Fall of philosophicus erectus

Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, trans. Amanda Minervini and Adam Sitze (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016). 208pp., £58.00 hb., £15.99 pb., 978 0 80479 218 9 hb., 978 1 50360 040 9 pb.

At first glance one has the impression that Adriana Cavarero's fascinating critique of verticality in *Inclinations* is a genealogical investigation of the subject. There is certainly a move to unearth the hidden suppositions of the notion of uprightness through an analysis of descent rather than origins, which reminds one of the Foucaultian project as he inherited it from Nietzsche. While, however, Nietzsche pursued an account of 'the descent of our moral prejudices', Cavarero illuminates the prejudices of rectitude through an examination of their descent in philosophy and art. As Foucault argues of genealogy in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', Cavarero 'disturbs what was previously considered immobile', she casts doubt on the purity of the ideal. Nonetheless, Cavarero's aim is not entirely to reject foundations and ideal significations. Instead she proposes another kind of being for the human: the comportment of inclination. Cavarero looks to that which is closest – the body – as a model by which to understand human nature. In particular, she is interested in how its representation when figured as masculine or feminine affects its valuation and truth status, and how these aspects are, in turn, related to the body being upright or inclined. As is the case with the strongest feminist analyses in the history of ideas, her analyses have ontological consequences for how we understand the subject. By examining the symbolic relevance of the human form in the European history of philosophy and art, Cavarero shows how culture in specific works reflects the gendering of people in the lived world and ultimately prioritises the male figure over the female.

In her introduction, Cavarero argues that the self in the tradition of Kant, and philosophy more generally, is conceived of as existing on a vertical axis, as an upright and autonomous 'I'. In taking issue with this, she thus describes the Kantian model of the self as one of 'egocentric verticality'. Cavarero points out that inclination as an affect, for example as love or desire, has been conceived of as something that cannot be mastered, as something that threatens to encroach upon the Kantian 'I'. And certainly one can find this concern voiced strongly by Kant in his writings on friendship, where he warns against its dissolution by too much love and not enough respect. Moving too close to the other through inclination is seen as impinging upon the rational and upright masculine subject through a feminine affect. Women, described by Kant as the less rational sex, are more likely to be overtaken by affects and interrupt the duties of men. As Cavarero observes, Kant states that women are themselves beings who are in a state of minority and, as such, encourage dependence in children. She also brings some levity to Kant's deplorable writings on women when she notes that, according to the latter, the cry of a baby upon birth is an expression of the longing for freedom (and not hunger or pain). Kant, who Cavarero remarks did not spend much time around women or children, apparently had a hard time fully understanding the importance of maternal love and nourishment in the formation of the human subject.

For Cavarero it is important to rethink the associations of comportment and sexual difference, but not, therefore, in order to insert relationality into the already prevailing Kantian model. Instead, she proposes that relationality and vulnerability are more fundamental to the human condition than autonomy, also claiming that it is to the figure of the mother and the infant-mother relation that we must look for a new model of the human condition. Her argument is that, 'Instead of continuing to fragment the subject, one could try – drawing on Arendt – to incline it.' I am not convinced, however, that she so significantly departs from the project of fragmentation as initiated by Nietzsche, although she does reorient it. Cavarero fragments the notion of rectitude so that it no longer has the force to define 'the subject'; once this is completed through an analysis of its activity in various constellations, she rebuilds the subject through inclination.

Cavarero begins the first chapter with an account

of Barnett Newman's works *Adam* and *Eve* in which she contrasts the two paintings in order to highlight their shared commentary on sexual difference. She argues that the use of lines and colours in these two paintings are symptoms of our celebration of verticality and its alignment with masculinity. Whereas Eve is represented in a solid red void with a thin black line at the edge, Adam is marked by strong red lines on a blackish background, lines which reach up to God. Cavarero compares these confirmations of the patriarchal symbolic order to a piece by Aleksandr Rodchenko called *Stairs* in which a woman who carries a child and a bag of groceries is photographed from an angle going up a set of stairs. This is Cavarero's first move to introduce us to what inclination looks like when based upon a model of maternity 'in which the smaller one counts on the inclination of the other, who holds him while going up the stairs'. Her point is that maternity exceeds the stereotype of self-sacrifice and should be more properly understood as the strength of relationality.

Cavarero's distaste for the Kantian 'I' becomes more visceral with her analyses of Virginia Woolf and Plato. She describes the 'I' in male writing via Woolf as a 'pronominal erection' that presumes the 'innate superiority' of men. In Plato's cave, Cavarero states that we find the foundations of the 'myth of the vertical subject' in which an equivocation is made between 'the good', 'the upright' and 'the true'. 'By directing his eyes to the sun, which is to say the Good, he stands vertically on the perpendicular axis of truth. This is the entrance on the scene, in ancient Greece, of the *philosophus erectus*.' Cavarero thus argues that having a straight and upright comportment comes to be the signifier of a well turned-out man who possesses reason and speaks the truth. In Kant's terms, he is the autonomous individual raised above animality and the temptations of the world. He stands free with 'the moral law within'.

Cavarero turns to an analysis of the hierarchical relationship between rectitude and inclination in her essays on Thomas Hobbes and Elias Canetti, where inclination is associated with violence and the dead. For Hobbes inclination is defined by the 'state of nature', the shared disposition towards power and domination which must be controlled through a political sovereign whose elevation above all allows for peace. Cavarero explains that for Hobbes equality is understood through the equal power to kill one another, what she terms 'homicidal aggressivity'. According to Hobbes then, the sovereign saves us from ourselves. Or does he? 'The gigantic *Homo erectus*, the State that ensures internal peace through the terror of its irresistible power, thus becomes a subject who, in relation to other States, is motivated by the same feral and violent logic of the natural individual.' For Cavarero, then, Hobbes' anthropology is one of perpetual war in which the human being should be understood as the one who lives to die.

At this point, if the reader is sympathetic to Cavarero's critique, they will be looking for alternative models of inclination to those of violence and death. Cavarero provides them through the artworks of Artemisia Gentileschi and Leonardo da Vinci. Gentileschi's painting, *Allegory of Inclination*, in which a young woman holding a compass leans towards a small star, represents the irresistible pull of artistic talent. In this case, Cavarero notes, inclination is given a positive attribution, as is also the case in stories of creation in cosmology from ancient Greece to those of today in which the collision of particles through inclined movement bring forth life. Cavarero's claim is that inclination is at the heart of creativity, life and maternity, and it exists here more than it does in violence and death. The overlooking of maternity has prevented us from coming to know the human subject in terms of its full potential for relationality. Yet we are not without models, Cavarero assures us. In *The Virgin and the Child with St. Ann*e, da Vinci departs from the previous form in painting which required a vertical pyramid of figures. Instead, he presents all figures in various positions of inclination, emphasising both the child's dependence but also the 'ethical density' of the maternal role.

How is it, then, that we have reduced the mother, a robust figure of relationality, to one of care? This reduction of the mother to a liminal figure has occurred not only in classical works of philosophy and art, but also in thinkers of natality and otherness, such as Arendt and Levinas. Cavarero argues that Arendt provides an ontological model of the human through the condition of birth which challenges the previous

metaphysics, but by avoiding the mother, she fails to fully grasp the potential of this new category. In order to respond adequately to the self-enclosed verticality of the Kantian subject, one requires an ethical subject whose primary state of being is relationality. The infant is dependent and vulnerable and it cannot fight back if it is harmed; the mother is the figure of responsibility who responds to this vulnerability. According to Cavarero, she is the ethical actor par excellence.

Cavarero cites criticisms that have been levied against similar arguments made in the past, such as to the ethics of care paradigm in feminist philosophy – for example, the concern that an emphasis on the vulnerability and dependence of the mother reinforces the binary opposition between genders through affirming the most stereotypical characteristics associated with the female sex. This binary view arguably also undermines the emancipatory move towards an equality of men and women, and the concomitant argument that they should be treated the same as workers and political subjects. Further, and Cavarero does not address this adequately, the maternal role is now performed by all genders, by subjects who in many instances did not give birth to the child that they are parenting. Is there a strict relationship between birthgiving and maternity in her model? Can maternity be extended to those who were not designated at birth as female according to Cavarero? These questions are not sufficiently addressed or answered.

As should be clear by now, Cavarero is not advocating an ethics of care model but is instead proposing that maternity and inclination have been effaced by the patriarchal symbolic order which champions the model of rectitude. Cavarero believes that we need a feminine model of human life based on the mother. It seems to me that especially in the discipline of philosophy, which still commonly defaults to the pronoun 'he' and largely retains faith in the moral status of the Kantian 'universal' subject, a new model of the subject is necessary. The mother as the subject of inclination who represents the human condition as relational, vulnerable and responsible is a robust alternative to Levinas's other, as well as many alternative versions in the history of European philosophy, as Cavarero demonstrates. No doubt philosophy would benefit from taking up Cavarero's subject of inclination as a part of dislodging the discipline from its iron commitment to the patriarchal order. The next step, however, is to consider how the notion of maternity can include all genders and locations in such a way that it does make invisible the feminine. For we have already seen how the claim for equality (to be treated the same as men) merely returns us to that old androcentric model that presumes neutrality through the veil of the autonomous subject. Certainly, it is worth considering seriously how, as Cavarero proposes, 'Maternal inclination could work as a model for a different, more disruptive, and revolutionary geometry whose aim is to rethink the very core of community.'

Willow Verkerk

Before democracy

Kojin Karatani, *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017). 176pp., £70.00 hb., £19.99 pb., 978 0 82236 885 4 hb., 978 0 82236 913 4 pb.

Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy is a far from straightforward book to assess. Its sustained and remarkably coherent re-reading of early Greek philosophy from its Ionian origins to the complex relationship between Socrates and Plato's thought is undoubtedly brilliant. However, this is achieved by means of a superstructure-base argument that, while not unfruitful, also involves some distinctly troubling political implications. This matters because Karatani is not simply producing a novel interpretation of how and why ideas developed the way they did from Thales to Plato: he wants to address the contradictions in modern bourgeois liberal democracy by exploring the gap between Athenian democracy and a rather earlier Ionian isonomia, associating the latter with a concept of no-rule.

Strictly speaking, *iso-* means equal or the same and *nomos* either share/portion or custom/usage. So, isonomia can mean equal shares or something like equal rights, but there is no *kratos* (power or sovereign authority), linked in the case of democracy with *demos* (people). As such, the distinction between democracy