

Kant's Enlightenment and Women's Peculiar Immaturity

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Abstract

In 'What is Enlightenment?', Kant claims that no women are currently enlightened. Here I argue that this exclusion is due to certain legal restrictions guiding Kant's conception of enlightenment. As enlightenment is intended to take place in society, it appears that Kant has a specific legal context in mind that affects its enactment. His twofold conception of citizenship and the dimension of subordination he puts forward by restricting the private use of reason will prove useful in clarifying those legal restrictions. It thus seems unlikely that Kant intended women to take an active part in enlightenment.

Keywords: Kant, Enlightenment, women, sexual equality, sexual difference, immaturity

1. Introduction

As a form of progress of humanity, the ideals of the Enlightenment have sparked interest among scholars ever since the eighteenth century. Some recent contributions examining these ideals have raised a question worth asking: were all members of humanity expected to participate equally in the Enlightenment, understood as a form of progress of humanity?¹ This question points to obvious gender- and race-related considerations.

While Immanuel Kant's practical philosophy, broadly construed, has generated similar concerns, his conception of enlightenment² in particular has received less attention in that respect. And yet Kant himself suggests that humanity as a whole may well progress towards enlightenment even if some of its members do not actively take part in that progression.³ The question, then, is whether the contributions of individuals are

unequal only by accident or if some are expected to contribute more than others. In light of Kant's racist and sexist remarks and of the questions they raise for the universality of his moral philosophy, it seems worth asking whether gender can affect one's participation in the Enlightenment.⁴

To be sure, the improvement in the use of reason suggested by Kant's famous motto 'Have the courage to use your own understanding!' could apply, at least in theory, to all rational beings. Yet Kant's conception of enlightenment is not restricted to the individual improvement of one's reason: it is also a social endeavour, taking place within a particular political and legal context. Social interactions play a major role in the enlightenment of a people, if only because Kant acknowledges that individuals can hinder the enlightenment of others by scaring them out of thinking for themselves; or, on the contrary, facilitate the enlightenment of others by setting a good example:

It is much more likely that an entire public should enlighten itself; indeed it is nearly unavoidable if one allows it the freedom to do so. For there will always be some independent thinkers even among the appointed guardians of the great masses who, after they themselves have thrown off the yoke of immaturity, will spread the spirit of rational appreciation of one's own worth and the calling of every human being to think for himself. (WIE, 8: 36)⁵

It thus seems that the best way to become enlightened is to do so collectively. Seeing or interacting with persons who think for themselves is probably the most powerful incentive to do the same – for people can obviously not be forced to think for themselves. Indeed, in the presence of external obstacles, the best way for someone to learn how to think for himself is probably to witness other people doing so.

This points to something very important in Kant's conception of enlightenment: while thinking for oneself seems to be a solitary undertaking, it must also take place in a social context. In that sense, enlightenment is also a collective task that requires a proper legal structure, at least from Kant's perspective. As such, his conception of enlightenment is bound by certain pre-existing political and legal considerations.⁶ The case of women proves useful in determining to what extent these considerations affect the enactment of enlightenment. Here I argue that Kant does not expect women to take an active part in enlightenment, and that this exclusion is grounded in legal considerations that prove to be extremely

important for an accurate understanding of his conception of enlightenment. To this end, I first discuss the passage in which Kant brings up the exclusion of women in 'What is Enlightenment?', along with a few compelling ways to interpret his claim. I then make sense of the context in which enlightenment takes place by using the Habermas-inspired notion of the public sphere. This notion will provide a useful way of conceptualizing the political exclusions with which enlightenment must comply. Kant's twofold conception of citizenship will then be further discussed with respect to this political dimension of enlightenment – with special attention to women's civil status. I end by addressing an objection to this politically grounded conception of enlightenment, namely, that enlightenment as Kant understood it could be taking place in society without regard to political and legal status. According to this objection, the Kantian enlightenment would therefore be open to everybody. I, however, show that this objection does not hold and that, although the Kantian conception of enlightenment could in principle be adapted to slightly different and more inclusive legal and political contexts, it must always rely on a pre-existing legal framework.

Focusing on the exclusion of women may be painting a rather grim picture of Kant's conception of enlightenment – which, to be sure, has a lot going for itself. The ideals of the Enlightenment promoted by Kant have served emancipatory purposes. The incitement to think for oneself is a particularly powerful one. Mary Wollstonecraft was notably influenced by this idea and used it to support feminist ends in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published only a few years after Kant's essay on enlightenment. For Wollstonecraft, sexist prejudices originate in the inability to think for oneself.⁷ And there is no doubt that Kant's motto has inspired many more men and women to question the undue authority of others.

But while the virtues of Kant's conception of enlightenment are rightly celebrated, its blind spots are still too often quickly dismissed. Dilek Huseyinazadegan notes that 'unless we are vigilant about incorporating the full picture of Kant's and Kantian philosophy into our feminist appropriations, we risk inadvertently claiming that problems of sexism, racism, and Eurocentrism, as well as intersections of these systematic injustices in Kant's texts and our lives, can be easily dismissed or evaded' (Huseyinazadegan 2018: 2). It is also my sense that anyone engaging with Kant's practical philosophy today should be well aware of these blind spots and of how they affect or may affect his better ideas. Moving forward, I also believe that an accurate understanding of the ways in which Kant's conception of enlightenment displays sexism will provide us with

valuable resources to overcome this sexism and its consequences while preserving the better parts of Kant's enlightenment. In other words, a feminist and inclusive appropriation of Kant's enlightenment is possible only insofar as we understand the reasons why women were excluded from it in the first place.

2. Kant's Exclusion of Women from Enlightenment

2.1 *The Passage from 'What is Enlightenment?'*

The exclusion of women from Kant's conception of enlightenment is not self-evident. In fact, any discussion of this exclusion must make sense of a passage from 'What is Enlightenment?' that has generated multiple and somewhat conflicting interpretations. Kant first defines enlightenment as follows:

Enlightenment is the human being's emancipation from its self-incurred immaturity (Unmündigkeit). Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's intellect without the direction of another. This immaturity is self-incurred when its cause does not lie in a lack of intellect, but rather in a lack of resolve and courage to make use of one's intellect without the direction of another. (WIE, 8: 35)

This preamble is useful to remind us that Kant does recognize the existence of non-self-incurred forms of immaturity, for instance in young children or in people who suffer severe cognitive impairment. But as for those who are candidates for enlightenment, immaturity is taken to be self-incurred – thereby suggesting the possibility that it can be lifted by them alone. Kant then stresses the causes of this self-incurred immaturity:

Idleness and cowardice are the reasons why such a large segment of humankind, even after nature has long since set it free from foreign direction (*naturaliter maiorenes*), is nonetheless content to remain immature for life; and these are also the reasons why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians. . . . The guardians who have kindly assumed supervisory responsibility have ensured that *the largest part of humanity (including the entirety of the fairer sex) understands progress toward maturity to be not only arduous, but also dangerous*. After they have first made their domesticated animals dumb and carefully prevented their tame creatures from daring to take a single step without the walker to which they have been harnessed, they then

show the danger that threatens them, should they attempt to walk alone. (WIE, 8: 35; emphasis added)

This passage emphasizes again that some forms of immaturity, likely those due to age, will be lifted naturally over time. But self-incurred immaturity cannot be attributed to nature: it is the result of one's own 'idleness and cowardice' – thereby implying that this person is able to do better. It is worth noting that, for Kant, thinking for oneself implies not only the thought process itself, but also the verbal or written communication of one's thoughts to others (see also WOT, 8: 144). This is undeniably demanding, difficult and dangerous, especially when it involves going against the common opinion or that of political leaders. It is, however, not impossible with some perseverance and courage. But idleness and cowardice are unfortunately all too widespread, with the result that most people are not willing to make the effort to think for themselves. According to Kant, this includes *all* women. The claim is quite peremptory given that Kant acknowledges the existence of some rare enlightened – or at the very least of 'currently enlightening' – people; for reasons that remain to be elucidated, it seems that none of them are women.

I would like to first clarify a possible ambiguity pertaining to how strictly we should interpret Kant's remark on women at WIE, 8: 35. 'What is Enlightenment?', first published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, was meant to be more accessible than most of Kant's other works. This can cast some doubt on how strictly to understand the exclusion of women introduced in the passage in question. Given this context, it is possible that Kant did not intend for his claim to be taken in a rigorous manner. Read loosely, the passage could indicate that he did not believe women were in a position to become enlightened given the circumstances of his day, but without thereby implying that it is not advisable for them to do so.⁸ This assumption grounds what I refer to as the most optimistic readings of this passage, discussed in subsection 2.2.1 below. My wager in this paper is that we should reject these approaches and this assumption altogether. If we accept that Kant's conception of enlightenment is unfolding in a specific legal and political context, as I show in section 3, I believe we can read Kant's claim as strictly as it is formulated at WIE, 8: 35. That is to say: if enlightenment must take place within a certain framework that does not allow women to make public use of their reason, women will not be in a position to actively contribute to enlightenment. I thus criticize the optimistic approaches presented in subsection 2.2.1 on these grounds. Section 4 then further explores the idea that the Kantian enlightenment is grounded in a non-inclusive political and legal context.

Building on these preliminary considerations, the next section will provide an overview of the most common ways to interpret Kant's claim about women in 'What is Enlightenment?' and of some of the useful insights they provide, before introducing my own interpretation.

2.2 Main Interpretations

2.2.1 Women's Immaturity is Self-Incurred. A plausible way to interpret the exclusion of women in 'What is Enlightenment?' is to take the above-quoted passage to suggest that (i) the immaturity of women is self-incurred and that (ii) they are expected to escape it and to take part in enlightenment, even if they are currently not in a position to do so. Kant would thus welcome the possibility of the enlightenment of women. This optimistic view is held by, among others, Katerina Deligiorgi (2005), Samuel Fleischacker (2013) and Helga Varden (2017).⁹ Varden summarizes the argument as follows:

Kant in his essay 'What Is Enlightenment?' encourages *everyone*, including women, to use their reason and try not to capitulate under the pressure of those who discourage them from developing their reason to the fullest. (Varden 2017: 656)

Indeed, Varden, Deligiorgi and Fleischacker are all aware that women were not in a good position to think for themselves within society as Kant knew it; yet they also hold that women, just like other rational beings, are free and thus responsible for their own mental immaturity and able to overcome it. Accordingly, they do not see the situation of women as presenting a challenge to Kant's conception of enlightenment.¹⁰

But in order to claim that women's immaturity is self-incurred and at the same time to make sense of Kant's claim according to which all women (but not all human beings) are currently immature, one has to be able to explain why women, unlike men, are taken to be lazy and cowardly to the extent that they cannot think for themselves. Such an explanation is not provided by Deligiorgi, Fleischacker or Varden. To be sure, the claim according to which Kant would welcome the possibility of the enlightenment of women and yet at the same time take all women to be lazy and cowardly would make sense in the context of a deterministic analysis of the gender-related power dynamics at work: in a society that is oppressive for women, one could argue that women are maintained in a subordinate state through (for instance) education, marriage and similar institutions. This would make sense of the first part of Kant's claim on women: according to the deterministic analysis, the guardians would make sure

that women are brought up and educated in order to become as submissive as possible and thus to take enlightenment to be impossible for them to achieve. Society would make them lazy and cowardly in that sense. This would be an interesting analysis of the situation of women, as well as a convenient way to make sense of Kant's odd remark. Yet it does not hold good within a Kantian framework for, as we know, Kant takes rational beings to be endowed with freedom of the will and thereby able to overcome material obstacles. While he is well aware that social and political conditions can make it difficult for someone to act in certain ways and that deterministic accounts of human actions are an appealing way of explaining the behaviour of human beings, he nevertheless takes rational beings to be able to overcome external obstacles. This is of course not to say that all obstacles can *easily* be overcome. Some certainly prove more challenging than others, and sexist institutions would undoubtedly fall under that category. But women should still be able to think for themselves, at least in principle.

And yet in the end, I do not believe that the passage at WIE, 8: 35, can be interpreted in such a way that Kant would be in fact encouraging women to think for themselves, as the optimistic view suggested by Deligiorgi, Fleischacker and Varden fails to explain why all women (but not all men) are still unenlightened. If Kant genuinely believed that women were good candidates for enlightenment, it would not make much sense for him to claim that they are all in a state of immaturity – unless some plausible explanation for their systematic immaturity could also be provided. A deterministic account of sexist oppression could provide such an explanation; and yet such explanation is incompatible with Kant's conception of freedom. Women, just like other rational beings, are free and, as such, should be able to use their freedom to overcome material obstacles, even in the most oppressive situations. There thus seems to be another condition required for partaking in the Enlightenment: reason alone is not quite enough. The next subsection goes over a few interpretations that have also emphasized the importance of other implicit requirements for one's participation into the Enlightenment. I will then argue in section 3 that the implicit requirement at stake is better understood as a legal and civil status allowing one to fully partake in public reason.

2.2.2 Women as Unfit for Enlightenment. There is another way to make sense of Kant's claim on women at WIE, 8: 35, namely, as claiming that women are, in fact, excluded from enlightenment. To be sure, the idea that Kant's conception of enlightenment is somewhat hostile to women is far from being new. It was expressed as early as 1784 by J. G. Hamann in a letter to C. J. Kraus discussing 'What is Enlightenment?': 'The self-incurred

immaturity is just such a sneer as [Kant] makes at the whole fair sex, and which my three daughters will not put up with' (Hamann 1996: 148).¹¹ Hamann's discomfort has been shared by a number of commentators since then, who came up with various ways to make sense of the exclusion of women suggested in Kant's essay.

Pauline Kleingeld convincingly argues that it is women's lack of courage that prevents them from taking an active part in enlightenment. Indeed, Kant makes clear in the *Anthropology* that he sees men as more powerful and courageous than women (cf. *Anth*, 7: 303–4). And the essay on enlightenment claims, as we have seen, that those who remain in a state of self-incurred immaturity do so out of 'idleness and cowardice' and that they lack the 'courage to use [their] own intellect' (WIE, 8: 35). Kleingeld thus concludes that enlightenment is not meant to include women: 'Thus, again, what is claimed to be a distinctive characteristic of women, fearfulness, runs counter to a precondition for a "human" ideal, namely, that of *Mündigkeit* [maturity]' (Kleingeld 1993: 136).

Kleingeld's remarks on enlightenment take place within the context of a broader analysis of the concept of humanity (*Menschheit*) throughout Kant's work. She argues that 'humanity' refers, more often than not, to men instead of to human beings. Her criticism of the conception of enlightenment must be understood within that context. Consequently, I do not take Kleingeld to be arguing that enlightenment is completely inaccessible to women, but rather that enlightenment converges in some respects with Kant's conception of the male character – which is, of course, problematic if enlightenment is to include humanity as a whole. Allen Wood also notes this special connection between enlightenment and the male character: 'Kant regards the ethical disposition of women as more a hindrance than a help in achieving public enlightenment, since he thinks women fear more than men the dangers of thinking for oneself' (Wood 1999: 339, n. 4).

In the end, the implications of this masculine orientation of enlightenment remain puzzling: what Kant is expecting of women seems to conflict with what he is expecting of humanity in enlightenment. I do not dispute that this is a serious problem. I will, however, turn to another feature of enlightenment that makes it inherently hostile to women: its underlying conception of the public sphere, from which women are *de facto* excluded. I therefore agree with Kleingeld and Wood that Kant's conception of enlightenment is hostile to women – and therefore that Kant's claim according to which all women are immature is not meant to welcome

the possibility of their enlightenment. I, however, think that there is a more compelling explanation for the systematic exclusion of women than that suggested by Kleingeld and Wood – an explanation that pertains to the enactment of enlightenment within a political context that excludes women from the start. To be sure, both explanations are compatible; but the advantage of focusing on the special legal limitations faced by women is that it provides a simpler and more systematic explanation of why Kant believes that no woman is enlightened. It also acknowledges the order of priority set by Kant himself within practical philosophy: while the legal prescriptions of the Doctrine of Right are a part of his metaphysics of morals, the character-related and other gendered considerations put forward in the *Anthropology* are meant to be the empirical application of moral principles to human beings, taking into account the peculiarities of human nature (DR, 6: 216–17). The former is normative and prescriptive, while the latter is supposed to be descriptive.¹² Although an explanation of the exclusion of women drawing on some of their (alleged) character traits is certainly useful, turning to the *a priori* part of Kant's practical philosophy can only strengthen this explanation.

3. The Kantian Public Sphere

3.1 Habermas' 'Bourgeois Public Sphere' and the Public Dimension of Enlightenment

While Kant did not himself use the expression 'public sphere', coined by Jürgen Habermas much later, this notion proves useful to understand the context in which Kantian enlightenment takes place. Habermas' conceptualization of the 'bourgeois public sphere' (*bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit*) is not meant to be limited to a Kantian context: it is an evolving notion, shaped by various historical and social factors. In very general terms, the bourgeois public sphere is a new way of conceiving of politics that, according to Habermas, emerged within liberal or proto-liberal frameworks:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. (Habermas 1991: 27)

Habermas' idea is that the bourgeois public sphere gradually took the place of previous ways of doing politics (such as, for instance, through the conception of divine right) and contributed to a redefinition of the

state within and through critical public discussions among citizens. The bourgeois public sphere is thus characterized by the increased participation of citizens in politics and constitutes a new way of conceptualizing the relation between the state and society. Although the bourgeois public sphere had not completely emerged in Kant's time, it is, according to Habermas, in his works that the general idea of the bourgeois public sphere first appeared (Habermas 1991: 102). Habermas even sees this idea as expressing the method *par excellence* of the Kantian enlightenment, as 'thinking for oneself seemed to coincide with thinking aloud and the use of reason with its public use' (104).

Indeed, enlightenment consists in part of a solitary undertaking (thinking for oneself, getting rid of one's prejudices) – but this process must also be enacted in a social context. The (free) public and (restricted) private uses of reason described by Kant are very important to the understanding of this collective dimension of enlightenment. It is worth recalling here the distinction drawn by Kant between those two uses of reason:

The public use of one's reason must be free at all times, and this alone can bring about enlightenment among humans; the private use of one's reason may often, however, be highly restricted without thereby especially impeding the progress of enlightenment. By the public use of one's reason I mean the kind of use that one makes thereof as a *scholar* before the *reading world*. (WIE, 8: 35)

In particular, the free public use of reason that one makes 'as a scholar before the reading world' proves to be an essential part of enlightenment, thereby pointing to its social and collective dimension. It is thus necessary to clarify who can take part in this public part of the process. This question is connected to the point that has just been discussed, namely, the ambiguous status of women with respect to enlightenment. Indeed, some features of the Kantian public sphere will help clarify the place of women in enlightenment, insofar as enlightenment is understood as a social and political phenomenon.

In her discussion of the important public dimension of enlightenment, Deligiorgi rightly notes that whoever is excluded from public debates is also *de facto* excluded from enlightenment. This leads her to ask the following:

Do ... women form part of the 'real public' or is the real public merely an extended and more open version of the various enlightened societies, with which Kant was familiar and which were made up of learned professional men? (Deligiorgi 2005: 72)

Deligiorgi subsequently refutes the second option by showing that Kant's conception of the 'real public' is not based on pre-existing learned societies – indeed, one can guess that those alleged 'enlightened' societies did not quite meet Kant's requirements for enlightenment. Kant's conception of public reason is definitely not meant to be restricted to a private society, club or salon. Yet rejecting this option is not sufficient, in my opinion, to conclude that women are included in Kant's conception of the 'real public'.

I will now show that there is, in addition to the explicit requirements already discussed, an implicit requirement for taking part in enlightenment: that of having a certain civil status. As I understand Kant's conception of enlightenment, partaking in public reason requires being in the legal position to do so – as an active citizen.¹³ There seems to be, in that sense, a particular conception of the public sphere grounding Kant's conception of enlightenment.

3.2 *Different Kinds of Immaturity*

The first important thing to note with respect to the Kantian public sphere is that enlightenment involves escaping a state of immaturity (*Unmündigkeit*) – and that this state has a social dimension, as suggested by Kant's reference to the guardians who assume 'supervisory responsibility' of those who do not think for themselves. This particular sense of the word 'immaturity' requires some clarification.

It is worth looking first at a very different context in which Kant uses the word 'immaturity'. The *Anthropology* brings up an interesting example in that respect:

Scholars usually are glad to allow themselves to be kept in immaturity (*Unmündigkeit*) by their wives with regard to domestic arrangements. A scholar, buried in his books, answered the screams of a servant that there was a fire in one of the rooms: 'You know, things of that sort are my wife's affair.' (*Anth*, 7: 210)¹⁴

The scholar who is unable to cope with his house being on fire and turns to his wife for such domestic affairs is thus immature in a certain way – which does not mean that he is immature in all respects. We can probably safely

say that this is not the kind of immaturity Kant is expecting people to escape through enlightenment. Indeed, let us imagine the wife of this scholar. We can assume that she is mature in at least one way: that of managing potentially life-threatening domestic situations – which is certainly not the worst skill to have. Yet again, this does not seem to be the sense of maturity implied by enlightenment, for it does not qualify as a public use of one's reason. This example shows that there is more than one way in which one can be immature and that Kant likely does not have an absolute sense of immaturity in mind in his essay on enlightenment. His lectures on anthropology also hint at various kinds of immaturity, among which the following can be noted: immaturity of age, immaturity of sex, immaturity of sickness, immaturity in the household, immaturity in affairs, immaturity in religious matters.¹⁵ While all these kinds of immaturity have in common that one is using one's understanding under the guidance of another, we can see that they take different forms and have different consequences. The immaturity of age, for instance, naturally resolves itself with age while the immaturity of sickness is permanent.¹⁶

We may now wonder what is the sense of immaturity relevant to enlightenment. I believe that Kant is, in fact, combining two different senses of immaturity in his discussion of enlightenment: (i) immaturity as the obstacle to the exercise of an intellectual endeavour taking place publicly, in society; and (ii) immaturity as the civil status opposed to civil maturity – the latter being an implicit precondition for lifting (i). Both of these senses of immaturity play a part in Kant's conception of enlightenment. Strictly speaking, immaturity can be described as self-inflicted only insofar as it refers to the first sense, i.e. to an uncritical use of reason. Thinking for oneself is undoubtedly an important part of the process of enlightenment; the inability or reluctance to do so results in the 'self-incurred immaturity' criticized by Kant in his essay on enlightenment. But insofar as enlightenment must be performed publicly, civil maturity seems to be a precondition for being in a position to escape the (intellectual) self-incurred immaturity. The connection between those two aspects of immaturity is explicitly suggested in a passage from the *Anthropology*, which I will now discuss, and supported by two other elements that will be investigated in the next two sections: Kant's distinction between active and passive citizens (section 4); and his insistence on the restriction of the *private* use of reason, which points to the important dimension of subordination associated with civil immaturity (section 5).

Indeed, Kant discusses the immaturity of women not only in 'What is Enlightenment?', but also in the *Anthropology*. In a section devoted to the description of deficiencies in the cognitive faculty, Kant brings up

the case of an understanding that is 'in itself sound (without mental deficiency)' but that is 'accompanied by deficiencies with regard to its exercise' (*Anth*, 7: 208–9). These deficiencies justify, in his opinion, that the person experiencing them should be represented by someone else with respect to civil affairs. Kant provides an interesting definition of immaturity in that context:

The (natural or legal) incapacity of an otherwise sound human being to use his *own* understanding in civil affairs is called immaturity. If this is based on immaturity of age, then it is called *non-age* (being a minor); but if it rests on legal arrangements with regard to civil affairs, it can then be called *legal* or *civil* immaturity. *Children* are naturally immature and their parents are their natural guardians. *Woman* regardless of age is declared to be immature in civil matters; her husband is her natural curator. (*Anth*, 7: 208–9)

This passage makes clear the connection between immaturity and civil affairs – and consequently between immaturity and the public sphere. Indeed, the cases discussed refer to two different forms of incapacity to use one's own understanding with respect to civil affairs: the incapacity due to age and the incapacity due to sex.¹⁷ There is thus a discrepancy between the two described cases of immaturity: while the first can make sense of some understandable natural deficiencies that children may encounter while using their (evolving) understanding in civil affairs and justifies assigning them legal guardians, the second seems much more arbitrary. No further justification is provided for women being placed under the legal tutelage of guardians, besides their legal incapacity to use their understanding – which sounds like begging the question. Kant does not regard this incapacity as natural like that of children – nor does he try to argue that women's understanding might be less good than men's.¹⁸ Quite the contrary: the rest of the passage points out that when it comes to talking, women are perfectly capable of representing themselves.¹⁹ Kant then adds that, 'just as it does not belong to women to go to war, so women cannot personally defend their rights and pursue civil affairs for themselves, but only by means of a representative' (*Anth*, 7: 209) – thereby confirming that the difference between the sexes relevant to the discussion of immaturity is first and foremost legal. Women cannot go to war and women cannot take care of their own civil affairs nor of 'public transactions' (*öffentlicher Verhandlungen*, *ibid.*) because they are women: no further justification is provided.

One could of course argue that the above illustrates a totally different sense of immaturity that has not much to do with enlightenment. Yet the connection between this legal sense of immaturity and the one at stake in enlightenment is suggested by Kant himself in the rest of the passage. Right after discussing women's immaturity with respect to legal matters, the text moves on to the reasons one might have to make oneself immature:

But to *make* oneself immature, degrading as it may be, is nevertheless very comfortable, and naturally it has not escaped leaders who know how to use this docility of the masses ... and to represent the danger of making use of one's *own* understanding without the guidance of another as very great, even lethal. (*Anth*, 7: 209)

This passage is of course reminiscent of the self-incurred immaturity discussed in the essay on enlightenment, attributed by Kant to idleness and cowardice (WIE, 8: 35). Both texts also emphasize the role played, in that respect, by those who assume supervisory responsibility of others. Yet the *Anthropology* brings up the topic in the context of a discussion of legal immaturity. This is not to say that the self-incurred immaturity at stake in enlightenment and the legal immaturity further discussed in the *Anthropology* are one and the same. There seems to be, however, a connection between the two.²⁰ I will now clarify the way in which women's legal immaturity is an obstacle to their participation in enlightenment.

4. Kant's Twofold Account of Citizenship

4.1 Active and Passive Citizens

In order to further investigate the implications of the legal dimension of immaturity, it is worth clarifying the legal status of women, for this status is in itself peculiar. First we need to have a look at Kant's account of citizenship, and more precisely at the distinction he draws between active and passive citizens. As we shall see, women belong to the latter category and cannot access active citizenship, which has consequences for their participation in public debates.

Kant clarifies his conception of citizenship in 'Theory and Practice' (1793) and in the Doctrine of Right (1797), two texts that are generally regarded as consistent with one another. Let's recall first that all members of society, except for slaves, are citizens. All citizens, including women and children, are regarded as free and equal before the law. While these two attributes are common to all citizens, a third one grounds an

important distinction between citizens: independence (*sibisufficiencia*, *Selbständigkeit*). Kant's conception of independence, although grounded in property-owning, is in nature more civil than material: it means that one is entitled to represent oneself when it comes to legal matters.²¹ While all citizens are free and equal, not all of them are independent in that legal sense.

Indeed, the attribute of independence is what grounds the distinction between active and passive citizens.²² While active citizens possess all the above-mentioned attributes, passive citizens are not legally independent. This leads to them not having the right to vote. Kant sees civil independence as a mandatory condition for being fit to vote: casting a vote is a civil action that requires that one is already independent, i.e. able to represent oneself. While all members of the commonwealth, active and passive citizens alike, are free and equal and must be treated as such before the law, those who are 'under the direction or protection of other individuals' (DR, 6: 315) do not possess civil independence. Women belong to that category, along with apprentices, domestic servants, and in general 'anyone whose preservation in existence (his being fed and protected) depends not on his management of his own business but on arrangements made by another (except the state)' (DR, 6: 314). In concrete terms, passive citizens lack civil personality; for that reason, they do not get to take an active part in the management of the state or in public affairs.

This distinction among citizens captures very accurately what is at stake in Habermas' criticism of the bourgeois public sphere, especially in his chapter devoted to Kant's public sphere:

Only property-owning private people were admitted to a public engaged in critical political debate, for their autonomy was rooted in the sphere of commodity exchange and hence was joined to the interest in its preservation as a private sphere. (Habermas 1991: 109–10)

Those who are propertyless, as pointed out by Habermas, do not satisfy the requirements of active citizenship: since they depend on others, they do not qualify as independent. Furthermore, not taking part in trade implies that they do not have a voice in public affairs; they are thus left out of public discussions. And yet those discussions are still regarded as open and public. This points to a distinctive feature of the public sphere, namely, that there can be only one public sphere. The public use of

reason, no matter whom it effectively excludes, takes place with respect to the one and only ideal public. Nancy Fraser has famously criticized that aspect in a way that applies just as much to Kant as it did to Habermas: besides the ideal public sphere, there have always been counterpublics (Fraser 1990: 70). We could think, for instance, of salons or of servants' halls. Not taking the discussions taking place there or in any other circle of non-property-owners to be relevant contributions to the culture of enlightenment seems genuinely puzzling.

4.2 *Women's Passive Citizenship*

As pointed out by Fraser and other feminist critics of Habermas, another limitation of Habermas' conceptualization of the bourgeois public sphere is that, while it makes clear that some people are excluded from public debates because of property-related considerations, it does not provide a way of making sense of the exclusion of women in particular. Indeed, women are not like any other passive citizen. Kant is, in principle, open to social mobility: for the sake of freedom and equality, anyone should be able to work his way up from the passive condition to an active one (DR, 6: 315). The Kantian public sphere thus seems to have a relatively open access. Kant is also known to have criticized hereditary nobility, which he describes as 'a rank that precedes merit and also provides no hope for merit' (DR, 6: 329). Although his conception of the public sphere is still questionable by Habermas' standards, for 'the real public' is only part of the people, it seems that Kant's public sphere has relatively open boundaries. Hay (2013) and Varden (2017) have both argued, on the basis of the possibility of social mobility, that Kant might have been open to the accession of women to active citizenship.²³ Yet the special status of women shows that Kant's public sphere is less inclusive than it may seem. A passage in 'Theory and Practice' poses a challenge to more optimistic takes on Kant's conception of women:

The only quality required for [citizenship], besides the *natural* one (that it is neither woman nor child) is: that one is *one's own master (sui iuris)*, and thus that one has some *property* (which also includes any skill, trade, fine art, or science) that provides for one. (TP, 8: 295)

While Kant had not yet come up with the distinction between active and passive citizenship in 'Theory and Practice' (he was then distinguishing citizens from 'protected compatriots'), the two texts are, as pointed out earlier, consistent with one another with respect to right and politics. The above-quoted passage thus seems to confirm that women are

excluded from active citizenship from the start, as they do not possess the natural quality of being men.²⁴ Women are not accidentally excluded from the category of active citizenship: active citizenship requires being a man. This restriction is also very much in line with the description of active citizenship provided in the Doctrine of Right: passive citizens are 'mere underlings (*Handlanger*) of the commonwealth because they have to be under the direction or protection of other individuals, and so do not possess civil independence' (DR, 6: 315). It is thus unlikely that social mobility is possible at all for someone who is by essence a legal dependant. While a private tutor or a tenant farmer (to use some of Kant's examples) can hope to gain enough money to eventually work their way up to property-owning and active citizenship, Kant does not seem to have considered a way for women to do the same – just as he did not suggest it would be possible for children under the age of majority to claim active citizenship.²⁵

It is also worth emphasizing that, despite the possibility of social mobility, even property-owning women remain excluded from Kant's account of active citizenship. Such exclusion is, of course, not unique to Kant. Robin M. Schott notes that throughout the Age of Enlightenment in Europe, women's status generally got worse: before the Age of Enlightenment, wealthy and noble women had some political power – and that opportunity was later on lost (Schott 1996: 473). In France, for instance, the distinction between active and passive citizens put forward by Sieyès²⁶ was enacted in the French Constitution of 1791. This distinction resulted from the efforts of the many proponents of census suffrage who objected to universal suffrage. It had serious implications for propertyless citizens and for women, who were *de facto* excluded from active citizenship, even if they happened to meet the other requirements for it. The legal status of women in Germany was also quite undesirable: until the twentieth century, despite being allowed to acquire property, they did not have the right to administer it. They also had to be represented by men in public affairs.²⁷ These historical considerations, combined with the passage at TP, 8: 295, and with the implications of active citizenship discussed in the Doctrine of Right, should bring us to reconsider more optimistic takes on Kant's views on the civil status of women. While he did not explicitly write in the Doctrine of Right that women should not be allowed to work their way up from the passive condition to an active one, it would be very surprising if he intended to suggest that they could ever become active citizens, or even to flag that possibility for his readers given how controversial the proposal would have been.

5. Immaturity and Subordination

At this stage, it seems plausible to make sense of the exclusion of women from enlightenment in light of their civil status. Yet it would also be possible, at least in principle, to conceive of Kant's public sphere as happening in society without taking on its legal exclusions. Publicity undoubtedly plays a key role within Kant's philosophy of right, but this does not entail that all uses of publicity must take place in a specific legal context. Moreover, Kant had not yet written on the active/passive categories of citizenship in 1784; we must therefore consider the possibility that he may not have had those exact categories in mind at the time his essay on enlightenment was published. What is at stake here is the extent to which the public use of reason relevant for enlightenment is bound by political considerations leading to the exclusion of women. In this last section, I will emphasize the dimension of subordination associated with the self-incurred immaturity at the heart of the Kantian enlightenment – which, again, points to the importance of legal maturity for those who are to make a public use of their reason. Such subordination is inherently political and, in the case of women, takes the form of a legal subjection preventing them from making public use of their reason.

Deligiorgi has convincingly argued that the public use of reason made in enlightenment is in fact not tied to Kant's conception of active citizenship and thus open to women:

[An] asymmetry emerges between the entitlement to participate in the political domain, which is strictly curtailed, and the freedom to speak in public. The latter, it emerges, is truly unrestricted. As Kant states explicitly, any member of the 'complete commonwealth' (VIII: 37, WE 56, emphasis added) who wishes to make use of his, and here we can add also her, reason may do so. That Kant does not use here the active/passive distinction, and refers instead to the complete commonwealth allows us to interpret the freedom of participation in the broadest way possible, taking into account all those who fall under the description of *naturaliter maiorennnes*. Thus while minors remain excluded, the domain of public reasoning remains open to otherwise disenfranchised members of the commonwealth, including women. (Deligiorgi 2005: 73)

If Deligiorgi is right, one does not need to be legally independent in order to make public use of his or her reason, but only to be a member of the commonwealth broadly construed.²⁸ In emphasizing that requirement,

Kant would in fact commit himself to an inclusive version of enlightenment. Deligiorgi's claim refers to a passage from 'What is Enlightenment?' that takes place right after the distinction drawn by Kant between the public and private uses of reason. It will prove useful to recall that distinction here. The public use of reason is 'the kind of use that one makes thereof as a *scholar* before the *reading world*'. This is contrasted with the private use of reason, which is 'the use that one may make of it in a *civil* post or office with which one is entrusted', that is, for 'affairs that serve the interests of the commonwealth' (WIE, 8: 37). What brings about enlightenment is the free public use of reason. The private use of reason, on the other hand, must always be restricted in order to serve the interests of the commonwealth. Kant's justification for this restriction is that people must sometimes be led by the government in the pursuit of public ends, as 'part of a machine'. This makes clear that he takes certain responsibilities to require subordination on the part of individuals. The private use of reason implies, in that sense, deference to an external authority: that of the person in charge of the 'machine' or of a specific part of it. This is not to say that the subordinate cannot think at all, but that he must follow the lead of the external authority supervising him in that context where he is a part of the machine. What characterizes those who are expected to make a public use of their reason is that they are, at some moments, off duty – meaning that they are not under someone's authority in each and every aspect of their life.

Yet unlike Deligiorgi, I believe that this authority must be understood first and foremost in political terms. The clergyman is, in some respect, under the authority of the church he belongs to; the officer is under the authority of his army; and the citizen who pays taxes is under the authority of government policies on taxes. In that context, those who can make a public use of their reason are free and encouraged to do so *whenever they are not in a position of civil subordination*. Indeed, the passage to which Deligiorgi is referring goes as follows:

For many affairs that serve the interests of the commonwealth a certain mechanism is required, by means of which some members of the commonwealth must play only a passive role, so that they can be led by the government in the pursuit of public ends ... *But in so far as this or that individual who acts as part of the machine also considers himself as a member of a complete commonwealth or even of cosmopolitan society, and thence as a man of learning who may through his writings address a public in the truest sense of the word, he may indeed argue without*

harming the affairs in which he is employed for some of the time in a passive capacity. (WIE, 8: 37; emphasis mine)

This passage makes clear that while individuals are sometimes required to make a passive use of their reason (i.e. the private, restricted use) in the context of their professional occupation, they are at other times free to make public use of their reason. Interestingly enough, the examples Kant provides of those who make a public use of their reason ‘as scholars, before the reading world’, all happen to be active citizens: the army officer, the clergyman and the citizen who pays taxes (WIE, 8: 37–8).²⁹ This could, of course, be a coincidence. But Kant’s distinction between the public and private uses of reason seems to be intended, first and foremost, for those he would later refer to as active citizens.³⁰ Those citizens, despite being subordinated at work – where they are part of a certain mechanism – can (and should) make a public use of their reason when they are not working. It is in this context that they are regarded as ‘members of a complete commonwealth’ – as opposed to being ‘a part of the machine’ when they are on duty. This contrast between being a part of the machine and a member of the complete commonwealth for one and the same individual rather suggests that Kant has in mind those who have a professional occupation. The ‘complete commonwealth’ appears less intended to refer to an inclusive commonwealth than to a context where active citizens are freed from the authority of their superiors and allowed to take an active part in public affairs. Indeed, the public and private uses of reason are described with respect to the same individual, which confirms that Kant’s targeted audience is people who hold a certain type of professional occupation. This does not apply to the situation of most women at the time. Yet Kant’s restriction on the use of private reason still reveals something important with respect to the situation of women in society. Women, along with all those whom Kant would later call passive citizens, lack civil personality and, as such, they are not permitted to take an active part in the management of the state, nor to take care of civil affairs of interest to them. Their rights and civil affairs are taken care of by means of a legal representative: father, husband, brother or other curator.³¹ This suggests that Kant’s conception of the (restricted) private use of reason can be used to make sense of passive citizenship. Passive citizens are, in that sense, permanently under the authority of someone else, in a way that is reminiscent of the clergyman and officer’s subordination to their superiors: while they certainly can think for themselves in a broad sense, the use they make of their reason is bound to be private – that is, subjected to the external authority of their tutor instead of to the authority of reason alone. Women, as the only passive citizens who are not

allowed to access active citizenship, are in a permanent position of political subordination as they must always obey some external authority.

They are therefore not in a position to make the public use of their reason required for active participation in enlightenment.

6. Conclusion

I hope to have shown that Kant's conception of enlightenment cannot be understood in isolation from political considerations due to the public sphere in which it takes place. This, in turn, sheds light on the puzzling exclusion of women from enlightenment. In order to show how, it was necessary first to take a thorough look at Kant's ambiguous way of excluding women from enlightenment and to consider and reject the possibility that he might have been open to their inclusion. The Habermasian conception of the public sphere then proved to be useful for understanding the context in which enlightenment must take place and the forms of exclusion it implies. Despite the self-incurred nature of the immaturity that one must escape in order to take part in enlightenment, I have shown that in order to enter the Kantian public sphere and to make a public use of his reason, one must first be legally and civilly mature. Legal maturity thus works as a precondition for shedding one's self-incurred immaturity. Kant's twofold conception of citizenship then confirmed that he did not take all citizens to have access to the same opportunities: passive citizens, including all women, lack civil independence and are not permitted to take part in public affairs. Finally, investigating the restriction of the private use of reason put forward in 'What is Enlightenment?' shed light on the political nature of the subordination of certain people in society, in particular women. It thus appears that Kant grounded his conception of enlightenment in a specific legal and political context and that this context affected who could take an active part in enlightenment. Since women, who are legally immature, do not fulfil the legal prerequisite for making public use of their reason, it is likely that Kant's conception of enlightenment is meant to exclude them from the start. While I believe that Kant's conception of enlightenment could be compatible with a different, more inclusive political framework in which active citizenship and the public use of reason would be truly accessible to all, this does not strike me as what Kant himself was trying to promote. The Kantian enlightenment as I understand it thus carries its share of exclusions that we ought to question and address in order to accurately identify their causes and to be able to move forward with feminist reappropriations of his ideas.³²

Notes

- 1 See in particular Deligiorgi (2005) and Fleischacker (2013)
- 2 I follow the distinction suggested by, among others, Schmidt (2003: 426–7) and Fleischacker (2013: 2): capitalized ‘Enlightenment’ refers to the historical period while ‘enlightenment’ refers to the intellectual process at stake.
- 3 The progress of humanity depends on generations rather than individuals (IUH, 8: 19; see also Anth-Mron, 25: 1417 and Refl #1471a on Anthropology (15: 650).
- 4 The implications of Kant’s racist and sexist remarks for his moral philosophy have been investigated notably by Bernasconi (2001), Kleingeld (1993, 2019), Mills (2005) and Mikkola (2011), among others. In this contribution, I focus on the particular issues raised by gender in Kant’s philosophy and on the specific case of the participation to the Enlightenment. While Kant’s views on women are notoriously ambiguous and have generated much debate in the secondary literature, they have seldom been investigated with respect to the Enlightenment in particular. My special focus on women should not, however, be taken to suggest that Kant’s racism is not also at work within his conception of the Enlightenment. Given the European framework Kant had in mind when expanding on his conception of the state as well as the racial hierarchy he still put forward in the 1780s, his assumption that not all individuals are expected to contribute to the Enlightenment should at the very least come across as suspicious in that respect. One of my objectives in this article is precisely to emphasize that Kant saw the Enlightenment as tied to a certain political and legal context that is European in nature. The question of how racial hierarchies and power dynamics come into play within this specific political and legal context is, however, one that I have to leave aside in this paper.
- 5 References to ‘What is Enlightenment?’ (WIE), to the Doctrine of Right (DR, part of the *Metaphysics of Morals*), to the ‘Idea for a Universal History’ (IUH), to ‘What is Orientation in Thinking?’ (WOT), and to ‘Theory and Practice’ (TP) are given to the Akademie edition. The translations used for citations are Kant 1996, 1997, 2006a–c and 2007.
- 6 The main political and legal structures involved here are what I refer to as the Kantian public sphere (discussed in section 3) and Kant’s twofold conception of citizenship (discussed in section 4).
- 7 See for instance the following passage of the *Vindication*: ‘The mind must be strong that resolutely forms its own principles; for a kind of intellectual cowardice prevails which makes many men shrink from the task, or only do it by halves’ (Wollstonecraft 1993: 76–7).
- 8 I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this point.
- 9 Louden (2000: 87) believes that Kant leaves open the possibility for women to escape self-incurred immaturity, but that he was not personally interested in further developing the idea.
- 10 Kneller, while holding a similar view, nevertheless notes a tension between Kant’s remark on women in ‘What is Enlightenment?’ and his arguments for the legal subordination of women (Kneller 2006: 453).
- 11 Letter to C. J. Kraus, 18 December 1784 (reproduced in Schmidt 1996: 148).
- 12 It should be acknowledged that Kant does not always respect his own distinction – some of the claims of the *Anthropology* undoubtedly have a normative connotation, as pointed out by Louden (2000: 82).
- 13 Varden, like Deligiorgi, sees the importance for women to take part in public reason if they are to play a part in enlightenment (‘I propose that what Kant was uncertain about was [women’s] ability to partake in public reason’; Varden 2017: 655). I very much agree with this claim, and I also believe Varden is right to draw our attention to the separate issue of public reason. But Varden believes, unlike me, that Kant’s faulty legal

prescriptions for women are merely the result of his anthropological assumptions and that, in the end, he does allow for women to become active citizens and to take part in public debates. She thus claims, contra Kleingeld (1993), that this is why Kant's works on moral and political issues are written using gender-neutral language (Varden 2017: 656, 683). I believe myself that Kant's ideas on the legal status of women in turn provide the grounds for some of these assumptions. If unjust laws and policies result in further constraints in the lives of women, they make it impossible for them to make a public use of their reason in a Kantian sense and, consequently, may give the impression that women are timorous, shy and incapable of partaking in public affairs.

- 14 For a similar passage in Kant's lectures on anthropology, see Anth-Mron, 25: 1302.
- 15 Anth-Mron, 25: 1298, 1427. The Mrongovius set of notes is particularly helpful for my purposes as these lectures are dated from the same period as the essay on enlightenment (1784–5).
- 16 The immaturity of age is also mentioned in 'What is Enlightenment?' (8: 35).
- 17 Kant also associates the 'immaturity of sex' with the inability to take part in public affairs in his lectures on anthropology (Anth-Mron, 25: 1300).
- 18 Which is why I cannot agree with Marwah, who takes women's immaturity to be grounded in their natural character (Marwah 2013: 560).
- 19 To be sure, Kant's remark is pejorative: he mentions that women could be called *übermündig* in that respect – which literally means 'over-mature', but is also a reference to the etymology of the word (*Mund*: women talking too much). Yet the use of speech in general is often associated by him with enlightenment. It is thus interesting to note that women's disadvantage does not pertain to speech.
- 20 LaVaque-Manty also distinguishes between those two specific senses of immaturity and notes that 'in some contexts the question of whether you are mature depends on whether you count as mature' (2006: 17). He does not, however, further discuss the implications of that connection.
- 21 S. M. Shell notes that, despite having been influenced by Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès' conception of citizenship, Kant's conception of independence departs from Sieyès'. While Sieyès makes 'the right to vote conditional upon possession of a degree of taxable wealth' (Shell 2016: 12), Kant's conception of independence depends more on the civil status than on the amount of material possessions – as the rest of this section will make clear.
- 22 This distinction is drawn in DR, 6: 314–15. It coincides with the previous distinction made by Kant between citizens and 'protected compatriots' in TP, 8: 295.
- 23 In addition to this optimistic interpretation, Kant's claims on the passive citizenship of women are sometimes dismissed as mere empirical remarks that would not be meant to have an *a priori* status (for instance in Hay 2013: 52; see also Fleischacker 2013: 122). This does not take into account Kant's characterization of the principles of the Doctrine of Right, which, as part of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, provides 'a system of *a priori* knowledge from concepts alone' (DR, 6: 216). The ideas discussed in the Doctrine of Right are thus not supposed to be inferred from empirical observations. It is possible that Kant unintentionally does so, but it is nevertheless important to pay attention to the status of those remarks.
- 24 I therefore tend to agree with Okin's (1982) pessimistic interpretation of women's passive citizenship according to Kant. Similar views have been expressed by Hull (1996: 302–3). I do not, however, agree with Okin's further conclusion that Kant also defines women out of the category of rational beings and that his moral theory as a whole therefore does not apply to them.
- 25 I should mention that Varden (2017: 672) takes TP, 8: 295, into account in her more optimistic interpretation. While I cannot do justice to her argument here, her main claim is that natural ends should not dictate moral ends within Kant's practical philosophy and

- therefore that the natural requirement for active citizenship should not be seen as preventing women from becoming active citizens. While I agree with the first part of this claim, it seems more likely to me, in light of the context of the DR and of TP as well as of the historical considerations discussed here, that Kant made an illicit use of natural categories in this part of his philosophy of right, than that he was implicitly open to changing the status of women.
- 26 It is worth noting that Sieyès was, in his own way, more progressive than Kant with respect to women: ‘Women, at least in the current state of affairs, . . . must not actively influence public affairs’ (Sieyès 1789: 21; my translation). Sieyès is thus opening the door to a change in women’s status.
- 27 On this topic, see Sagarra (2017: 406–7).
- 28 It is worth noting that Kant’s conception of cosmopolitanism and of the commonwealth is in many ways indebted to the Stoic tradition. Kleingeld mentions this point in her *Kant and Cosmopolitanism: The Philosophical Ideal of World Citizenship* (2012: 2–3). It is, however, unclear to what extent Kant’s remark at WIE, 8: 37, is meant to refer to a Stoic idea. I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this issue to my attention.
- 29 On this point and on the general elitism of Kant’s conception of enlightenment, I am indebted to the contribution of Piché (2015).
- 30 This is also suggested by the context of publication of ‘What is Enlightenment?’ and the underlying debate on civil marriage started by Biester and Zöllner in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*.
- 31 As noted by an anonymous reviewer, my claim should perhaps be qualified to acknowledge that Kant’s conception of marriage is more egalitarian than the rest of his philosophy of law. All human beings, regardless of their citizenship status, can get married. The relation of the spouses is then ‘a relation of *equality* of possession, equality both in their possession of each other as persons . . . , and also equality in their possession of material goods’ (DR, 6: 278). Women are thus not legally subordinated to men in each and every aspect of their life. I very much agree that Kant’s conception of marriage is by far the most promising grounds on which a Kantian argument for the legal equality of men and women could be constructed. But the rest of Kant’s legal philosophy does not reflect this egalitarianism; and, more importantly, this relative egalitarianism does not carry much value outside the household. While husband and wife are regarded as equally sharing their possessions as spouses, only men are able to conduct business and manage the (common) affairs of the couple outside of the household, i.e. in the public sphere. So while Kant’s legal and political philosophy could be better for women if it were revised in light of the egalitarian grounds of his conception of marriage, this egalitarianism on its own does not mean much for the participation of women in the public sphere.
- 32 Huseinzadegan’s 2018 article convincingly explains why these questions matter but also why we cannot easily get rid of them.

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