefully. In other words, it deserves to be criticized. However justified the revolt at the origins of this massive protest movement, it is legitimate to question some aspects of its ideological rationalization.

The first question concerns the analysis of the sexual act. One may wonder about the material basis for the structural partition between weaker and stronger parties. The only plausible answer has to do with penetration: woman is the weaker party in coitus because her body is penetrated. In one of his last writings, “Joyce le Symptôme” (Lacan 2001),<sup>6</sup> Lacan propounds a theory of the body. He singles out the relation expressed by “having a,” and he defines human being as having a body. At the same time, he rejects the relevance of the relation expressed by “being a.” From a merely linguistic point of view, it is interesting to note that the verb “to have” (like the French verb *avoir*) excludes the possibility of an identity between subject and object. Although it is transitive, “to have” cannot be used reflexively: “I have myself” seems grammatically odd as long as “to have” means “to be in possession of,” while “I own myself” has become rather frequent in psychological terminology. In French, the same is true of the impossible *je m’ai* or *il s’a*, in contrast to the unusual yet possible *je me possède*, *il se possède*. Yet in penetration, is it still true that the penetrated woman *has* her body?

Admittedly, Lacan does not mention the sexual act in “Joyce le Symptôme.” But it is legitimate to apply his model to it. A decisive step is taken by the text’s introduction of the phrase *to have a human being*. “Puisque l’homme a un corps, c’est par le corps qu’on l’a”: “Since man has a body, it is by means of the body that one has him” (ibid., p. 568).<sup>7</sup> Lacan was of course perfectly aware of the difficulties that originated in the use of the noun phrase *l’homme* and of its English translation *man*. Even though his article does not directly deal with them, it makes it obvious that *homme* and *man* must be understood here in an inclusive way. An admissible

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<sup>6</sup> The article is based on a talk given in 1975.

<sup>7</sup> The indefinite pronoun *on* derives historically from the Latin *homo*. It may only refer to human beings, without determining their quantity. Although the verb phrase’s agreement is always singular, *on* may designate either an anonymous multiplicity or an anonymous individual.

paraphrase could be: *Someone has a human being, whether male or female, by means of the body that that human being has.*

That formula summarizes the ultimate Lacanian doctrine of domination. An implicit consequence follows: the human being that someone other has does not fully have his/her body anymore. Although Lacan does not use the passive form, it is convenient to express the situation of a dominated being as follows: *The human being is had by means of the body he/she has.* The example Lacan gives is drawn from twentieth-century history; obviously, he was thinking of the concentration camps. But consider coitus: Is it absurd to hold that the penetrated woman *is had* by means of the penetration of the body she has? Is it absurd to consider that, during penetration, she does not *have* her body in the same way as before penetration? Such an approach could easily be extended to homosexual relationships, and Me Too always claimed to be concerned also with violences and abuses between sexual partners of the same gender. In short, Lacan's conception could be accepted in the philosophy of Me Too.

A subtlety, however, would have to be taken into account. Lacan does not state that a body is dominating another body; he says that a human being dominates another human being by means of the latter's body, or that a human being is dominated by another human being by means of his own body. Since Lacan refuses to consider that the human being *is* his body, the domination takes place between human beings rather than human bodies. However, the Me Too philosophy seems rather inclined to accept the equation *human being = human body*. In other words, Lacan's conception of sexual relation remains a relation between human beings (by means of the bodies they have); it is not a relation between bodies. On the contrary, Me Too's conception of coitus seems to be a relation between two material bodies, defined by their material anatomy, instead of a relation between human beings.

Coitus and penetration entail domination. Domination entails a partial or total loss on the part of the dominated woman of the

body that she had. Once again, the analysis could be modified in order to include homosexual relations. The sexual Me Too movement views the consequences of this structure as all-pervasive and affecting all sexual relations involving men, however gentle they may seem. But in that case, the philosophy of the sexual Me Too movement goes back to Freud's saying: "Anatomy is destiny" (Freud 2001 [1912], p. 189). In other words, where Women's Studies succeeded in separating gender from anatomy, Me Too returns to a particularly strong form of anatomical determinism. Once again, it breaks with earlier feminist conceptions.

Nevertheless, a second question must be raised. Is this return of anatomy necessary and sufficient to resolve the many problems that arise concerning sexual identity? Does the Me Too movement render the notion of gender completely obsolete? Since surgery (vaginoplasty or phalloplasty) is the only way to allow passive or active penetration, must it become the privileged procedure with respect to the wishes of transgender persons?

A third interrogation concerns the decision to focus on penetration and coitus. If coitus is indeed the main cause of all sexual brutalities, and the actual basis of the domination exerted by men over women, then the only way to modify the prevailing situation must concern coitus itself. But penetration seems to be indissociable from it. Does that mean that coitus should be prohibited or considered at least as an extreme sexual practice, analogous, for example, to bondage? Procreation without coitus should prevail, since the new developments of scientific research have made it possible. *In vitro* fertilization could become the preferential method to be adopted by politically minded couples. It could even be made obligatory. Moreover, it could be combined with the strict birth control that some ecologists believe to be unavoidable, if the climate change problems should be effectively addressed. Although such developments seem nowadays to belong to science fiction novels or television series, there is no principled way for the sexual Me Too movement to exclude them. Is that

really an acceptable social or political ideal for the living beings that, until now, were called human and that, in the near future, may be irreconcilably divided into two anatomically opposed subspecies, one male and one female?

It is disquieting to hear, in the accusations levelled against men taken as an homogeneous group, the echoes of analogous accusations that in the past were, and sometimes still are, levelled against other “homogeneous” groups, namely the so-called savages or the Jews or the Amerindians or the Afro-Americans or the Latinos or immigrants of all origins. Once again, we must refer to Lacan (Lacan 1995, p. 12, and 2015, p. 16).<sup>8</sup> He predicted that the rise of the universal market would be followed by increasing demands for segregation. Such a demand is undeniably latent in the sexual Me Too movement. In other words, women’s material freedom is conceived as requiring an apartheid, segregating sexually mature males from the rest of the society.

The fourth interrogation concerns the notion of structural weakness. It is impossible for the sexual Me too movement to tolerate some oversimplified formulations that we find in mass media and according to which women supposedly hold a monopoly over weakness. Almost immediately the objection arises: What about the relation between children or teenagers and adults? Is it possible to state without reservations that an adult woman is structurally weaker than a male child or even a male teenager? Without taking a stand about the validity of the accusation levelled by a young comedian against the filmmaker Asia Argento, the crucial facts lie both in the question it raises and in the short time it took for it to appear. From a more general point of view, it should be acceptable, even for the leaders of the sexual Me Too movement, to grant that in sexual relations in particular and in social relations in general children or teenagers are the weakest

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<sup>8</sup> The statement belonged originally to a spoken intervention that took place in 1968.

party with respect to the adults, even when they are males facing a female adult. Pedophilia is not confined to the limits of the Catholic Church, nor is it exclusive to male adults.

### 7) *About a Defect in the Program of Me Too*

A discussion of children and teenagers immediately leads to the question of the familial environment and incest. In that domain, it should be clear that the structurally weaker party are not women *per se*.

On the contrary, by insisting on the status of adult women and on penetration, the philosophy of the sexual Me Too movement is led to forget about a massive phenomenon: the acts of violence exerted on young girls *before* penetration is supposed to have happened. The practice of female circumcision is a case in point. It is not only widespread, but spreading. In the name of multiculturalism, many Western countries refuse to take any action against this development. Although it may be argued that the custom derives from a patriarchal system of values, it is often imposed and performed on younger girls by older women—their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, etc. In such a case, the relevant feature is not the domination of men over women, but the domination of adults over children.<sup>9</sup>

For a long time, women have protested against the use of the noun *man* as designating humanity in general, but the same defect marks the use of the noun *woman* and of the adjective *feminine* as designating female human beings in general, without taking note of the fact that girls are submitted to specific violences.

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<sup>9</sup> These considerations about female circumcision rely heavily on a still unpublished work by Dominique Sigaud. She is presently conducting an extensive research about the girls' status in various societies. She granted me access to her documentation and to the conclusions she is drawing from them. I am very grateful to her for this invaluable information.

There is no reason for confusing a girl with an adult woman, for the risks they are exposed to are not always the same. The all too spontaneous use of the phrase “women’s rights” implies the same denial as the use of the phrase “rights of man.” I would even submit the hypothesis that, nowadays, such a denial entails graver consequences.

Admittedly, for the time being the practice of female circumcision remains a specificity of cultures the existence of which the Me Too movement does not seem to mention often, if at all. But, should this be confirmed, such a lack of attention is in itself inexcusable. If the movement and its sexual philosophy do not curb their propensity for neglecting the specific inequality between children (or teenagers) and adults, if they consider it but a subcase of the unequal relations between adults, and if, moreover, they keep forgetting about societies that exist outside the narrow circles that have adopted the liberal capitalist way of life, then disaster is unavoidable. The sexual Me Too movement will emerge as a new version of the white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant system of values. In the name of civilization, it will carry the same rejection of the so-called savages and the same horror for the physical reality of bodies that the so-called savages (in other words, men as such, but also natives, Blacks, Jews, Latinos, immigrants, etc.) are accused of rendering unbearably present.

The sexual Me Too movement entails the fearful possibility of such an evolution. All the more so since its “professionalistic” counterpart has openly chosen the path of white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant ideology. According to its views, the main aspect in the Harvey Weinstein case has to do with the fact that the sexual assaults took place within a professional framework, between a man who exerted an almost absolute power in the film industry and women who wanted to make a career in that industry. Two problems then arose: a) it is impermissible for any individual to use their professional position to satisfy their own personal fantasies (whether sexual or not); b) while there is nothing wrong with the

almost absolute power some individuals exert (provided that they remain professional), there is something fundamentally wrong with the fact that women do not hold such a position.

The sexual aspect of the abuse of professional power is no longer essential; seen from the point of view of professional ethics, the gravity of the offence would have been the same even if it had involved non-sexual idiosyncrasies such as forced binge-drinking or roulette. Sexual regulations are necessary, of course, but they function as a component of the general regulations that must be imposed on professional life and which concern the respective status of men and women. Consequently, the main goal of this specific version of the Me Too movement is twofold: on the one hand, professional life must be governed by contracts that specifically exclude any behavior, however innocuous it may seem, that a woman might experience as (either physically or morally) offensive or coercive; on the other hand, professional life must abolish any rule, however insignificant it may seem, that a woman might experience as advantageous to men.

In this conception, sexual harassment is understood in such a way that it becomes a component of a wider notion of harassment. That wider notion of harassment is indeed wide enough to include the mere physical presence of masculine bodies in a space that a woman might experience as narrow.

According to well-informed sources, the professional approach is becoming ever more widespread in contemporary U.S. society. The sexual approach of the Me Too movement, however, has not disappeared. Indeed, it still prevails outside of the U.S. It is not surprising then that the two versions of the movement should influence one another. If the “professionalist” version of Me Too comes to affect its sexual version with excessive depth, then all the limitations I pointed out will take effect. In that case, the hopes raised in the earlier days of Me Too will be crushed. Admittedly, the number of highly paid and powerful women will increase. That will ensure great changes in the composition of the

small elite that rules over the few superpowers and their satellite states. Even if that evolution benefited women of the middle and lower middle classes, its impact will be both symbolically important and materially limited. The effective situation of women around the world will not change. There is no such thing as a trickle-down in the economy; there is no such thing as a trickle-down in social matters.

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