

ABSTRACT

Friendship, Rights, and Community:
Aristotle and John Locke on the Family and Political Life

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This dissertation develops an account of Aristotle's view of the family in contrast to the now more familiar and influential understanding derived from Locke's theory of rights and government. For Locke, the individual as an autonomous unit enters into associations such as the family and civil society on a contractual basis, for limited purposes and with limited obligations. In response to the Lockean approach, this dissertation explores Aristotle's view of the family, the relations between men and women, and the political and philosophic implications of his position. It argues that, for Aristotle, friendship in the family is the source and foundation of political life. The proper practice of politics aims at friendship, and depends upon the development of a family structure conducive to that goal. For Aristotle, this development means transforming a family dominated by the manliness of the father into a family that makes room for the rule of the woman—a rule that allows for and fosters friendship. When properly structured, the family affirms an important role for women, an influence that is crucial to the formation of political life and its proper practice. Aristotle's view of the

family offers a richer and more comprehensive framework for our thinking about the relations within the family between husbands and wives and parents and children, as well as relations between the family and the broader political communities.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>DA</i>	<i>De Anima</i>
<i>FT</i>	<i>First Treatise</i>
<i>GA</i>	<i>Generation of Animals</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Magna Moralia</i>
<i>Meta.</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>NE</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Ody.</i>	<i>Odyssey</i>
<i>PA</i>	<i>Parts of Animals</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politics</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	<i>Rhetoric</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Second Treatise</i>

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Locke, Individual Rights, and the Family

This dissertation explores Aristotle's view of the family, the relations between men and women, and the political and philosophic implications of his position. I argue that, for Aristotle, friendship in the family is the source and foundation of political life. The proper practice of politics aims at friendship, and depends upon the development of a family structure conducive to that goal. For Aristotle, this development means transforming a family dominated by the manliness of the father into a family that makes room for the rule of the woman—a rule that allows for and fosters friendship. When properly structured, the family affirms an important role for women at the level of the family, an influence that is crucial to the formation of political life and its proper practice.

Before turning to Aristotle's writings on the family, I begin with a discussion of the alternative to his account that is offered by Lockean liberalism. Aristotle, I show, not only provides the most profound account of the family, he does so in a way that can work to correct the tendency in liberalism to underestimate the importance of familial relationships. To show that this is the case, this chapter explores the theoretical foundation of this tendency by examining Locke's account of rights and demonstrating how that account depends upon the rejection of the natural family.

In order to illuminate Locke's view of human beings and their associations, I turn to the ways in which the Lockean understanding manifests itself in the political sphere. To do so I follow the work of the political theorists Michael Zuckert (who defends Locke) and George Grant (who attacks Locke), both of whom argue that Locke's account

of rights most clearly reveals itself politically through the issue of abortion. As we will see, Locke's view of the family is clearly at work in arguments used to support abortion, and I explore these arguments primarily by way of opinions offered by Supreme Court Justices. These reasonings are useful to our understanding of Locke's view of the family, for they provide practical examples which illustrate the relationship of Locke's account of the family to his broader right-based political theory. They also reveal the need for the more complex understanding of the family that is offered by Aristotle, an understanding which I examine in Chapters Two through Nine of this dissertation.

John Locke's Liberalism, and its Political Manifestation

John Locke bases government and rights on an equality that springs from man's radical individualism.¹ In doing so, Locke sharply distinguishes between private and public life, and sets up his theory of politics in direct contrast to a patriarchal system, making his account of parent's relationship to their children crucial to understanding his system of government.² For Locke, the individual is an autonomous unit who enters into associations such as the family and civil society on a contractual basis, for limited purposes and with limited obligations. The denial of the natural family was necessary to Locke's project because the equality implied by his social contract theory requires an individualism that entails freedom from any familial obligations. As we will see, this

¹"Man being born, as has been proved, with a Title to perfect Freedom, and an uncontrouled enjoyment of all the Rights and Privileges of the Law of Nature, equally with any other Man, or Number of Men in the World." John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), *Second Treatise* §. 87. I will hereafter refer to the two treatises as *FT* (*First Treatise*) and *ST* (*Second Treatise*).

²Nathan Tarcov argues that the fundamental separation of powers in Locke may be the separation of political from parental power. *Locke's Education for Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 72. See also David Foster, "Taming the Father: John Locke's Critique of Patriarchal Fatherhood," *The Review of Politics* 56, no. 4 (1994): 643; Jacqueline L. Pfeffer, "The Family in John Locke's Political Thought," *Polity* 33, no. 4 (2001): 598.

individualism leads him to argue for the equality of the sexes in the family, transforming it from a natural relationship based on paternal rule to a contractual institution based upon parental rule.

It is widely accepted that the thought and writings of John Locke deeply inform the American regime. The leading exponent of this understanding is Michael Zuckert, whose work has been widely praised for its important and careful explication of Locke's account of natural rights and its relationship to America. In *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* and in *Launching Liberalism*, he broke new ground in Lockean studies, arguing that Locke is the first philosopher to outline a natural rights doctrine that compels respect for the rights of others without appealing to God. According to Zuckert, in order to ensure the political success of his philosophic innovation, Locke attempted to transform competing traditions of political thought (such as Old Whig constitutionalism and Puritan political theology) in a way that made each compatible with liberalism. Zuckert argues in his *Natural Rights Republic* that Locke's project has been a success: a careful reading of the *Declaration of Independence* and other founding documents shows the "primacy of natural rights liberalism for understanding the American founding."³ America is the "natural rights republic," and its rights are Lockean in nature.

Zuckert tempers his all-encompassing characterization of America by noting that, even in America, the Lockean assimilation of competing traditions has not been absolute. Tensions between the remaining remnants of the incorporated traditions occasionally reemerge and diverge from one another. On such occasions, those traditions can and should be brought back into the liberal fold by the reassertion of the Lockean natural

³Michael Zuckert, *The Natural Rights Republic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 7.

rights doctrine. As an example of such disharmony, he points to the debate over abortion.⁴ The example is not idly chosen, for in his “Fundamental Rights, the Supreme Court and American Constitutionalism,” Zuckert again introduces his subject by reference to the problem of abortion.⁵ More importantly, Zuckert introduces the central chapter of *Launching Liberalism* by citing abortion as the most divisive topic in our political culture, and therefore the topic that can illuminate the relationship of Locke’s political theory to America.⁶

Zuckert’s repeated claim that an understanding of abortion is central to understanding of the liberal project, and therewith America, is supported by the Canadian political philosopher George Grant. But despite agreeing with Zuckert that America is wholly Lockean, Grant makes this the reason for condemning the nation. Moreover, just as Zuckert pointed to the issue of abortion when exploring the Lockean quality of the American regime, Grant claims that America’s Lockean character is most fully revealed when one considers the issue of abortion. For Grant, the significance of *Roe v. Wade* is that it “speaks modern liberalism in its pure contractual form,” and shows the failure of liberalism to offer a sustainable ground for justice or politics.⁷

⁴Zuckert, *The Natural Rights Republic*, 8.

⁵Zuckert’s essay argues for the consistency of fundamental rights and the fourteenth amendment with natural rights. Michael Zuckert, “Fundamental Rights, the Supreme Court and American Constitutionalism,” in *The Supreme Court and American Constitutionalism*, ed. Bradford Wilson and Ken Masugi (Lanham: Roman and Littlefield, 1998), 129-156; compare 130-131, 156. See also his remarks on rights and human capacity on 149.

⁶Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 169-170. The chapter focuses on the difference between natural rights and natural law.

⁷George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1998), 70. The Court’s decision in *Roe v. Wade* is self contradictory, argues Grant, because it relies on quasi-ontological distinctions (persons vs. non persons) while at the same time rejecting ontology’s (the question of what a fetus *is*) relevance to justice, which it holds to be wholly contractual. Clifford Orwin disagrees with Grant’s assessment: “From Professor Grant’s presentation of *Roe* it might appear that the burning legal question at issue was that of the

Does the liberal Zuckert side with the right to procure an abortion as Grant claims a Lockean must? Although he raises the issue of abortion so as to indicate its central importance for an assessment of the final consistency of Locke's teaching, Zuckert never explicitly provides the Lockean answers to the problem it raises. Instead he simply offers Locke's liberal doctrine, leaving it to the reader to discover how abortion illuminates the meaning of that doctrine. Let us turn then to Zuckert's analysis.

Lockean Rights

According to Zuckert's Locke, natural right is achieved as property, or more specifically, as self-ownership. Self-ownership requires the development of the self, a self that is made by human beings themselves. Indeed, insofar as one has a self, that self is self-owning: "human beings are self-owners because they are the makers of their selves and they own what they make."⁸ Self-ownership is "the foundation or ground of rights," and this self-ownership makes rights inviolable, since "inviolability (exclusive right) is precisely what ownership means or implies."⁹

Achieving self-ownership is coeval with personhood. A person is a self that is "a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself,

personhood of the foetus. It was not. . . . The watershed is not that of 'personhood,' but of 'viability.'" Review of "*English-Speaking Justice*," *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 30, no. 1 (1980): 111. Orwin's argument depends on his claim that no one on the Court even suggests that a fetus is a person (112). Blackmun, however, argues that the common law's recognition of quickening as a legal landmark reflected a general agreement between philosophy, theology, civil and canon law, that when the fetus becomes recognizably human, it is a person. He also notes, "If . . . personhood is established. . . the fetus' right to life would then be guaranteed specifically by the [14th] Amendment." Thus, while Orwin is right that Blackmun makes viability the controlling legal question, Blackmun's doing so depends upon his prior refusal to answer the question of whether the fetus is a life, a refusal which makes it impossible for the fetus to meet the definition of a person who can be deprived of life under the 14th Amendment.

⁸Michael Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 278.

⁹Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism*, 194.

the same thinking thing in different times and places.” Thus, “the term person ‘belongs only to intelligent agents capable of a law and happiness and misery.’ . . . Personhood is something non-animal-like. All animate beings share in life and in the strong drive to preservation, but only in human beings does this drive become a right.”¹⁰ In other words, since some men (and children) are incapable of or have not achieved reason and reflection, “man and person are terms or ideas that refer to quite different things.”¹¹

We now see why Zuckert considers the issue of abortion to be of central interest to our assessment of Locke’s teaching. On Zuckert’s account, the fetus does not have an inviolable right to his or herself: since the fetus does not possess the qualities requisite for a self, the fetus cannot claim self-ownership, and therefore cannot possess rights. According to Zuckert: “So far as it [the self] accurately understands its situation, it necessarily raises rights claims over its body, actions, and road to happiness. The self posits itself as a possessor of rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”¹² The recognition of these rights depends on reason, and that same reason compels the holder of rights to respect those rights in others: justice consists in respecting rights. Because a fetus is not self-owning—because it cannot and does not posit itself as a self who possesses rights—it does not have rights. And since rights predate justice (for they must be understood and claimed before they can be respected),¹³ fetuses can be destroyed without violating justice. In other words, since fetuses do not have a self, they cannot

¹⁰Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism*, 279. Zuckert is quoting Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 2.27.8.

¹¹Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism*, 279.

¹²Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism*, 196.

¹³Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism*, 317.

have self-ownership; they do not have the right to posit rights and therefore do not possess them. In contrast, if a mother has an inviolable right to herself, then she may justifiably exercise that right by removing the fetus from her body. As a self-owner, she is inviolable.

In *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* the plurality opinion argues that “at the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”¹⁴ Although some scholars understand these words as mere window dressing, doing so overlooks the remarkable similarity between the view the Court articulates, and the Locke’s doctrine of rights.¹⁵ If Grant is correct about *Roe*’s inherent liberalism, then it would not be surprising if *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, by “reaffirming the central holding of *Roe*,”¹⁶ defended that reaffirmation by appealing to Lockean principles.¹⁷ And Zuckert’s account of the grounding of natural rights is consistent with *Casey*’s famous liberty phrase: since a fetus cannot posit its own “concept

¹⁴*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U. S. 851 (1992). In *Lawrence v. Texas*. 539 U. S. 538 (2003) the Court repeats the phrase when ruling against Texas’s law prohibiting sodomy.

¹⁵Hadley Arkes called these words fatuous. Robert George said the Court was not describing anything. It was just inventing a rationale to justify the right it had invented in *Roe v. Wade*. “The Supreme Court 1997: A Symposium,” *First Things* 8, no. 8 (October, 1997): <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/09/001-the-supreme-court-1997-50> (accessed January 30, 2010).

¹⁶*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 853.

¹⁷Ronald Dworkin, Thomas Nagel, Robert Nozick, John Rawls, T.M. Scanlon, Judith Jarvis Thomson, when defending assisted suicide, agree that the reasoning of *Casey* is consistent with its famous liberty passage: “The analysis in *Casey* compels the conclusion that the patient-plaintiffs have a liberty interest in this case that a state cannot burden with a blanket prohibition. Like a woman’s decision whether to have an abortion, a decision to die involves one’s very “destiny” and inevitably will be “shaped to a large extent on [one’s] own conception of [one’s] spiritual imperatives and [one’s] place in society.” “Assisted Suicide: The Philosophers’ Brief,” *New York Review of Books* 44, no. 5 (March 27, 1997), <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1237>, (accessed December 1, 2009). The “philosophers” are arguing for the right to commit suicide. Locke reaches a similar conclusion in regards to suicide (see *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism*, 240-246; *Launching Liberalism*, 192). The Supreme Court, however, has refused to affirm the claim that “there is a right to die” or that the Constitution implies “a liberty to choose how to die.” *Washington v. Glucksberg*, 521 U.S. 702 (1997).

of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life,” abortion is permissible. Moreover, since the mother can posit these things, she is a holder of rights, including the right to protect her body from the violation embodied in the form of the child who is growing inside her.

Lockean liberalism and *Casey* are also consistent in that both ground rights in liberty. According to Zuckert, whereas “[Thomistic] natural law is natural moral duty; natural right, on the other hand, is permissive, a liberty. As he [Locke] said, ‘Right consists in the fact that we have the free use of something, but law is that which either commands or forbids some action.’”¹⁸ Lockean liberty requires that human beings belong wholly to themselves, owing no man or God anything.¹⁹ In this liberty, they may define their own “concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe,” including the right to have an abortion, for it is the very defining of these things that entails the right to procure an abortion. If the famous liberty phrase of *Casey* is the defining principle for American constitutional law, we might well suppose that Zuckert is right that America is fundamentally Lockean.

Lockean Rights and the Family

As we focus on the absolute liberty *promised* by Lockean natural rights we should be aware of the absolute liberty *required* by Lockean political theory. The liberating abstraction upon which the Lockean natural rights doctrine depends, poses the danger of

¹⁸Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism*, 191. Zuckert is citing Locke’s *Questions* 11.

¹⁹Complete self-ownership manifests itself in more than one way: “Human beings are unique in that as selves they can seize on their entire lives as wholes.” Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism*, 195.

abstracting our thoughts from the radical nature of its project.²⁰ Note, for instance, that the alienation of the individual from his or her family is necessary for the absolute liberty promised by Locke's doctrine of rights.²¹ In order for a mother to assert Lockean natural rights—in order for her to be wholly self-owning—she must posit that she does not owe her fetus anything, and therefore she cannot regard herself as a mother or love her child. Locke's theory of rights requires a prior, more fundamental, radicalized freedom—a freedom from any obligation to others, and especially from any obligation to one's children or parents or family. This implication is pointed out by William Mathie, who, in response to Grant's critique of liberalism's contractual justice, asks “whether the present crisis for our justice may not summon an equal consideration of the liberal critique of the Biblical teaching?” For, wonders Mathie, is not the Judaic and Christian understanding of the family “displaced by a purely contractual account in the writings of Hobbes and Locke”?²²

In order to explore the possibility that the abortion decisions are the outworking of Locke's view of the family, we might turn to Zuckert's assessment of the family. But Zuckert rarely discusses Locke's account of the family, offering instead what Thomas West calls “a silence or near silence on the family.” For West, Zuckert's near silence

²⁰It is not my purpose here to explore whether the Lockean doctrine articulated by Zuckert is finally applicable to only the few. However, one might note that if complete self-ownership involves understanding oneself as the bearer of rights, and if Locke's version of rights is the only possible ground for that understanding, one could conclude that only those who fully understand his theory (only those who live with reason as their only guide and compass) can rightly recognize themselves as bearers of rights (thus the law of nature is reason). On this possibility, the recognition of rights in others would be extremely limited. One might wonder whether this possibility does not finally undermine the political teaching of equality that Locke attaches to his theory of rights, and makes necessary to his political project.

²¹William Mathie, “Reason, Revelation and Liberal Justice: Reflections on George Grant's Analysis of *Roe v. Wade*,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 19, no. 3 (1986): 443-466, especially 463-465.

²²Mathie, 464.

points to the weakness of his account of Lockean rights. Yet in reply we might note that Zuckert's near silence on the family may not be as important as West makes out, especially since that silence parallels Zuckert unwillingness to explicitly answer the question of abortion that he suggests is central to Lockean liberalism.

But West goes further than simply charging Zuckert with neglecting part of Locke's teaching: he argues that a close reading of Locke's writings undermine Zuckert's reading, and reveals Locke to be a defender of the family:

It is hard to see how self-ownership could possibly create what Locke calls 'a right of being nourished and maintained by their parents, which God and nature has given to children, and obliged parents to, as a duty.' And in fact Locke does not even try to ground parental duties in self-ownership. Instead, Locke suggests that this duty is grounded in the parents' 'strong desire also of propagating their kind, and continuing themselves in their posterity.'²³

Later West again explains his opposition to Zuckert's self-ownership thesis by referencing Locke's writings of the family:

But in the crucial passage in the *First Treatise* where Locke addresses the ground of natural right, the basic right to kill animals and eat them, and the basic right of children to be taken care of by their parents, do "emerge as a means to other things," namely, as a means to self-preservation and self-perpetuation. A man's reason pronounces the means to these ends to be right because they are "necessary and useful for his being."²⁴

West's Locke therefore defends the family, albeit on utilitarian grounds. If West is right, Zuckert's account of Lockean rights that we have thus far followed is severely weakened.

West's defense of Locke (and critique of Zuckert's interpretation) becomes problematic, however, when one notes that, in the passage from Locke's *First Treatise*

²³Thomas West, "Nature and Happiness in Locke: A review of *Launching Liberalism: On Lockean Political Philosophy* by Michael P. Zuckert." The review was published in *The Claremont Review of Books* 4, no. 2 (2004), but I am quoting from the unabridged version, posted on the Claremont Institute's website at: www.claremont.org/publications/pubid.659/pub_detail.asp (accessed October 21, 2009).

²⁴*Ibid.*

that West cites, the two standards of self-preservation and self-perpetuation are not consistent when it comes to the family:

[the wolves and lions] obey God and nature in being tender and careful of their off-spring: they will hunt, watch, fight, and almost starve for the preservation of their young; never part with them; never forsake them, till they are able to shift for themselves. And is it the privilege of man alone to act more contrary to nature than the wild and most untamed part of the creation? Does God permit us to destroy those, he has given us the charge and care of; and by the dictates of nature and reason, as well as his revealed command, requires us to preserve? He has in all the parts of the creation taken a peculiar care to propagate and continue the several species of creatures, and makes the individuals act so strongly to this end, that they sometimes neglect their own private good for it, and seem to forget that general rule, which nature teaches all things, of self-preservation; and the preservation of their young, as the strongest principle in them, over-rules the constitution of their particular natures (*FT* §.56).

This statement is the closest Locke comes to affirming the naturalness of the family, as he finds a natural desire to preserve one's offspring so strong as to overrule even the natural desire for self-preservation. Insofar as he does affirm familial duties, Locke grounds them in human desire manifesting God's command, a desire that turns out to be in tension with nature's teaching of self-preservation.

After placing these two principles in opposition to one another, Locke immediately qualifies his observation of the parents' desire to preserve their children by referring his readers to a story about people in Peru who begot and fattened children in order to eat them:

The story is so remarkable, that I cannot but set it down in the author's words. "In some provinces, *says he*, they were so liquorish after man's flesh, . . . they spared not their own children, which they had begot on strangers taken in war: for they made their captives their mistresses, and choicely *nourished* the children they had by them, till about thirteen years old they butchered and eat them; and they served the mothers after the same fashion, when they grew past child bearing, and ceased to bring them any more roasters.

[§.58] Thus far can the busy mind of man carry him to a brutality below the level of beasts, when he quits his reason, which places him almost equal to angels (*FT* §.57-58).

Here, Locke sets up a tension between man's desire and man's reason. God-given but beastlike desire, which had first defended the family over and against nature's rule of self-preservation, is here shown to destroy the family and to be inferior to reason. Locke claims that the story of the Peruvians is an "example of what hath been done rather than what ought to be" (*FT* §.57), and gives us every reason to believe that this claim (which links the two passages), also applies to his remarks about parent's tendency to die for their children. Thus, Locke attempts to show the futility of grounding the naturalness of the family—and therewith the obligation to nourish one's children—in such unreasonable desire, showing that human desires can also entail the eating of one's children.²⁵ Indeed, he even allows the reader to wonder whether, if such desires are the foundation of rights, the desire to eat human flesh could of itself establish the obligation to nourish one's child.

When Locke introduced the possibility of the natural family by asking "whether it the privilege of man alone to act more contrary to nature than the wild and most untamed part of the creation [who follow the instinct for perpetuation bestowed by God by defending their children]," the question appeared merely rhetorical. The end of the discussion, however, reveals Locke's question to be deadly serious, for he answers with it with an unqualified yes: it is the privilege of man (as opposed to beasts) to deny any obligation to the family that seems to stem from the desire for perpetuation. On Locke's account, only reason can provide the proper basis for human life. Here Zuckert's analysis

²⁵See also *FT* §. 59: "Be it then, as Sir *Robert* says, that *anciently* it was usual for men to *sell and castrate their children*, *Observations*, 155. Let it be, that they exposed them; add to it, if you please, for this is still greater power, that they begat them for their tables, to fat and eat them: if this proves a right to do so, we may, by the same argument, justify adultery, incest and sodomy, for there are examples of these too, both ancient and modern." Note that, on Locke's account, eating or selling one's children might be more justified than risking one's life for them, since eating and selling could be a means to self-preservation.

of Locke withstands West's critique, which attempted to frame Locke as a defender of the family.

Likewise, when Locke speaks of parental duty he writes: "The *Power*, then, *that Parents have* over their Children, arises from that Duty which is incumbent on them, to take care of their Off-spring, during the imperfect state of Childhood" (*ST* §.58). For Locke this duty arises from the fact that all parents are "by the Law of Nature, under an obligation to preserve, nourish, and educate the Children, they had begotten, not as their own Workmanship, but the Workmanship of their own Maker, the Almighty, to whom they were to be accountable for them" (*ST* §.56). Again, the statement's meaning is unclear. On the one hand, Locke claims that parents are responsible for those they have begotten, while on the other he claims that no one truly begets, since children are the workmanship of God rather than of the parents.²⁶ If there is any duty to take care of children, it does not seem particular to the biological parents. Locke soon makes this implication explicit, arguing that there is no difference between biological fathers and foster-fathers:

This power so little belongs to the *Father* by any particular right of Nature, but only as he is Guardian of his Children, that when he quits his care of them, he loses his power over them, which goes along with their Nourishment and Education, to which it is inseparably annexed, and it belongs as much to the *Foster-Father* of an exposed Child, as to the Natural Father of another: So little power does the bare *act of begetting* give a Man of his Issue, if all his Care ends there, and this be all the Title he hath to the Name and Authority of a Father (*ST* §.65).

²⁶Locke also denies that the parents have any power due to their part in conceiving their children, writing that "no Parents can pretend to be [maker] of their children" (*FT* §. 63). He then goes further, adding: "What Father of a Thousand, when he begets a Child, thinks farther than the satisfying his present Appetite? God in his infinite Wisdom has thereby put strong desires of Copulation into the Constitution of Men, thereby to continue the race of Mankind, which he doth most commonly without the intention, and often against the Consent and Will of the Begetter" (*FT* §. 54).

For Locke the basis of parental power is not natural, but rather is tied to the activity of caring for a child through nourishment and education, a care that is freely chosen by the parent. The workmanship argument is not any more compelling to the biological parent than it is to the foster father.²⁷

Nor does the law of nature make the workmanship argument more compelling, for Locke describes that law as knowable only through reason. According to Locke, this reason does not restrain, but rather directs the agent to his proper interest, which Locke calls the preservation and enlargement of freedom as opposed to being governed by the arbitrary will of another (*ST* §.58). In this freedom, one can choose to care for or not to care for a child. Fittingly, when Locke notes the supposition that fatherhood is granted by the act of begetting, he follows the claim by again distinguishing between men and beasts. While both are guided by self preservation, men are directed by reason and intellect, and beasts by instinct (*FT* §.85-86). Man's begetting, however, occurs through instinct rather than reason (*FT* §.64); it is beastlike and so should not be compelling to human beings. Instead, man "had a right to make use of those Creatures, which by his Reason or Senses he could discover would be serviceable thereunto. And thus Man's Property in the Creatures was founded upon the right he had, to make use of those things, that were necessary or useful to his being" (*FT* §.86).²⁸ Locke thus resituates the workmanship argument: his earlier claim that children are not the workmanship of the parent's begetting but of God turns out to mean that children are the workmanship of

²⁷The absence of any natural parental power is connected to Locke's claim that property comes from labor: Locke must deny that the parents in any way make their children, for their doing so would imply a kind of ownership. Locke writes that labor implies Title (*ST* §. 51), but that the sole Title a father has to his children is tied to his care of them, rather than his begetting (*ST* §. 65).

²⁸This is one of the phrases quoted by West (see above).

their parent's reason rather than their instinct. And Locke describes reason as the voice of God (*FT* §.86). The child becomes the parent's workmanship (i.e. the parent's son or daughter) by way of the voice of God—i.e. by way of the reasoned choice of the father or mother.²⁹

It is not surprising then, that Locke denies that nature compels obedience to the father by the son. Instead, every man's child is by nature as free as himself (*ST* §.73). The father is therefore ruler of his children by “the express or tacit Consent of the Children” (*ST* §.74), a consent that makes his authority seem “almost natural” (*ST* §.75). The relationship between children and their parents is contractual rather than natural: the parents decide to care for the child, a care that gives them “a perpetual right to respect, reverence, support and compliance,” a right that is determined in direct relation to the “Father's care, cost and kindness” in the child's education (*ST* §.67).³⁰

In arguing against the patriarchal rule of the family, Locke explicitly claims that the mother has just as much power over her children as does the father (*ST* §.81). But since parental power is not natural, when Locke grants that the mother's parental power is equal to that of the father's, that granting does not connect her power to her role as the child's natural mother, but rather to the claim that she has the power to contract with a child to be his or her mother in the same way a man can contract with a child to be his or her father. The mother is equal to the father in parental power inasmuch as neither has a

²⁹Locke's account of inheritance parallels Locke's claim that the duty of parents to their children establishes a right to be cared for. At first Locke claims that the right to bequeath one's inheritance is derived from self-preservation, and so is in this way natural. Yet later he admits that it is derived from common law rather than from nature. The argument from self-preservation parallels the self-perpetuation argument he makes about the duty of parents toward their children. Both appear as a kind of law that stems from nature, but both prove to be undermined by nature's reasonable law of self-preservation.

³⁰Locke notes that the possibility of an inheritance creates the possibility of a second contract that extends beyond the age of reason: obedience for the sake of inheritance (*ST* §. 72-23).

natural power over their children. In this way, Locke achieves equality of the sexes: not by the affirmation of the mother's parental power, but by the erasure of patriarchal power.³¹

Just as the relationship between parent and child is contractual, for Locke, the foundation and end of marriage and the family is the creation and fulfilling of a contract. According to Locke, conjugal society is a voluntary compact or contract between a man and woman made for the sake of procreation and the continuation of the species (*FT* §.47; *ST* §.78-79). According to Locke, once the child or children reach independence, the contract between husband and wife has reached its natural end, and each party is free to choose a new mate (*ST* §.80).³² The relationship between husband and wife has no foundation in affection; should any affection arise (a possibility not mentioned by Locke), that affection would not be properly natural.

So although Locke distinguishes between parental and political power, in important ways, he collapses the distinction between the family and political life. Neither the family nor political life is natural: both entities are created by contract, with any obligations following from the agreements reached. Human beings are fundamentally free from any obligations save those that they agree to. And even those obligations that

³¹Locke is not unaware that some desire equality more than they do power, perhaps even to the extent of being willing to give up power to achieve equality.

³²Although it should be noted that Locke's version does not exclude the possibility of polygamy. Indeed in his "Commonplace Book," Locke wrote: "for a man to cohabit and have children by one or more women, who are at their own disposal, and, when they think fit, to part again, I see not how it can be condemned as a vice, since nobody is harmed, supposing it done amongst persons considered as separate from the rest of mankind." "The Commonplace Book," in *Political Writings of John Locke*, ed. David Wootton (New York: Mentor, 1993), 241. Pfeffer points out this passage and notes "that in his Second Treatise Locke recorded without disapproval the practices of the American Indian 'Woman [who] hath more than one Husband at a time (2TS65).'" Pfeffer goes on to show that while Locke condemns polygamy in English society (see "The Commonplace Book," 241-242) he does so only on conventional grounds: the English conventional distaste for polygamy would undermine the mother's ability to carry out her parental tasks (Pfeffer, 209-210).

are agreed to are not fully binding—one reserves to oneself (in certain cases) the right to executive power, the right to end one’s life, and the right to revolution. Likewise, a child, whatever he agrees to in contracting with his parents, cannot give up the absolute liberty that is due to him once he reaches the age of reason. In sum, the contract between parent and child is a binding authority on the child only insofar as the child lacks authority in his or her reason. As we saw, it is this reason that forms the basis of property (or self-ownership) in the child, which carries with it a series of rights, including the right to revolution applied to his rulers or his parents.

Lockean Rights Illuminated by Practice

Thus, just as Zuckert claims that the issue of abortion is essential to our understanding the rights which derive from reason or self-ownership, in the *First* and *Second Treatise* Locke turns to an analysis of the family in order to distinguish his political doctrine from those political theories and philosophies which preceded it. As we have seen, that analysis proved the natural family and its relationships to be unnecessary and even antithetical to his theory of rights. *Casey’s* liberty phrase is therefore striking, not only because it is expressive of Locke’s theory of rights grounded in self-ownership, but also because Locke himself shows that the working out of his theory depends upon overcoming the challenge posed by the natural family: we should not be surprised that the Court’s most direct articulation of Lockean liberty-grounded rights occurs in decisions that support the most direct challenges to the natural family and its relationships.

Like Locke, the Court’s most ardent supporters of liberty-grounded rights admit that these rights depend on overcoming the family’s natural relationships. For instance, Justice Ginsberg argues that the woman’s right to fully exercise her talents and capacities

depends upon her autonomy, which in turn depends upon her ability to control her reproductive life through abortion:

There was a time, not so long ago, when women were regarded as the center of home and family life. . . . Those views, this Court made clear in *Casey*, are no longer consistent with our understanding of the family, the individual, or the Constitution 505 U. S., at 897. Women, it is now acknowledged, have the talent, capacity, and right to participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation. *Id.*, at 856. Their ability to realize their full potential, the Court recognized, is intimately connected to their ability to control their reproductive lives. *Ibid.* Thus, legal challenges to undue restrictions on abortion procedures do not seek to vindicate some generalized notion of privacy; rather, they center on a woman's autonomy to determine her life's course.³³

Just as Locke's doctrine of rights requires the rejection of the natural desire to care for one's family (and to perpetuate oneself), for Justice Ginsberg, the fulfillment of the woman's capacities depends upon jettisoning the motherhood imposed by nature.

To understand the move toward Justice Ginsberg's position it is useful to trace the history of the abortion decisions back to *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, which transformed the right to privacy affirmed in *Griswold v. Connecticut*.³⁴ According to *Griswold*, the right to privacy extends to the use of contraceptives in a marriage because, in dealing with the family, "we deal with a right of privacy older than the Bill of Rights -- older than our political parties, older than our school system. Marriage is a coming together for better or for worse, hopefully enduring, and intimate to the degree of being sacred."³⁵ In *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, however, Justice Brennan turned away from this justification and toward an account premised on individualism, arguing that "if the right of privacy means

³³Justice Ginsberg's dissent, *Gonzales v. Carhart*, 550 U. S. ____ (2007). She also favorably quotes *Casey*'s claim that "[t]he destiny of the woman must be shaped . . . on her own conception of her spiritual imperatives and her place in society." *Casey*, 505 U. S., at 852."

³⁴For a discussion of the move toward individual privacy, see H. Jefferson Powell, *The Moral Tradition of American Constitutionalism* (Duke University Press, 1993), 176-177.

³⁵*Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U. S. 479 (1965).

anything, it is the right of the individual, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child.”³⁶ As a result of this turn, in *Roe v. Wade* the right to privacy became the source of a woman’s right to free herself from the burden of pregnancy. The right to privacy, originally meant to defend the family, was transformed in a way that freed individuals from the family itself, a freedom articulated by the Court’s support of autonomous individualism in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*.

Conclusion

In order to explore understand an alternative to this Lockean view of the fully autonomous individual—and therewith its possible utility as a way of understanding ourselves and our relationships—I will now turn to Aristotle’s view of the family, the relations between men and women, and the political and philosophic implications of his position. I will argue that Aristotle’s view of the natural basis of the family and its essential role in political life encourages men and women’s distinct and complementary contributions to these social units in a way that sustains rather than undermines their integrity as individuals.

While my primary goal is to investigate Aristotle’s account of the relationship between the family and political life, I also hope that my doing so will help us think through current political problems, including ways of resolving the sharp tension between individual rights and the family that personify the Lockean approach to the family. Thus, after exploring Aristotle’s account, I will briefly sketch out the possibility of integrating his view into the political sphere in a way that recognizes the importance of the family

³⁶*Eisenstadt v. Baird*, 405 U. S. 438 (1972).

and that therefore corrects the weaknesses in the Lockean approach. In sum, while my purpose is to shed light on how the family serves as the foundation of Aristotle's political project, I also hope to outline the possibility of applying his account of the family to the current practice of politics.

CHAPTER TWO

Aristotle on Generation, the Family and Political Life

The greater part of scholarship directed at Aristotle's account of familial relationships deals with his biological account of the differences between men and women in his *Generation of Animals*, and with his presentation of the family in the *Politics*. Several passages in these texts have led critics to charge that Aristotle presents a less than favorable view of women. In the *Generation of Animals*, Aristotle calls women incomplete men (*GA* 737a27-30) and appears to attribute the generation of a new human being exclusively to men, thereby ignoring or substantially downplaying the important contribution of women. In the *Politics*, Aristotle claims that the woman is less of a leader than the man (*Pol.* 1259a39-b9) and that her reason lacks authority (*Pol.* 1260a8-15). Using these passages, critics such as Prudence Allen, Paige Du Bois, and Susan Moller Okin have interpreted *On the Generation of Animals* as portraying the female as inferior to the male.¹ Likewise, Leah Bradshaw and Jean Elshtain argue that, by relegating women to the household in the *Politics*, Aristotle unfairly presents them as unsuited to political life and its accompanying virtues.² Okin goes the furthest, using these texts to

¹Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: the Aristotelian Revolution 750B.C.-1250 A.D.* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1985); Paige Du Bois, *Saving the Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Susan Okin, *Woman in Western Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). See also: Maryann Cline Horowitz, "Aristotle and Woman," *Journal of the History of Biology* 9 (1976), 183-213; Lynda Lange, "Woman is Not a Rational Animal: On Aristotle's Biology of Reproduction," in *Discovering Reality*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1983), 1-15.

²Leah Bradshaw, "Political Rule, Prudence, and the Woman Question in Aristotle," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 24, no. 3 (1991), 557-573. Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

assert that Aristotle irrationally presents women as inferior to men, thereby laying the framework for the subsequent misogynist history of political philosophy.³

Okin reaches her conclusion by reading Aristotle as a set of propositions or assertions meant to convince us of an unambiguous or straightforward conclusion. Aristotle, she claims, means to acquire “knowledge of the way the world is, and moreover, to explain why it is the way it is.”⁴ In response to such interpretations, political theorists such as Harvey Mansfield, Mary Nichols, Steven Salkever, Arlene Saxonhouse, and Judith Swanson have argued that, when read within the context of a more nuanced and careful reading of Aristotle’s texts, Aristotle’s often-cited comments about women actually defend against misogynistic Greek culture,⁵ and even work to transform that culture.⁶ Contra Aristotle’s feminist critics, these theorists argue that Aristotle’s understanding of women stems from a complex view of nature—a view not wholly dependent upon biology. For instance, according to Nichols, Okin’s assumption that Aristotle describes the world in a straightforward way leads her to understand his

³Okin, 235.

⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

⁵For a good summary of the legal limits imposed on women and the negative social attitudes attached to them, see Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society, Vol. 2. Ancient Greece* (New York and London: Continuum, 2005), 59-100.

⁶Harvey Mansfield, *Manliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Mary P. Nichols, review of “Women in Western Thought,” *The Political Science Reviewer* 13, no. 1 (1983): 241-60; Mary P. Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle’s Politics*. (Savage: Roman and Littlefield, 1992); Arlene Saxonhouse, “Family, Polity & Unity: Aristotle on Socrates’ Community of Wives,” *Polity* 15, no. 2 (1982): 202-219; “Aristotle’s Defective Males, Hierarchy and the Limits of Politics,” *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 32-52; Stephen G Salkever, “Women, Soldiers, Citizens: Plato & Aristotle on the Politics of Virility,” *Polity* 19, no. 2 (1986): 232-253; Judith Swanson, *The Public and the Private in Aristotle’s Political Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

account of human nature to be inflexible. As a result, Okin misses the extent to which Aristotle moves beyond the status quo.⁷

Defenders of Aristotle also respond to his critics by placing his supposedly harsh biological account of women within the context of a nuanced and careful reading of his political works.⁸ Mansfield places the subject within the context of a larger discussion of the virtue of manliness, noting that manliness poses serious risks to political life: “manly assertiveness reveals an element of tyranny . . . the manly men in taking responsibility for others cannot stop themselves from ruling their inferiors and from treating them as slaves.”⁹ Manliness must therefore be tempered by womanliness: “women see themselves in relation to men, and men, who are more spirited, have a need for women

⁷Nichols, “Women in Western Thought,” 252.

⁸I generally engage scholarship that emphasizes the complexity of Aristotle’s work, by attempting to understand his arguments within the context of the political and pedagogical intent of his texts. I favor this approach because it results in a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of Aristotle. Since my argument itself intends to be proof of this latter claim, for now it suffices to note that Aristotle himself claims that his text is political and that it is directed at making us good (*NE* 1094b11; 1103b27; 1179b1-4; 1194a22-3).

Within this approach there are additional distinctions to be made. Aristide Tessitore argues that the *Ethics* contains contradictions, which appeal to two distinct and incompatible audiences: the gentleman whose action is restricted to political life, and the potential philosopher, who must escape the confines of the city in order to achieve the philosophic life. Aristotle, he writes, “chooses rather to mute the conflict between philosophers and the gentlemen, making the philosophic life more palatable to educated non philosophers.” *Reading Aristotle’s Ethics: Virtue, Rhetoric, and Political Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 3. Smith agrees that the aim of the *Ethics* is to lead its readers away from politics and toward philosophy, but also claims that the Aristotle’s presentation of the virtues contains an interrogation of “the psychic motives underlying the pursuit of honor . . . is a flight from death and a flight to noble life.” The life of philosophy, argues Smith, allows for the release “of the obsessive concern with self and its self-protective projects, which liberates them to live a divine life.” Thomas Smith, *Revaluing Ethics: Aristotle’s Dialectical Pedagogy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 282. My own approach is closer to Mary Nichols, who argues that Aristotle’s *Politics* demonstrates that an escape from political concerns is in fact a problematic move for philosophy. Following the example of Aristotle, she argues that philosophy concerns itself with politics because the practice of politics allows for the fuller practice of philosophy than one divorced from all external things (*Citizens and Statesmen*, 167). Like Nichols, I argue that Aristotle means to show the need to turn to politics. I, however, place more emphasis on philosophy’s natural aversion to political life.

⁹Mansfield, 218.

they often do not care to admit.”¹⁰ Saxonhouse addresses the concerns of feminists by providing an excellent overview of the issues at work in the texts, focusing on the ambiguity of many of Aristotle’s perceived attacks on women. Nichols’s response to Okin goes further, offering a sustained account of the role of women that points beyond Aristotle’s account of necessity (both at the level of biology and the pre-political family) and toward an account of politics that defends the integrity of women and their unique contribution to human life, particularly their ability to “affirm the goodness of human life.”¹¹

While I generally agree with these defenders of Aristotle, in contrast to their emphasis on the *Politics*, I focus on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The *Ethics*, I argue, shows that the contribution of women is essential to the public and private realm, inasmuch as it is the influence of the woman at the level of the family that allows for both the formation of political life and its proper practice. For Aristotle, this development means transforming a family dominated by the manliness of the father into a family that makes room for the rule of the mother—a rule that fosters friendship. I demonstrate that the *Ethics* contains not only an important argument about men, women, and the family in its own right, but that it also provides the most solid basis for understanding Aristotle’s writings on those subjects in the *Politics*. The *Ethics*’ account sheds light on the relationships of men and women, their familial and political contributions, and their connection to the intellectual and moral virtues.

Useful to the latter part of this project is the work of Steven Salkever, who argues that “familial life prepares us for political life, and at the same time it provides a separate

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 213.

¹¹Nichols, “Woman in Western Thought,” 253.

focus of attention and care that can check political excess which threatens to turn the most tightly knit cities into armed camps.”¹² The household is important to the development of the intellectual virtues because it enables the shame necessary to the development of persuasion and deliberation.¹³ Aristotle, suggests Salkever, means to replace a politics of virility with a politics of moderation by mitigating the manly and virile political impulses with private concerns of the family and philosophy. Here, Salkever is in general agreement with Saxonhouse who describes manliness as a serious and spirited concern for an action based politics, and womanliness as a playful concern for private life that emphasizes speech and that includes the life of the philosopher.¹⁴

I agree that Aristotle means to establish the integrity of private life in a way that will moderate manliness, but I argue that this account leaves too great a dichotomy between manliness and womanliness, as Aristotle understands it. It is not simply the case that manliness is properly identified with politics; since womanliness is characterized by a distinctive concern with other human beings, the practice of politics ultimately fulfills her nature. Likewise, insofar as womanliness is concerned with life, she must demonstrate spiritedness in order to preserve that life.

My argument relies primarily upon the discussion of family that occurs during the books of the *Ethics* that deal directly with friendship. Discussing those books, Ethan Leib argues that the family is defined by a friendship of unequals, which is only an approximation of the ideal type of friendship which is “the friendship of those equal in

¹² Salkever, “Women, Soldiers, Citizens: Plato & Aristotle on the Politics of Virility,” 247.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹⁴ Arlene Saxonhouse, “The Philosopher and the Female,” *Political Theory* 4, no. 4 (1976): 195-212. The primary concern of the article is Plato.

virtue pursuing the good.”¹⁵ On Leib’s reading, Aristotle holds up unequal and approximate friendship in the family only because it is the type of friendship necessary to political life. And for Leib there is little distinction between the family and political life: “since he [Aristotle] thinks that kingship is the best form of government, the best government corresponds to the friendship of unequals displayed paradigmatically by the father-son relation.”¹⁶

Leib, however, neglects the importance of the mother’s relationship with her child. Likewise, he overlooks the many ways Aristotle undercuts his endorsement of the prevailing father-son relationship. This oversight ultimately leads Leib to make the claim that Aristotle’s use of the father-child relationship as the paradigmatic example for politics shows that “Aristotle is wrong.”¹⁷ In contrast to Leib, I show that Aristotle’s account of womanliness, particularly as manifest in the mother and wife, sheds light on friendship in a way that makes Aristotle’s account of unequal friendships necessary not only to the proper practice of politics, but even to the highest form of friendship. For instance, although there is an obvious inequality between a mother and her child, Aristotle calls their relationship a friendship and often uses the mother’s love for the child as a model for friendship during his subsequent discussion. Moreover, despite saying that husbands and wives possess different, and perhaps even unequal, forms of virtue,

¹⁵Ethan Leib, “The Politics of Family and Friends in Aristotle and Montaigne,” *Interpretation* 31, no. 2 (2004): 172.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 174.

their relationship is the only specific example of a friendship of virtue given by Aristotle in the *Ethics*.¹⁸

Women and Men in the Generation of Animals

As an introduction to my examination of Aristotle's political works, especially the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a brief examination of Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* is in order. That work is the locus of Aristotle's apparently most misogynist statements and is often cited by feminists as Aristotle's foundation for the political views about women to which they object.

The most convincing and thorough treatment of the *Generation of Animals* is provided by Daryl Tress.¹⁹ Against the claims of feminist critics, Tress argues that Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* provides a theory of generation that corrects the prevailing theories of the time, theories which treat women as only cursory participants in the generation of a new human being.²⁰

Tress begins her analysis of Aristotle's text by noting its claim that both men and women play crucial roles in the generation of a new and unique human being: "the male and female are the principles [*archai*] of generation" (*GA* 716a5-7).²¹ According to

¹⁸These two examples are connected, for Aristotle indicates that a concern for their children is one of the bonds that unifies a husband and a wife (*NE* 1162a28-30).

¹⁹Daryl Tress, "The Metaphysical Science of Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* and Its Feminist Critics," *The Review of Metaphysics* 46, no. 2 (1992): 304-341.

²⁰Most important of Aristotle's time was the theory of preformationism, which holds that the mother merely nourishes the animalcule transferred from the father to her womb (see Tress, 318).

²¹Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, translated by A. L. Peck, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943). References to Aristotle will appear in the text. I quote from the following translations with occasional modifications: *De Anima* and *Metaphysics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, translated by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941); *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Martin Ostwald (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999); *Politics*, translated by Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

Tress, “the entirety of *GA* should be regarded as the working out, scientifically and philosophically, of [this] basic observation.”²² Part of the reason for the confusion over this fact, notes Tress, has been the tendency of translators to translate *sperma* simply as semen, despite the fact that Aristotle uses *sperma* to describe the matter contributed by both men and women.²³ Such translations have unfortunately led readers to wrongly understand Aristotle’s account to favor the generative role of men to the exclusion of the role of women, and therefore to miss Aristotle’s break with the theories that predate his work.²⁴ As Aristotle is well aware, the theories that he sets out to replace have been popularized by texts and plays like Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*.²⁵ By critiquing and replacing these theories, Aristotle supports not only the mother’s claim to a natural authority over her children, he undermines a basis for the Greek tendency to subordinate women to men.

Tress’s explanation of Aristotle’s use of “*sperma*” helps to clarify his theory. When Aristotle distinguishes between the male and female *sperma*, he argues that the female provides the material (*GA* 727b30), and the male the movement and form (*GA* 729a10).²⁶ The material contribution of the female *sperma* is not simply nutritive, but rather contains (in its potential) all the material parts of the body, including the material necessary to generate both a male and a female (*GA* 737a23). The contribution of the

²²Tress, 314, 314n12. Tress notes that this claim is repeated in the *Metaphysics*, when Aristotle uses the example of the child coming from the mother to describe *archē* as the source of motion and change “as the child comes from the mother” (*Meta.* 1013a8-9).

²³*Ibid.*, 314n14.

²⁴Tress provides a list of scholars who mistakenly confuse Aristotle’s account with the preformationist account he is breaking with (320n24).

²⁵In the play, Orestes murder of his mother is justified by the argument that “the mother is no parent of that which is called her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed that grows. The parent is he that mounts” Aeschylus, *Aeschylus I: Orestia*, translated by Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), *Eumenides* 657-660.

²⁶Note that Aristotle had no physical proof of the ovum.

form and motion by the male *sperma*, on the other hand, despite being material itself, provides no material contribution. According to Aristotle, “it is clear that [the male] *sperma* possesses soul, and that it is soul, potentially” (GA 735a9; see also 734b18-19). The male *sperma*, claims Aristotle, gives form to the material provided by the female, which has everything potentially but the soul. Thus, we have the male contribution that is immaterial and all soul (potentially), and the female contribution that is material of a new human (potentially) but no soul. According to *De Anima*, however, the soul cannot be without a body (DA 412a29-b7; 414a15-25), and Aristotle writes that “there seems to be no case in which the soul can act or be acted upon without involving the body” (DA 403a5-7). What is provided by the male *sperma* is therefore only potentially soul because of its potential to interact with the female *sperma*. Likewise, since the soul is the organizing principle of the body, the material of the female is only potentially male and female because of its potential to have a soul. Put another way, the potentiality of soul depends upon the female, and the potentiality of material depends upon the male. Although Aristotle does not explain how something immaterial is carried through material *sperma* or how it interacts with the material provided by the mother, Aristotle holds that both the male and female play essential roles in the generation of a new human being.

As Tress notes, Aristotle reasons that the contribution of the male and female *sperma* must differ on the grounds that male and female *sperma* cannot contribute the same thing to generation; if they did, they would have no need of the other. On the other hand, if the contributions of the male and female *sperma* are wholly different, it is difficult to explain how these independent principles unite to create a single principle that

directs the development of the particular human being.²⁷ Thus, although Aristotle does reason that what each sex contributes to generation is different, he also suggests that what each contributes is not wholly so (see *DA* 407b14-25). For example, the matter contributed by the female already has some form: it is already potentially a female and male human (not dog or cat). Similarly the form provided by the male *sperma* is the form of a human being, whether male or female.

But what of Aristotle's claim that the female is *pepērōmenōn*, or an incomplete male?²⁸ Tress provides a possible explanation. According to Tress, Aristotle's purpose is to explain what might appear to be a theoretical problem in his account of generation:

His crude sounding analogy is meant to show that females can and do produce male offspring because they do possess (potentially) the "extra" male organs. But they themselves, as females, do not manifest them and so might be said, in this way only, to be like those who are deformed or underdeveloped in that they possess parts which are of no use to them. Aristotle is not in this passage offering a philosophy of women as a deformity of nature or as an underdeveloped human but rather he is trying to solve some technical difficulties facing his theory. He overcomes them by positing an extended potentiality to this generative material of the female, potential to generate what the female herself does not exhibit.²⁹

Thus, the fact that the female sperm has the potentiality to grow into either a male or female, that it "contains all the parts of the body potentially" and that "all includes those parts that distinguish both sexes" (*GA* 737a24-25), the generative process of women is

²⁷Tress, 324-25.

²⁸Peck offers several ways to translate *pepērōmenōn*, including deformed, imperfectly developed, and underdeveloped. I use incomplete here because the other words often wrongly imply disfiguration. Aristotle rarely uses *pepērōmenōn* elsewhere, but when he does, he uses it to describe the failure to fully accomplish some end, rather than to describe disfiguration. For example, he uses *pepērōmenōn* in his *Parts of Animals* to describe the failure of lobsters to consistently have a larger right claw (the larger claw is randomly distributed). In other clawed animals, the right claw is always bigger for the sake of hunting. The irregularity of the lobsters, argues Aristotle, is connected to their failure to reach the end of claws, which is hunting (lobsters use claws for locomotion). Thus, *pepērōmenōn* does not refer simply to disfiguration (for even the lobsters with larger right claws are *pepērōmenōn*), but to the relationship of the claw to the end of hunting (*PA* 684a34-b3).

²⁹Tress, 336-337.

necessarily incomplete. Her *sperma* cannot produce male and female simultaneously, only one or the other. Paradoxically, if the woman were able to produce only females, then she would be complete. In sum, when understood in context of the philosophic problem, it is difficult to read Aristotle's description of women as misogynistic.

Aristotle nevertheless says of the female *sperma* that it "lacks one constituent, and one only, the principle of soul." But since Aristotle has insisted that the male contributes no material to generation, by the same token the male could be called incomplete since his *sperma* lacks one constituent: the material needed for the body. And since the presence of the soul depends upon the presence of the body (*DA* 412a29-b7), even if the male *sperma* contains "the principle of soul," that principle is not a soul in itself, and so cannot in itself fulfill (and perhaps even cannot possess) the potential for soul. Since, as Aristotle has already told us, "the male and the female are the principles of generation," both male and female are incomplete, for neither can successfully generate without the other.

Politics and the Generation of Animals

According to Tress, feminist critics misread the *Generation of Animals* because they read it as a text primarily concerned with power and politics, a reading at odds with Aristotle's true intention: the attempt to work out a philosophic problem.

Acknowledging that Aristotle's arguments have had political implications, Tress separates those implications from Aristotle's intention. While an extensive account of the intricacies of Aristotle's account of generation and its relationship to his political writings goes beyond my present purpose, it is worth noting that Aristotle is aware of possible political implications of biological science. Take, for example, his strict

separation of what is contributed by the male and female. When Aristotle attributes the material cause of generation to the mother and the formal and efficient causes to the father, he goes on to claim that, since form is better and more divine than matter, “it is better also that the superior one should be separate from the inferior one” (*GA* 732a5). As Tress comments, while for Aristotle form has preeminence over matter, Aristotle has given us no reason to think “that this preeminence accrues to male creatures *qua* male.” As she points out, since in Aristotle’s view “both male and female are fully members of the same species, [both] possess the same “substantial formula” of matter and form.”³⁰ From this she concludes that “Aristotle’s commonplace views” about the superiority of the male creep into “his more careful philosophical thinking.”³¹ It is also possible, however, that Aristotle states the general Greek view of male superiority for the very purpose of highlighting its inconsistency with his theory. It is in fact fitting that Aristotle calls the separated (or pure) form divine, since only immortals do not require generation: only gods can be all form and no matter. By implication, the very fact of generation undermines any claim that the male is superior because he contributes the form.³²

In any case, Aristotle’s scientific model, his theory of human generation must take account of a final cause, a cause that is difficult to separate from Aristotle’s claim that human beings are uniquely political—that politics is our end (or a *telos*). Since this end is a final cause (and therefore influences the development of the human), his discussion of the roles played by men and women in human generation—to the extent that it does

³⁰Tress, 330. Tress refers us to *GA* 730b34-5 and *Metaphysics* 10.9.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Note that Aristotle’s move here is double pronged, for even if some Greeks initially miss that Aristotle is highlighting the difficulties of the conventional view, once Aristotle’s general scientific theory is accepted, a careful analysis of that theory will reveal theoretical difficulty of prioritizing the male over the female in matters of generation (as Tress’s own account shows).

not account for the teleological political nature of human beings—is incomplete.³³ It is not surprising then, that in the *Generation of Animal* the soul possesses no praiseworthy human characteristics such as found in Aristotle’s political works, and few, if any, of the characteristics present in *De Anima*.³⁴ The separation of the principles of body and soul leads to the depreciation of the soul. The soul, when viewed solely in terms of generation, is merely a catalyst for the body.

Aristotle’s account of biology can no more be a full account of human nature than can his account of pre-political human nature: since Aristotle does not view biology as a complete account of human nature, any account that presents it as such must be similarly incomplete. Thus, we cannot ignore the need to consider Aristotle’s works of natural science in light of his political account. And, as we will see, a careful reader of Aristotle’s political works, even without carefully analyzing the *Generation of Animals*, has good reason for questioning the interpretation of that text that characterizes women in a negative light. To cite the briefest of examples, the claim that the woman is incomplete takes on a new aspect in light of Aristotle’s claim in the *Politics* that “human beings rarely achieve their end” (*Pol.* 1339b26).

³³Indeed, on Aristotle’s scientific model, a full discussion of human generation, or any aspect of human biology, would have to take into account the relationship of man’s origins to his ends, which would include the question of why men and women engage in the activity needed to produce generation.

³⁴In this way the *Generation of Animals* parallels *De Anima*. In the *Generation of Animals*, which emphasizes bodily generation, the soul becomes inconsequential insofar that it fails to account for anything particularly human. In *De Anima*, which emphasizes the working of the soul, the body becomes inconsequential in a way that makes the account of the soul inhuman. For this reading of *De Anima*, I am following Seth Benardete’s “Aristotle: *De Anima* III.3-5,” *Review of Metaphysics* 28, no. 4 (1975): 611-622. For instance, Benardete notes: “the soul is mainly considered apart from time and the awareness of time (611). This is an incomplete account, notes Benardete, in part because it does not account for corruptibility (614; see also *NE* 1154b22-23). The alienation of body and soul is also seen in Book I of the *Politics*, where, as Nichols notes, Aristotle undermines slavery by presenting masters as all soul and slaves as all body (*Citizens and Statesmen*, 20-23).

Aristotle's claim in the *Generation of Animals* that women are incomplete men makes men, in their completeness, look like gods. As we will see in the next chapter, *Politics* Book I presents this view, tracing the development of political life in a way that emphasizes the subordination of women, with men ruling women as though they are slaves and as though they themselves are gods. Aristotle, however, does not endorse these god-like men, I shall argue, but shows their similarity to beasts, placing them outside of man's political nature, and excluding them from political community. In comparison with such men, women serve as a better model for human life in the sense that, by reminding us of our incompleteness, they remind us that we are human, and that we are fitted for community. In the same way as it is the female's biological *capacity* to produce both males and females that serves as the foundation of her incompleteness, Aristotle's political works indicate that a turn to the merits of women (and therewith the recognition of our own limits and the capacities they imply) allows for a more comprehensive knowledge: a knowledge that moves beyond oneself and toward the creation of political life.

CHAPTER THREE

Aristotle's *Politics* Book I: The Pre-Political Household

Book I of the *Politics* describes the move from a pre-political existence to political life in terms of stages, with humans moving through the household and the village before finally creating the city. The formation of the household consists in a move from a solitary to a social existence, and the creation of cities requires a move from a society defined solely by the family, to a way of life that moves beyond the limits of the family and allows its participants to share in political rule. Aristotle's presentation of the original condition of human beings indicates that the only way to escape a savage and solitary existence is to become part of a partnership. For households to come into existence, one must either enslave another or be enslaved oneself. As Michael Davis argues, within the pre-political household the difference between slaves and women is collapsed, for "the household cannot preserve the distinction between wife and slave."¹ Even beyond one man becoming master over another, I argue that Aristotle implies that the household is established by men enslaving women.² Yet as we will see, Aristotle's description of this development leaves open a crucial role for the woman, and even suggests that she is at least as responsible as the man for the development of the household that allows for the move toward political life.

¹Michael Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy: A Commentary on Aristotle's Politics* (Lanham: Roman and Littlefield, 1996), 24.

²Dana Stauffer reaches the same conclusion but for different textual reasons and with different implications. "Aristotle's Account of the Subjections of Women," *Journal of Politics* 70, no. 4 (2008): 929-941. See also Mansfield, 206.

The Development of the City

For Aristotle, the study of politics is concerned with the political partnership that is the city and with the question of who rules. At the beginning of the *Politics*, Aristotle says that his study is concerned with which type of rule is “most authoritative and embraces all the others...and aims at the most authoritative good of all” (*Pol.* 1252a5). He lists four kinds of rule, calling only one political rule. Only political rule is said to define and sustain the political partnership that is the city (*Pol.* 1252a4-14). Yet insofar as the political partnership comprehends all the others, it allows for the other types of partnerships and the other types of rule. Thus, Aristotle opens his investigation of politics by breaking the city into its uncompounded parts and examining “how things develop naturally from the beginning” (*Pol.* 1252a25). Tracing the natural development of the city, he analyzes the various partnerships and relationships that make it up: the male and the female, the parent and the child, the master and the slave, the household, and the village. Since these lower partnerships are first investigated as they exist prior to the creation of the city, the initial discussion includes men and women who are not yet political.

Despite providing a teleological account in which the culmination of human nature depends upon participation in political life, Aristotle’s account of the chronological development of the city indicates that, originally, everyone was “without a city through nature” (*Pol.* 1253a3). Prior to the development of partnerships, the original condition of human beings found them isolated, without clan, law or hearth, and perhaps even desiring war (*Pol.* 1253a3-7). Though human beings are fitted for the community

and opportunities provided by the city—though we are by nature social and political animals—our nature also contains lower and harsher elements.

By describing the undesirable and solitary state that defines life without a city and especially life prior to the formation of partnerships, Aristotle raises the difficult question of how we progress from a solitary life of base existence to a political life that allows for human flourishing. The original condition of pre-political life means that the only escape from a savage and solitary existence is to become part of a partnership. The development of the city requires movement from a solitary life to a household to a village to a city. Aristotle, however, does not clearly describe how these moves toward political life are effected: he does not directly account for how the partnerships that make up the household were formed, or how villages became cities.³

Aristotle begins his chronological account of the development of the city with the household, which is a “partnership constituted by nature for the needs of daily life” (*Pol.* 1252b14). The household, however, is made up of two other partnerships: the partnership between males and females, and the partnership between masters and slaves (*Pol.* 1252b10). In spite of his promise to show “how things develop naturally from the beginning” (*Pol.* 1252a25), Aristotle does not explicitly say whether the male/female partnership or the master/slave partnership is prior. To make that determination we must follow the ways in which he distinguishes between the cause and aim that belong to each of the two partnerships.

According to Aristotle, the original partnership between male and female did *not* occur “from intentional choice” (*Pol.* 1252b10), but rather was caused by “a natural

³Least perplexing is the creation of villages: since villages are ruled by kingly patriarchs, the village grows organically out of the immediate family (the equivalent nature of kingship and fatherhood is made explicit by Aristotle).

striving” (*Pol.* 1252a29), for the sake of preserving the species (or “another like oneself” [*Pol.* 1252a27]). Sexual desire accounts for the natural striving of the male/female partnership, a partnership which aims at the preservation of the species. In contrast, the master/slave partnership is said to aim at preserving the parties involved (*Pol.* 1252a31). In other words, both the male/female and master/slave partnerships come into being for the sake of human life. The preservation of the species is tied to the continuation of oneself, and the preservation of oneself is tied to the preservation of the species.

The creation of the household is what allows for the eventual formation of the city and therefore political life. But since the sexual act is short-lived, the partnership created by the sexual desire that defines the partnership between man and woman is brief rather than permanent. Thus, the male/female partnership can take place outside of the household, and exists prior to its formation: it does not, in itself, account for the household.⁴ Indeed, given the beastlike existence that defines existence apart from all partnerships, the creation of the household would require foresight of the mind, a foresight that does not belong to the male/female partnership, since that partnership does not require intentional choice.

In comparison, Aristotle attributes foresight to the natural master: “for that which can foresee with the mind is the naturally ruling and naturally mastering element, while that which can do these things with the body is the naturally ruled and slave; hence the

⁴Many readers assume that the sexual male/female partnership is the equivalent of the family, avoiding the problem of how the household is founded. For example, see Arlene Saxonhouse, “Aristotle: Defective Males, Hierarchy, and the Limits of Politics,” in *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory*, edited by Mary Shanley and Carole Pateman (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 32-53, 40; Salkever, “Women, Soldiers, Citizens,” 241.

same thing is advantageous for the master and slave” (*Pol.* 1252a32).⁵ The foresight of mind required for the household apparently belongs particularly to the master rather than to the partnership of man and woman. The master is defined by the foresight of his mind and the slave is defined by the body. Interestingly, Aristotle also defines the male/female partnership exclusively in terms of the body, describing its aim as fulfilling the bodily desire for sex without the exercise of any intellectual capacity. If the master is defined exclusively by the activity of his mind, and the slave by the activity of his body that is said to be the equivalent to the activity of the slave, then the sexual activity that defines the male/female partnership appears to be slavish.⁶

While the master’s foresight of mind is necessary for the partnership of the household, only slavish bodily desires are necessary for the sexual activity that defines the relationship between male/female. Since the household is defined by masters, slaves, males, and females, and since sex is traceable to desires characteristic of the slave, the master’s particular contribution to the household is the institution of slavery. The master/slave relationship is instituted with the goal of preserving oneself: whereas the master preserves himself by enforcing slavery and thereby creating the household, the slave preserves himself by yielding to slavery.⁷ The origin of slavery is coterminous with the origin of the household, for the master/slave partnership’s concern with preserving

⁵The formation of the city would also require great foresight, and Aristotle says that the one who founds it is responsible for “the greatest of goods” (*Pol.* 1253a31). The formation of the village would not take foresight since it is an inevitable outgrowth of the family.

⁶I am distinguishing between slavery and slavishness. Slavery, unlike slavishness, requires mastery.

⁷The master/slave aim of preservation explains why the household is said to be established for the sake of daily needs.

the parties involved fits with the aim of the household, which is “the partnership constituted by nature for the needs of daily life” (*Pol.* 1252b10).

Thus, escaping the slavish status that defined the life and partnerships of men and women prior to the household requires that the male/female relationship be joined with the master/slave partnership. In other words, Aristotle’s general account of masters, slaves, and first partnerships, appears to show that the origin of the household depends upon the male moving beyond a sexual relationship with the female by enslaving her. Aristotle asks us to consider “how things develop naturally from the beginning,” and allows us to conclude that the household depends upon transforming the male/female partnership into the master/slave partnership. Inasmuch as only the temporary male/female partnership is prior to the household, the creation of the family and household seems to depend upon making the male/female partnership permanent through the male’s enslavement of the female.

The Kingly Rule of the Household

That the foresight required for the formation of the household belongs particularly to the manly side of human nature appears to be supported by Aristotle distinguishing between men and women on the ground that “it is the work of the man to acquire and of the woman to guard [or preserve]” (*Pol.* 1277b24). Nichols notes that when Aristotle differentiates between the courage of a man and a woman (or ruling and serving courage), he uses the Greek *archē*, which, in addition to “ruling,” can be translated as “initiating” or “beginning.” Understood this way, she argues, “the man’s courage to rule lies in his going beyond what he possesses, or what he is, even in risking it, for the sake of bringing something new into being. It is related to his work of acquiring—by which

he makes something his own that was not his before.”⁸ This account of the man’s work bringing something new into being applies to the development of the household, which involves the acquisition of slaves by men, and so stems from the man’s ability to acquire. Man’s acquiring allows for preservation: the master/slave partnership exists for the sake of preserving the parties involved and the household is concerned with the provision of daily needs. The formation of the household in which the man rules his woman as though she is a slave appears reflective of his natural expertise in ruling (*Pol.* 1259a39-b9).

This reading is supported by Aristotle’s use of Hesiod, whom he quotes in a way that compares the slave with the ox: “first a house, and woman, and ox for ploughing’—for poor persons have an ox instead of a house-slave” (*Pol.* 1252b10).⁹ Aristotle’s paraphrase of Hesiod is odd, for surely the ox is better at ploughing than is the slave. The slave is needed, not to bear the plough, but to direct the ox. What Hesiod’s actually says is far more reasonable: “get a house, and a woman, and an ox for the plough, *a slave and not a wife, to follow the oxen.*”¹⁰ Whereas Hesiod contrasts the slave as plougher with the wife as plougher, Aristotle’s paraphrase does not distinguish them. By failing to do so, Aristotle confuses the meaning of his statement, leaving the reader to turn to Hesiod for an explanation.¹¹ And Hesiod’s explanation highlights the fact that the ploughing ox will either be driven by the wife or the slave. Since the slave is not present in Aristotle’s

⁸Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen*, 32.

⁹Note that the example makes slaves the equivalent of beasts.

¹⁰Hesiod, *Works and Days*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1914), II.405-406. My italics.

¹¹Stauffer’s analysis of the reference focuses on where the Hesiod passage is situated in his *Works and Days* (933-934). In doing so, she too concludes that Aristotle means to show that the early household tended toward collapsing the distinction between slaves and women.

version, the wife would be left to drive the plough, thereby filling what Aristotle says is the proper role of slaves.¹² It is fitting, then, that Aristotle's version replaces the slave with the wife, for his doing so indicates once again that, at the formation of the household, the male-female relation is despotic: that the man treats the woman as a slave.

Aristotle, of course, seems to defend the man's rule of the household, characterizing it as kingly on the grounds that the man acted as a kind of legislator: "every household was under the eldest as king, and so also were the extensions of the household constituting the village as a result of kinship. This is what Homer meant when he says that 'each acts as law to his children and wives'; for human beings were scattered and used to dwell in this manner" (*Pol.* 1252b23). Aristotle goes on to claim that there was a godlike stature to this kingly rule, and that the kingly rule of human beings led to suppositions about the gods: "and it is for this reason that all assert that the gods are under a king—because they themselves are under kings now, or were in ancient times. For human beings assimilate not only the looks of the gods to themselves, but their ways of life as well" (*Pol.* 1252b23-27). Nevertheless, these remarks about the kingly rule of the father should not be read as a simple endorsement of that rule. Rather, by tying kingship to divinity, Aristotle highlights that kingship is an exception to his famous claim that we are by nature political animals: "one who is incapable of participating or who is in need of nothing through being self-sufficient is no part of a city, and so is either a beast or a god" (*Pol.* 1253a27). By describing the man's kingly rule of the household as godlike, Aristotle emphasizes that it is not political rule. The husband and father's pre-

¹²For the slave to replace the woman and so free her from slavish work requires wealth, and wealth requires an existence beyond the household (see *Pol.* 1257a19-20). But see Stauffer, 933.

political rule over his wife and children may take the form of kingship, but it is not fit to be practiced within the city.¹³

Indeed, Aristotle implies that kingship is indistinguishable from the rule of a tyrant, for the Homeric quotation that ties fatherhood to kingship is a reference to the Cyclops (*Ody.* 9.112-115), who do not live in a city or villages, and whose cannibalistic and incestuous practices fulfill Aristotle's subsequent description of the most unholy and savage creature (*Pol.* 1253a36). The man's kingly rule may imitate law, but it is not law, and when man is "separated from law and adjudication he is the worst of all [animals]" (*Pol.* 1253a34). Thus, on Aristotle's account, godlike kingly rule accompanies the most beastlike existence possible: man's claim to rule the woman by nature may aim at godliness, but ends in beastly domination that recognizes no integrity in what and who is ruled.¹⁴ The kingly rule of the man within the household is tyrannical, for it assumes a kind of divinity that justifies the treatment of the other ruled members of the household as slaves.¹⁵

After showing that the development of the household involves the man ruling the woman as though she were a slave, Aristotle indicates that the result is not satisfactory. "Every city," writes Aristotle, "is composed of households," and "the complete [*teleios*] household is made up of slaves and free persons" (*Pol.* 1253b4). As we have seen, the complete household is complete because it is wholly defined by the rule of the divine

¹³I provide a further analysis of Aristotle's critique of fatherly and kingly rule in my discussion of the *Ethics*.

¹⁴Davis agrees, writing that that the pre-political household "tends toward cannibalism—the inability to recognize the human" (*The Politics of Philosophy*, 26).

¹⁵This godlike rule abstracts from the fact that, since the origin of the household depends as much on the male's sexual desires as on any foresight he might contribute, he is as slavish as the female, at least by Aristotle's defining bodily desires as slavish.

king (or the rule of master over slaves), a rule that explains its completeness but is ultimately unsatisfactory. The complete household is not satisfactory because it recognizes no need for an existence outside the household.¹⁶ While the individual lives a solitary existence prior to the development of the household, the move to a family expands the possibilities of the family's members exercising or even developing their particular excellences. But the move also limits them. While the man who rules as king expands his talents through his rule, those who are ruled find themselves wholly defined by the rule of the kingly father: insofar as the kingly rule of the father dominates the household, his rule is restrictive of the other family member's developing their potentials. Indeed, the expansion of the father's rule threatens to swallow the integrity of the family's other members and thereby make any meaningful social activity, and especially friendship, impossible. On the other hand, although the absolute rule of the father appears to develop his potential, it also severely limits it, for it ignores that a "human being is by nature a social and political animal" (*NE* 1097b10). The complete household is unsatisfactory because it hides the incompleteness of its members. The complete household recognizes no need for a city.

Aristotle follows his remark about complete households by noting the need to separate the household into its parts in order to help determine what each partnership "is and what sort of thing it ought to be" (*Pol.* 1253b1-7), since the investigation aims at attaining "knowledge about these things that is better than current conceptions" (*Pol.* 1253b12).¹⁷ By presenting the household as a stage in a larger development to

¹⁶On this point, see Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy*, 25.

¹⁷Aristotle elsewhere notes the former Greek practice of buying their wives (*Pol.* 1268b38). Although Aristotle claims that only now barbarians (as opposed to the Greeks) treat their women as slaves

humanity's end, Aristotle undercuts the man's claim to absolute rule within the household. That rule is unjust and inhumane, for the woman has an integrity that makes the man's domination unacceptable. The household must be transformed into an entity that acknowledges its own incompleteness and therewith the need to enter into political life. The failure of the household to recognize its incompleteness is prohibitive of political life, for as Aristotle argues: "The city is in its nature a sort of multitude, and as it becomes more a unity it will be a household instead of a city, and a human being instead of a household . . . even if one were able to do this, one ought not do it, as it would destroy the city" (*Pol.* 1261a18-3). The dominance of the father over the other members of the household excessively unifies the household, attempting to make it solely an expression of himself.

The manly work of acquiring involves changing what is already present into something new. But this proves impossible if one fails to recognize the nature of what is being transformed, and therefore the limits of one's possible work. The result of such a failure is an unsatisfying domination of others that limits the potential for human excellence and friendship—although the household depends upon both the male's work of acquiring and the female's work of preserving, the male tends to rule as though he is solely responsible for it. When human life is viewed in terms of acquisitions simply, preservation becomes for the sake of what is acquired simply, denying the possibility that persons (such as one's wife or children) have an integrity apart from their being acquired which ought to be preserved and cultivated. This is problematic because to define what is acquired by that acquisition is to understand oneself as the source of its being, since its

(*Pol.* 1252b5-10), Stauffer points out that he does so by quoting the words of Euripides' Iphigenia. The context of the play undercuts the words quoted by Aristotle, argues Stauffer, for Iphigenia speaks them as she is about to be sacrificed by her father Agamemnon and the Greeks (932).

being is defined by one's having acquired it. Thus, the preservation of what is acquired aims at the preservation of oneself. Acquiring becomes the transforming of what is other into oneself. It depends on the presupposition that one is the source of one's own being: that one is divine. Both these suppositions fit well with Locke's account of property, which, as we saw, is grounded in self-ownership, and views property as an extension of the self-owner.

On such an account, the man, absent from the woman's influence, fails to recognize the natural integrity of those he rules, and rules in a tyrannical rather than a political fashion. For the household to recognize its own incompleteness, the male ruler of the household must overcome his tendency to overestimate his natural authority: in order to overcome the notion that he is divine he must recognize the aspects of human excellence that are rooted in women, and therewith the natural integrity of those whom he rules. As Aristotle notes, the relationship between husband and wife should be political not slavish (*Pol.* 1252b4-9, 1259a39).

When Aristotle objects at the beginning of the *Politics* to those who collapse all forms of rule ("political rule, kingly rule, managing the household and being a master of slaves") into a single form of rule, he himself distinguishes between the large household and the small city (*Pol.* 1252a6-10). Likewise, he distinguishes between the science belonging to kingship and the science belonging to politics (*Pol.* 1252a14-15). For Aristotle, where political rule is absent other kinds of rule can be collapsed into one—in the pre-political household in which men rule as kings, women and children are inseparable from slaves. On the other hand, within the context of the established city Aristotle is able to distinguish between kinds of rule (within the household) to a much

greater extent: “the wife being ruled in political, the children in kingly fashion” (*Pol.* 1259a40-41). The pre-political household cannot practice justice, since “the virtue of justice is a thing belonging to the city. For adjudication is an arrangement of the political partnership, and adjudication is judgment as to what is just” (*Pol.* 1253a40). Instead of political partnerships, the household (and subsequently the village) finds itself under the kingly rule of the man. The absence of a political partnership in the pre-political household and village is prohibitive of justice.

Women, Political Rule, and the Development of the Household

Aristotle describes political rule as ruling “in turn” or “in part,” which means that “there is an alternation of ruler and ruled” (*Pol.* 1259b4-6; see also 1261b2-5, 1279a8-10).¹⁸ Fittingly, despite his emphasis on manly rule, Aristotle leaves open a crucial role for women in the development of the household. He writes:

For that which can foresee with the mind is the naturally ruling and naturally mastering element, while that which can do these things with the body is the naturally ruled and slave; hence the same thing is advantageous for the master and slave. Now the female is distinguished by nature from the slave (*Pol.* 1252a33-b1).

On its face, this passage is meant to increase the standing of women in the eyes of men. But why include it within the context of a discussion of the foresight necessary to the development of the household? In reply, it is worth noting that if read literally, the passage gives deeper meaning to its obvious aim: although the category of slave explicitly includes both men and women, Aristotle distinguishes here only between

¹⁸See Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen*, 29-30.

women and slaves.¹⁹ Because this distinction directly follows Aristotle's division of the natural master and the natural slave, Aristotle momentarily leaves open the strange conclusion that the woman is the naturally ruling element, a characterization that describes the master rather than the slave.

What role does the woman play in the development of the household? Although Aristotle does not offer explicit remarks on this topic in *Politics* Book I, it is noteworthy that, although he promises to break down the city into its various parts and to show how it develops from the beginning, the account he provides finally fails to do so, for while it contains an account of male/female and master/slave partnerships, it ignores the relationship between the mother and her child, a relationship that predates the formation of the household (and perhaps even the male/female partnership). This oversight is not accidental. Following Book I, Aristotle claims that the *Politics* requires a new beginning. That new beginning is Book II of the *Politics*, which criticizes Plato's *Republic*, in part, for not properly accounting for relationship between the mother and her child (*Pol.* 1262a15-23). Thus, Aristotle implicitly points to his neglect of such a discussion in Book I.

Aristotle's avoidance of the relationship between a mother and her child is significant because the end of the mother/child relationship would not be sufficiently explained by the male/female partnership's as Aristotle initially describes it. Remember, Aristotle claims that the male/female partnership initially existed for the sake of "reproduction," which he restated as producing "another like oneself" (*Pol.* 1252a27). Upon the birth of the child, the *reproduction* of another like oneself takes on a new

¹⁹By distinguishing females from slaves—and thus implying that no females are slaves—Aristotle eliminates almost any possible natural justification for slavery: if females are not slaves but males are, then men are slaves at least in part because they are men.

aspect, for the mother's activity shifts from the reproduction of the species to the *preservation* of her particular child. The move from the abstract reproduction belonging to the male/female partnership to the particular preservation of the female/child relationship also introduces the possibility of intentional choice, choice that was said to be absent from the male/female partnership, but not from the household. While the mother's care for her child is partially caused by the necessitous desires of the body, these desires naturally lead to the creation of a more complex relationship that more fully reveals the character and potential of human nature.²⁰

On these considerations, it is the woman rather than the man who has the motivation to enter the household, for her affection for her child, and the recognition of the demands of necessity, encourage the foresight necessary to appreciate the household's possibility. From the point of view of the male, once the sexual desire is fulfilled the woman is of no further use: she does not need to be enslaved, for she is not required for his preservation in any obvious way (presumably he can care for his daily needs without the household, for otherwise there could be no existence that predates its creation). On the other hand, the woman is more likely to find the man useful to her own preservation, particularly if her relationship with the man results in her becoming pregnant. A woman in late term pregnancy would have trouble attaining what is needed for the provision of her daily needs, a problem that is exacerbated during her recovery from the delivery and the care of the child that follows it. Moreover, the mother's need to provide for her child's daily needs for the sake of his or her preservation requires that she exercise

²⁰“There seems to be no case in which the soul can act or be acted upon without involving the body” (DA 403a5-7). Saxonhouse argues that the excellence of the male and female must be related to their bodies (“Family, Polity & Unity,” 204).

intentional choice. As we have seen, according to Aristotle it is the work of the woman to preserve.

Whereas the work of acquiring involves changing what is already present into something new, the recognition of the integrity of what is already present uncovers the natural limits to one's work and therefore the limits of one's ability and virtue. Understanding the integrity of what is ruled allows one to see the possibilities in what is acquired or in who is ruled. The ability to appreciate and preserve the integrity of what is ruled is connected to the mother's love for her child. Aristotle claims that, if she can have it no other way, the mother is willing to allow him or her to be raised by somebody else, since it is enough to see her child prosper (*NE* 1159a30-32). Although it is hard for us to imagine many circumstances that fit this assertion, it does fit with the mother's submission to the rule of the father at the origin of the household, for the kingly rule of the father means that the mother must take little or no part in raising her child (see *NE* 1160a35-37). The mother's affection for her child allows her to release him to the rule of the father: by recognizing that her child cannot be wholly defined by her, the mother allows for the prospering of the child, and therefore the transformation of that child into something new. Given the tyrannical tendencies of the father, however, it is questionable whether the full prospering of the child can occur if the family is ruled without the influence of the mother. In other words, the mother cannot simply hand the child over to the father.

Rather, as we will see, Aristotle shows that in order for her child to fully prosper, the mother must share in the rule of the household, a rule that allows for the founding of political life. Before turning to Aristotle's account of women's essential contributions to

the development and practice of political life, it is necessary to further explore the obstacle posed to that influence by the manly desire for self-sufficiency, which manifests itself here in the kingly rule of the household, and which Aristotle carefully reveals in his treatment of virtue in the *Ethics*. As we will see, this desire threatens to lead men to mistake their own virtue and authority as complete, which, like the complete household, poses the danger of obscuring the importance of participating in political life.

CHAPTER FOUR

Virtue and the Problem of Manliness in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

Aristotle's discussion of the moral virtues shows us the possibility of becoming better human beings. But although Aristotle's presentation of moral virtue is the most famous part of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's thematic treatment of moral virtue occupies less than half of the *Ethics*, which also treats such topics as the intellectual virtues, continence (not a virtue), and friendship. On my reading the need to turn to these topics is intimated in Aristotle's discussion of the moral virtues. Although Aristotle insists that virtuous activity merits praise, his account also contains an implicit critique of the tendency to equate virtue with noble self-sufficiency and to therefore abstract from friendship and the political community. Aristotle's presentation of the virtues points to the insufficiency of virtue for full human flourishing and therefore to the dangers that a life devoted simply to the flourishing of one's own virtue can entail. In doing so, Aristotle presses those men who consider themselves virtuous in a way that attempts to make them conscious of their incompleteness—of the importance of justice, of their obligation to their families, of their need for friends, of their mortality.

By alienating the life of moral virtue from the particular relationships of human life, the pursuit of self-sufficient nobility abstracts from the practice of politics, which is dependent on an engagement with those relationships. If the consideration of ourselves as virtuous tempts us to see ourselves as self-sufficient, we are in danger of failing to fulfill our nature as political beings, thereby undermining the very possibility of happiness—which is Aristotle's purpose to reveal in the *Ethics* (*NE* 1095a15-20).

Aristotle attempts to guard against this danger, I argue, by exploring the problems of moral virtue as well as its achievements.

As we will see, the desire for nobility can include the desire to escape bodily dependence. It is therefore not surprising that moral virtue (which is noble) poses the danger of abstracting from sexual differences (and therewith the particular excellences of men and women). This abstraction leads Harvey Mansfield to conclude that gender differences are all but irrelevant in the *Ethics*: “for the sake of moral virtue Aristotle implies the possibility of a gender-neutral society in which all are required to be virtuous . . . In Aristotle’s *Politics*, however, the picture changes from his *Ethics* and the sex difference becomes relevant.”¹ While Mansfield notes the tendency of Aristotle’s discussion of moral virtue to abstract from gender differences, he does not trace the tendency of moral virtue to abstract from these differences to manliness itself. In contrast, I argue in this chapter that the pursuit of noble self-sufficiency that tends to characterize the moral virtues belongs especially to the quality of manliness. In showing the limits of manliness, Aristotle provides the ground for his claim that the contribution of women is essential to the public and private realm, a claim I explore later in the dissertation.

To make this case requires that I show two things to be true: first, that the virtues—insofar as they are understood as the equivalent of noble self-sufficiency—tend to abstract from political life. And second, that such an abstraction belongs especially to manliness. Although it is beyond the scope of this work to give a detailed account of each of the *Ethics*’ moral virtues, I will provide a brief overview of how each virtue tends

¹Mansfield, 208. For a similar view, see Thomas K. Lindsay, “Aristotle’s Appraisal of Manly Spirit: Political and Philosophic Implications,” *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 3(2000): 433-448, especially 434-435.

to abstract from political life, an overview that will be filled in by the discussion of the family and virtue that follows. To fulfill the second requirement, my discussion of the moral virtues will provide a more detailed account of courage and magnanimity. The former deserves attention because courage (*andreia*) is etymologically related to manliness (*andria*), and could even be translated as manliness,² and because courage serves as the model for the discussion of the other moral virtues.³ The latter virtue represents the culmination of moral virtue, with the magnanimous man in possession of moral virtue entire, which of course includes the virtue of courage or manliness.

In sum, the account of moral virtue points to the need to moderate the dangerous inclination of manliness to aim at self-sufficiency, an aim that threatens to separate virtue from familial and political life. This chapter focuses on this issue by examining Aristotle's account of moral virtue. I begin with Aristotle's discussion of the mean, a discussion that Aristotle complicates by connecting it to irony. I then turn to the *Ethics'* account of courage (or manliness), magnanimity, and the other moral virtues. In the next chapter, I turn to Aristotle's account of the family as it appears in his discussion of moral virtue. These two chapters will provide the framework for the rest of my analysis, which will focus on Aristotle's explicit presentation of the family, and therewith the relationship between virtue, the family, and political life.

²According to Thomas Smith, "the term literally means 'manliness.'" *Revaluing Ethics: Aristotle's Dialectical Pedagogy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 85. See also Susan Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 51; Mansfield, 207; Salkever, "Women, Soldiers, Citizens," 233.

³For an excellent account of the many ways that courage serves as a model for the other virtues, see Lee Ward, "Nobility and Necessity: The Problem of Courage in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 1 (2001): 71-72.

The Mean and Irony

According to Aristotle, moral virtue is a mean between two vices, measured in terms of proper emotion and action:

virtue is a characteristic involving choice, and . . . consists in observing the mean relative to us, a mean which is defined by a rational principle, such as a man of prudence would use to determine it. It is the mean by reference to two vices: the one of excess and the other of deficiency. It is, moreover, a mean because some vices exceed and others fall short of what is required in emotion and in action, whereas virtue finds and chooses the mean” (*NE* 1106b36-1107a6).

Aristotle begins his exposition somewhat tentatively: “if virtue, like nature, is more precise and better than any art, we must conclude that virtue aims at the mean” (*NE* 1106b14-15; compare with 1103a17-20). Aristotle’s suggestion that virtue is more precise than art is surprising, for Aristotle himself has already noted the need to resist the desire for too much precision and perfection in moral matters, since such subjects tend to “hold good, only for the most part” (*NE* 1094b21-22). The status of moral virtue as a mean from the very outset of Aristotle’s account thus seems to find more precision in the subject matter than is warranted—the very thing he earlier warned his readers against. Moreover, Aristotle defines the mean in a particular situation “by a rational principle, such as a man of prudence [*phronimos*] would use to determine it” (*NE* 1107a1). But what is a “rational principle”?⁴ And could prudence be more precise than art, especially since Aristotle couples prudence and art in Book VI as the two intellectual virtues that deal with those things that are not necessary, but admit of variation or of being one way or another?

⁴Discussing virtue as a mean, Susan Collins writes: “Aristotle’s definition remains provisional since he postpones the investigation of the rational principle or right reason that underlies moral virtue until his account of intellectual virtue in Book VI” (*Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship*, 44).

When Aristotle distinguishes art from virtue in the passage noted above, he gives writing as an example of an art (*NE* 1105a23-29; and of course the *Ethics* itself is a writing). Writing, however, seems to offer the possibility of precision far more readily than does prudence, which relies on particular circumstances and experiences that are often outside of its control (*NE* 1142a14-15). In undertaking the *Ethics*, Aristotle had said that he practiced a kind of politics, to which he refers at the outset as the “architectonic art” (*NE* 1094a15), and later claims that the one philosophizing about politics is “a master-artisan [*architectōn*] of the end on the basis of those things we call good or bad” (*NE* 1152b1-5). These remarks raise the possibility that Aristotle’s discussion of virtue is the product of his art. This possibility fits with his discussion of the intellectual virtues, for in Book VI prudence is said to be concerned with the means necessary to reach certain ends. Although Aristotle says there that moral virtue provides the ends (*NE* 1144a6-10), it is also possible that prudence could be exercised in the service of art, which, through its interest in production, sets the ends. If this is the case, then the discussion of the mean and virtue as a whole cannot be the primary purpose of the *Ethics*: the discussion of the mean is the method by which we reach conclusions conducive to Aristotle’s *politikē*, his political science or project.⁵

The proposition that virtue is a mean depends on a second condition: “it is not a bad idea to discuss nameless virtues, too, for if we go through them one by one we shall gain a greater knowledge of the factors involved in character and confirm our belief that

⁵Although *politikē* is generally translated political science, the typical understanding of “science” limits the term to Aristotle’s “investigation of social and political matters,” rather than to the practice of politics. While this is certainly part of the meaning of *politikē*, Aristotle also notes that the good for man and for the city “are the aims of our investigation” (*NE* 1094b11-12). In other words, for Aristotle, *politikē* includes both the practice and investigation of politics, with the possible implication that one is necessary for the other.

the virtues are means, if our survey shows that this is true in every instance” (*NE* 1127a13-18). Here, Aristotle indicates that his initial description of the virtue as a mean may be hypothetical. Virtue may not be a mean if the mean does not hold in a number of instances, and Aristotle does not specify how many instances of the mean he needs to demonstrate to make his case.

Aristotle refers to this second condition as an introduction to the unnamed virtue which involves falsehood and truth in the sphere of speech, action, and pretense [*prospoiēma*] (*NE* 1127a20). Aristotle ascribes the virtue to the truthful man, whom he distinguishes from the boastful man (who enjoys falsehoods) and the self-depreciator (who understates his own qualities in order to avoid bombast).

Aristotle refers to Socrates to illustrate irony (*NE* 1127a24-27). But Socrates is a strange example since Aristotle says that one is ironic in order to avoid notice and therewith a reputation for bombast. Socrates is famous for his irony and suffered a reputation for bombast for the very reason that he was held to be ironic (*Republic* 337a). By the end of his discussion of truthfulness, Aristotle admits this complication, if not explicitly about Socrates, at least about irony in general:

Both excess and exaggerated deficiency tend to be boastful. But people who make moderate use of self-depreciation and understate such of their own qualities as are not too noticeable and obnoxious strike one as cultivated. It is the boastful man who is evidently the opposite of the truthful man, because he is inferior (*NE* 1127b29-33).

The danger accompanying the practice of irony is that the virtue and vices will collapse into one: that it will become boastfulness about the truth. Here, then, Aristotle suggests that truthfulness and irony should become a virtue concerned with avoiding bombast and the appearance of boastfulness. Aristotle criticizes irony not primarily because it is

untruthful, but rather because it is so unrestrained—or perhaps lacking in knowledge of oneself and others—as to be understood as boasting. It is the truthful man, Aristotle says, who is inclined “to understate the truth” (*NE* 1127b8-9), which would require him to depreciate his own truthfulness.⁶ Since truthfulness allows for self-depreciation, irony is compatible with truthfulness, but only irony of a certain kind: one must “make moderate use of self-depreciation,” or depreciate one’s irony. In initially presenting irony as a vice and distinguishing it from truthfulness, Aristotle depreciates irony—Aristotle is ironic about irony itself.

Aristotle’s irony, however, does not lead to a reputation for bombast, for his description of truthfulness and its extremes endorses those qualities which are highly valued (in word, if not in deed) by others. It seems that Aristotle has mastered irony in a way that eludes Socrates, Aristotle’s example of an ironic man. Aristotle undermines his account of truthfulness as a mean by ultimately connecting it with irony and thus, by his own criterion, questioning his presentation of virtue as a mean. If the understated, and hence ironic, presentation of the truth becomes the virtue in matters related to the truth, as it does by the end of Aristotle’s discussion of truthfulness, we must rethink the way in which virtue is a mean and read Aristotle’s account of moral virtue in a new way. Thus, we must wonder whether Aristotle’s discussion of virtue as a mean ironically understates the radical nature of virtue—the mean does not hold in every case, if it holds at all.

Without reference to political life, truthfulness’s concern with nobility makes it bombastic and therefore subject to attack (see also *Gorgias* 511a). Socrates suffered a reputation for bombast, and was attacked by the city, not because ironic men must suffer

⁶Aristotle’s initial claim that the virtue of truthfulness belonged to the sphere of pretense (along with speech and action) foreshadows this conclusion.

such a reputation, but because, as indicated by his *Apology*, he did not value politics enough to adopt his speech to the city. Whereas Socrates inflamed the people, Plato thinks Socrates should pay the fine and reconcile himself with the city (*Apology* 37b). Likewise, Aristotle's discussion of truthfulness, and his critique of Socrates, recognize both the ways that the city limits the speaking of the truth, and shows the need for speech—for truthfulness (and irony)—to be adapted to the requirements of political life. Plato's writing shows the possibility of being ironic without suffering a reputation for bombast: by placing Socrates at the center of his writings, Plato depreciates his own work. The turn to an irony that is more compatible with politics is a turn to the human that recognizes the limits of virtue, limits that guide its end. That Aristotle agrees with Plato is evidenced by his general use of writing, writing that, unlike the private conversations of Socrates, must be compatible with a public audience (*Phaedrus* 275d-277a). But while Aristotle's irony certainly overlaps with the irony of Plato (for his discussion of truthfulness depreciates the very irony he is employing), he goes further by turning to another "mean": the virtue of wit.

Wit and Writing

Literally the name of the witty man (*eutrapelos*) means "turning well," or "good turns." In contrast to the slow moving and slow talking magnanimous man who precedes him in Aristotle's discussion (*NE* 1125a13-16), the witty man is defined by his quickness of wits (*NE* 1128a10). The witty man is a comic (*NE* 1128a24) who is concerned with playful speech that accompanies relaxation (*NE* 1127b33). While this description may

appear to make wit a social grace that simply adorns the other virtues,⁷ Aristotle removes this assumption by calling playful relaxation an essential and necessary part of life (*NE* 1127b33, 1128b4).

The witty man combines his comedy with tactfulness: he is defined as a man who “says nothing that is improper for a free man, or as a man who will not give pain, or even one who will give joy to his listener” (*NE* 1128a24-27). On the one hand, the witty man is defined by his freedom. He is “a law unto himself” (*NE* 1128a30-34), dismissive of the city’s law and its potential to curb the practice of his virtue (*NE* 1128a30-34). On the other hand, the witty man’s assertion of independence or self-sufficiency is in tension with his virtue, which is wholly dependent on the tastes of his audience. According to Aristotle, this latter characterization makes his virtue “indefinable,” since “different things are hateful and pleasant to different people” (*NE* 1128a28-29). By implication, a varied audience limits the practice of wit to private conversation, and excludes the possibility of writing, for the diversity of a large audience by its very nature restricts the virtue of the witty man, who can not give joy without pain to every member of the audience. It is therefore not surprising that the witty man is not ruled by the city’s law, but is rather “a law unto himself,” for the law of the city, like all writings, must address large audiences and therefore give pain to some and pleasure to others. Both writing and politics curb the practice of wit.

In Book X, through his discussion of happiness and in his treatment of law and politics, Aristotle returns in both word and deed to the theme of playfulness that he

⁷Harry Jaffa argues that “the social graces . . . [are] an adornment of the description of the magnanimous man.” *Thomism and Aristotelianism: A Study of the Commentary by Thomas Aquinas on the Nicomachean Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 51.

introduced during his discussion of wit in Book IV. Specifically, he begins by dismissing playfulness or amusement (the horizon of wit), writing:

Happiness does not consist in amusement. In fact, it would be strange if our end were amusement, and if we were to work and suffer hardships all our life long merely to amuse ourselves . . . amusement is a form of rest, and since we cannot work continuously we need rest. Thus rest is not an end, for we take it for the sake of activity. The happy life is regarded as a life in conformity with virtue. It is a life which involves effort and is not spent in amusement (*NE* 1176b27, 1176b34-77a5).

Nevertheless, soon after dismissing the amusement that belongs to rest and noting that it exists only for the sake of work and activity, Aristotle claims:

We regard happiness as depending on leisure; for our purpose in being busy is to have leisure, and we wage war in order to have peace . . . But the activity of the statesman, too, has no leisure. It attempts to gain advantages beyond political action, advantages such as political power, prestige, or at least happiness for the statesmen himself and his fellow citizens, and that is something other than political activity: after all, we are investigating it [political activity] as not the same [as happiness] (*NE* 1177b4-6, 13-16).

While rest and play were initially for the sake of work, work is now for the sake of leisure. In making his remarks, Aristotle points to his own deeds, and his deeds remind us of the witty man: consistent with the virtue of wit (*eutrapelos* or “good turns”) Aristotle has flipped, or turned, his remarks about work. While rest was initially for the sake of activity, now activity, at least in the form of politics, appears to be for the sake of leisure, a leisure which Aristotle goes on to say is required for private and self-sufficient contemplation (*NE* 1177b21-23). But Aristotle repeats this flipping at the end of Book X, turning from the claim that the best life is wholly devoted to private contemplation, to the study of politics that he promises to undertake in the *Politics* (*NE* 1181b12-16): his deeds overturn his words.⁸ Likewise, Aristotle distinguishes between law and speech at the end

⁸Aristotle’s move is foreshadowed by his remark that the life devoted to a theoretical knowledge that “aims at no end beyond itself” (*NE* 1177b20) “would be more than human” (*NE* 1177b26). Although

of the *Ethics*, citing the need to turn to law over and above speech. Although the turn to law is a turn to a form of writing over and above speech, the persuasive writing that defines the *Politics* goes beyond the force that characterizes law: the *Politics* (like law) speaks to many, but (unlike the law) its exposition or arguments must persuade rather than coerce. The *Politics* thus mediates the distinction between law and speech. By recognizing the importance of politics, Aristotle demonstrates how writing can mitigate the tension between being a law unto oneself, and succumbing to the diverse demands of one's audience. By recognizing the interdependence of philosophy and politics, Aristotle points to the possibility of providing words that speak to more than one audience.

The Mean and the Extreme

At the end of Book II, Aristotle suggests that, since the human passions incline us more toward one extreme than the other, we should aim at the extreme furthest from our natural inclination, thereby counterbalancing that inclination in a way that allows us to hit the mean (*NE* 1109a30-31).⁹ In support of his claim that the mean requires us to aim at an extreme Aristotle cites what he says was Calypso's advice to Odysseus in the *Odyssey*: "Keep clear your ship of yonder spray and surf" (*NE* 1109a32). The advice, however, was actually given by Circe to Odysseus, who in turn recounts it to his men when they

Aristotle initially claims that his investigation treats the two lives—the statesman's unleisured political activity and the life of leisured private contemplation—as distinct, by calling the leisured life of private contemplation inhuman, he leaves open the possibility that there is a human kind of leisure. Here we might remember that Aristotle calls what he is doing *politikē*, and calls the work of the political philosopher *architectōn* or the ruling art. It therefore appears possible to spend one's life in leisure and engaged in an activity (the investigation of politics) with ends apart from itself, an activity that comprehends the life of the statesman and the life of leisurely contemplation. Aristotle's investigation may initially treat the life of the statesman and the life of the wholly theoretical man as distinct (*NE* 1177b13-16), but his doing so points the need for an alternative to them, an alternative that is provided by his own investigation of politics.

⁹Another reason for choosing an extreme is that one extreme is more opposed to the mean than the other (*NE* 1109a1-6).

are preparing to pass between the monstrous Skylla and the dangerous surf. Moreover, the quote appears badly chosen, since Circe's advice to aim at one extreme is not because she wants Odysseus to navigate the mean between the Skylla and the surf. Rather, Circe encourages Odysseus to sail his ship close to the Skylla because it is a far lesser evil than the surf (*Ody.* 12.105-110). Thus, the example of Odysseus undermines Aristotle's initial claim that we should aim for the extreme for the sake of the mean, for Odysseus aims at the extreme not for the sake of hitting the mean, but rather for the sake of hitting the extreme that is the lesser evil. As Aristotle himself notes in his comment on the passage: "one of the two extremes is more in error than the other, and since it is extremely difficult to hit the mean, we must, as the saying has it, sail in the second best way" (*NE* 1109a35-b2).

In recounting the advice of Circe to his men, Odysseus misleads them, for he does not tell them of the Skylla and thereby avoids telling them about Circe's prediction that it will be impossible for Odysseus' ship to pass without loss of life (*Ody.* 12.154-164).¹⁰ Aristotle's misrepresentation of Odysseus' advice to his men repeats Aristotle's misrepresentation of Circe's advice to Odysseus. Both Odysseus and Aristotle are guilty of understatement, for they say less than they know or leave something to be explained. Odysseus recounts the advice to his men neither for the sake of the mean nor for the sake of the extreme. Rather, he recounts it so that they will undertake the mission and so that as many of them as possible will safely pass. By implication, Aristotle indicates that, while his endorsement of virtue contains certain dangers, it is the best way for him to direct his readers to the goal of the journey—to the proper end. In other words, Aristotle

¹⁰Odysseus' advice would appear to be representative of art rather than virtue, for "in the arts, excellence lies in the result itself. . . . But in the case of the virtues . . . he must choose it [the act] for its own sake" (*NE* 1105a26-27).

suggests that his discussion and endorsement of virtue is meant to fulfill an end or ends that go beyond virtue simply for its own sake.

When Aristotle incorrectly attributes the advice to aim at the extreme to Calypso rather than to Circe, he suggests that such advice is characteristic of the nymph who advised that Odysseus take an extreme course when she encouraged him to remain with her and become immortal (*Ody.* 5.135-140). In contrast, when Circe advises Odysseus, she reminds him of his mortality, for she advises him that, although his desire for nobility will tempt him to fight Skylla, he should not arm himself (*Ody.* 12.142-146). She worries that Odysseus desires superhuman virtue and that his desire will tempt him to try to remove himself from the bounds of nature and confront Skylla. But Odysseus does not agree with Circe's assessment of himself, for he does not follow her advice, but rather puts on his "glorious armor" (*Ody.* 12.225) when preparing to face Skylla.¹¹ Unlike Achilles who battles gods for the sake of immortality, Odysseus both rejects Calypso's promise of immortality, and prepares to nobly fight Skylla, if necessary. Doing the latter, he rejects Circe's premise that a concern with nobility will overwhelm him: he shows that human choice allows him to be concerned with nobility without forgetting the limits that mortality places on virtue.

The doctrine of the mean, then, is complicated in a variety of ways, for although Aristotle first cites Homer to support the claim that we should aim at an extreme for the sake of the mean, the goal is only to minimize the danger that accompanies the pursuit of happiness, happiness which both Aristotle and Odysseus understand to involve human

¹¹All references to Homer will appear in the text. I am using the following translations: *Iliad*, translated by Robert Fagles (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990); *Odyssey*, translated by Richard Lattimore (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).

community. In other words, Aristotle indicates that the nobility of the extreme tempts human beings to aim at the extreme for its own sake, a temptation characterized by the desire for inhuman immortality. This temptation would characterize the pursuit of virtue itself, if the pursuit of virtue's nobility leads one to take that nobility to be an end sufficient in itself, without consideration for the other goods needed for human happiness.

In sum, virtue as a self-sufficient end in itself confuses the human with the divine, with the result that the pursuit of virtue for its own sake threatens human community. Both fighting Skylla solely for the sake of nobility and remaining with Calypso might prevent Odysseus from returning home. Both choices imply that the desire for immortality keeps human beings from their families and political communities. If the doctrine of the mean is compatible with the Homeric example cited by Aristotle, it is only in the sense that the pursuit of virtue must be mediated both by an acknowledgement of our mortality and the limits of human life, and by the recognition of the goodness of human community and friendship.

Courage (Manliness) and the Virtues

Although this chapter emphasizes the dangers that can accompany the pursuit of the nobility promised by the moral virtues, the reader should not understand me to imply that I do not take Aristotle's famous endorsement of the virtues seriously. Few readers of the *Ethics* can deny that Aristotle means to promote the life of virtue, and that he makes such a life desirable to his readers and students. Not only does Aristotle display virtue as something worth having for its own sake, he indicates that it is important to the proper practice of politics and friendship. But even here we might note a potential problem: having virtue for its own sake is not necessarily the same thing as its being useful for

politics. For instance, although its nobility can make virtue attractive, that same attractiveness can make nobility an end higher than the city, an end that might justify even the sacrifice of one's city. In light of this problem, Aristotle attempts to reconcile nobility and the city to the greatest extent possible. Crucial to his doing so is his presentation of the virtues, virtues which are meant to make the pursuit of nobility compatible with the city. Everyone knows or should know that the city needs courageous men to defend it, and Aristotle's account of courage makes it more likely that the city will have the men it needs. But Aristotle's attempt to make the pursuit of nobility compatible with the ends of the city and the ends of human beings also requires that he deal with the problem posed by those men who pursue nobility with the greatest intensity, for although such men can provide great benefits to the city, they also have the strongest tendency to remove themselves from the city in their pursuit of nobility.

That virtue's nobility poses the danger of overwhelming a concern for politics fits with the general structure of Aristotle's discussion of virtue,¹² which presents three sets of five virtues.¹³ The first set of virtues begins with courage, proceeds with moderation,

¹²Scholars differ on the reason behind Aristotle's ordering of the moral virtues. Francis Sparshott argues that the virtues progress according to the development of civilization. *Taking Life Seriously: A Study of the Argument of the Nicomachean Ethics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 148-149. Jaffa, attempting to refute what he says is St. Thomas Aquinas's understanding, argues that the virtues grow organically from lower to higher virtues, culminating in the peak of magnificence and magnanimity. Jaffa bases this interpretation on the "passion with which Aristotle's writing becomes charged" when dealing with the virtues of this "peak." This interpretation is not subjective, he protests, because it has "been the impression of discerning readers" (51-52). Salkever argues that there is a progress from those virtues which make the least use of prudence to those that make the most use of prudence. "Teaching the Questions: Aristotle's Philosophical Pedagogy in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*" *The Review of Politics* 69, no. 2 (2007): 203n12. (Neither Jaffa nor Salkever give a sufficient account of wit [which especially involves prudence] or the other social virtues). Susan Collins provides the most careful and convincing treatment of the problem thus far, arguing that the peak of moral virtue is wit, and that, by the end of the *Ethics*, wit "occupies the middle ground between a dogmatic commitment to the law and skeptical alienation from it" (*Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship*, 163).

¹³Aristotle's discussion also treats justice (which does not fall into these sets) as a virtue, which can itself be subdivided in a number of ways. Aristotle himself characterizes justice as a different kind of virtue (*NE* 1129b26), distinguishing it from virtue on the grounds that "justice alone of all the virtues is

liberality, and magnificence, and culminates in magnanimity. The second set (the social virtues) begins with an unnamed virtue concerned with honor, discusses three other unnamed virtues, and ends with a discussion of wit.¹⁴ The third set, which Aristotle describes as the intellectual (as opposed to the moral) virtues (*NE* 1103a4-10), begins with science, follows with art, prudence, and intelligence, and ends with theoretical wisdom. In each of the three sets, the fifth virtue is a kind of peak in the discussion of virtue (*NE* 1123b30), and each peak appears as a highly self-referential whole: the magnanimous man is self-sufficient (*NE* 1125a13), the witty man is a law unto himself (*NE* 1128a33), and theoretical wisdom “produces happiness . . . as health itself makes a person healthy” (*NE* 1144a3-5). I shall argue the pursuit of the nobility promised by perfect virtue constitutes a dismissal of the limits of the human, for it forgets that human beings cannot be perfect or complete (*NE* 1154b30), that they are not divine (*NE* 1154b22-31). This self-forgetting—the forgetting of one’s body, appetites, mortality or incompleteness—threatens to make virtue an extreme that alienates it from the human activities of politics and friendship.

To see how Aristotle addresses this concern, I will begin with the virtue which poses the greatest danger in this regard: the virtue of courage (or manliness). On my reading, this introductory virtue reveals the manly desire to transform political virtues

thought to be the good of another. . . . They are the same thing, but what they are is not the same: insofar as it is exhibited in relation to others it is justice, but insofar as it is simply a characteristic of this kind it is virtue” (*NE* 1130a4, 11-13). Given his description of justice in terms of relating to others it is not surprising that Aristotle emphasizes the relationship between justice and friendship (*NE* 1155a22-28). I take up justice again during my discussion of friendship and the family.

¹⁴What distinguishes the first set of moral virtues from the second is that the second is concerned with the social side of human life, and especially speech, whereas, the first set belongs to the realm of human life that does not, strictly speaking, require speech. Although the second set offers a broader context for understanding human life than the first, Aristotle must go even further for a more complete account of the human good, which he does in the discussions of friendship, politics, and education that follow the new beginning in Book VII.

into nonpolitical ones, or to escape political life for the sake of the noble. This desire requires the denial of any meaningful existence beyond oneself, and therefore the rejection of the political and social side of humanity. For Aristotle, manliness is at the root of the human desire for self-sufficiency and therefore at the root of man's desire to escape the social confines of the family and the city.

Courage

Aristotle begins his presentation of the specific moral virtues with courage and spends much more time on it than any other virtue except magnanimity, which receives almost as much space. Aristotle's choice of courage as the first virtue makes it a case study for the rest of the moral virtues. Unlike his discussion of most of the other virtues, Aristotle's account of courage provides an account of how and why Aristotle defines the horizon of the virtue, and accounts for why certain fields of action fall outside of its scope. Moreover, the discussion of courage contains broad characterizations about virtue and vice. As a result, it provides a framework for understanding Aristotle's presentation of the other virtues.

Aristotle begins his discussion of courage or manliness by limiting its definition to facing a noble death in battle (*NE* 1115a23-31). This definition contains a generally overlooked implication: since battles are fought exclusively by men, the definition restricts the practice of courage to men. Indeed, Aristotle chooses the only possible definition of courage that would exclude women from developing and exercising the virtue (this restriction likewise excludes women from the virtue of magnanimity, since magnanimity contains all the virtues). In the *Politics*, Aristotle distinguishes between the virtues as they manifest themselves in men and women: "the moderation of a woman and

of a man are not the same, nor their courage or justice, . . . but there is a ruling and a serving courage, and similarly with the other virtues” (*Pol.* 1260a19-24). The fact that the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not contain this distinction may be part of the reason for Mansfield’s claim that the *Ethics* is gender-neutral. But since Aristotle certainly realizes that the two works will be read in light of one another (after all, the end of the *Ethics* roughly outlines the *Politics* as its sequel), and since the *Ethics*’ account of courage is restricted to those activities performed by men, we may conclude that the virtue of courage as it is discussed in the *Ethics* is particularly concerned with the courage (or manliness) belonging to a man. Once we recognize the manly character of courage as it appears in the *Ethics*, we will see that the apparent abstraction from gender is actually gender specific: manliness involves abstracting from the merit of women.¹⁵

By restricting the range of courage to facing death, Aristotle makes the remarkable claim that the virtue of courage is not concerned with risking injury or one’s reputation. And by further restricting courage to death in battle, he excludes the possibility of courageously facing a death caused by natural elements, disease, and a series of other imaginable situations usually understood to involve courage (firefighters who enter burning buildings do not qualify as courageous). This extreme narrowing of the definition is striking, for it does not conform to what we generally hold to be true—a standard to which Aristotle characteristically appeals.

Aristotle defines courage and its accompanying vices in relation to the passions of confidence and fear. He who exceeds in lack of fear has no name; he who exceeds in confidence is reckless; he who exceeds in fear and is lacking in confidence is a coward

¹⁵The *Ethics*’ discussion of friendship ends this abstraction as it turns to the particular merits of both men and women.

(*NE* 1115b24-a4). Although the cowardly man is said to have excessive fear and a lack of confidence, there is no counterpart at the other end of the spectrum: no single vice is described in terms of both excessive lack of fear and excessive confidence. Rather, Aristotle splits these two characteristics into separate vices, saying that the excessive lack of fear has no name, and calling excessive confidence recklessness.

The discussion of the unnamed man of excessive fearlessness is brief but telling: “he must be a madman or immune to pain if he fears nothing, neither earthquake nor flood” (*NE* 1115b28). But this description shirks the very issue said to be at stake. Whereas the virtue of courage was strictly limited to facing a noble death in battle, the account of the unnamed man of excessive lack of fear cites his imperviousness to the dangers posed by earthquakes and floods, examples that do not, strictly speaking, belong to the realm of courage. Nevertheless, when Aristotle discusses how the courageous man behaves when facing uncontrollable and life threatening forces of nature, he surprisingly claims that the courageous man is fearless in such situations (*NE* 1115b1). In doing so, he directly and indirectly collapses the distinctions between the courageous and fearless man, who is described in the same way.

Although Aristotle has defined moral virtue as the correct disposition toward a passion, whereby one is affected by it in the proper way (for example, at the right things, for the right motive, in the right manner, and at the right time [*NE* 1115b17-20]), the courageous man is almost never said to experience fear. The one possible exception is Aristotle’s remark that the courageous man “endures what is fearful to a human being and what seems fearful . . . for that reason it is a mark of even greater courage to be fearless” (*NE* 1117a18; see also 1115b12). As Ann Charney notes, “though death is ‘the most

fearful thing,' the courageous man does not fear it."¹⁶ This fearlessness is fitting in the sense that courage aims at overcoming death, which, as the most fearful thing, would likewise be the most painful. To be even more precise than Charney, though death is "the most fearful thing" to *human beings*, the courageous (or manly) man does not fear it. Fearlessness is an abstraction from mortality and therefore an abstraction from the human.

The collapse of virtue into the extreme also occurs in Aristotle's discussion of the reckless man. The reckless man is initially said to be the man of excessive confidence. However, immediately after Aristotle makes this claim, he shows that the man of excessive confidence does *not* exceed in confidence, but rather possesses false confidence: when faced with danger, he quickly runs away: "most reckless men are reckless cowards: they put on a show of confidence when the situation permits, but do not stand their ground when there is something to fear" (*NE* 1115b32-33). Recklessness, which initially appeared to be an extreme level of confidence, becomes the equivalent of cowardice—the vice that lacks confidence. The man of excessive confidence is really the man of false confidence. Excessive confidence thus disappears in the course of Aristotle's discussion, just as the man initially said to possess it runs away when confronted with the fearful. This can be explained by noting that if a man possesses true confidence, it is impossible that his confidence could be in excess. Confidence is either true or it is false. False confidence collapses into cowardice and true confidence is courage.

¹⁶Ann Charney, "Spiritedness and Piety in Aristotle," in *Understanding the Political Spirit: Philosophical Investigations from Socrates to Nietzsche*, edited by Catherine H. Zuckert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 72.

But what does the courageous man have confidence in? We might suspect that Aristotle means confidence in one's skill in battle, but the text points to a different possibility:¹⁷ since the reckless coward cannot overcome what is to be feared, and since courage (cowardice's very opposite [*NE* 1116a3]) is concerned with death (which is said to be the most fearful of all things), confidence must refer to confidence in one's ability to endure or overcome the fear of death (*NE* 1117a18-20).¹⁸ The man of false confidence who runs away in battle does so because he overestimates his ability to endure or overcome the fear of death. True confidence lies in correctly believing that one can overcome the fear of death. This confidence, combined with a lack of fear, belongs to courage. Thus, the extreme fearlessness and confidence that defines courage makes the mean the equivalent of an extreme. As such, it is appropriate that Aristotle calls courage the very opposite of cowardice, which joins together the opposite extremes of fearfulness and lack of confidence.

The extreme confidence and fearlessness that finally define courage are inseparable from the concern with nobility. The reason Aristotle gives for restricting courage to matters regarding death is that "the most fearful thing of all is death" (*NE* 1115a26). The reason he gives for restricting the definition to death faced in battle is that "in battle a man is faced by the greatest and most noble of dangers" (*NE* 1115a31). In other words, the standard to which the definition refers is nobility. Thus, "the end of every activity corresponds to the characteristic that produces it. This also applies to a courageous man: courage is noble" (*NE* 1115b23). Defined by its nobility, courage is an

¹⁷Later in the discussion, Aristotle indicates that "the confidence of optimists . . . [which is based upon the] belief that they are the strongest and will suffer no harm," is a spurious form of courage (*NE* 1117a12-14).

¹⁸In Chapter Eight I discuss the relationship between endurance and manliness.

end in itself: it is noble. The confrontation with death is the means or byproduct of the pursuit of nobility.

Facing death in battle is noble because it entails being able to overcome a concern with death—the most fearful thing of all—in order to prove one’s excellence. As noted above, battle requires an excess in confidence and a lack of fear. But in order to be noble, battle requires the possibility of death (there is nothing noble about a giant defeating a boy in battle). In other words, since the deeds of courageous men are limited by their concern for nobility, men of true courage do not make the best professional soldiers: “The best professionals are men who have less courage, but have nothing to lose; for they are willing to face dangers and will sell their lives for a small profit” (*NE* 1117b17-19). If less courageous men are more willing to sacrifice their lives because they have less to lose, courageous men are less likely to do so, for they have more, and perhaps even everything, to lose. The more courageous a man the less he acts. Indeed, he only acts for the noblest of reasons, which is to say that he only acts in self-defense, or perhaps when facing someone as noble as himself, a standard that would increase in difficulty in exact proportion to his virtue. If there are no worthy opponents, the courageous man will not willingly enter into battle. The most courageous man appears unwilling to fight if the battle does not present the prospect of a noble death.¹⁹ In aiming at nobility, courage simultaneously aims at death. The restriction of the definition of

¹⁹Lee Ward notes that Aristotle’s account of courage for the sake of the noble contains a contradiction with virtue as it is described earlier: “In view of Aristotle’s initial argument that voluntary action requires knowledge of “particular circumstances,” we are left to wonder how a general concern with acting solely for the sake of the noble can be made compatible with the knowledge of particular circumstances required to escape the false courage produced by ignorance” (“Nobility and Necessity,” 77). In light of this problem one might push the inactivity even further, since one way of solving the difficulty of reconciling nobility with the need to know particular circumstances, is to never act. By implication, one might even conclude that acting requires one not to act for the sake of the nobility: activity is a threat to perfect nobility.

courage to the realm of battle is made necessary by its fundamental concern with nobility. The unmoderated pursuit of nobility and the confrontation with death are interminably bound together.

If courage aims at death in order to achieve nobility, then it is self-defeating: either courage remains unexercised or the exercising of courage aims at—and ultimately requires—the extinguishing of courage through one's death. In the pursuit of the nobility that belongs to courage, the courageous man fully submits himself to the universal standard of nobility and abstracts from his own particularity—a particularity that is rooted in the body. Whereas the deeds of courage depend on the use of the body, courage aims at escaping the limits of that body, for if nobility is the sole standard by which virtue is judged, the body must be overcome. Thus it is that death is said to be the most fearful of all human things, yet the courageous man does not fear it. By abstracting from the particularities of human life, the pursuit of nobility abstracts from the good of human life.

Nevertheless, Aristotle ends his discussion of courage by claiming that death is particularly difficult for the courageous man:

Death and wounds will be painful for a courageous man, and he will suffer them unwillingly, but he will endure them because it is noble to do so or base to do otherwise. And the closer a man is to having virtue in its entirety and the happier he is, the more pain will death bring him. Life is more worth living for such a man than for anyone else, and he stands to lose the greatest goods, and realizes that fact, and that is painful. But he is no less courageous for that, and perhaps rather more so, since he chooses noble deeds in war in return for suffering pain (*NE* 1117b8-14).

Again Aristotle demonstrates the paradoxical character of courage. The pure pursuit of nobility is shown to be self-defeating: while courage is noble, the courageous man's pursuit of noble deeds aims at death, and therefore at the destruction of the noble character that belongs to the courageous man. This problem is heightened when one

remembers that, whereas Aristotle indicates that death is the most fearful of all things because life is good, the courageous man does not consider death a fearful thing.

Aristotle's account therefore finally draws back from ascribing to courage the full implication that the pursuit of nobility must aim at death. This is not surprising, for he has defined virtues as action, and death gets in the way of action: the pursuit of nobility must be moderated. Without such moderation, the courageous man suffers an irresolvable contradiction: to the degree his life is virtuous and happy and hence worth living, the pain of his loss—should he lose his life in battle—is all the greater. Without such moderation, it would be difficult for him to consider his life good, for a life defined by courage would be a life defined by death, which is the most painful of all things, and even more painful for him than for others (*NE* 1117a30; 1117b13). He would find the prospect of death painful because it entails the loss of noble virtue rather than the loss of life itself. It is not surprising that Aristotle excludes the courage of the citizen-soldier from the realm of courage proper, on the grounds that his activity is motivated by political pleasures and pains (honors and punishment by the laws and rulers) rather than by the pursuit of nobility (*NE* 1116a15-17, 1116b3). Without such moderation, men who are defined solely by manliness become for themselves the standard by which all deeds are to be judged: they become self-referential artifacts of nobility, wholly separate from political life, and therefore not much use to their communities. They remind us of Aristotle's claim that all men are political except those who are gods or beasts.

Magnanimity

The problem of action that arises for the courageous man is said to belong to virtue entire: "the closer a man is to having virtue in its entirety and the happier he is, the

more pain will death bring him” (*NE* 1117b10). Having moral virtue entire belongs to the magnanimous man, and the magnanimous man’s view of virtue is similar to that of the courageous man’s: “a magnanimous man does not take small risks and, since there are only a few things which he honors, he is not even fond of risks. But he will face great risks, and in the midst of them he will not spare his life, aware that life at any cost is not worth having” (*NE* 1124b7-9).

The magnanimous man is also like the courageous man in that he rarely acts. The only exception is “when some great honor or achievement is at stake” (*NE* 1124b24). But on this criterion, he would never act, since he “regards nothing as great” (*NE* 1125a15; 1123b34). There is one exception. Although the magnanimous man regards nothing as great, he himself is great (his name, *megalopsuchia*, literally means greatness of soul). Aristotle writes that “what is great in each virtue would seem to be the mark of a virtuous person” (*NE* 1123a30).²⁰ The magnanimous man is aware of this greatness, for upon consideration of himself the magnanimous man thinks he deserves great things (*NE* 1123a2). Thus, it follows that the magnanimous man considers himself his own reward.²¹ This fact sheds light both on Aristotle’s claim that it is the courageous man’s consideration of his own virtue and nobility that makes the prospect of death painful, and on his claim that a magnanimous man will only act when something great is at stake and that his acts only involve great risks (*NE* 1124b7-9): like the man of courage, the only

²⁰The next line ties the statement to courage: “It would be quite out of character for him to run away in battle with arms swinging.”

²¹Likewise, the magnanimous man wants and deserves honors from those who are worthy of giving it. But since none but himself is worthy, the only source of honor can be himself: he must honor himself (*NE* 1123b23-24; 1124a5-12).

deed worthy of the magnanimous man is the preservation of nobility, which is the preservation of himself.

Thus, the man of virtue only risks his life when his life is already in danger. Indeed, he will not sacrifice any part of his nobility for the sake of human life, for he does not consider the loss of life painful in itself, but only because it is a condition necessary to his virtue. For the man of virtue, the most painful of all things is also the means to the most noble of deeds—the greater the risk to his life, the more noble its defense. The only act worthy of the magnanimous (and courageous) man is to die for his nobility. By conforming himself to an unchanging standard of nobility, the most virtuous of men becomes for himself the standard of nobility that measures and encompasses all others.²² Since the circumstances of human life pale in comparison to the nobility that defines virtue, there is almost never anything to be gained by entering battle, unless that battle poses the likelihood of death, for all earthly rewards are but small profit when compared to the standard of nobility. Thus the virtue of the magnanimous (and courageous) man is self-sufficient and completely free from any consideration of the needs belonging to political community. He is in this way useless. Aristotle makes this implication of virtue explicit in his description of the magnanimous man, who would “rather possess beautiful [noble] and profitless objects than objects which are profitable and useful, for they mark him as self-sufficient” (*NE* 1125a12). What the magnanimous man (who is courageous) possesses is himself. The courageous and magnanimous man’s nobility is a mark of his self-sufficiency and the standard by which all deeds are measured.

²²This would help explain Aristotle’s comment that there is no difference between the magnanimous man and the virtue of magnanimity (*NE* 1123b1-2).

Aristotle's move from courage to magnanimity moves his audience from a virtue explicitly concerned with the self-denial that characterizes the pursuit of noble death to a virtue that explicitly praises the importance of self-affirmation. Nevertheless, a careful reading of both virtues shows that the extreme affirmation of oneself poses the danger of denying the importance of others. And if Aristotle is correct that we are by nature political animals, the self-affirmation that denies this nature or that attempts to make us immortal, finally takes the form of self-denial. Thus, Aristotle suggests the need for a more complex self-affirmation, an affirmation that would recognize that achieving our achieving virtue partially depends on our relationship with other human beings and that those relationships provide the proper ground for noble self-sacrifice.

Aristotle's Virtue and the Tradition

The claim that Aristotle's account and endorsement of the virtues is at the same time a critical reflection on the danger of their being considered the whole of human life may appear to be at odds with the virtue-ethics tradition that springs from the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. Although it is with due reverence that one must submit to St. Thomas's claim that arguments from human authority are the weakest kind (*Summa Theologica* I.I.1.8.reply 2),²³ there can be little doubt that St. Thomas is the most important interpreter of Aristotle and so must be addressed. Since magnanimity belongs to the man who possesses the entirety of moral virtue, it is useful to see whether St. Thomas's interpretation of the virtue fits with my analysis. I believe it does.²⁴

²³St. Thomas is relying on the argument of St. Gregory.

²⁴Many writers ignore or are surprisingly dismissive of St. Thomas's analysis of Aristotle. Susan Collins, for instance, writes: "[Aquinas] contends that Aristotle discusses first the virtues and vices pertaining to internal passions, then those pertaining to passions connected with external goods, and finally

As we saw, the magnanimous man “thinks he deserves good things and actually does” (*NE* 1123b2-3), and attempts to achieve godlike self-sufficiency (*NE* 1124b14-16, 1125a12).²⁵ Since the magnanimous man is characterized by pride, magnanimity would appear to be opposed to the tenets of the Christian doctrine, and especially the Christian emphasis on humility. Thus, it is surprising that St. Thomas confirms magnanimity as a virtue in his *Summa Theologica* (II.II.129). In doing so, however, St. Thomas does not ignore the problem posed by magnanimity to Christianity, but rather emphasizes the

those pertaining to external actions. Aquinas, of course, seeks to transform Aristotle’s political philosophy in such a way as to make it amenable to Christianity.” “The Moral Virtues in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*,” in *Action and Contemplation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 154n5. It is not clear why St. Thomas’s description of this order of the virtues of the *Ethics* is inconsistent with Aristotle’s order of the virtues. If she means that St. Thomas’s account is an insufficient account of the order of the virtues, then she ignores the possibility that St. Thomas thinks so too (as the forthcoming account of his analysis of magnanimity will show). Later, quoting sec. 590 of the *Commentary*, Collins adds that “Aquinas’s efforts to transform Aristotle’s view are evident at the conclusion of his commentary on courage: ‘we must consider, however, that to some virtuous men death is desirable on account of the hope of a future life. But the Stoics did not discuss this, nor did it pertain to the Philosopher in this work to speak of those things that belong to the condition of another life’” (“The Moral Virtues in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*,” 154n6). But if St. Thomas is here referring to the Christian view, he is not transforming Aristotle as Collins claims, but rather differentiating Aristotle’s view from the Christian one. Dismissing St. Thomas so quickly also ignores other possible interpretations. For example St. Thomas’s description of a virtuous man for whom “death is desirable on account of the hope of a future life” is a good description of Achilles, who is willing to die for the sake of eternal fame. On this reading, the quoted passage of St. Thomas cleverly points to the glaring absence of any mention of Achilles in the *Ethics*.

Collins, like many who dismiss St. Thomas’s analysis, follows the argument of Harry Jaffa’s *Thomism and Aristotelianism*. Because Jaffa’s interpretation of Aristotle differs from my own, it is difficult to examine his analysis of St. Thomas’s commentary here, except to say that by misunderstanding Aristotle, Jaffa misunderstands the *Commentary*. Jaffa’s general unfairness to St. Thomas is perhaps most evident in the section entitled “The Incompatibility of Thomistic and Catholic Natural Law and Aristotelian Natural Right.” There he claims that St. Thomas’s view of birth control and abortion are at odds with Aristotle’s discussion of politics in Books VII and VIII of the *Politics* (184). According to Jaffa, Aristotle’s discussion disproves St. Thomas’s belief “that the family has rights over against the state” (224n36). But Jaffa offers no citations to support that this is in fact St. Thomas’s position. Moreover, he ignores how political circumstances may influence how the two writers present their arguments. For while Aristotle writes within the context of a society that accepts extreme forms of birth control, St. Thomas writes within a Church that does not require him to appear to accept such practices. In other words, while both may agree that it is politically imprudent to undermine the integrity of familial life, the political circumstances in which they find themselves may influence the way in which they express that understanding. Even if differences do exist between Aristotle and St. Thomas on the question of abortion and birth control, there is no reason to assume that the differences are rooted in a disagreement about family rights rather than what is politically prudent.

²⁵Note that in *De Regno*, St. Thomas writes: “one man cannot live a self-sufficient life.” *St. Thomas Aquinas: Political Writings*, translated by R. W. Dyson (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 6.

tension between the pride of Aristotle's magnanimity and the virtue of humility, quoting the *Ethics* to the effect that "the magnanimous man deems himself worthy of great things, and despises others" (II.II.129.6.objection 4).²⁶ In response to this objection, St. Thomas replies that "magnanimity makes a man deem himself worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts he holds from God" (II.II.129.6.reply 4). In other words, the magnanimous man claims to deserve great things, not because of his own merit, but rather because of the merit of God. By claiming that God is finally responsible for the gifts of virtue, St. Thomas shows humility to be at the root of magnanimity.²⁷ In doing so, St. Thomas suggests that the only one who fully fits Aristotle's definition of magnanimity (the only one who "thinks he deserves good things and actually does") is God himself. Thus, he provides a new ground for the virtue, showing that, insofar as magnanimity can be practiced by us, it requires that we properly and humbly recognize the greatness of God.

By preserving magnanimity through the introduction of the need to humbly recognize virtue as a gift from God, St. Thomas offers an implicit critique of magnanimity as it appears in Aristotle's account (which lacks these features), and points to the magnanimous man's pride, not in God, but in himself. But as we saw, Aristotle himself has similar reservations about magnanimity. For although Aristotle claims that

²⁶*The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Second and Revised Edition, 1920, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (Online edition: Kevin Knight, 2008), from <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/> (accessed May 2009-December 2009). All references are to this translation.

²⁷St. Thomas distinguishes humility from magnanimity on the ground that "humility makes a man think little of himself in consideration of his own deficiency, and magnanimity makes him despise others in so far as they fall away from God's gifts" (*Summa Theologica* II.II.129.6.reply 4). Because magnanimity focuses on the proper consideration of God's gifts, it despises those who reject God's gifts, a rejection that would be rooted in pride. Thus, humility is at the root of magnanimity: humility acknowledges one's limits in a way that allows for magnanimity, which is concerned with the proper judgment of God's gifts (a judgment that can only be humbling).

the magnanimous man only acts for the sake of greatness (*NE* 1124b24-26, 1124b8), at the same time he notes that “nothing is great” to him (*NE* 1123b33, 1125a3).²⁸ The literal implication of these two statements is that the magnanimous man rarely, if ever, practices his virtue. And since happiness depends upon the practice of virtue and not its mere possession (*NE* 1095b34-1096a2), the magnanimous man would be unable to achieve the proper end of virtue, which is happiness.²⁹ By thinking himself only worthy of great things while simultaneously believing that nothing compares with his own greatness, the magnanimous man is led by his pride into a life that is unable to achieve happiness.

Unwilling to use the noble (or beautiful) virtue that he possesses, the magnanimous man gives his virtue the form of a beautiful but profitless object, which is not surprising since Aristotle claims that he prefers “beautiful and profitless objects” to those that “are profitable and useful” (*NE* 1125a12-13). Aristotle’s account of magnanimity shows the danger that pride poses to the proper practice of virtue, and therefore shows the need for human beings to acknowledge the limits of their virtue. St. Thomas’s implicit critique is therefore consistent with Aristotle’s purpose, even if his solution to that critique in the *Summa* is not simply identical with the philosopher’s.

That St. Thomas is aware of Aristotle’s purpose becomes clear in his *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*. Commenting on Aristotle’s claim that the magnanimous man considers nothing great, Thomas explains by distinguishing between internal and external things: “there is nothing great for him among the things that can happen *externally*, because *his whole life* is busy with *internal goods*, which are truly great” (sec.

²⁸This is also Glaucon’s view of the man of complete virtue in Plato’s *Republic* (486a-e).

²⁹As Aristotle puts it: “activities in conformity with virtue constitute happiness . . . men who are supremely happy spend their lives in these activities most intensely and most continuously” (*NE* 1100b10, 14-15).

777; my italics).³⁰ But earlier, when commenting on the magnanimous man's concern with honor, St. Thomas claimed: "magnanimity is concerned with *one* object in particular. . . . [H]onor is the best of all *external goods*. Consequently, magnanimity *should* give the greatest consideration to honors" (sec. 742; my italics). Thus, by section 777 the magnanimous man's concern for the external good of honor (a concern that St. Thomas endorses), has been overwhelmed by his prideful desire for self-sufficiency, a desire which rejects the importance of the external world and therefore the need for action. An overview of the progress of the *Commentary's* discussion demonstrates the movement in this direction: in section 742 external goods are identified as the primary concern of the magnanimous man; in section 749 the magnanimous man is said to not place a great value on external goods; in section 755 the magnanimous man is said to "despise external goods and value only the internal goods of virtue"; and in section 777 the whole life of the magnanimous man is said to be concerned with internal goods.³¹ Thus, St. Thomas' *Commentary* understands, points to, and reflects the problematic tendency of moral virtue (the tendency of moral virtue to overvalue its nobility and abstract from external goods) as it is presented by Aristotle in the *Ethics*, and therefore the need to move beyond it.

³⁰St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by C. J. Litzinger (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 1993).

³¹The shift from section 742 to section 777 coincides with Aristotle's repeated remark that nothing is great to the magnanimous man. In section 742 (which deals with the first instance of the remark), St. Thomas ignores the claim and instead chooses to discuss the importance of external goods to the magnanimous man. When he notes the second and final use of the remark in section 777, St. Thomas then only speaks of internal goods. The difference between St. Thomas's two reactions to the same statement marks the importance of Aristotle's remark.

Moderation

In the *Politics*, Aristotle argues that at least some virtues can take manly and womanly forms, and even that courage can be possessed by women, at least in a serving form. Consistent with this claim, Aristotle's *Ethics* does not restrict the virtues to men, but describes them as virtues belonging to human beings. On the other hand, courage (or manliness) as it is described in the *Ethics* is especially constructed to apply to men, and that manliness especially characterizes magnanimity. Because magnanimity unifies the virtues (or at least the virtues prior to magnanimity), insofar as the virtues aim at magnanimity (and its noble self-sufficiency), or insofar as the virtues belong to the magnanimous man, they may be said to take on an especially manly quality. To see the extent to which this is the case, beginning with moderation, I will briefly sketch out the ways that each moral virtue exhibits a manly concern for noble self-sufficiency, a self-sufficiency that abstracts from the body and from political life. In sum, although my discussion initially focuses on this manly aspect of the virtues, this focus should not be understood to deny that Aristotle's discussion of the virtues contains other elements meant to make the manly aspect of virtue compatible with our existence as social and political beings. Indeed, rather than denying this reading, my focus on Aristotle's critique of the potential dangers that accompany the pursuit of nobility supports the claim that Aristotle's discussion of the virtue is compatible with our other ends as human beings (such as politics and friendship), for his critique helps make possible the recognition of these other ends, especially to those men whose mistakenly take the pursuit of noble virtue to be the whole of human life.

Like courage, moderation is concerned with the body. Unlike courage, it is not concerned with the pain of death, but with the pleasures of life, and specifically with the pleasures belonging to the realm of food and sex. Following the pattern of virtue as a mean, Aristotle initially describes moderation as a mean between self-indulgence (which pursues pleasures in excess), and an insensitivity to pleasure so rare Aristotle says as to be nameless (*NE* 1119a5-10). As a mean between them, the moderate person pursues the correct amount of pleasure in regard to matters of food and sex (*NE* 1119b16-17).

In the course of his discussion of moderation, Aristotle calls attention to the fact that the appetites involved in this virtue and its vices are natural: “the appetite for nourishment is common to all and natural, since everyone who lacks food or drink (or occasionally both) has an appetite for it; and also, as Homer says, everyone who is young and vigorous has an appetite for sexual intercourse. . . . in the natural appetites few people go wrong (*NE* 1118b9-12, 15). Thus while Aristotle seems to go on to indicate that we “err” or go wrong primarily when our natural desires for food or sex become directed to particular objects, his account of moderation is prefaced by a surprisingly sympathetic statement about natural desires.

Although moderation is defined as a mean disposition toward the bodily pleasures of food and sex, Aristotle says that the moderate man takes “no pleasure in what is most pleasant to the self-indulgent, but rather finds it disgusting” (*NE* 1119a13). Since what is pleasant to the self-indulgent man (food and sex) is not different in kind from what is pleasant to the moderate man, and since “the pleasure of the self-indulgent is not produced by the touch of the whole body, but the touch of some specific parts” (*NE* 1118b7, 1119a3-5), we are led to conclude that the moderate man finds sex disgusting,

and incompatible with the noble. As for food, he desires merely that which is “neither detrimental to health and well-being, not incompatible with what is noble” (*NE* 1119a18).

These comments work at two levels. On the one hand, by emphasizing the soul over and above the body, Aristotle’s discussion works to cultivate moderation in those citizens for whom the possibility of erring on the side of too little food or sex is slight. On the other hand, on a more literal reading, Aristotle here shows the danger of the pursuit of nobility dominating any and all concern for the body. For instance, based on the last quoted passage we may note that, while the moderate man does not starve, the realm of moderate activity open to him is severely limited, and it becomes increasingly difficult to see how he enjoys the choice that is said to be characteristic of virtue. Unlike the self-indulgent man who exercises choice in the pursuit of pleasure (*NE* 1119a1-3), the moderate man does not, and is instead called moderate “for not feeling pain at the absence of or abstinence from his pleasure” (*NE* 1118b34). He is like the man “to whom nothing is pleasant and who does not differentiate one thing from another.” As Aristotle puts it, such a man “must be anything but a human being” (*NE* 1119a9-10).

Paradoxically, when brought to the extreme, the moderate person’s pursuit of the noble resembles the pursuit of pleasure by the self-indulgent man, who is said to have an “appetite for everything pleasant or for what is most pleasant, and . . . is driven by his appetite to choose pleasant things at the cost of everything else” (*NE* 1119a1-3).

Understood thusly, the moderate man’s pursuit of the noble replaces the pursuit of bodily pleasure—the body is sacrificed to the soul.

Liberality

In his discussion of liberality (or generosity), Aristotle takes the nobility that was initially the defining concern of the courageous man and presents it as the defining concern of virtue as a whole: “Virtuous actions are noble and are performed because they are noble. Accordingly, a liberal man too will give—and give in the correct manner—because that is noble” (*NE* 1120a23-25). In Book I, however, Aristotle dismissed money as a motive of human action on the ground that money is only a means (*NE* 1096a7). People who treat money as though it were an end are mistaken. Money is the means by which we care for our bodies. But in the discussion of liberality, the concerns of the body disappear: money turns out to be the means for nobility.

Although Aristotle begins his account of liberality by calling it a mean between the giving and taking of material goods whose value is measured by money (*NE* 1107b9-10, 1119b26-27), during his discussion of the virtue the taking aspect all but disappears. This move begins when the liberal man is introduced in Book IV with the remark that he is concerned with giving over and above taking (*NE* 1119b25). Aristotle continues this move, writing: “[a] liberal man is characterized rather by giving to the right people than by taking from the right and not taking from the wrong sources (*NE* 1120a10-11). Soon he adds that “a liberal man . . . is not a taker” (*NE* 1120b15), except from the right source, which Aristotle says are his own possessions (*NE* 1120b1). Here, as in the discussion of courage, virtue and vice begin to collapse in on one another: liberality becomes equivalent to the vice of extravagance, which “is an excess in giving without taking” (*NE* 1121a13). Accordingly, Aristotle writes that the extravagant man “has the qualities requisite for a liberal man: he gives and does not take, though he does neither rightly and

well” (*NE* 1121a20-22). Although some difference remains between them—the extravagant man gives indiscriminately and the liberal man gives only nobly—the result is the same: both men run out of funds. Of course this problem is more pressing for the liberal man, since the result for him is that he will be unable to practice his virtue. As Aristotle notes, the excessiveness of liberality means that “a liberal person has a strong tendency to go to such excess in giving that he leaves too little for himself; for not to look to himself is typical of a liberal person” (*NE* 1120b4-6). Like the courageous man, the liberal man so conceived takes on a paradoxical character, for his very pursuit of nobility leads him to neglect the conditions (money or the body) necessary to his pursuit.

Liberality poses the danger of abstracting from the body—from the necessities of human life. As Aristotle puts it, the liberal man does “not look to himself” (*NE* 1120b5). Forgetting his body, the liberal man attempts to transfer a means into an end. He tries to transfer a means that is concerned with the body into an end concerned with the soul. Although liberality is concerned with money, which is itself primarily concerned with necessities, within the horizon of nobility money becomes the means to transcend necessity. The liberal man who only takes from himself never looks to himself—he thinks his virtue is self-sufficient and self-sustaining. The liberal man believes he has no need for others, and so misjudges himself.

Aristotle’s discussion here again works at more than one level. On its face, the move from courage to moderation and liberality is a move from the concern with death to a concern for life, and the move from courage and moderation to liberality is a move from a concern for internal goods to a concern for external goods. Both moves thereby work to present a fuller picture of human life. However, as we have seen, Aristotle also

indicates the move to liberality is not sufficient. The desire for nobility poses the danger of transforming liberality's concern for life and external goods into merely an internal virtue that ignores the needs of the body in a way that aims at death. Aristotle supports the importance of moving from courage and moderation to liberality, while at the same time indicating that even liberality does not itself fully reconcile the tension between the means and the aim of virtue, an insufficiency that serves to heighten the tension between the end of virtue and our existence as social and political beings.

Magnificence

The expansion of the horizon of virtue from death to life and internal to external goods continues in the move to magnificence. For just as the move to moderation and liberality from courage served to remind us of the importance of the body, of external goods, and of virtue's relationship to other human beings, Aristotle's move to magnificence provides us with a more complex setting for virtue, for it reminds us of our relationship to the city. Yet, as we will see, this more complex understanding of human life also serves to heighten the tension between social and political life, and the man defined solely by the pursuit of the nobility promised by virtue. To see this tension more clearly, let us turn to a closer reading of magnificence's relationship to the city.

The magnificent man is described as possessing the virtue of liberality, only on a larger scale of spending (*NE* 1122a23, 28-30). Unlike the discussion of liberality, however, the discussion of magnificence does not even note the problem of acquisition: the magnificent man is wholly freed from the demands of necessity and the demands of

the city.³² Nevertheless, according to Aristotle, the magnificent man does not spend on himself, but rather spends both on ceremonies and matters concerning the gods, and on affairs that are “of interest to the whole city or to eminent people” (*NE* 1122b19, 1123a1). Thus, magnificence would seem to be nobler than liberality, for it is nobler and more divine to secure the good for a city than to secure it for one human being (*NE* 1094b9-11).

Given Aristotle association of magnificence with the claim that it is more noble and divine to spend on public affairs than on the affairs of one human being, and given his claim that magnificent men do not tend to spend on themselves, it is surprising that the discussion of magnificence shows that the magnificent man is concerned with spending on himself:

It is also typical of a magnificent man to furnish his house commensurate with his wealth—for it too is a kind of ornament (*kosmos*)—and to prefer spending his money on works that endure, since they are the noblest; in each particular case he will spend an amount suited to the occasion. For the same thing is not fit for both gods and human beings, and what suits a temple does not suit a tomb (*NE* 1123a5-10).

Since “a man is magnificent not when he spends on himself, but when he spends on the common good” (*NE* 1123a70), the magnificent man spending on his own house implies that he has conflated himself with the common good. If it is more noble and more divine to secure the good for a city than to secure it for one person (*NE* 1094b9-11), then the one who secures it (or who can secure it) might even consider himself divine, and it is more noble and divine to secure the good for a god than it is to secure it for a city. It finally belongs to the magnificent man to spend on himself. Thus, Aristotle’s comparing the magnificent man’s house with a temple, and contrasting it with a tomb, is fitting. By

³²Collins argues that by abstracting from the need for acquisition, magnificence avoids the consideration of justice (“The Moral Virtues in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*,” 59).

mistaking himself for a god, the magnificent man similarly mistakes his house for a temple,³³ and in doing so, mistakes himself as one who will endure. His house is described as a *kosmos*, an ornament to his virtue—an ordered whole made by him and for him. In mistaking himself as godlike, the magnificent man forgets his mortality. In building a temple for himself, he builds his own tomb.

To further illustrate the character of magnificence, Aristotle claims that the Homeric phrase “to many a wanderer did I give” (*NE* 1122a27) does not apply to the magnificent man, inasmuch as he gives only for noble causes. The phrase is spoken by Odysseus to the beautiful Antinous (*Ody.* 17.420, 454-455). Odysseus, having returned home, is dressed in rags and is begging Penelope’s guests and suitors for food and money in order to see whether or not they are just. All of the guests and suitors give him money except for Antinous. In the passage quoted by Aristotle, Odysseus explains that, when he was able, he gave to whoever asked. Antinous responds by berating him for spoiling the feast, and hits him with a stool.

It is remarkable that Aristotle points to the “unliberal” Antinous as an illustration of the virtue of magnificence. At Antinous’ refusal to give to the beggar Odysseus, he is criticized by Telemachos and by the other suitors for taking without giving and for breaking the law (*Ody.* 17.400-404, 485-88). The story reveals Antinous (whose name is literally “anti-mind”) to be foolish, for he fails to acknowledge the possibility that his knowledge is incomplete—that he could be entertaining even a god (*Ody.* 17.485). On the analogy given by Aristotle, the magnificent man considers his spending to be magnificent because such expenditures act as an ornament to his own virtue. The magnificent man becomes for himself a self-referential standard that subsumes all deeds

³³ Collins, “The Moral Virtues in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*,” 139.

to himself, including the need to consider other human beings or the city. But Odysseus offers another possibility, for he is willing to take from another when in need. He is therefore not simply a liberal man who gives without taking. While Antinous is a beggar who looks like a king, Odysseus is a king who looks like a beggar (*Ody.* 17.416). His pride does not stop him from accepting his beggar disguise and asking for food (*Ody.* 17.345-355), for when deprived of his own, he comes as a beggar to reclaim it, even if he will soon appear as himself.

The difference between liberality and magnificence is that the former consists of giving to others, while the latter consists in giving to oneself. The liberal man makes his relationship to others the sole source of his private virtue, while the magnificent man makes himself the sole source of public virtue. The liberal person never looks to himself, while the magnificent person, living in his self-created *kosmos*, never looks to others, or rather only sees others in terms of their participation in that *kosmos*. During Aristotle's introduction to magnificence he notes that the magnificent man is liberal, but that the liberal person is not magnificent, since the magnificent man does not spend on insignificant things (*NE* 1122a28-30). But since the liberality (in contrast to magnificence) is concerned with both small and great matters (*NE* 1120b28-30), it would seem that the liberal person is magnificent, but that the magnificent person is not liberal: that magnificence is liberality lacking in a concern for small matters. This difficulty can be reconciled by the standard of self-sufficiency: the courageous man never fights, except for the sake of courage; the moderate person avoids the pleasures of food and sex as much as is possible; the magnanimous man neither takes nor gives honor (except from himself). On Aristotle's defining the virtues in terms of an attempt to achieve self-

sufficiency, it is fitting that the liberal man never takes (except from himself). It is on this ground the magnificent man can be understood to complete liberality, for he neither takes nor gives (except from and to himself).

As we have seen, when moral virtue attempts to achieve self-sufficiency it understands itself to be its own cause. Understood thusly, moral virtue has difficulty accounting for its own existence. But Aristotle says not only that virtue involves choice, but that it is instilled by habituation (*NE* 1179b25-80a4). But one cannot be habituated to courage if one is not already courageous: if one is cowardly, one simply flees battle. Likewise one cannot be habituated to magnificence, which is the completion of liberality, for magnificence requires one to have an extraordinary amount of money and to spend it on extraordinary things. In other words, by ignoring necessity, moral virtue does not properly account for habituation—all that remains is noble choice. And if moral virtue requires choice, this choice cannot explain itself—it cannot explain its origins, and it cannot account for habituation or its own coming into being. Insofar as moral virtue does not understand its limits, and therewith the impossibility of self-sufficiency, it lacks self-knowledge.

CHAPTER FIVE

Virtue, the *Iliad*, and the Family in the *Nicomachean Ethics*

In his introduction to the *Ethics*, Aristotle suggests that the “final and perfect good” for man is self-sufficiency. He immediately follows this claim, however, by arguing that a happy life cannot occur in isolation, but only belongs to one who lives “with parents, children, a wife and friends and fellow citizens generally, since man is by nature a social and political animal” (*NE* 1097b10). In other words, the self-sufficient man, insofar as he is happy, proves to not really be self-sufficient. Aristotle’s discussion of the family and friendship offers a broader context for the life devoted to moral virtue.

Following this possibility, this chapter moves from a general discussion of moral virtue, and the potential problems posed by the pursuit of nobility, to Aristotle’s use of the family in that same discussion. The desire for noble self-sufficiency poses the danger of abstracting from the family and from friendship, and so, not surprisingly, references to the family are largely absent from the discussion of moral and intellectual virtue. But although Aristotle does not explicitly examine familial relations until his Books on friendship, his earlier discussion does include passing and implicit references to the family. These references point to the need to situate virtue in a fuller account of human life by pointing the reader back to the primary character of our relationships with particular human beings, and of our need to engage the political realm.

Family and Virtue: Ethics Books I-VI

The family's first appearance after its entrance into Book I's account of self-sufficiency occurs during the discussion of the voluntary. In this context Aristotle refers to Merope's nearly killing her son (*NE* 1111a15) along with Alcmaeon's murder of his mother Eriphyle (*NE* 1110a20)—both references to plays of Euripides. While Aristotle excuses Merope upon the grounds that she mistook her son for an enemy, he condemns Alcmaeon, arguing that matricide is an act “which no one can possibly be compelled to do . . . he should [rather] accept the most terrible sufferings and death” (*NE* 1110a20). Although we have lost the play, according to the myth, Alcmaeon killed Eriphyle to avenge his father's death, and we know from an ancient commentator “that Alcmaeon's motive for killing his mother in Euripides' play was to escape the curse of his [dead] father [Amphiaraus].”¹

In discussing the voluntary, Aristotle claims that if we deny that wickedness is voluntary, then we must deny “that man is the source and begetter of his actions as a father of his children” (*NE* 1113b15). However, if man is the sole source and begetter of his actions, then he is self-sufficient. If the father is the self-sufficient source of his son's being, then the son is bound to his father's will and the murder of Eriphyle is justified. Amphiaraus' curse ignores that he himself has a father, and that Alcmaeon has a mother.²

Aristotle provides a list of circumstances that, if unknown to the agent, may lead one to act involuntarily, such as who the agent is, what he is doing, and the result intended (*NE* 1111a1-6). “No one,” he claims, “except a madman would be ignorant of

¹Ostwald, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 53n2.

²As we saw in Chapter Two, Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals* shows that women play a major role in the begetting of children.

all these factors, nor can he obviously be ignorant of the agent; for how could a man not know his own identity?" (*NE* 1111a7-8). But the question of knowing oneself is not a simple one, especially when one considers the role played by one's father. If Alcmaeon thinks that his father (but not his mother) is the source of his being, he does not know his own identity, and by Aristotle's criterion his actions would therefore be those of a madman, and he would commit an awful injustice to his mother on the basis of an illusion. In submitting to his father's will, Alcmaeon affirms his father's perceived self-sufficiency and neglects the issue of his own identity. His subservience to his father means that neither the tension between father and son that define his familial origins, nor the tension between familial origins and an ability to act as begetter of his own actions, arises for him.

According to the myth, Amphiaraus died as part of the expedition of the Seven against Thebes, which he joined after being "compelled to do so by his wife, who had been bribed."³ Amphiaraus' curse may assume absolute authority over his son, but his own fate depends on his wife. Although Alcmaeon and Amphiaraus ignore Eriphyle's role in determining Alcmaeon's being, her existence stands as a self-evident challenge to Amphiaraus' perceived self-sufficiency. Thus, when Amphiaraus claims authority over Alcmaeon as though he is the sole source and begetter of his son (as implied in his command to his son and his curse), he personifies the identification of voluntariness with fatherhood to which Aristotle alludes. For Amphiaraus, fatherhood becomes the equivalent of being the sole source of one's own being. While dominating his son confirms Amphiaraus' perception of himself as self-sufficient, Eriphyle's existence

³Ostwald, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 53n2.

stands as a challenge to it, and she must therefore be removed. In order for him to maintain his illusion about himself, Eriphyle must be killed, and killed by his son.

Thus, Aristotle indicates that only a madman presumes to know his own identity in the complete sense, for such a man is ignorant of the limits of the human condition, and is suffering from a lack of self-knowledge. A mark of madness is claiming to know what one cannot know. It is to believe that one is a god. We may very well be the source and begetter of our actions “as a father of his children” (*NE* 1113b15), but this is the statement of a puzzle rather than the solution to one, for while a father is certainly a begetter of his children, he is not the sole cause of their existence.

As Aristotle turns to the specific moral virtues in Books III and IV we find only two explicit references to the family. In the first, Aristotle writes that “a man is not a coward if he fears insult to his wife and children” (*NE* 1115a20-21). Although Aristotle here supports the care for one’s family, he categorizes that care as outside of those things that “are the concern of the courageous man” (*NE* 1115a23). In the second instance, Aristotle claims that the magnificent man spends his wealth on weddings for the same reason that he spends it on his home. His expense is not for the sake of his family, but rather is meant to serve as an ornament to his virtue (*NE* 1123a1-7; see also 20-23). The family, like the city, disappears under the light of the courageous man’s concern for confronting the most fearful of all things, and the magnificent man’s concern for his self-perpetuated noble giving.

There is only one reference to the family in the *Ethics*’ discussion of intellectual virtue. After distinguishing household management (along with legislation and politics) from the concern for one’s own person (*NE* 1141b29-31), Aristotle notes their

interdependence, arguing: “surely one’s own good cannot exist without household management nor without a political system” (*NE* 1142a8-10). The reference to household management occurs during a discussion of prudence, which Aristotle soon contrasts with theoretical wisdom. While the one possessing prudence is concerned for one’s own good (and the good of one’s community), Aristotle says we call the knowledge belonging to those possessing theoretical wisdom “useless because the good they are seeking is not human” (*NE* 1141b5-6). As we noted earlier, theoretical wisdom, like the virtues of magnanimity and wit, is the fifth virtue in its set. Although Aristotle calls the virtue of theoretical wisdom the most “perfect form of knowledge” (*NE* 1141a17), its perfection, is not a good that belongs to human beings.⁴ Indeed, Aristotle notes that one who is defined by theoretical wisdom studies “none of the things that make a human being happy” (*NE* 1143b19). As an example of such a man, Aristotle cites Thales, who was famous for being laughed at by a Thracian servant girl, after falling into a well while star-gazing (*Theaetetus* 174a). Thales, in pursuit of a wisdom that Aristotle says properly belongs to gods (*NE* 1141b21-23), neglects the more human virtue of prudence, which Aristotle associates with household management and politics.

The Iliad, Self-Sufficiency, and the Family

In addition to the explicit references to the family that occur during his discussion of virtue, Aristotle develops his account of the family by references to Hector and Achilles throughout the *Ethics*. These references form a narrative that examines the

⁴Perhaps this raises the question of whether Aristotle means only that it is the most perfect form of knowledge possible for human beings. If so, its perfection still turns out to be problematic, for the standard by which it is the most perfect form of knowledge for human beings is not a human one (*NE* 1141b1). As Aristotle puts it, “we . . . call their knowledge useless because the good they are seeking is not human” (*NE* 1141b7).

tension between the family and godlike virtue through the exploration of the events surrounding Hector's death at the hands of Achilles. The Iliadic narrative is especially conspicuous during Aristotle's account of superhuman virtue in Book VII, which Aristotle calls "a kind of heroic and divine excellence" (*NE* 1145a20). Aristotle illustrates this excellence by quoting Priam saying that his son Hector "did not seem like one who was a child of a mortal man, but of a god" (*NE* 1145a21-22). Although Priam's remark initially appears to be a boast, the reader is sobered by the memory that, in Book I, Aristotle claimed that one cannot achieve supreme happiness "if a fate such as Priam's befalls him" (*NE* 1101a8). The remark in Book VII suggests that Priam's fate meant more than the death of Hector—it meant that Hector had become so divinely heroic that Priam could no longer see himself in him: he was no longer his father's own. The excess of virtue that changed Hector into a god removed him from his family.⁵

Priam's complaint that Hector had become a god is made after Hector falls at Achilles' hand. Hector's superhuman status is therefore dependent on his willingness to confront death at the hands of Achilles. When Hecuba and Priam attempt to dissuade Hector from doing so, Hecuba reminds Hector of how she nurtured him at her breast, and worries that if he fights and is killed she will be unable to properly preserve and mourn his body, which will be desecrated by Achilles (*Iliad* 22.80-89). In contrast, the reason Priam gives for advising Hector not to meet Achilles is *not* his love for his son. Instead, he anticipates that Hector's death will be noble, and complains that a noble death for Hector will mean the fall of Troy and thereby an ignoble death for himself (*Iliad* 22.60-73). The quoted remark of Priam does not reveal a concern for his son's well being, but rather is a complaint that Hector's godlike death has separated him from Priam's fatherly

⁵According to Poseidon, Hector claims "to be the son of high and mighty Zeus" (*Iliad* 13.67).

authority, and that this separation serves as a challenge to Priam's own sense of noble self-sufficiency derived from his rule of the family.⁶ Aristotle not only demonstrates the family to be at odds with noble self-sufficiency, he also shows how the desire for nobility outside of the family is a threat to the family's own desire for self-sufficiency. As we saw in the case of Amphiaraus, when a desire for noble self-sufficiency is exercised within the context of the family, the individual integrity of the family's members—the wife and the children—may become wholly subject to the father.

Hector, in choosing to pursue noble self-sufficiency, rejects all his ties to the family and political life.⁷ Nevertheless, in his discussion of courage, Aristotle had quoted Hector as an apparent example of the spurious virtue of the citizen soldier: “citizens, it seems, endure dangers because the laws and customs penalize and stigmatize them if they do not, and honor them if they do. It is this very type of courage which Homer describes in such characters as Diomedes and Hector: ‘Polydamas will be first to put a reproach upon me’” (*NE* 1116a19-23). Hector makes the remark during the famous speech in which he decides to meet Achilles in battle. Earlier Polydamas suggested that the Trojan forces should retreat into the city walls in order to escape Achilles' wrath and protect the city and their women (*Iliad* 18.254-265).⁸ In response, Hector declared his intention to

⁶The characterization of Hector as the son of a god is made to his remaining sons, whom he calls miserable cowards. As Priam makes this disparaging remarks, Homer describes Agathon as godlike, Polites as master of the battle cry, and Dius as noble (*Iliad* 24.255-56). Hector's excessive virtue separated him from Priam, and Priam's excessive concern for this virtue leads him to disown his sons.

⁷Hector's denying of his family in order to avoid shame is foreshadowed in Book VI. When he declares his intent to avoid shame, he places his helmet on his head, causing his son to hide in terror (*Iliad* 6.440-490).

⁸Earlier, Polydamas twice disputes Hector's decision to attack the Greek ships (*Iliad* 12.230, 13.740-750), the second time suggesting a council to discuss and decide the matter. Although initially Hector agrees to the council, Ajax's insults distract him, and he leads the Trojans against the Greeks without discussion, a mission that ends in failure.

stay and fight, replying that “he is sick of being cooped up inside those walls,” and that he wishes to win glory (*Iliad* 18.287, 292).⁹ Rather than retreating, Hector attempted to meet the Greeks in battle while Achilles and the Greeks were at the height of their power. But Hector’s plan was a disaster for the Trojans and, after suffering great losses, his army was forced to retreat.

Thus, at the moment in the *Iliad* quoted by Aristotle, Polydamas’ judgment has proved superior to that of Hector’s, which has proven insufficient. As a result, Hector will be forced to suffer reproach. He will be forced to acknowledge the limits of his virtue to Polydamas and to the city.¹⁰ In order to avoid this fate, Hector places the shame he would feel upon such an occurrence in the service of his courage, and goes out to fight Achilles. Hector was motivated by honor to ignore Polydamas’ advice, and is motivated by the avoidance of shame when he accepts Achilles’ challenge.¹¹

After referring to Hector’s remark about Polydamas, Aristotle writes: “this kind of courage . . . is motivated by virtue, that is, by a sense of shame and by the desire for a noble object (to wit honor) and avoidance of reproach as something base” (*NE* 1116a27-29). It is appropriate that shame is the defining quality of the *spurious* virtue of citizen-courage rather than of courage itself, for Aristotle explicitly claims in Book IV that “it is incorrect to speak of a sense of shame as being a virtue, for it resembles an emotion more

⁹While here I agree with Smith that Hector is motivated by a desire for honor, I see no evidence for his accompanying claim that Hector’s decision to meet Achilles is motivated by a concern for the fate of his wife, children, and city (Smith, 88-89).

¹⁰Polydamas points out the limits that Hector refuses to acknowledge: “Impossible man! Won’t you listen to reason? Just because some god exalts you in battle you think you can beat the rest at tactics too. How can you hope to garner all the gifts at once?” (*Iliad* 13.839-842). Homer later adds that Polydamas was “the only man who saw what lay in the past and what the Trojans faced. . . . he excelled in trading words as [Hector] at trading spear-thrusts” (*Iliad* 18.288-292). Note that the need for the courageous man to recognize his limits (and the difficulty he has doing so) is compatible with our earlier discussion of the magnanimous man.

¹¹Smith, 89.

than a characteristic” (*NE* 1128b10-12). Courage must be distinguished from citizen-courage just as virtue must be distinguished from shame. Virtue is an abstraction from one’s incompleteness (*NE* 1154b29), which, when recognized, properly leads one to shame and political life.

Nevertheless, in his analysis of the shame that defines Hector’s citizen-courage, Aristotle calls that shame a virtue (*NE* 1116a28). In Book IV, when Aristotle distinguishes shame from virtue by characterizing it as an emotion, he adds that shame is not a virtue because it “is not the mark of a decent man . . . since it is a consequence of base actions” (*NE* 1128b21-22). Hector, however, never experiences shame for any vice or from any misdeed he intends but doesn’t commit. Hector is ashamed of his incompleteness, and that has led him to avoid experiencing or accepting that incompleteness. Hector’s shame has become a characteristic (and a virtue) rather than an emotion: he personifies a type of shame separate from the shame discussed in Book IV. His virtue leads him to deeds that will prevent his being shamed. Making shame into a virtue transforms shame into the avoidance of shame, separating Hector from the judgment of his family and the political community.¹²

Aristotle refers to a second type of citizen-courage, one based on fear rather than on shame:

We might include under this head [of citizen-courage] also those who are forced to act by their superiors. They are, however, inferior inasmuch as they are prompted not by a sense of shame but by fear, and because what they try to avoid is not baseness but pain. Their masters exert compulsion as Hector does when he

¹²In contrast, Lee Ward argues that Aristotle’s transformation of shame into a virtue corrects his earlier account, thereby bringing courage more in line with the political community (“Nobility and Necessity,” 75).

says: “But if I shall see any man who cowers and stays out of battle, / Him nothing shall save to escape from the dogs” (*NE* 1116a30-35).¹³

Although the citizen-courage of those men ruled by Hector is inferior to the citizen-courage of Hector himself, inasmuch as it is governed by fear rather than shame, it is Hector himself who arouses that fear. But this fact is not due to a deficiency in the men’s character, but rather to the deficiency of Hector. In the scene to which Aristotle refers, the Trojans are routing the Greeks, and have begun stripping them of their armor. Hector’s threat is not meant to prevent retreat, but to compel advancement. For Hector, the men are too concerned with the trophies of war: they are too concerned with honor. By threatening his men, Hector shifts the ground of their deeds from honor to fear, thereby providing the means to fulfill his own pursuit of honor.¹⁴ In doing so, he threatens to treat his subjects even worse than his enemy Achilles will treat him.¹⁵ Hector, the man of superhuman or godlike virtue, rules his men as though they are dogs or beasts. Rather than ruling his men politically, he rules them as a master rules his slaves, and in so doing alienates his men from the honor that belongs to the political realm.

¹³Ostwald notes that the quote is not exact, and that “the words cited here are closer to, though not identical with, those spoken by Agamemnon in *Iliad* II.391-93” (73n22). Charney suggests that Aristotle means us to think of Agamemnon, arguing that the reference is meant to connect the low political courage of Agamemnon’s men with Hector’s more noble political courage that led to his encounter with Achilles. Aristotle, she argues, means to reveal that, in all its forms, political courage is dogmatic and dog-like (70-71). Like Agamemnon, however, Hector rules his men as though they are beasts, thereby denying their political nature (Aristotle later makes Agamemnon’s tendency to do so explicit [*NE* 1061a10-11]).

¹⁴It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the command he gives his soldiers, Hector takes and fights in the divinely-forged armor of Achilles.

¹⁵Aristotle leaves out Hector’s threat not to bury his men. The original passage reads: “Drop those bloody spoils! Any straggler I catch, hanging back from the fleet, right here on the spot I’ll put that man to death. No kin, no women commit his corpse to the flames—the dogs will tear his flesh before our walls!” (*Iliad* 15.408-415). After killing Hector Achilles eventually relents and allows him to be buried by his family.

When Aristotle refers to Hector's decision to fight Achilles, he pairs Hector's remark with a quote from Diomedes: "for some day Hector will say openly before the Trojans: 'The son of Tydeus, running before me'" (*NE* 1116a25-26). In the cited episode, Diomedes is resisting Nestor's suggestion that they retreat from Hector and the advancing Trojans. Nestor, however, continues to point out that holding their position means almost certain death, and finally convinces Diomedes to retreat. During the retreat, Diomedes' fears prove correct, for Hector ridicules him: "Diomedes—once the Danaan riders prized you first of men . . . Now they will disgrace you, a woman after all. Away with you, girl, glittering little puppet! I'll never yield, you'll never mount our towers, never drag our women back to you ships of war." (*Iliad* 8.181-184). According to Homer, Hector's mocking leads Diomedes to three times experience an almost overwhelming temptation to turn and fight.

Aristotle groups Hector's and Diomedes' remarks as though they represent one form of citizen-courage united by shame. But the difference between the two is striking: Hector acted in accordance with his quoted speech, while Diomedes did not.¹⁶ While Hector's shame is a characteristic, Diomedes' shame is an emotion. Diomedes' shame consists in his acknowledging that he cannot defeat Hector, and this shame leads him to act in a way that is inconsistent with noble self-sufficiency. To live is to have shame, and

¹⁶ Charney fails to note this important difference between Hector and Diomedes, arguing that both cases show that "the sense of shame or fear of blame causes the heroes to act contrary to good military strategy" (70). Charney's conflation of the two heroes is based on her claim that it took three of Zeus' lightning bolts to send Diomedes into retreat. But as Charney herself admits, Zeus' intervention is necessary because Diomedes has been so successful in his rescue of Nestor that he has almost killed Hector. In other words, Diomedes' initial inclination appears to be the correct military decision, as is his willingness to follow Nestor's advice, accept shame, and retreat. Following Charney, Lee Ward interprets the citations to Hector and Diomedes as though they are a single case. This move allows him to conclude that "Aristotle's presentation of true courage points to the deficiencies in the Homeric presentation" ("Nobility and Necessity," 80). But could Homer not mean to point the reader to those same deficiencies and the possibility of at least partly overcoming them, a conclusion that I believe can be reached by noticing the differences between characters, and how (some, at least) develop throughout the epic.

to wholly escape that shame requires death. When shame becomes a virtue it aims at noble death, while in its non-virtuous form shame becomes the means to self-improvement, and allows for the more human virtue of citizen-courage: although Diomedes experiences shame when he retreats from Hector and the Trojans, when the tide of the battle shifts in favor of the Greeks, “not a single man could claim he outstripped Diomedes, Tydeus’ son lashing his high-strung team across the trench to reach the front and battle hand-to-hand” (*Iliad* 8.290-297). The proper acknowledgements of one’s limits is not necessarily incompatible with the courageous and noble risking of one’s life.

Achilles

The *Iliad* provides the models of virtue for the Greeks, and although he never mentions him by name in the *Ethics*, Aristotle knows that his audience’s horizon of virtue is strongly defined by the courageous manliness of Achilles.¹⁷ Thus, we can understand any references to Achilles to be especially important to the discussion of virtue. It is noteworthy, then, that Aristotle begins his account of virtue with an implicit reference to Achilles:

Virtue renders good the thing itself of which it is the virtue, and causes it to perform its function well. . . . The virtue of a horse makes it both good as a horse and good at running, at carrying its rider, and at facing the enemy. Now if this is true of all things, the virtue of a human being will be the characteristic which makes him a good human being, and which causes him to perform his own function well (*NE* 1106a15-23).

¹⁷Plato, *Hippias Minor*, 333a-d. As Smith notes, “in the city-states of Greece, manliness was so strongly emphasized that it sometimes came to be taken for virtue in its entirety” (85). See also Lorraine Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 90. In the *Iliad*, Achilles is called “*theios anēr*,” or “godlike man” (*Iliad* 16.798). Seth Benardete points out that, given the clear distinction between men and humans in the epic, “*theios anthropos*” or “godlike human” is inconceivable. *Achilles and Hector: The Homeric Hero* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2004), 15.

As Seth Benardete points out in *The Homeric Hero*, the comparison of virtue to horses is not idly chosen by Aristotle, for it is also the metaphor chosen by Homer, who ties the virtues of horses to the virtue of Achilles:

The word *arête*, “virtue,” occurs, all told, sixteen times in the *Iliad*. It is used exclusively of horses and men. But what is equine virtue? “A horse must be both strong and beautiful: its strength resides in the legs, its beauty in the head.” Thus it is the perfect image for Achilles, the swiftest and most beautiful of the heroes. What is more, Aristotle assigns to the horse two virtues (among others) which, we have seen, characterize Achilles: “The virtue of a horse makes him both run quickly and abide the enemy.” It is, therefore right and proper that Achilles should have the best horses. That Achilles harmoniously unites two virtues that usually cannot even fit together, stamina and speed, constitutes the miracle of his existence.¹⁸

Achilles is the most manly and most virtuous man of the *Iliad*, combining speed, endurance, power and beauty, without having to sacrifice one for the other. Like the magnanimous man, he is more than a sum of the parts.¹⁹ It is therefore fitting that Aristotle uses Achilles’ remarkable virtue as a backdrop for his own discussion of virtue, and especially his discussion of magnanimity.

As we have noted, the magnanimous man possesses “perfect virtue” (*NE* 1124a1), virtue which entails the desire to mark oneself as “self-sufficient” (*NE* 1125a12). This desire is the source of the magnanimous man’s attitude toward giving and receiving benefactions. As Aristotle writes:

Magnanimous men remember the good turns they have done, but not those they have received. For the recipient is inferior to the benefactor, whereas a high-

¹⁸Benardete, *The Homeric Hero*, 48.

¹⁹Benardete, *The Homeric Hero*, 48-49. If there can be any doubt that Achilles is magnanimous, Aristotle resolves it at *Posterior Analytics* 92b15, where he lists him as an example of a magnanimous man. Jacob Howland argues that the *Posterior Analytics*’ discussion shows the deficiency of Achilles as a magnanimous character, and that only Socrates possesses true greatness of soul. “Aristotle’s Great Souled Man”, *The Review of Politics* 64, no. 1 (2002): 27-56. This interpretation does not pose a problem for my reading, since I understand the discussion of magnanimity in the *Ethics* to include a critique of magnanimity which might suggest the need to move beyond Achilles and toward a more complex standard for human life, a standard that may or may not be personified by Socrates.

minded man wishes to be superior. They listen with pleasure to what good they have done, but with displeasure to what good they have received. That is apparently why Thetis does not mention the good turns she had done to Zeus (*NE* 1124b15).

The example indicates both the godlike direction of magnanimity, and its connection to the models provided by the *Iliad*. Zeus, the greatest and magnanimous of all gods,²⁰ is matched with Achilles, the most divine of all Homeric heroes. Aristotle's reference to Thetis involves her beseeching Zeus on behalf of her son Achilles, who is upset at the lack of respect shown to him by Agamemnon. Achilles can trace his lineage back to Zeus in three generations. Thus, Thetis' mediation between Zeus and godlike Achilles takes the form of a mother mediating between her son and his father. Achilles is slighted not because he wants Agamemnon to honor him, but because the gods have not made Agamemnon do so. Zeus, he says, "should give me honor—but now he gives me nothing" (*Iliad* 1.419). Achilles desires honor from the gods, honor that would include his ruling the Greeks.²¹

Aristotle's account of the episode involving Zeus, Achilles, and Thetis is only accurate in part. When Achilles tells his mother to remind Zeus of when she saved Zeus from the plot to throw him in chains (*Iliad* 1.470-480), he follows the magnanimous impulse to remember the good deeds one has done and to take the side of the superior party—his mother in this incident. However, since Zeus himself is magnanimous, and magnanimous men prefer not to remember the good deeds they have received, Achilles' advice is potentially disastrous. It is significant then, that Thetis only partly follows her

²⁰Although Thetis saved Zeus from the plot to throw him in chains, the plot does not change Zeus' opinion of himself as impervious to plots by the other gods (*Iliad* 8.19-25). Indeed, he claims himself "stronger . . . than gods and men" (*Iliad* 8.28-32). For another example of Zeus' magnanimous qualities, see *Iliad* 11.80-84.

²¹Achilles to Phoenix: "What do I need with honor such as that [offered by the Greeks]? I say my honor lies in the great decree of Zeus" (*Iliad* 9.739-741).

son's advice. "Remembering her son's instructions," she tells Zeus: "Father Zeus, *if* I served you well among the deathless gods with a word or action, bring this prayer to pass: honor my son Achilles!" (*Iliad* 1.590-600; my italics). Thetis, then, allows Zeus to take the position of the benefactor, while at the same time subtly reminding him that she could enumerate the ways she has acted as a benefactor for him—an enumeration that Achilles suggested and that Zeus will not want to hear. It is an enumeration that Thetis does not make. Unlike Achilles, but like Aristotle, she is aware that magnanimous men "listen with pleasure to what good they have done, but with displeasure to the good that they have received" (*NE* 1124a20), and manages to forge this teaching with the fact that they "will requite good with greater good" (*NE* 1124a10). Achilles' mother mediates between her magnanimous son and the magnanimous Zeus. Thetis is able to do so because, like Aristotle (and unlike her magnanimous son), she understands magnanimity.

Despite his reliance on his mother, Achilles is dismissive of his mother's role in his lineage. When he meets Pelegon in battle, Achilles mocks him for descending from a water-god, all the time tracing his lineage to Zeus and forgetting that his own mother is a sea goddess (*Iliad* 21.190-199).²² Likewise, Achilles complains about his mother while fighting the river god Scamander,²³ an act that Homer says made him "like something superhuman" (*Iliad* 21.273-278). At the height of his pursuit of divinity, Achilles not only objects to his mother, he becomes her enemy—he becomes like fire: "like inhuman fire raging on through the mountain gorges splinter-dry, setting ablaze big strands of

²²See also *Iliad* 20.390-392 and 21.124-132; Achilles also forgets that Zeus himself descends from water: 14.244-246.

²³Achilles: "Father Zeus, To think in all my misery not one god can bring himself to rescue me from this river! Then I'd face my fate. And no god on high, none is to blame so much as my dear mother—how she lied, she beguiled me" (*Iliad* 21.308-309).

timber, the wind swirling the huge fireball left and right—chaos of fire— Achilles storming on with brandished spear like a frenzied god” (*Iliad* 20.555-62).²⁴ The result of Achilles’ turn away from his mother is thereby brilliantly brought to light by Homer, for as Benardete notes: “Fire is unlike all other elements, for it contains within itself its own destruction . . . it is an exact image for wrath.”²⁵ The manly Achilles finally acts, not because of virtuous character, but rather because of emotion. This is exactly what Homer suggests at the beginning of the *Iliad* when he asks the Muse to sing of the wrath of Achilles.

Aristotle’s Homeric reference calls into question magnanimity’s god-like self-sufficiency. Desiring the noble, Achilles wants to take the side of the benefactor when he beseeches Zeus, but his ability to do so depends on his mother—self-sufficiency proves itself to be an illusion, and the magnanimous man’s attempt to attain it betrays his lack of self-knowledge. Here, as in Book I of the *Ethics*, the reminder of this illusion is the family. And it is also Aristotle, whose half-truths about the story match Thetis’ mediation of Achilles’ command. Aristotle, through the mother, undercuts the self-sufficiency that tends to characterize the aim of moral virtue.

Despite his superior virtue, or rather because of his superior virtue, Achilles is inactive throughout much of the *Iliad*, waiting for the gods to properly recognize his virtue. And when Achilles finally does act, as evidenced by his desecration of Hector, his motive is not noble virtue. Instead, he is spurred by a desire to revenge the death of

²⁴See also *Iliad* 13.53, 688; 17.88-89; 18.154; 20.423; 21.12-16. On this subject I am following Benardete, who writes: “Zeus the hurler of lightning and thunder is greater than water: Achilles boasts his descent from fire and forgets that his own mother is a sea-goddess. If he is more closely related to the gods on his mother’s side, Achilles prefers to emphasize the divine lineage of his father: for there is something womanish and humane about Thetis that does not fit with Achilles’ image of himself” (*The Homeric Hero*, 62).

²⁵Benardete, *The Homeric Hero*, 60.

Patrocles (*Iliad* 18.113-120; 19.66-70). Ironically, Achilles' inactive virtue was the cause of the very danger to the Greeks that prompted Patrocles to act. Achilles' virtue was the cause of his losing his friend, and his friend is the cause of his losing his noble virtue.

Thetis' role in assuring that virtue tends in a human direction is not limited to the role she plays in Aristotle's discussion of magnanimity. As Achilles prepares to enter battle, Odysseus proposes that the men eat and drink before battle in order to sustain their courage and stamina (*Iliad* 19.190-200). But Achilles refuses to eat until his hunger for revenge is quelled: the hunger once filled by food and his friendship with Patrocles (*Iliad* 315-320) is replaced with the hunger for revenge, a hunger that cannot be quenched.²⁶ When godlike Achilles returns to food, he returns to the human. This is relevant to the *Ethics*, for, as we saw, during the discussion of moderation, Aristotle writes: "The appetite for nourishment is common to all and natural, since everyone who lacks food or drink (or occasionally both) has an appetite for it; and also, as Homer says, everyone who is young and vigorous has an appetite for sexual intercourse" (*NE* 1118b9-12). The words attributed to Homer are spoken by Thetis to Achilles (*Iliad* 24.130-131) in an attempt to end Achilles' prolonged desecration of Hector's body. During the eleven day desecration, Achilles has gone without food or drink or sex, and apparently has had no appetite for it. If the model for moderation is the young and vigorous Achilles, to whom no bodily thing is pleasant, then moderation is an extreme. But the appetite for food and sex are natural for human beings (*NE* 1118b15), a fact that must be pointed out by Thetis

²⁶Arlene Saxonhouse argues: "the psychological motives and the physical necessities are irrelevant for Achilles. His thymos no longer sets him within the structure of society. The vengeance he seeks goes beyond the boundaries of the laws of camp and body. . . . In his rage against those who have harmed him, he transcends humanity." "Thymos, Justice, and Moderation of Anger in the Story of Achilles," in *Understanding the Political Spirit: Philosophical Investigations from Socrates to Nietzsche*, edited by Catherine H. Zuckert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 37-38.

to Achilles, who not only reminds him to eat, but tells him that it is “welcome thing to make love to a woman—you don’t have long to live now, well I know: already I see them looming up beside you—death and the strong force of fate” (*Iliad* 24.130-131). Achilles has forgotten his body, and Thetis reminds him of it.

Aristotle’s last reference to Achilles is the myth of Niobe. According to Aristotle, Niobe is an example of those who devote themselves “to the pursuit of honor or to their children and parents more than they should” (*NE* 1148a39-40). The legend of Niobe is recounted by Achilles to Priam during the ransom of Hector’s body. Achilles reminds Priam that Niobe thought her children were powerful enough to defeat the gods (*Iliad* 24.704), but that her children were killed in the ensuing battle by Apollo and Artemis, the sons of Leto. The evident purpose of the story is to convince Priam, who has been fasting, to eat, since Niobe ate, “though she saw a dozen children killed in her own halls” (*Iliad* 24.708).

Niobe’s pride in her children parallels what Achilles thinks is Priam’s attempt to prove his son greater than Achilles by allowing Hector to meet him in battle, just as her children’s confronting Apollo and Artemis parallel Hector’s confronting Achilles in battle.²⁷ Indeed, Achilles positions himself as a god whose deeds exceed those of Apollo and Artemis, for he has desecrated Hector’s body for eleven days, while the gods allowed Niobe to bury her children after ten days.²⁸ But although Achilles’ telling the story allows for this interpretation, Achilles draws the analogy only after agreeing to give up

²⁷Achilles is unaware of Priam’s resistance to Hector’s decision to fight.

²⁸John Alvis notes that “although his [Achilles’] role corresponds to that of Apollo and Artemis in the myth, his prerogatives are not divine, and in fact, he has usurped a wrath proper only to divinities in presuming to deny burial as once gods had denied burial to Niobe’s children.” *Divine Purpose and Heroic Response in Homer and Virgil* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 74.

Hector's body, and he agrees to give up Hector's body only after following Thetis' advice that he should eat. Moreover, he refers to Niobe after conversing with Priam, who has reminded Achilles that his father Peleus will need to be rescued from indignities when Achilles returns home—and is therefore not a god. But Achilles knows that the triumph over Hector means that he will not return home. By killing Hector, he has left his father in the same state as Priam finds himself. If Priam is like Niobe, then Achilles is like her children, for he has aimed at god-like virtue and will leave his father abandoned by his death.²⁹ Priam, like Thetis, reminds Achilles of his mortality.

When Aristotle refers to the myth of Niobe, he does so as an example of one of those who excessively devote themselves “to the pursuit of honor, or to their children and parents more than they should” (*NE* 1148a30-31). Concern for these noble and good things can go too far and can go against right reason. The example of Niobe joins together the concern for one's children and the concern for honor. An excessive concern for one's children can mean that one mistakes them as divine, and demand too much honor for them, as Priam does for Hector. Niobe and Priam forget themselves as the source of their children and therefore become estranged from them. Conversely, Hector's concern with shame and honor removes him from his family and political community. Finally, Achilles' extreme devotion to his father, which led him to forget his mother's role in his lineage and virtue, has led to his helplessness at the prospect of his father's downfall.³⁰ The pursuit of the noble, even when that nobility originates in the family or

²⁹“Priam wept freely for man-killing Hector, throbbing, crouching before Achilles' feet as Achilles wept himself, now for his father, now for Patrocles once again” (*Iliad* 24.597-599).

³⁰Homer foreshadows this possibility when Achilles is confronted by Aeneas: Achilles claims to be the son of Zeus, forgetting his real father (*Iliad* 20.192-195), a fact that is corrected by Aeneas (*Iliad* 20.200).

political community, poses the danger of estranging human beings from those very same families and communities.

For Achilles, the myth of Niobe is both an act of self-reflection on his own mistaken assumptions about himself, and an invitation to Priam to join him in this reflection. Like Priam and Niobe, Achilles' grief led him to refuse food and drink. Once he was reminded by his mother that he is a mortal rather than a god, Achilles ate. Immediately after recounting the myth to Priam, Achilles offers him food. By offering the analogy of Niobe to Priam, he challenges Priam's belief that Hector appeared as one born from a god, and returns Priam to the consideration of the need to turn to and affirm the goodness of life and community. The community of Priam and Achilles forms around food or the recognition of their mortality, a recognition that allows them to appreciate each other's noble traits, and perform deeds befitting friends.³¹ Following Priam's departure, we see Achilles for the last time in the *Iliad*. His mother's advice has led him to become reconciled with Priam, and his reconciliation with Priam has allowed him to fully follow his mother's advice. He is lying with Briseis.

Aristotle and Homer

Despite detailing the cause and aftermath of Achilles' encounter with Hector, the *Nicomachean Ethics* provides no reference to the famous scene. In the *Poetics*, however, Aristotle writes about Achilles' pursuit of Hector:

The wondrous is most of all a consequence of the irrational [*alogon*] because we are not looking at the doer. Were the things concerning the pursuit of Hector on the stage, they would appear laughable—men standing and not pursuing while

³¹Achilles calls Priam "old friend", and grants him eleven days to bury and mourn Hector, matching the length of his desecration of the body (*Iliad* 24.629-35, 660-670).

one man signals, shaking his head—but in the epic it is not noticed (*Poetics* 1460a13-19).

In the scene, Achilles—the “doer” to whom Aristotle refers—is signaling with his head for the Greek soldiers not to shoot Hector, whom he is chasing (Achilles wants to kill Hector himself). Because Achilles is pursuing Hector at full speed, it would be difficult for any shake or nod of the head to be seen (let alone deciphered) by any Greek soldier, to say nothing of the whole Greek army.³² To be close enough to see and decipher Achilles’ signals, the soldiers would have to be extremely close to the action, at which point Achilles should merely speak. The stage would place Achilles close enough to the Greek soldiers for this to occur, and that placing would illuminate the use of signals in place of speech as especially laughable. While Homer’s speech obscures the natural limits of human action, the stage, and therefore the tragedian, by imposing unnatural limits on the body, makes human action laughable. Whereas on the stage, Achilles’ gestures would be absurd, in the epic, the Greek soldiers follow a signal they have no way of seeing. Aristotle, then, explicitly acknowledges an irrational element to the noble: although Achilles’ chasing of Hector appears noble to the listener, his nobility depends on our “not looking at the doer,” an abstraction from physical reality. Homer’s description of Achilles’ gestures reflects Achilles’ attempt to make the pursuit of nobility a one-man affair.

In addition to pointing out difficulties in Homer’s plots, Aristotle claims that Homer distracts the reader from inconsistencies in character:

³²As Davis writes: “Achilles’ shake of the head is supposed to be what keeps the Greeks from closing in on Hektor. We can take that for granted because Homer tells us it is the case; however, given the amount of ground covered in Achilles’ pursuit of Hektor, it is not so clear that the Greeks could even have seen a movement of Achilles’ head let alone interpreted it correctly.” *The Poetry of Philosophy: on Aristotle’s Poetics* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 1992), 140.

Since tragedy is an imitation of those who are better than we, tragedians ought to imitate the good image-painters. For, in rendering the individual shape, the image-painters make the images similar to it, but they paint the images to be more beautiful. So also, the poet, in imitating the irascible and the easy-going and those who have in point of character other traits of this sort, must in making them of that sort make them sound [*epiekēēs*], just as Homer made Achilles (*Poetics* 1454b9-14).

It seems that in order to counteract the tendency toward anger that characterizes Achilles, Homer is compelled to make him more beautiful. Homer appears to be like the painter as described by Plato's Eleatic Stranger, who notes:

[If painters] give back the simply true proportions of the beautiful things, the upper segments, you know, would appear smaller than they should and the lower bigger, because we see the upper from a distance and the lower near at hand . . . Accordingly, they dismiss the truth, and work at producing in their images not the proportions that are but these that seem beautiful (*Sophist* 236a).³³

If the Stranger is right, it would seem that in order to display the beauty or nobility of Achilles, Homer has to overstate Achilles' beauty and make his irrational tendency toward anger compatible with nobility. In doing so, he allows us to see the nobility that might otherwise be overshadowed by less attractive aspects of Achilles' character. This would likewise appear to illuminate Aristotle's explanation of why we do not notice the problematic aspects of Achilles' pursuit of Hector: "Homer has been especially effective in teaching everyone else how they must speak falsehoods" (*Poetics* 1460a20-21).

Homer understands, writes Aristotle, that if the end is understood as true, then the reader tends to accept the means that explain that end (*Poetics* 1460a22-23). As Michael Davis explains of the scene we discussed above, the art of the poet may mislead our perception of the scene: "We are told that Achilles pursued Hektor, and, because the details of the pursuit as presented are rather elaborate, we are not likely to ask whether they cohere.

³³Plato, *Sophist*, translated by Seth Benardete, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Because we know that he pursued Hektor, we tend to assume whatever was necessary for the pursuit to be possible.”³⁴

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle also refers to Achilles’ chase of Hector:

Those engaged in praising and blaming do not consider whether someone has performed advantageous or harmful actions, but often they even make it a matter of praise that he did some beautiful thing in disregard of what was profitable to himself; for example, they praise Achilles because he went to the aid of his companion Patroclus in the knowledge that he would have to die, though it was possible for him to live. For him, a death of that sort was a more beautiful thing, though living was advantageous (*Rhetoric* 1359a1-8).

Here we discover that by interpreting Achilles’ pursuit of Hector as beautiful rather than harmful, interpreters often mislead, for in praising Achilles’ nobility they must downplay the goodness of human life, for, as Aristotle says, “living was advantageous.” The interpreters’ choosing to focus on noble death rather than advantageous life replicates the contradiction of Achilles himself, who upon being overcome by anger at the loss of his friend, chooses a noble death—a death that denies the very goodness of life that was confirmed by his friendship with Patroclus. In other words, by choosing death, Achilles undermines the ground for the friendship he claims to revenge. As the interpreters of the scene demonstrate by siding with death over life, the problem is not that we will disregard the beautiful or noble aspects of Achilles’ character because of his tendency toward violent anger, but rather that we will see his anger rather than his friendship as noble. Aristotle makes this explicit at the beginning of the *Ethics*, writing: “when we praise violently angry persons, we call them manly” and think them capable of ruling (*NE* 1109b18; see also 1126b1).

When the violently angry and manly Achilles rules the Greeks with a nod, we initially do not give it a second thought. This problem is consistent with the fact that we

³⁴Davis, *The Poetry of Philosophy*, 140.

think violently angry and manly men capable of ruling. Perhaps we might surmise that, just as we overlook the physical difficulties of Achilles' nod or shake of the head because we assume whatever is necessary for the pursuit to be possible, we take that pursuit as possible (and Achilles' nod as effective) because we think violently angry men capable of ruling: we assume whatever is necessary to their rule, even when it is physically impossible. We might also add that if we think manliness to be perfectly noble, we will side with the anger and violence necessary to defend that perfection: in order to defend the completeness of nobility, we will call violent anger noble, for it is that completeness that violent anger such as Achilles' defends. When Aristotle says we do not look at the doer, he means that we interpret Achilles actions only in light of what we take his character to be (noble), rather than in light of what he actually does. Only when we attempt to reconcile his character with the deeds, are we looking at the doer.

When Aristotle says that the laughable aspects of Hector's pursuit are not noticed because they occur offstage, he demonstrates that they in fact are noticed. We notice the irrational aspect of Achilles' pursuit of Hector when we consider the staging of that pursuit. We see in action what we otherwise might otherwise miss when we first hear the story and create an image of the scene in the mind's eye. But Aristotle does not need to stage the chase for us to see the inconsistency. Simply by having us *consider* the staging, Aristotle compels us to replace the initial image of the mind's eye with a new image. Likewise, when Aristotle says that readers do not notice the irrational aspect of Achilles' pursuit of Hector, and claims that it is because they are not looking at the doer, Aristotle means more than the fact that the *Iliad* is not a staged tragedy. Since Aristotle has

noticed the irrational aspect of the pursuit, his remark reveals that it is possible to look at the doer.

According to Aristotle, one allows Achilles' nod because it furthers the end of Homer's art: because it allows him to achieve his end, and that end causes wonder. This claim echoes his earlier reflection on the scene that "the wondrous is most of all a consequence of the irrational" (*Poetics* 1460a13). The cause of wonder is the falsehood itself. When Homer has Achilles nod to his men, we accept the truthfulness of the plot, and like Achilles we choose perfect nobility over necessity, supposing that Achilles' violent anger is beautiful in itself. We only later discover its irrationality.

If Homer teaches others to speak falsehoods, then Aristotle, by pointing out this fact, teaches us to recognize them. In doing so, Aristotle asks us to reflect on our own perception of reality, and wonder why we have difficulty seeing things as they really appear. Aristotle praises Homer for his ability to teach others to tell falsehoods because those falsehoods allow us to raise questions that lead us to see truths, not only about the *Iliad* and its characters, but also about ourselves. As we have seen, these falsehoods are not the mistakes in Homer's poetry, but rather the falsehoods we tell ourselves when we read Homer's misleading poetry. When Aristotle claims that "Homer has been especially effective in teaching everyone else how they must speak falsehoods," he also says his doing so is a "*paralogism*"—something "outside of reason," or "contrary to reason" (*Poetics* 1460a20-21). Homer's falsehoods help us to uncover the truth, and make it our own. That our learning the truth depends on our discovering the lies in ourselves (and in characters such as Achilles) would seem to be against reason, or the "*paralogism*."³⁵

³⁵Fittingly, *paralogism* could also be translated as "beside reason" that is, "by its side."

As we have seen, like Homer, Aristotle shows that nobility cannot be perfectly exercised, that it does not properly account for necessity or human relations (such as Achilles' nod to the men) that are necessary to human activity. Our recognition that perfect nobility is both conceivable and incompatible with human life is cause for wonder. To act as if this tension does not exist—to exercise virtue as though it is perfect and not bound by necessity—is to become laughable.³⁶

The Iliadic narrative contained in the *Ethics* therefore exposes the danger posed by abstract self-sufficient virtue, and the tension between that virtue on the one hand, and political life on the other. The narrative of the *Ethics* contrasts the relationship between Hector and Priam with the relationship between Achilles and Thetis. Its references place Achilles and Hector side by side. Hector removes himself from his family and his city in such a way that he finally dies outside the city walls, having failed to heed his father's advice that his decision to fight Achilles would be detrimental to Troy. While Hector begins the epic as Troy's greatest citizen, Achilles begins by denying the ruling authority of the Greeks, and by removing himself from the Greek army. By rooting his virtue to a standard wholly outside of the Greek community Achilles finds no ground upon which to act. Just as Hector's exclusive orientation proves self-defeating, so too does Achilles' virtue, for it fails to protect him from the loss of his friend. When the two meet in battle, each is at the peak of their virtue. The cause of that peak is their alienation from the foundation of their virtue, a foundation that has proven insufficient. The transformation of shame into a virtue causes Hector's death and estranges him from his family. Likewise, at the peak of his virtue, Achilles forgets about his family, only to be brought

³⁶Aristotle also calls the circumstances that compel Alcmaeon to kill his mother laughable or absurd (*NE* 1110a29).

back to the human things by his mother. As a result, he meets with Priam, a meeting that allows for the reconciliation of Priam with his son, and Achilles with his parents. The tension between nobility and the family may be partially reconcilable, if virtue remains grounded in human life.

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that Aristotle's acknowledgment of an irrational element to the pursuit of the noble occurs in the *Poetics*: he is never as explicit in his account of nobility and virtue in the *Ethics*. Rather, he seems to follow the example of Homer, by protecting the noble and leaving his readers to discover and reflect on the difficulties themselves. Like Homer, Aristotle understands the important role that the pursuit of nobility plays in the development of virtue. He also understands, that for the most talented and ambitious men the pursuit of nobility can pose the danger of overwhelming a concern for social and political life. For Aristotle, however, the example of Achilles is not sufficient to teach these lessons. For although Aristotle, like Homer, goes far in his protection of the noble, his account of the virtues mutes not only the critique of Achilles, it mutes the example of Achilles himself—Aristotle never mentions the Greek hero by name. Moreover, the virtue that the *Iliad* most powerfully represents to Athenians (manliness) is moderated by Aristotle's emphasis on the possibility of achieving nobility through other virtues, virtues that concern themselves with one's body (moderation), one's relationship to others (liberality), and one's relationship to the city (magnificence). While each of these virtues can also lend themselves to an inhuman pursuit of nobility, together they remind Aristotle's most ambitious readers of the complexity of human life. Being so reminding his readers, Aristotle makes it more likely that they will reflect on the dangers that can

accompany the pursuit of nobility, thereby providing a more solid basis for virtue in human life.

CHAPTER SIX

The Father and Political Life

I have thus far argued that, while the *Nicomachean Ethics* points to benefits that virtue can contribute to social and political life, Aristotle also means to moderate the dangerous inclination of manliness to aim at noble self-sufficiency. This aim, Aristotle shows, when brought to its extreme, threatens to unnaturally separate virtue from familial and political life in a way that ultimately threatens all three. To achieve this moderation, Aristotle's account of virtue not only provides an implicit critique of the danger of taking an uncompromising pursuit of nobility, he actively promotes the consideration of a fuller human life lived in families and political communities.

The foregoing discussion forms the backdrop of the next two chapters, which shift the emphasis to Aristotle's explicit analysis of family, an analysis which further develops the complexity of human life by emphasizing the importance of affection and friendship. In this chapter I argue that, in addition to the tension between manly virtue and familial and political life that runs through Aristotle's discussion of the virtues and his use of Homer's *Iliad*, Aristotle explores the manly domination of the family, pointing to the tendency of the father to rule the family as though he is a god-like king. Aristotle shows that, by compelling his children to treat him as though he is divine, the father restricts his children's ability to establish their own lives outside of the family, thereby obstructing the proper practice of politics: when manliness dominates the family, it corrupts the proper functioning of the family, thereby making difficult (if not impossible) the move

from a familial to political society. In other words, Aristotle shows that the self-sufficient tendencies of manliness must be moderated for the sake of political life.

Before launching into an analysis of Aristotle's text, it is useful to note the counter-intuitive character of Aristotle's argument. Whereas the father is critiqued for his tendency to unhealthily dominate the family, the mother is shown to facilitate the release of the child from the family in a way that cultivates the development of political life. On the surface this argument is in tension with the more common view of the family, which conceives of the mother as the basis of family life and as the one who holds her children (too) close; and of the father as the one who (too) easily abandons his domestic responsibilities for the sake of political life. But, as we will finally see, this view of familial relationships is not ignored by Aristotle. Rather Aristotle means to show that what is conventionally understood as the natural relationship between familial and political life is more complex than it first appears, since it is dependent on, even if it is in tension with, the more counter-intuitive relationships that I have outlined above.

The Ethics and Kingly Fathers

As we have seen, in the first part of the *Ethics*, Aristotle points to a tension between virtue and the family. In Book VIII, however, this concern at first appears to disappear, for Aristotle claims that kingly rule is equivalent to the rule of fathers (*NE* 1160b23-26), and identifies kings by their virtue, defining them as "self-sufficient and superior in all good things" (*NE* 1160b4). Making the analogy of kings and fathers, Aristotle writes:

The friendship of a king for those who live under his rule depends on his superior ability to do good. He confers benefits upon his subjects, since he is good and cares for them in order to promote their welfare, just as a shepherd cares for his

sheep. Hence, Homer spoke of Agamemnon as “shepherd of his people.” The friendship of a father is of the same kind (*NE* 1161a11-15).

Aristotle, however, qualifies his positive statement about paternal rule by the example of Agamemnon, who famously sacrificed his own daughter in order to further what he took to be the demands of his kingly rule, and was subsequently killed by his wife upon his return (*Ody.* 3.233-235).

The reference to Agamemnon parallels Aristotle’s earlier condemnation of Alcmaeon. Like Alcmaeon, Orestes revenges the death of his father (Agamemnon) by killing his mother, a murder that is justified by the argument that “the mother is no parent of that which is called her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed that grows. The parent is he that mounts” (*Eumenides* 657-660). The godlike claim that the father is the sole begetter of his son is used to support Orestes’ murder of his mother, just as it was used to support Alcmaeon’s murder of Eriphyle.¹

This godlike claim of the father is likewise evident in Aristotle’s description of the king as one who cares for his people like a shepherd does his sheep. Aristotle later writes: “there is neither friendship nor anything just in a relationship to inanimate objects. Nor can either exist with a horse or an ox, nor with a slave . . . but there can be friendship with him as a man” (*NE* 1161b1-6). But as Lorraine Pangle argues, if friendship is impossible with a horse, the king who treats his subjects as sheep cannot be their friend,

¹Orestes’ defense rests on proposition that his father is the equivalent of a god: “There can be a father without any mother. There she stands, the living witness, daughter of Olympian Zeus, she who was never fostered in the dark of the womb yet such a child as no goddess could bring to birth.” *Aeschylus I: Orestia, Eumenides*, 662-666. It is worth noting that the argument of the *Orestia* (as opposed to that of Orestes) recognizes limits to the claims of the mother as well as to that of the father. This best seen in the fact that, while the problem of the play is reconciled by bolstering the claims of the male to his children, that reconciliation depends on the deeds of a woman after whom the city of Athens is named.

and indeed treats them worse than slaves.² If Agamemnon's friendship for his people is like his care for his daughter, he assumes a godlike status that denigrates those he rules to the level of beasts. The tension between kingship and the family is still present, for the example of kingship as fatherly rule is ominous, to say the least.

The example is suspect in another way. For although Agamemnon is spoken of as "shepherd of his people," so too is Achilles (*Iliad* 16.2, 19.386), and much of the *Iliad* hinges on the dispute between Achilles and Agamemnon over who should rule. Whereas Achilles argues from the basis of natural right, Agamemnon argues from the basis of the authority granted to him by Zeus and through his ancestors, an authority that he attempts (but fails) to equate with Achilles' natural virtue (*Iliad* 1.178). As Aristotle himself notes elsewhere, however, Agamemnon finally rules by way of ancestral authority (*Pol.* 1284a14), and not by virtue of his being "self-sufficient and superior in all good things" (*NE* 1160b4).³ Upon the standard given by Aristotle—that the king is self-sufficient and superior in all good things—it is Achilles and not Agamemnon who should be king.

The example of Agamemnon therefore serves as a signpost against the dangers of making kingship the equivalent of fatherhood, and indicates that the attempt to do so is inseparable from kingly rule. To justify one's kingly rule, one must transform ancestral right into virtue. But ancestral kingly rule cannot meet the standards of nature insofar as nature demands that kingly rule be granted to whoever is "self-sufficient and superior in all good things." On the other hand, this standard of nature cannot be combined with political life: Achilles' heroic virtue cannot in itself justify why he and not Agamemnon should rule: Achilles is forced to turn to speech. Gaining the throne depends upon the

²Lorraine Pangle, 102.

³See Benardete, *The Homeric Hero*, 33-34, 36-39.

opinion of others and therefore upon the recognition of virtue by those who are inferior. It depends upon political rhetoric, which is an art that belongs to Odysseus or Nestor or Diomedes over and above Achilles (*Iliad* 9.54-55). It depends on reconciling his virtue with the political situation. Nature turns out to be complex: Achilles' heroic virtue fulfills one standard of nature (the higher ruling the lower), but it does not fulfill human nature as political, a nature that is revealed by speech (*Pol.* 1253a8-9). Just as Agamemnon's ancestral kingly rule does not meet the standards of nature, Achilles does not meet the requirements of political rule, for that rule depends upon opinion and art, neither of which is compatible with his perceived self-sufficiency.

The man who holds himself to be "self-sufficient and superior in all good things" has an alternative to art and to submitting to the opinions of others: he may take the throne by force.⁴ Here we are reminded that, in the *Republic*, the philosopher king must purge the city of its parents in order to establish his rightful authority (*Rep.* 540e-541a).⁵ Upon doing so, the philosopher king attempts to transform the city into a family (*Pol.* 1264b30) and become the equivalent of the father. This move parallels Aristotle's account in the sense that, if kingship is the equivalent of fatherly rule, then it would require the king to treat his citizens as though they are children and inferior to him in every way. If a king is superior in every way, then it follows that he should rule in every way. The superiority of the king makes the authority of the father inconsequential. The absolute rule of the man of virtue requires forgetting what is owed to one's family or to one's city, just as the absolute rule of ancestral right means forgetting the virtues that

⁴As Achilles attempts to do before being restrained by Athena (*Iliad* 1.180-22).

⁵For the stated interpretation, see Mary P. Nichols, *Socrates and the Political Community* (Albany: State University Of New York Press, 1987), 121-122.

distinguish one type of rule from another. Both the absolute rule founded in virtue, and the absolute rule founded in ancestral right, require the elimination of all ties to anything outside the parameters of one's standard of right. The particulars of human life, including those that distinguish political rule from despotic rule, and the family from the city, are swallowed up by the universal claim to rule. Thus, Aristotle demonstrates the family to be an obstacle to a noble life defined by human independence and self-sufficiency, and shows how the desire for self-sufficiency is a threat to the family and its particular relationships.

Kings, Fathers, Tyrants

Aristotle distinguishes kingly from tyrannical rule in two ways. First, tyrannical fathers treat their children as slaves (*NE* 1160b25), while the kingly father pursues the good of his children because he is the author of their being: "Homer spoke of Agamemnon as 'shepherd of his people.' The friendship of a father for his children is of the same kind. . . . For he is the author of their being. Furthermore, it is by nature that a father rules over his children, ancestors over their descendents, and a king over his subjects" (*NE* 1161a11-19).

The second difference between the king and the tyrant exists on the level of self-sufficiency: the king is described as self-sufficient, whereas the tyrant is said to pursue his own good (*NE* 1160b5). The tyrant is therefore defined by not having what he desires. Conversely, as self-sufficient, the king is defined by having all that he desires. But what he has are his children. His self-sufficiency is therefore inseparable from his rule over his children. But children grow up. A father who remains kingly by treating

his adult offspring like children becomes a tyrant.⁶ This eventuality appears inescapable since what defines the father's rule as kingship over and above tyranny is his superiority and self-sufficiency, both of which are dependent on his children being children. If self-sufficiency is the defining factor of kingship, and if to remain a king is to become a tyrant, then self-sufficiency poses the danger of tyranny. As Aristotle puts it, "kingship leads to tyranny" (*NE* 1160b10).⁷ Aristotle makes fathers the equivalent of kings (and vice-versa) not because the family ruled by the father is the best model for politics, but rather because the example of each serves to undermine the other. Aristotle means to show that fathers who rule like kings and kings who rule like fathers stymie the human capacity for political life. This fits with Aristotle's claim that, prior to the development of the city, fathers ruled in the manner of kings (*Pol.* 1252b18-27; 1255b16-20): both the absolute rule of kings and the absolute rule of fathers are incompatible with political life.

The implication that kingship is not compatible with political life fits with the account of kingship provided in the *Politics*. There, Aristotle explicitly compares the absolute king to a god (*Pol.* 1284a3-14), while excluding gods from political life (*Pol.* 1253a27). As even contemporary defenders of kingship like Robert Bartlett admit, in order for Aristotle's kingly regime to be successfully realized, "the political community must . . . become something like a large family headed by a human being of outstanding virtue."⁸ Bartlett, however, fails to note that Aristotle's discussion of the family (and especially the discussion of the relationship between husbands and wives) does not favor

⁶"Tyranny . . . looks to nothing common, unless it is for the sake of private benefit" (*Pol.* 1311a2).

⁷In the *Politics*, Aristotle writes: "Kingships no longer arise today; if monarchies do arise, they tend to be tyrannies" (*Pol.* 1313a2-4).

⁸Robert Bartlett, "Aristotle's Science of the Best Regime," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 1 (1994): 149.

kingly rule, but rather undermines it. In other words, if the *Politics*' discussion of kingship directs the reader to a consideration of familial rule, the *Ethics*' consideration of that familial rule shows the theoretical difficulties with the absolute rule that defines kingship.⁹

After identifying fathers with kings, and justifying the rule of both on the basis of their absolute authority over their subjects, Aristotle immediately undermines this basis by showing that neither king nor father can justify the status of absolute ruler. The father, he notes, is also a husband, and so rules his wife. As in the case with the father's rule over his children, the husband's rule over his wife "depends on his worth or merit" (*NE* 1160b33-35). Here we discover that the husband's merit is no longer described as absolute: "whenever the husband takes the authority over all matters into his hand, he transforms the association into an oligarchy, since in doing so he violates the principle of merit and does not rule by virtue of his superiority" (*NE* 1160b35-37).

If the man is not superior in all matters, then he should not rule in a kingly fashion, since kings are defined by being "self-sufficient and superior in all good things"

⁹Even the general discussion of kingship in the *Politics* supports my position. As Nichols argues in her critique of Bartlett, Aristotle's endorsement of kingship in the *Politics* is ironic. She notes that the metaphor that supports it (the lion ruling the hares by virtue of his claws and teeth), fails to demonstrate the godlike status necessary to justify kingly rule. "Aristotle's Science of the Best Regime," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 1 (1995): 154. Bartlett replies:

As the lion apparently said to the hares, "Where are your claws and teeth?", so the men of superlative virtue could say, "Where is your virtue?" To decide whether the lion's claim to be king is as absurd as Nichols suggests, I believe we would need the testimony of a hare sufficiently familiar with the ways of the jungle. (Since the lion does not in fact claim to be above the rule of "the same necessities as the rest of the animal kingdom" or to be of an "absolutely different order from the ruled" [p. 154], these considerations are irrelevant with a view to evaluating his claim.) (159n4; Nichols's critique and Bartlett's reply appear in the same article.)

But if these considerations are irrelevant, one wonders why Aristotle chooses to raise them by comparing the virtuous king to a god, who surely would be of an "absolutely different order from the ruled." At the same time, one wonders why the godlike man would model himself after a beastly lion. In other words, we might conclude that, rather than being supportive of kingship, Aristotle's discussion in the *Politics* illustrates that the attempt at god-like self-sufficiency threatens to end in beastly domination.

(NE 1160b4). Since the woman is superior to the man in at least some things, she must rule in those things. The relationship of a father to his children is therefore properly aristocratic rather than kingly, for the father must recognize the merit of the mother, and allow her to share in the rule of their children. And if the man does not have the merit necessary to justify his rule over his wife or children in a kingly fashion (if he is not superior in every way), then neither can a king be superior in every way, for he too would be lacking the merit that belongs to the woman. The role of the woman in the family therefore proves to be an obstacle not only to the absolute rule of the father at the level of the family, but also the absolute rule of the king at the level of the city.

The Family and the Problem of Justice

The problem that the absolute rule of the family poses for political life is first pointed to in Book V's account of justice. There Aristotle argues that "the just exists only among human beings whose mutual relationship is regulated by law," and claims that, since a child is a part of the father until he reaches independence, their relationship does not fall into this category:

What is just for the master of a slave and just for a father is similar to, but not identical with the politically just. There can be no unqualified injustice in relations to what is one's own: a piece of property, and a child are part of one's person, as it were, until [the latter] reaches a certain age and becomes independent (NE 1134b7-13).

In Book VIII, however, Aristotle states that, since we owe our parents our very being, we owe our fathers more than we can ever repay (NE 1162a5). The same point would also apply to fathers. Since the debt to one's father can never be repaid, it is impossible for even a grown child to reach independence. The difference between father and son is so great that it makes them incommensurable, and Aristotle later says that in such

relationships justice and friendship are impossible: “if there is a wide disparity between the partners as regards their virtue, vice, wealth, or anything else . . . they are no longer friends or even expect to be friends. The most striking example of this is the gods. . . . But the same point is clear in the case of kings” (*NE* 1158b33-36). Since the son can never repay the debt, he can never achieve independence and therefore cannot have a relationship with his father that is based upon justice. The son’s debt to his father destroys the possibility of justice toward or friendship with anyone else (*NE* 1164b25), for if one owes his father more than he can ever repay, he owes him everything. The comparison of the child and the slave is apt, for the attempt to rectify the debt would require becoming a slave to one’s father and cutting oneself off from others.¹⁰ And if there is no release from familial obligations—if just and independent existence is made impossible—then grown children are unable to participate in political justice.¹¹ Put another way, if the father rules the son as though he were only a part of him, as the son is described in Book V, and as is indicated by the example of Alcmaeon and (by implication) Agamemnon, then the father rules the son as though he is a slave: he rules in the manner of a tyrant.

Although the immense debt owed to one’s father can never be fully repaid, the father can release his child from his obligation to pay that debt:

It would seem that a son does not have the right to disown his father, whereas a father has the right to disown his son. A debtor must pay his debt, but nothing a

¹⁰Likewise, Aristotle claims in the *Magna Moralía* that the father/son relationship is the equivalent of the master/slave partnership, at least in the sense that both relationships are prohibitive of justice (*MM* 1194b5-23). Mary Nichols points out the passage, noting that “both relationships lack the distance necessary for justice” (*Citizens and Statesmen*, 190n46).

¹¹Aristotle says that if a man strikes his father thinking he is someone else, the act is not voluntary and so not blameworthy (*NE* 1135a30). Based on his previous remarks (*NE* 1134b10), this issue could not have arisen if the son was not yet a man—he would still be a part of his father and it has been said that one cannot commit injustice against oneself.

son may have done is a worthy return for everything his father has provided for him, and therefore he will always be in his debt. But a creditor is free to remit the debt, and a father likewise. At the same time it seems unlikely that any father would break off relations with his son, unless the son were exceedingly wicked. For apart from the natural friendship, it is only human not to reject assistance. The son, on the other hand, if he is wicked, will regard the task of satisfying his father's needs as something to be avoided or not to be eagerly pursued (*NE* 1163b19-26).

Here, however, the problem is deepened rather than solved, for Aristotle claims that the father will only cease demanding that the debt be repaid if his son is exceedingly wicked—i.e. when the son does not attempt to repay his debt. Thus, while Aristotle explains why a father might break off relations with a son, he gives no explanation of why a father might remit the debt of his son. And if the father does not remit the debt, an independent existence for the son is only possible if the son is wicked— if he does not attempt to fulfill his just obligations. The child, even when fully grown, cannot justly achieve independence. Thus, the creditor/debtor relationship of father and son cannot achieve friendship and this fact has placed the relationship outside the bounds of politics. Because there is no willing release from familial obligations, grown children are unable to participate in political justice.

To move beyond tyrannical rule at any level of society requires moving beyond the absolute rule of the father. As long as the father rules absolutely, this move is impossible, since the father demands that his son fully recognize that he owes more than he can ever repay: the son must finally fully submit to his father in every way, or overthrow him as ruler. Insofar as the family is defined by the father-son relationship understood as one between a creditor and debtor, there is no room for the son to escape. This helps explain why Aristotle provides two instances of father-beating which he excuses or almost excuses by categorizing them as examples of ill-temper and anger,

characteristics he says “are more natural than are the appetites which make us strive for excess and for what is not necessary” (*NE* 1149b3-7). Father-beating is the natural reaction against the tyranny of the father (and therefore the confines of the family) as it appears in the first half of the *Ethics*. If the father rules like a tyrant who thinks he is a king, it is no surprise that sons resort to father-beating. Aristotle claims that it is by nature that a father rules over his children as a king (*NE* 1161a19), but he also calls father beating a form of natural anger.¹² As we saw in Chapter Four, Aristotle claims that “when we praise violently angry persons, we call them manly” and think them capable of ruling (*NE* 1109b18; see also 1126b1).¹³ The manliness at the root of the father’s tyrannical rule turns out to also be at the root of father-beating. As Aristotle notes at the beginning of the *Ethics*, it is possible for men to be ruined by the virtue of manliness (*NE* 1194b17).

A father’s unwillingness to release his son from his debt is reminiscent of the magnanimous man, who enjoys remembering only those benefits he has conferred rather than those he has received.¹⁴ The debt owed to the father by his son is a reminder of the former’s greatness: when the father attempts to manifest magnanimity within the family, he is unable to give up his claim to his children. Paradoxically, the father’s desire to be recognized as the benefactor ends with his attempting to take the lives of his children

¹²The absolute rule of fathers (and therefore of kings) is natural in the sense that “man is by nature more inclined to live in couples than to live as a political being” (*NE* 1162a17-18). Of course, human beings are also by nature political: the “natural” rule of the father over the children makes it impossible for human beings to live as the political and social beings that they are fitted for by nature. The rule of the father, when absolute, makes impossible the fulfillment of the complexity of human nature.

¹³In Chapter Eight I offer a detailed account of these passages and of how Aristotle compares reason, anger and manliness with pleasantness, appetites, and womanliness.

¹⁴Zeus is the model for the father, the king, and the magnanimous man (*NE* 1124b15, 1160b31; *Pol.* 1284b25-31).

from them. Aristotle's discussion of father-beating illustrates that the self-sufficiency of the father is an illusion. The father's "self-sufficiency" is connected to his belief that his children wholly belong to him and indeed are parts of him. But the father who is beaten in Book VII remembers beating his own father. Fathers have fathers: even if we set aside the crucial role played by the mother in the begetting of children, the "self-sufficient" father cannot be the sole source of his child's being, for he is not the source of his own being. It appears that one beats his father for the sake of becoming the sole source of being: the manly escape from under the tyranny of the self-sufficient family seems to entail becoming its tyrant. Aristotle, therefore, presents us with the need to temper the vast inequalities caused by the family's defining qualities. If the pursuit of the noble or beautiful that defines moral virtue is an abstraction from the family, and aims at an unachievable divinity or superhuman virtue, the family's attempt to wholly contain that pursuit within itself denigrates man into a beast driven to father-beating.¹⁵

In sum, despite the theoretical difficulties of their doing so, fathers tend to rule as kings within the family and rulers tend to rule their subjects as though they are wholly inferior children. Tyrannical rule within the family poses a significant problem for politics because it provides no means for escape from the confines of the family. The son who is ruled in a tyrannical fashion cannot escape the rule of his father, for his father's

¹⁵In his discussion of father-beating, Aristotle notes the example of a son who defended the practices in two ways: (1) his father had beaten him in his youth, and (2) father-beating "runs in the family" (*NE* 1149b7-11). The example appears to be an allusion to the justification given by Pheidippides when beating his father Strepsiades in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (1408-1428). In Pheidippides' version of the justification that beating one's father is according to nature (or that father-beating runs in the family), he claims that, since chickens and other beasts beat their fathers, his own parricide is justified. As Strepsiades notes, however, Pheidippides argument turns human beings into beasts: "since you imitate chickens, won't you eat dung and sleep on a perch?" (*Clouds* 1429-1430). One might add to this critique that the justification of father-beating requires speech, and beasts do not speak. Likewise, the argument that father-beating runs in the family does not justify the practice on human grounds, since it does not allow for choice. (For Pheidippides use of the first defense noted by Aristotle, see *Clouds* 1406-1412.)

rule is absolute. His only choice is to replace his father as the absolute ruler. Thus, there is no space for the creation of political life. There is only familial rule. This helps explain Aristotle's tautological claim that fathers rule as though they are kings, and kings rule as though they are fathers. If fathers rule as though they are kings, and if rulers rule their subjects as though they are superior to them in every way, the rule of both is tyrannical. The analogy of fathers and kings is fitting because of the parallels between the family ruled wholly by the father and the life wholly and simply devoted to noble virtue, both of which are prohibitive of political life. Aristotle constructs his analysis of the types of rule present in the family and outside of the family in a way that undercuts any endorsement of a family defined exclusively by the prevailing father-son relationship or any endorsement of absolute kingship.

But although Aristotle indicates the ways in which the spirited desire for independence (and the assertion of that independence) can be self-defeating, he also indicates that it makes an essential contribution to the development and practice of political life. Without it, there would be no desire to move from the family to a fuller existence as a political animal. Yet, as we have seen this healthy desire can be perverted by the family that is overly defined by spiritedness: rather than the desire for independence leading to its proper end (political life), it simply means replacing one family tyrant with another. Aristotle, then, does not deny the value of spiritedness but rather indicates the need of the family to be constructed in a way that gives it a just and proper outlet. He indicates the need for a familial structure that is supportive of political life.

Familial and Political Rule in the Politics

As we have seen, in the *Ethics*' comparison of the types of familial rule to the types of regimes, kingship and oligarchy are closely linked, with the man's absolute rule over the family being described as both kingly (over his children), and oligarchic (over his wife).¹⁶ Indeed, the father's relationship to his son is described in oligarchic as well as kingly terms, with Aristotle comparing that relationship to the one shared by a creditor and debtor. Likewise, Aristotle links the husband's oligarchic rule of the wife to kingship, for his endorsement of the husband's turning over part of the rule of the household to the wife, would serve to correct not only his oligarchic rule over her, but his kingly rule over the children as well.¹⁷ This account of the man's relationship to his wife and children, and the possibility of moving beyond it, sheds light on his discussion of family and regimes that appear in the *Politics*, and especially the relationship between kingship and oligarchy laid out in Book III.

There Aristotle differentiates between four types of oligarchy by way of their distance from monarchy. On his account, oligarchy can take better and worse forms. In the first type of oligarchy, the property requirement for participating in the regime is minimal and open to the majority of citizens. In the second type, a more restrictive property requirement creates an exclusive class who elect the rulers. The third type of oligarchy further increases the property requirements and places the governing offices

¹⁶After writing that the husband's absolute rule over his wife is oligarchic because the husband violates the principle of merit Aristotle adds: "sometimes the wife rules because she is an heiress. But of course this kind of rule is not in terms of excellence or virtue, but is based on wealth and power, just as in oligarchies" (*NE* 1160b33-36). The rule of the household is based on wealth and power. Since wealth usually passes to the male and not the female heirs, the household is generally ruled by the man rather than the woman.

¹⁷As I discuss in detail in the next chapter, this correction makes the rule of the household aristocratic and fulfills his characterization of political rule.

directly in the hands of the rich, whose offices pass to their sons upon their deaths.¹⁸ The fourth type is similar to the third, with the property requirement so strictly tightened that the regime becomes a dynasty that is “close to monarchy” in form (*Pol.* 1293a10-35).

Aristotle compares the most extreme form of oligarchy to tyranny: “To speak summarily, whatever causes we spoke of in the case both of the unmixed and final sort of oligarchy and of the extreme sort of democracy are to be regarded as causes in the case of tyranny as well; for these [regimes] happen to be tyrannies” (*Pol.* 1312b33-37; see also *Pol.* 1292b8-10). Oligarchic rule by a single ruler is the equivalent of tyranny. Likewise, oligarchic rule by a single man characterizes the husband’s absolute rule over his wife and household. Indeed, the husband’s rule is only oligarchic when it is absolute. By implication, in comparing the husband’s rule to oligarchic rule, Aristotle links the exclusion of the woman’s influence to the success of tyranny.

In the most extreme forms of oligarchy, the rule of the household and the city converge. Because property requirement is the standard of rule, this final outcome rightly reflects the character of oligarchy: the ruler of the richest household is likewise the ruler of the city. The private becomes the standard for the public (see also *Pol.* 1317b39). Because the private becomes the standard for oligarchic regimes, the husband’s absolute rule of the wife is more than a model for oligarchy, it is a relationship inseparable from oligarchic rule. It is worth noting that the association of male rule with the rule of the private overturns the more typical association of the public with males and the private with females. This, of course, does not deny the important role for women in private life, but rather underscores the fact that oligarchic rule problematically

¹⁸Aristotle writes: “Another form of oligarchy is when the son succeeds the father” (*Pol.* 1292b2).

undermines the woman's potential for an important private role that supports healthy political communities.

In Aristotle's general description of oligarchy in the *Politics*, he claims that a regime "is oligarchic when it is not open to all [actually to share in office in spite of being full citizens]" (*Pol.* 1292b32). He later adds that "the defining principle of aristocracy is virtue, as that of oligarchy is wealth" (*Pol.* 1294a8). It is therefore fitting that the absolute rule of the husband over the wife is described as oligarchy, since it ignores both the excellences of women and the fact that "women are a part amounting to half of the free persons" (*Pol.* 1260b19). When Aristotle suggests that turning over part of the rule of the household to the woman would change the husband/wife relationship to an aristocratic form of rule, the standard of rule shifts from a private to a public one.

Since the rule of oligarchy depends upon the private realm, the move toward extreme oligarchy likewise entails a move toward kingship within the family. Aristotle writes: "At Cnidos too the oligarchy underwent revolution when the notables fell into factional conflict against one another because few shared [in offices]—as was said, if a father shared, the son could not, and if there were several brothers only the eldest" (*Pol.* 1305b13-16). Extreme oligarchy leads to the absolute rule of the father, even beyond the maturity of the son's reason. The result is a conflict between the father and his son, and between brother and brother.

The danger posed by oligarchic regimes and the related oligarchic and kingly rule of the household also poses the danger of luxury, which Aristotle describes as the foundation of tyranny:

The effect of living in luxury is that [luxurious children] do not become habituated to being ruled even at school; but those who are excessively needy

with respect to these things are humble. So the ones do not know how to rule but only how to be ruled, and then only in the fashion of rule of a master, and the others do not know how to be ruled by any sort of rule, but only to rule in the fashion of rule of a master. What comes into being, then, is a city not of free persons but of slaves and masters, the ones consumed by envy, the others by contempt. Nothing is further removed from affection and from a political partnership, for partnership involves the element of affection—enemies do not wish to have even a journey in common (*Pol.* 1295b14-24).

Since the oligarchic and kingly rule of the household is defined by luxury,¹⁹ the members of such households cannot rule politically, for they view the ruled with contempt.

According to Aristotle, this situation makes education impossible for both the rulers and the ruled. He then adds the striking claim that nothing is further from political rule than a contemptuous rule that follows from a life of luxury, since it is devoid of affection and therefore of common purpose. The lack of affection that characterizes such oligarchies fits with the discussion of the family that occurs in the *Ethics*, for as we saw, when the family is discussed in terms of the oligarchic rule of the father, the relationship between father and son is characterized, not as one of affection, but as a relationship exclusively defined in terms of creditor and debtor. By tying the lack of affection to the oligarchic nature of the relationship that leaves the father ruling the son in a kingly fashion, Aristotle points to the danger of the father's absolute rule.

The faction between brothers caused by oligarchic rule flies in the face of how Aristotle describes brotherly relations in the *Ethics*. There, brothers are said to have a friendship that is based on equality that is like the "friendship among bosom companions" (*NE* 1161a27). This brotherly friendship provides a model for a government in which citizens "hold office in turn" (*NE* 1161a29), a model that is compatible with political rule as described in the *Politics* (*Pol.* 1259b4-6; see also

¹⁹Aristotle reinforces this problem later, writing: "at present . . . in oligarchies the sons of the rulers live luxuriously" (*Pol.* 1310a23).

1261b2-5, 1279a8-10). The difference between the relationship between brothers in the *Ethics* and brothers under the oligarchic rule described in the *Politics* is therefore rooted in the fact that the latter prevents participation in political rule. The oligarchic rule of the city entails the oligarchic rule of the household, and both require the exclusion of the sons from political life. Since the oligarchy described in the *Politics* does not allow for participation in the political rule of the city, the sons are unable to exercise the political rule over one another conducive to their friendship. The brotherly friendship of the *Ethics* is made impossible by the father's oligarchic and kingly rule of the household.

In order to avoid the danger of pitting brother against brother that is characteristic of pure oligarchies, Aristotle argues that oligarchies should expand the ruling offices in order to allow for brothers and sons to share in the offices held by the father (*Pol.* 1305b5-9). The result, he claims, would be a revolutionary move from oligarchy to polity (*Pol.* 1305b10-12). Thus, the movement from oligarchy toward polity depends upon the father giving up the absolute rule of the family. But, as we have seen, fathers tend to be unwilling to release their children from their rule and from the debt that they owe, with the result being that their relationship with their son is oligarchic and distinguished from a relationship of affection. On the other hand, Aristotle notes that the household can be transformed into an aristocracy if the husband hands over to his wife, part of the rule of the household in accordance with her merit. What that merit is, and how it affects the political problem of oligarchic rule, both of the family and the city, is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Mother and Political Life

Thus far I have argued that Aristotle's comparison of fathers and kings is meant to point to the danger of the father viewing himself as self-sufficient and superior in all good things. Such a father, Aristotle shows, tends to subsume the family to himself, denying its members their integrity as individuals. As a result, existence outside of the family, and therefore political life, is made impossible. Aristotle's solution to this dilemma, I argue, depends upon women exercising their particular excellences within the family. Aristotle argues that when the wife enters the equation, the husband's merit is no longer absolute, and he should turn over at least part of the rule of the household to his wife according to her merit. In this chapter I begin to examine this merit, which Aristotle indicates is rooted in (although not necessarily limited to) the woman's role in the family, and especially in the love the mother has for her children. First, I contrast Aristotle's account of fathers with his account of mothers, showing how mothers facilitate their children's release from the confines of the family, thereby making possible their participation in political life. Next, I discuss the ways in which the relationship between the mother and her child fulfills and enriches Aristotle's account of friendship and its implications for human life, focusing especially on the issues of merit and reciprocity. Finally, I end by connecting Aristotle's analysis of familial friendship with his account of types of rule in the *Politics*, showing that the possibility of political and aristocratic rule depends upon the healthy familial relationships, relationships Aristotle moves to protect when giving practical advice to rulers.

Mothers and Affection in Aristotle's Ethics

What is the particular merit of the wife that warrants the husband's turning over at least part of the rule of the household to her? According to Aristotle, the woman has superior affection, affection that makes her willing to go significantly further than the father in her care for her child:

Friendship appears to consist in giving rather than in receiving affection. This is shown by the fact that mothers enjoy giving affection. Some mothers give their children away to be brought up by others, and though they know them and feel affection for them they do not seek to receive affection in return, if they cannot have it both ways [i.e. receiving affection as well as bestowing it]. It seems to be sufficient for them to see their children prosper and to feel affection for them, even if the children do not render their mother her due, because they do not know her. Since, then, friendship consists in giving rather than receiving affection, and since we praise those who love their friends, the giving of affection seems to constitute the proper virtue of friends (*NE* 1159a27-32).¹

According to Aristotle, children owe their parents more than they can every repay (*NE* 1162a5). As we saw in the last chapter, the magnanimous father has difficulty giving up what is owed to him by his children. In contrast, here we see that the mother is willing to forgive what is due to her. Her willingness to release her children serves as a model for friendship.

As we also saw in the last chapter, Aristotle initially describes the father/son relationship in terms of creditor and debtor, and explains that there is no affection in that relationship. Benefactors, however, represent a different kind of relationship, for Aristotle makes them a model of affection in a way that reminds us of the mother who releases her children:

There is no affection between creditor and debtor, but only the wish for the preservation of the other, in order that something may be got out of him. But benefactors have affection and love for those they have benefited, even if those

¹“Affection” translates the active and passive voice of *phileō* from which *philia* (“friendship”) is formed.

they have benefited are not useful to them at the moment and are unlikely to be useful at a later time (*NE* 1167b30-34).

Indeed, Aristotle soon explicitly compares mothers and benefactors, writing: “mothers love their children more [because] birth involves a greater effort on the mother’s part, and she knows more clearly that the child is hers. The same would also seem to apply to benefactors” (*NE* 1168a25). On first glance, the mother who cares for her children in order that they might prosper appears to be like the magnanimous man, who likes to be reminded of the good deeds he has done. But unlike the magnanimous man, who sees no limits to his virtue, the mother’s release of her child depends on her admitting that, in this particular instance, her virtue is insufficient for the child’s care. Moreover, Aristotle indicates that the pleasure the mother will feel at seeing her child prosper is not for the sake of being reminded of her own good deed, but rather springs from the love she feels for her child as someone distinct from (as well as connected to) herself: affection is enjoyed for its own sake. Because, for the mother, the giving of affection is enjoyable in itself, “friendship appears to consist in giving rather than in receiving affection” (*NE* 1159a25-26).

Consistent with this analysis, just prior to the discussion of the mother’s affection for her child, Aristotle distinguishes affection from the honor desired by the magnanimous and kingly father: “Affection is enjoyed for its own sake. Thus, receiving affection would seem to be better than receiving honor, and friendship would seem to be desirable for its own sake” (*NE* 1159a25-26).² Unlike the father, who desires honor from his children, the mother desires to receive affection, even though she is ready to forgo it

²In the *Politics* Aristotle claims that “what pertains to honor is characteristic of kingship” (*Pol.* 1311a8).

“if she cannot have it both ways.” In *Ethics* Book I, Aristotle distinguishes between honor and praise on the grounds that, whereas praise is appropriate for only relative things, honor is due that which is divine—“the source and cause of all good things” (*NE* 1101b15-24, 1102a1-3). Just as the kinglike father’s desire for honor fits well with his desire to be considered divine, the mother is worthy of praise because of her goodness relative to her children. Aristotle, then, by rooting affection in the mother, both makes her love for her child the paradigmatic example of the affection that belongs to the proper virtue of friends, and places her role in the family higher than the role of the kingly father, insofar as his concern with what pertains to honor is said to be lower than her own concern with what pertains to affection.

According to Aristotle, mothers will release their children even when useful benefits cannot be guaranteed, since it is “sufficient for them to see their children prosper and to feel affection for them.” As Ann Ward notes, “the affection that mothers feel toward their children for their children’s sake puts them in the category of the benefactor.” Discussing this point, she adds that “a benefactor, according to Aristotle, does good deeds and shows affection for the recipient without expecting or usually receiving anything in return.”³ But this is not completely accurate, for when Aristotle notes that the benefactor does not receive immediately useful benefits, he not only leaves open the possibility that the benefactor may receive something useful at some later time (*NE* 1167b32), he adds that the benefactor does expect to receive benefits, even if those benefits are not classified as useful: “to the benefactor, that which depends on the benefactor’s action [that which the benefactor produces] is noble, with the result that the

³Ann Ward, “Mothering and the Sacrifice of Self: Women and Friendship in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*,” *thirdspace* 7, no. 2 (2008): 43.

object of his action gives the benefactor joy” (*NE* 1168a9-11). If the mother is a model for benefactors (see also *NE* 1168a24-28), then her children (who depend on her action), their potential for noble deeds (or prospering), and the friendship she experiences in giving affection, can be understood as a kind of nobility that she takes joy in. This fits with Aristotle’s earlier claim that “we regard as a friend also a person who shares sorrow and joy with his friend. This quality, too, is most frequently found in mothers” (*NE* 1166a7-10). The mother shares with the magnanimous man the desire to benefit others and a concern for nobility. However, unlike the inactive magnanimous man whose virtue is a useless if beautiful object, the mother’s virtue is active, for it produces children who are themselves capable of producing noble deeds, deeds that might be useful to others, even if not immediately useful to herself. Unlike the magnanimous man, who considers his nobility to be an unmatched and sufficient benefit to others, the mother confers benefits, enjoying and making possible the noble deeds of others. This once again fits well with Aristotle’s praise of mothers, for as he puts it when distinguishing praise from honor, “praise is proper to virtue, because it is virtue that makes one capable of performing noble deeds” (*NE* 1101b33-35).

The mother’s willingness to release her child from the confines of the family stands in contrast to the danger posed by the unmoderated father’s desire to subordinate the family’s members to his will. As we saw in the last chapter, when made manifest, this desire destroys the family and results in father-beating. When the unmoderated father attempts to manifest magnanimity within the family, he is unable to give up his claim to his children. In contrast, here we discover that, unlike such a father, the mother can take pleasure in their children’s success and independence from the family. Whereas

the son must beat his father or treat him unjustly in order to gain his independence from the family, the mother's affection and own willingness to release her son serves as a model for the father's releasing of the son from the debt that is owed to him, thereby encouraging him to release his son from the confines of the family. Such a release would allow the son to participate in political life, and therefore to partake in justice. Justice is made possible through the mother's willingness to release the child from the confines of the family.⁴ Political justice is possible because of the mother's friendship with her child, a friendship that is grounded in her affection. Friendship is the foundation for justice.

The Friendship of Mothers: The Questions of Merit and Reciprocity

After claiming that the affection which makes the mother willing to release her child is an example of friendship, Aristotle concludes: "since we praise those who love their friends, the giving of affection seems to constitute the proper virtue of friends, so that people who give affection to one another according to each other's merit are lasting friends and their friendship is a lasting friendship" (*NE* 1159a33-36). Here, Aristotle seems to undermine his appeal to the mother's affection as an example of friendship. Since the child who does not know his mother cannot reciprocate her friendship, and since the mother does not love her child according to any merit that distinguishes him or her from any other child, their relationship would not seem to qualify as a friendship. And yet, in spite of these apparent objections, Aristotle continues to refer back to the mother's affection during his discussion of friendship (*NE* 1161b24-26, 1166a5-7, 1168a1-4, 1168a25-26). The objections are not as absolute as they first appear.

⁴When Ann Ward writes: "in Book Eight, mother-love was suppressed in the politicized understanding of the family, only coming into view when the focus shifted to the family from within conceived as a web of natural relationships," she misses the extent to which mother-love supports and indeed makes possible political life (42).

With regard to the objection that the mother's love for her child does not fulfill the definition of friendship because the child is lacking in merit, it is useful to cite Aristotle's account of friendship in Book IX: "We count as a friend a person who wishes for and does what is good or what appears to him to be good for his friend's sake; or a person who wishes for the existence and life of his friend for the friend's sake. This is also the feeling which mothers have for their children" (*NE* 1166a5-7). The affection of the mother for her children consists in wishing for the existence and life of her child for the sake of her child. It also consists in desiring what is good for her child. When Aristotle claims that a mother will willingly release her child and lose the affection that is due to her, he adds the qualification that she will do so only if "she cannot have it both ways." It therefore appears that she will not release her child unless her own life, or the life of her child, is at stake. Aristotle's pairing of life with what is good is not surprising, since he argues that "existence is by nature good" (*NE* 1170b4; see also *Pol.* 1335b24-26). In other words, the affection of the mother, like friendship itself, affirms the goodness of human life, a goodness that belongs to her child as a human being, and which the child therefore merits.⁵

While the release of the child requires the mother to love her child's life as good, her affection for her child especially depends on the love of one's own. When explaining the superior affection of the mother, Aristotle writes: "mothers love their children more [than fathers do]: birth involves a greater effort on the mother's part, and she knows more clearly that the child is hers. The same would also seem to apply to benefactors" (*NE* 1168a25-26). Since the mother loves the child because the child is her own (or another

⁵I owe the formulation "affirming the goodness of human life" to Mary Nichols, who uses it in her analysis of Aristotle's reference to Tecmessa in Book I of the *Politics* (*Citizens and Statesmen*, 32). I discuss the reference to Tecmessa in the next chapter.

self), it would seem that her love is inseparable from her knowing herself. But since the mother does not produce an exact replica of herself, the certainty of the mother that the child is her own highlights for her the differences between herself and her child.⁶ She is therefore left with far less ground upon which to account for those differences than is the father.⁷ Thus, the mother's particular ability to accept the individual distinctness of her children is founded in her certainty that they are her own: whatever distinctive qualities the child might possess, they do not threaten the mother's claim to be the child's mother. The mother is therefore especially able to love her child as her own and as a being distinct from herself. The individual integrity of her child does not pose an obstacle to her own integrity as a human being. Instead, her relationship with her child allows for both the bond and the distance necessary for affection.

In sum, the mother's love for her child brings together the love of one's own and the love of life, for her love teaches her that her child's life is good. The love of one's own thereby serves as the cause of the love of the good. The recognition that her child's life is good allows the mother to recognize her child as a being possessing an integrity

⁶If the mother were to use the certainty that the child is her own to conclude that she is the sole source of her child's being (or that she is the actuality to her child's potentiality), then she would be forced to deny the integrity of her child as an individual distinct from herself. If she were to simply view the child as an exact replica of herself, she would have no need for friendship (or generation), for she would already be fully actualized, and her self-knowledge complete. And if a child were the exact replica of his or her mother—and therefore a fully actualized being with no potentiality—the child would not be capable of friendship. Neither the child nor the mother would have any basis for friendship for, as fully actualized beings, both would resemble gods (*NE* 1159a5-7). Knowing one's child reveals the limits of self-knowledge, for it reveals that the child who appears to be "another self" is a distinct human being with its own integrity.

⁷In comparison, the father, who is far less certain than the mother that the child is his own, has more motivation to make the child his own. In Book VIII, Aristotle writes: "if there is a wide disparity between the partners as regards their virtue, vice, wealth, or anything else, for then they are no longer friends or even expect to be friends. The most striking example of this is the gods, for their superiority in all good things is exceeding. But the same point is clear in the case of kings" (*NE* 1158b33-36). Since kings are the models for fathers, and since the disparity between fathers and their children is great (as their bond is uncertain), they have more difficulty achieving friendship with their child than does the mother.

separate from herself, a recognition that allows the mother to permit her child's release from the family, and to take pleasure in her child's success and independence from the family, even if her child does not know her.

But what of the objection that the mother's love for her child does not fulfill the definition of friendship because the relationship lacks reciprocation? On this point it is appropriate to note that Aristotle distinguishes the affection of parents from the affection of children:

Parents love their children as something which belongs to them, while children love their parents because they owe their being to them. But parents know better that the offspring is theirs than children know that they are their parents' offspring, and the bond which ties the begetter to the begotten is closer than that which ties the generated to its author . . . parents love their children as soon as they are born, but children their parents only as, with the passage of time, they acquire understanding or perception. This also explains why affection felt by mothers is greater. So we see that parents love their children as themselves: an offspring is, as it were, another self, "other" because it exists separately (*NE* 1161b19-22, 24-28).

Although parents (and especially mothers) love their children as something that belongs to them, children's affection for their parents requires them to recognize that they owe their parents their very being. Although Aristotle says this debt can be remitted (*NE* 1163b19-26), and implies that the mother will do so because of her natural affection for her child, the obligation of the child is not simply removed, for the forgiveness of such a debt by the parent is a benefaction that can never be fully repaid by the child. According to Aristotle, the children's recognition of that debt is a cause of their affection: justice is a cause of their friendship. But, as we have seen, the affection of the children is not guaranteed: insofar as the dominating father will not allow the release of his son from his debt, the son will not have the distance required for justice, and may even be driven to father-beating. The children's love of their parents is therefore ultimately rooted in the

mother's affection for them, an affection that releases them from the family. In other words, the friendship of the mother allows for the distance necessary for politics (and therewith justice), and politics allows for the possibility of justice and friendship, and perhaps, in certain ways, even friendship with one's parents.⁸ Thus, while the objection that the mother's love is not reciprocated by the child is true in the sense that the child does not immediately have perception or understanding of friendship, the mother's love is the fundamental source of reciprocation, since it allows for the possibility of reciprocation, and since according to the provided standard of justice the child will reciprocate that friendship. It is therefore rightly said that the mother's love for her child is a model for friendship.

The forgoing analysis of the mother's friendship and its reciprocal character is supported by Aristotle's claim in Book IX that benefactors, like mothers, "love [*agapōsi*] their handiwork more than it loves its maker" (*NE* 1168a3-4, 25-28). Aristotle ties this account of love to friendship, writing: "affection is something active, while getting affection is passive; and affection and friendly feelings are the attributes of the more active of the two partners" (*NE* 1168a20). He adds:

We exist in activity, i.e. by living and action, and in his activity the maker is, in a sense, the work produced. He therefore loves his work because he loves existence. And this lies in the nature of things: what a thing is potentially [*dunamei*] is revealed in actuality [*energeia*] by what it produces" (*NE* 1168a6-8; see also *Metaphysics* 1048a25).

⁸The debt that is owed, even when forgiven, places certain limits to the friendship between parents and children that do not apply to other relationships. For a discussion of these limits see: Joseph Kupfer, "Can Parents and Children Be Friends?" *Philosophical Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1990): 15-26. Kristján Kristjánsson disagrees, arguing that complete friendships between parents and their children are not only possible but common. "Parents and Children as Friends," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 37, no. 2 (2006): 250-265.

If the mother is defined by her affection, and affection is something active, and activity defines our existence, then the product of her activity is in fact another self at least insofar as that other self is active: i.e. at least insofar as what she produces is a friend. If the mother's love for her child ultimately produces and preserves a child who is a friend to others, she reveals her love to be an example of friendship.

Mothers and Affection in Aristotle's Politics

Aristotle's account of familial friendship in the *Ethics* helps to shed light on his discussion of regimes in the *Politics*. As we saw in the last chapter, in extreme forms of oligarchies the male rules the family and the city as an oligarch, with his absolute rule excluding his sons from an independent existence until their father's death. In contrast, in an aristocratic family, which is defined by the rule of the mother as well as the father, the son is free to enter into the political realm and prove his fitness for rule. When Aristotle discusses the possibility of an oligarchy expanding the ruling offices in order to allow for brothers and sons to share in the offices held by the father, he calls the change a revolutionary move from oligarchy to polity (*Pol.* 1305b5-12). Since that move depends upon the influence of the mother's affection, it is not surprising, that Aristotle distinguishes extreme oligarchic rule from political rule on the grounds that the former has no part in the affection belonging to the political rule (*Pol.* 1295b14-24).

Thus, the aristocratic family, which is distinguished from the oligarchic family by way of the influence of the mother's affection for her children, allows for political rule in the city. Here it is worth noting that in the *Politics* Aristotle calls the ruling relationship between the husband and wife political, rather than aristocratic. This can be reconciled by noting that political rule can be aristocratic so long as the political rule (ruling in turn

or in part), allows for the exercise of virtue. As noted, the arrangement of the family in which the mother rules at least in part (i.e. politically), is not only characterized by the exercising of her talents, but allows for the children to exercise their virtues as well, an exercising that Aristotle characterizes as a move toward polity (or political rule).

Political and aristocratic rule are interdependent: according to Aristotle, an aristocracy is the regime ruled in a way that “is best for the city and for those participating in it” (*Pol.* 1279a35-37), and a polity is “the rule by the many for the common advantage” (*Pol.* 1279a37-39). In the end, then, the two regimes “are not far from one another” (*Pol.* 1294a29-30).⁹

Given that the role played by mothers in fostering the release from the family that allows for a more just regime, it is not surprising that in Book III of the *Politics* Aristotle ties affection to the city’s coming into being:

[the city] is the partnership in living well of both households [*oikiais*] and clans [*genesi*] for the sake of a complete and self-sufficient life. This will not be possible, however, unless they inhabit one and the same location and make use of intermarriage. It was on this account that marriage connections arose in cities, as well as clans, festivals, and the pastimes of living together. This sort of thing is the work of affection; for affection is the intentional choice of living together (*Pol.* 1280b34-38).

Since intermarriage between families is due to affection, affection allows the city to come into being. Without this affection, all that one has is a contractual arrangement between families for the sake of self-preservation in which each treats “his own household as a city,” a state equitable to the father ruling as king (*Pol.* 1280b24-32). Although Aristotle’s reference to affection most obviously refers to the affection of husband and wife, it also fits with the affection a mother has for her child, since that affection allows

⁹I am following Mary Nichols’s discussion of polity in *Citizens and Statesmen*. For its relationship to aristocracy, see especially 63-64, 99, 206n32.

for the independence from the family needed for intermarriage. This possibility would give new meaning to Aristotle's claim that the affection of the mother serves as the model for benefactors, for as he notes, unlike the self-sufficient man who is "either a beast or a god," "the one who first constituted [a city] is responsible for the greatest of goods" (*Pol.* 1253a29-31). If the affection of the mother is what allows for the city's coming into being, then her benefactions extend beyond the family by allowing for the formation and perpetuation of cities, and therefore of political life.

In contrast to this interpretation, Ann Ward argues that the mother's willingness to release her child fits especially well with Socrates' city-in-speech:¹⁰

A mother who gives up her child to others so that the child can have a better life, makes a true sacrifice of self for the love of another without any expectation of self-fulfillment in return. In this sense she is like the woman in Socrates' just city, articulated in Plato's *Republic*, who turns her offspring over to communal rearers for the happiness of the child and the greater good of the city (460b-d). Perhaps for Aristotle this is the one example of unconditional love in human life.¹¹

Ward provides the interpretation of the mother's release of her child in order to show that the "mother's natural love for her biological children can provide the grounds for women's political caring and friendship."¹² In *Politics* Book II, however, Aristotle himself suggests "that to seek to unify the city excessively is not good" (*Pol.* 1161b10-11). Moreover, Aristotle claims that "there will be less affection where children and women are common" (*Pol.* 1262b1-2). In other words, Ward's analysis of the *Ethics*

¹⁰Joseph Cropsey also notes that the circumstances under which a woman would give up her child would exist in the Socrates' city-in-speech. He, however, hesitates to approve of such a move, claiming that it would perhaps be wrongheaded and may even be contrary to nature. *Political Philosophy and the Issues of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 266.

¹¹Ann Ward, 44.

¹²*Ibid.*, 47.

does not fully account for the problem posed by Aristotle's work in the *Politics*: if mothers do release their children for the good of the city simply, they would be sadly mistaken in doing so, since they would actually destroy the basis of political life.

Aristotle does not say that mothers release their children for the good of the city. Nor is it clear that a mother would think that handing over her child to the guardians of the city-in-speech would increase the happiness of her own child, except perhaps in the sense of avoiding evil. As we have noted, the mother will only release the child to be raised by somebody else, "if she cannot have it both ways." In the proposed city, turning over one's child would be compelled by the manly guardians of the *Republic*, who, as it were, give the mothers no other choice.¹³ In other words, the release of the child occurs only because of the demands of the manliness personified by the guardians, a manliness that desires a unity which is criticized by Aristotle for being prohibitive of politics.¹⁴

Thus, while political life is certainly difficult to obtain without the contribution of the mother, the mother's contribution does not fundamentally consist in her giving up or denying her motherhood (as in Socrates' city-in-speech), but rather in affirming her relationship with her child as good, even (or especially) when that relationship is threatened by others. The particular love of the mother is said to be rooted in the fact that she knows that the child belongs to her, a proposition that is made difficult by her turning the child over to the guardians in the manner proposed by Socrates. For, although

¹³The dominance of men over women is also seen in Aristotle's claim that the men hold "women and children in common" (*Pol.* 1262b1). Women are not said to hold men in common.

¹⁴As Lee Ward notes, "the guardians in Plato's *Republic*, whom Aristotle criticizes in Book II of the *Politics*, are rigorously educated in the noble, and their communized condition removes from them the motivations for citizen courage (*Politics* 1260b25-1264b25). . . . Only after the abolition of private property and the private family can the Guardians perform virtuous action for its own sake, without the intrusion of such extrinsic motives as particular material concerns and private desires" (79). This characterization fits our discussion of Aristotle's account of noble courage or manliness.

recognition of the child by the mother may be possible in some cases within the city-in-speech (*Pol.* 1262a18-22), it is not certain. And even in those cases that recognition does exist, Aristotle says it exists as a challenge to the plan of Socrates' city-in-speech. Motherhood is thus incompatible with the city-in-speech.¹⁵ Aristotle therefore criticizes the plan of the city-in-speech for its attempt to define politics simply in terms of manliness to the exclusion of the particular qualities of women. The city-in-speech attempts to universalize the love of one's own, but in doing so both dilutes affection (*Pol.* 1262b7-8) and breaks the bond between parents and offspring, which is the very ground of affection itself.¹⁶ At the same time, the abstraction from one's own aims at a unity that would make impossible the recognition of other human beings as distinct from oneself (including women from men), thereby removing the possibility of affection.¹⁷

The city-in-speech ignores the interdependence of the love of one's own and the love of another.¹⁸ As Aristotle writes, the proposal for holding women and children in

¹⁵Note that that it is the father in the city-in-speech who, "least of all says 'mine' of his son" (*Pol.* 1262b16).

¹⁶Arlene Saxonhouse, "Family, Polity & Unity," 214.

¹⁷An apparent exception to this would be the frequent homosexual relations (including incestuous relations) that Aristotle implies are inevitable in such a city (*Pol.* 1262a32-35), and which stand in distinction to the relations between women and men, which are strictly limited. But the tight regulations on the one hand, and lack of restrictions on the other, are in tension with the city's claim that there are no significant important differences between the sexes. In other words, while the city-in-speech must distinguish between men and men, and men and women, in terms of sexual relations, its doing so is illustrative of its attempt to limit the physical manifestation of the differences between the sexes (as much as is possible given the need for procreation). At the same time, it allows for sexual practice in its most manly manifestation (i.e. abstracted from women) to occur unabated.

¹⁸As Saxonhouse argues: "The private sphere—the realm in which we are creative—is where love and care grow and develop. This private sphere must be preserved in order for the whole to function. Without concern for the private, the public will disintegrate. . . . Aristotle is again suggesting that concern with governance comes from a concern with what is one's own, from the particular love of what one has created. He describes love (*philia*) as the greatest good for the city (1262b7); but it is love for a specific other. Far from diluting the care for what is public, as Socrates fears, the love of one's own is essential for support of the public realm. The destruction of *philia* through Socrates' reforms will lead to apathy" ("Family, Polity & Unity," 215).

common makes impossible the “two things above all which make human beings cherish and feel affection, what is one’s own and what is dear” (*Pol.* 1262b20-24). The *Politics*, like the *Ethics*, contains a critique of transcending the family for the sake of a perfectly noble self-sufficient city, and the conflation of the household and city that necessary accompanies such transcendence. The dominance of the household by the city proposed by Socrates in the *Republic*, like the dominance of the family by the man of virtue, and the dominance of the son by the father, does not permit the distance necessary for politics or justice.¹⁹ Rather, the attempt at a unity which ignores the difference between the individual, the household, and the city (and therewith the differences between men and women), ends in faction (*Pol.* 1262b30-35). In contrast, the recognition of the diversity of individuals and the distinct but connected role of men and women allows for a city grounded in the kind of unity that can be provided by affection.

Familial Affection and Politics: Aristotle’s Practical Recommendations

Given Aristotle’s recognition of the crucial role the mother’s love for her child plays in developing and sustaining political life, it is not surprising that he makes several practical suggestions meant to encourage this relationship. In order to maximize the friendship in the family necessary to the production of a healthy polity, Aristotle encourages citizens to have many children. In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle claims that having many children and having good children is conducive and even necessary to happiness,

¹⁹Cropsey, 262-63. Note also that Aristotle’s claim at the end of Book V that there cannot be justice toward oneself denies the analogy between the just city and the just soul made by Socrates in the *Republic*, an analogy that perhaps implies the denial of political justice.

both at the level of the city, and in private life (*Rhet.* 1360b19-22).²⁰ Likewise, in the *Politics*, Aristotle suggests that women should marry at the age of eighteen and men at the age of about thirty-seven.²¹ The aim of this proposal is to maximize the chance of children being born, for “at such an age, union will occur when their bodies are in their prime, and will arrive at its conclusion conveniently for both of them with respect to the cessation of procreation” (*Pol.* 1335a30-31).

Aristotle’s attempt to encourage familial life for the sake of private and public happiness is at odds with the Greek practices of aborting or exposing unwanted children, practices which undermine the mother’s relationship with her child, including her affirmation that her child’s life is good. Such practices therefore undermine her important contribution to the foundation of political life. It is not surprising, then, that Aristotle argues against the exposure of unwanted children, even when the number of children exceeds limits set by established customs (*Pol.* 1335b23-26). Moreover, he restricts the practice of abortion to “before perception and life arises,” adding that “what is holy and what is not will be defined by reference to perception and life” (*Pol.*

²⁰According to Aristotle, children provide the city the youthful virtues of the body (size, strength, beauty, and athletic power) and provide the city and families with the virtues of courage and moderation (*Rhet.* 1361a1-10). Later, however, Aristotle partially modifies his remarks on the youthful soul, reemphasizing the courage or manliness belonging to youth (*Rhet.* 1389a25), but characterizing it as immoderate (*Rhet.* 1389a3-5; see also 1390b8). This discrepancy is connected to the difference between men and women and their public and private roles, for in the first account, Aristotle distinguishes between young men and women (with the women possessing moderation), while in the second, Aristotle does not distinguish between the sexes, and appears to be speaking primarily of men. This reading is supported by the fact that Aristotle identifies the physical “prime of life” of males to be between the ages of thirty to thirty-five, a number which fits his description of the physical prime of males in the *Politics* (which he there sets at thirty-seven). Since Aristotle sets the physical prime for women at eighteen in the *Politics*, and since the *Rhetoric* ignores that age when discussing the prime of life, Aristotle’s later discussion of youthful immoderation in regards to sex seems to be made primarily in regards to men.

²¹Nichols provides a good account of the way Aristotle’s recommendation of age differences at marriage promotes friendship between husband and wife, and parents and children (*Citizens and Statesmen*, 153-54).

1335b24-26). Aristotle therefore restricts abortion to those times when the child is not held to be a child, and then only permits them to be performed by the city.

Aristotle's move to eliminate the exposure of children, and his granting of the authority to perform abortions only to the city, and then only at the time prior to life and perception (a time when the pregnancy will be difficult for the city to identify), allows little ground for a legislator to pursue population control. This limit can be explained by noting that, on Aristotle's account, such policies are rarely, if ever, needed. Indeed, the only circumstances that Aristotle specifically says would justify a limiting of births belong to those proposed (or non-existent) regimes—like the regime described in Plato's *Laws* (*Pol.* 1265a38-b4, 1266b5-12)—which entail precise laws concerning property ownership. As a result of these policies, argues Aristotle, such regimes, unlike the cities that exist now, would need to strictly control birthrates in order to prevent the poverty and faction that can accompany overpopulation (*Pol.* 1265b12-15).²² But to achieve the precision in population these cities need would seem to be impossible without resorting to the methods that Aristotle condemns. It is therefore not surprising that that Aristotle does not endorse any of these regimes, but provides the *Politics* as an alternative to them.

As we noted, Aristotle restricts the need for population control to imagined cities. But even if we assume that Aristotle allows that some circumstances might require population control, in pursuing such a policy the legislator would not need to violate Aristotle's near-impossible restrictions on abortion. Consider that Aristotle introduces

²²According to Aristotle, the cities that exist now do not require the precision in property distribution required in proposed regimes such as the regime of the *Laws*, which requires that property be indivisible (*Pol.* 1265b4). In contrast to such proposed (but non-existent) regimes, Aristotle claims that, currently, "procreation is left unrestricted, on the grounds that it will remain sufficiently close to the same number through childlessness . . . because this is held to be the result in cities now" (*Pol.* 1265a39-41).

his restrictions on direct methods of birth-control by noting that the lawful age of marriage will affect the number of births. Following Aristotle's logic, the legislator could easily raise the age of marriage of women from eighteen to twenty-two (giving them four fewer years of childbirth) or to any number,²³ without adversely affecting Aristotle's stated goals in setting the age of marriage.²⁴ In other words, Aristotle allows the legislator to achieve the population levels he desires without having to navigate Aristotle's near impossible restrictions on the abortion and exposure of children.

Conclusion

By supplanting the private standard of the household with a concern for the public good, Aristotle demonstrates both that politics (or the public good) is more authoritative than the family, and that the proper practice of politics concerns itself with recognizing the integrity of the family and strengthening its relationships. The complexity of this interdependent relationship between the family and political life is likewise manifested in Aristotle's remark that abortions should be restricted because "what is holy and what is not will be defined by reference to perception and life." Here, we see Aristotle affirming the goodness of human life on political grounds, despite having shown that that affirmation is especially rooted in the mother's love for her child. Here again, the political argument that moves the standard of population control from the family to the city confirms the higher authority of politics in a way that endorses the importance of the family and its relationships. Aristotle thus bolsters the integrity of the family, limiting

²³Note that Aristotle is himself willing to play around with the ages to get appropriate results: his claim that the man is in his prime at thirty-seven is not wholly consistent with his claim in the *Rhetoric* that his bodily prime occurs as early as thirty (*Rhet.* 1390b11).

²⁴The stated goal is restricting the possibility of procreation to the years covering the prime of the man's and woman's life. The restrictions also appear meant to ensure that (generally) both parents will survive long enough to see their children reach adulthood.

the possibility of the family's members acting counter to their natural relationships, thereby preserving the mother's role in affirming the goodness of human life, an affirmation that legitimizes the practice of politics.

In sum, Aristotle emphasizes and protects the mother's love for her child, a love that Aristotle indicates is necessary to move from a contractual arrangement between families to political life (*Pol.* 1280b24-40). The problem that arises when the family is dominated by the tyrannical father—the problem that made justice, friendship and piety impossible—is resolved when the mother's affection allows for the beneficial release of her son from the bonds of the family. But in order for the child to be released from the family—in order for political life to justly come into being—the father as well as the mother must come to recognize the individual integrity of his children and release them from their obligations, especially since he more clearly rules the family. The success of the family is dependent upon the man recognizing the merit of his wife, and relinquishing to her at least part of the rule of the household, thereby establishing political rule. As I will argue in the next chapter, his doing so is aided by the development of a friendship with his wife, a friendship that teaches him the value of affection, including affection for his children.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Women and Men: Friendship, Education and Political Rule

This chapter begins by exploring the character of friendship between men and women, and the ways in which Aristotle indicates that their friendship is important to human happiness and conducive to the development of a healthy political community. I then turn to potential obstacles to this friendship, focusing on the account of men and women in *Ethics* Book VII, and on the ways the weaknesses of the different sexes manifest themselves politically, through womanly luxuriousness on the one hand, and the manly neglect of leisure on the other. I end by examining Aristotle's solutions to these problems, solutions which depend on the proper education of men and women. This education, I argue, allows both sexes to recognize the virtues of the other in a way that allows for a relationship defined by political rule and friendship. The effects of this education also supports political rule at the level of the city, a rule that affirms the virtue of the ruler while recognizing the integrity and excellences of those who are ruled,

As we have seen, men tend to recognize their own virtue and to understand themselves as especially equipped to rule, but have difficulty recognizing their limits, and tend to see their virtue as complete. This dangerous tendency makes it difficult for them to recognize the integrity of other human beings, including the integrity of their wives and children. Nevertheless, Aristotle shows that the husband can come to recognize the merit of his wife, and turn the rule of the household over to her accordingly: specifically

he shows that the husband can recognize the affection of his wife, and see it as good.¹

Indeed, by pointing to this possibility, and by pointing out the merits of women, Aristotle moves to effect such change.

Since the father has greater difficulty than does the mother in seeing the merit of his children, we might suppose that it may not always be easy for him to recognize the mother's friendship for their children as good. On the other hand, it may be easier to recognize affection as good when it is directed toward himself. In other words, the most obvious way husbands can come to recognize their wives' affection as good is through friendship.

Despite claiming that the friendship of husband and wife can be one of virtue (*NE* 1162a25), Aristotle writes that the friendship of husband and wife "involves the superiority of one of the partners over the other" (*NE* 1158b13), and that "those who are equal must respect the principle of equality by giving equal affection to one another and by establishing equality in other respects, while those who are unequal must make a return proportionate to their superiority or inferiority" (*NE* 1162b4).² It would seem that the woman's inferiority to her husband is initially rooted in her inferior virtue: women cannot develop the virtue of courage (for they do not fight in battles) or the virtue of magnanimity (which requires the possession of courage). Moreover, if the woman does not participate in ruling she cannot exercise, or presumably even develop, the virtue of prudence.

¹Although I am emphasizing affection, the woman obviously has other qualities that the husband should recognize as good.

²Although Aristotle also says that honor and profit are exchanged in unequal friendships, as I argued in Chapter Six, Aristotle shows such friendships to be problematic and ties them to men, and especially the relationships between husbands and sons. Affection, he notes, is higher than honor, and honor belongs to kingship (*NE* 1159a25-26).

Yet, as we have seen, the wife is not inferior simply. If the rule of the husband allows him to exercise virtue in a way that apparently keeps the wife inferior to him, in order to attain equality, and therefore friendship, she must show him greater affection than he shows her. Justice is dependent on friendship, or on affection, and the woman is more responsible for bestowing affection than is the man. But if the woman's greater affection is the cause of friendship between herself and husband—and if additionally she loves their children more than he—then her affection is greater than is his.

The “unequal” wife's greater affection thus produces a paradoxical result: inasmuch as giving affection is better than receiving it, as Aristotle has argued, the woman's superior affection—required by her inferiority to her husband in other respects—means that her husband cannot be superior in all good things. To maintain an absolute superiority he must emulate and surpass his wife in affection, which after all she deserves due to her superior affection, if for no other reason. And if affection is added to the husband's virtue, then the wife, in order to achieve equality, would have to increase her level of affection beyond his own. Since the wife's affection will be based on her husband's virtue and affection, and the husband's affection will be based on his wife's superior affection, in accordance with Aristotle's characterization of friendship, their affection is ever active (*NE* 1168a19-21). Indeed this relationship allows for the further development of their friendship, for it lays the ground for the husband to recognize the virtues of his wife that go beyond her affection (for he must discover something to love), and therefore the recognition of the ability of woman to participate more fully in ruling the family, a possibility that might also allow for the cultivation of certain virtues that

would previously be left underdeveloped in her character.³ In other words, although the relationship begins with a sharp disjunction between affection and virtue (a problem that we emphasized in our discussion of moral virtue in earlier chapters), it points to the possibility of partially reconciling these characteristics of friendship by tying the ever active affection of friendship to the different yet related virtues of men and women.

It is fitting then, that Aristotle not only claims that husbands and wives can be friends, he claims that their relationship has the potential for virtue friendship. Indeed their relationship is the sole example of such a friendship that he gives.⁴ And yet, as we have seen, Aristotle does not claim that husbands and wives possess identical virtue. Rather, he claims that neither partner possesses perfect virtue, for “each partner has his own particular excellence and they . . . find joy in that fact” (*NE* 1162a26-27).

The relationship between husband and wife therefore provides an alternative model of friendship to that offered by the friendship of equally virtuous men. Indeed, in several ways, their friendship is superior to that model. Note, for instance, that if friendship is based solely on virtue and if that virtue is equal in every way, then the motivation for friendship disappears: the one friend can offer nothing that is not already possessed by the other. The friendship based solely on equal virtue is therefore in tension with the affection necessary to friendship. Indeed Aristotle emphasizes this fact, writing: “when people are friends on the basis of virtue, they are eager to do good to one another, since that is a mark of excellence as well as of friendship” (*NE* 1162b7-8). Here Aristotle suggests that virtuous men may perform the deeds of friends not for the sake of

³For example, as we saw, Aristotle ties prudence to the rule of the household (*Pol.* 1277b23-27).

⁴Also note Aristotle’s remark that “nothing characterizes friends as much as living in each other’s company” (*NE* 1157b18-20).

friendship, but for the sake of their own excellence. Aristotle confirms this suggestion in Book IX, when he observes that the virtuous man will always act as a benefactor, since it is more noble for him to do so (*NE* 1169a25-35). For the sake of nobility, they give everything (but take nothing) from their friend, making their friendship useless to themselves. As we will see, Aristotle reveals in Book VII that this pursuit of nobility means that such a man will choose to hide some misfortune he has experienced rather than sharing his suffering with his friends. And since a friendship of virtue depends upon revealing one's character (which depends upon revealing what gives pleasure and pain), this choice finally makes friendship impossible. As Aristotle puts it, such a man "chooses nobility at the cost of everything else" (*NE* 1169a30-31).

The friendship of husband and wife would appear to overcome these difficulties, for their relationship partakes both of virtue and affection rather than simply the choice of one over the other. In their friendship, both parties recognize the excellences and affections of the other, and therewith that they possess virtue, even if they are not in themselves complete. Aristotle therefore provides ground for reconciling the unequal virtue of husband and wife with the possibility of a friendship of virtue, for such a friendship would properly recognize the interdependence of virtue and affection, a recognition that would allow for an increase in both. The resultant friendship (which would recognize the merit of both husband and wife) would allow the woman to partake in the rule of the family, thereby allowing the man's oligarchic and kingly rule to be transformed into aristocratic and political rule.

Men, Women and Political Rule

Aristotle's claim that the relationship between men and women should be political (*Pol.* 1252b4-9, 1259a39) is complicated by his argument that men are naturally better leaders than women:

[one ought] to rule a wife and children as free persons, though it is not the same mode of rule in each case, the wife being ruled in political, the children in kingly fashion. For the male, unless constituted in some respect contrary to nature, is by nature more expert at leading than the female, and the elder and complete more than the younger and incomplete. In most offices, it is true, there is an alternation of ruler and ruled, since they tend by their nature to be on an equal footing and to differ in nothing; all the same, when one rules and the other is ruled, the ruler seeks to establish differences in external appearance, forms of address, and prerogatives, as in the story Amasis told about his footman. The male always stands thus in relation to the female (*Pol.* 1259a39-b9).

As Leah Bradshaw notes: "it is not at all obvious . . . why Aristotle deems the appropriate relation between men and women in the household as an equal, political one, yet at the same time proclaims that the male is by nature more expert at leading."⁵ Adding to this difficulty—but perhaps explaining why men are better leaders—are Aristotle's remarks on rule that introduce his gender-based distinctions about the virtues:

Thus by nature most things are ruling and ruled. For the free person rules the slave, the male the female, and the man the child in different ways. The parts of the soul are present in all, but they are present in a different way. The slave is wholly lacking the deliberative element; the female has it but it lacks authority; the child has it but it is incomplete. It is to be supposed that the same necessarily holds concerning the virtues of character: all must share in them, but not in the same way, but to each in relation to his work. . . . the moderation of a woman and of a man are not the same, nor their courage or justice, . . . but there is a ruling and a serving courage, and similarly with the other virtues (*Pol.* 1260a8-24).

On first glance, since the man rules the woman, the ruling type of courage, moderation, and justice, naturally belongs to the man. But this reading is complicated by the sentence that follows: "hence the ruler must have complete virtue of character (for a work belongs

⁵Bradshaw, 564.

in an absolute sense to the master craftsman, and reason is a master craftsmen) while each of the others must have as much as falls to him” (*Pol.* 1260a16-19). But if the ruler must have complete virtue of character, then he must possess both the type of virtue that serves and the type of virtue that rules, since there is a ruling and serving virtue, and Aristotle says that rulers must possess both: “it is not possible to rule well without having been ruled . . . the good citizen should know and have the capacity both to be ruled and to rule. . . . Both belong to the good man too, as well as whatever kind of moderation and justice is characteristic of ruling” (*Pol.* 1277b14-17).⁶ Ruling therefore paradoxically turns out to consist partly in serving.

As Aristotle notes, the ruler is the master craftsmen, and the master craftsmen is defined by reason, a characteristic that he says belongs to women as much as it belongs to men, even if the woman’s is without authority.⁷ Thus, if we conclude that the ruling virtues belong to men, we must temper this conclusion by noting that men can only rule in the proper sense when they also serve. This is consistent with Aristotle’s claim that the male should rule the female politically (*Pol.* 1259a40-41), which he defines as “in turn” or “in part” (*Pol.* 1259b4-6; see also 1261b2-5, 1279a8-10).

Moreover, when Aristotle writes “the moderation of a woman and of a man are not the same, nor their courage or justice, . . . but there is a ruling and a serving courage, and similarly with the other virtues” (*Pol.* 1260a19-24), his statement does not require

⁶Notice that Aristotle purposely raises the question of whether the ruling or serving aspect of moderation and justice belongs to the ruler. He thereby raises the possibility that the serving virtues of moderation and justice may rule. Note also that courage is dropped from the list of virtues compatible with ruling and being ruled, or rather with the good man doing so.

⁷The listed virtues with ruling and serving manifestations—courage, moderation, and justice—correspond to the virtues of the *Republic*. Wisdom, however, is missing from this list. Its absence is indicative of the impossibility of wisdom ruling and ruling in turn. Whether it is also indicative of the impossibility of human beings achieving this virtue is ambiguous here.

that all the ruling virtues belong to the man or that all the serving virtues belong to the woman. His statement leaves open the possibility that women tend to display the ruling form of some virtues and the serving form of others. For example, women may tend toward the ruling virtue of moderation and the serving virtue of courage, while men may tend toward the ruling virtue of courage and the serving virtue of moderation.⁸

Since men do not possess the virtues in the way that women do, the rule of virtue depends upon men sharing their rule with women. For men to rule women politically, they must, in part at least, be ruled by women. Likewise, in order for women to serve men, they must, in part at least, rule the male. In sum, since both the male and the female would be required to exercise both ruling and serving virtues, it would be a mistake to assume that the ruling type of virtue belongs exclusively to men, even if his rule is more visibly manifest.

The foregoing analysis is further complicated by Aristotle's argument that, in spite of the equality of the parties involved, the ruling male seeks to establish differences between himself and the ruled, and for this reason "the male always stands thus to the woman." This explanation seems to lead to the strange conclusion that the only reason for the man's natural rule of the woman is that he rules her by convention.⁹ Those who

⁸Indeed, Aristotle even leaves open the possibility that in some cases, the serving or ruling aspect of a virtue that belongs especially to one of the two sexes may only be serving or ruling in one aspect of that virtue. For example, he might mean that women display the ruling form of moderation in regards to sex, but the serving form of moderation in regards to food.

⁹Interpreters of this passage generally respond to the tension between Aristotle's claim that men rule by nature and his convention-based explanation of that rule, by taking one of the two sides to be his true position. Darrell Dobbs's account argues that the man ruling by nature is fitting and does not violate the principle of equality upon which political rule rests, but does not account for the fact that Aristotle uses convention to justify the practice. "Family Matters: Aristotle's Appreciation of Women and the Plural Structure of Society," *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 1 (1996): 78, 83. On the other side, Saxonhouse takes Aristotle's use of convention to be his true account, ignoring his claim that men rule by nature: "[the husband] is marked off from his wife less by a difference in nature than 'by a difference in appearance and speech and honors'" ("Family, Polity, and Unity", 206). Nichols follows Saxonhouse in

emphasize the conventional aspect of the male's rule rely on the example of Amasis that is cited by Aristotle as an example of the relationship between men and women.

In the story, Amasis, a former commoner who became king of Egypt, is despised by the people because of his common origins. In response to this political problem, employing wit rather than force, Amasis claims that a gold statue that the people had recently come to worship as a god is actually his melted and reformed gold footpan.¹⁰ Amasis tells the people that, since he is a commoner ruling as king, his authority is as conventional as the statue's divinity: that he is the equivalent of the former footpan. He then asks the people to serve him as they did the newly formed statue. Upon hearing this, "the people consented to be his subjects."¹¹

Aristotle introduces the story of Amasis by saying: "the ruler seeks to establish differences in external appearance, forms of address, and prerogatives, as in the story Amasis told about his footpan." Saxonhouse, noting that "the substance of the pan had not changed, but its appearance and the honors accorded it did," concludes that Aristotle means to indicate that although the ruling male "receives the external honors and accoutrements of a ruler . . . he may be no more worthy of reverence than Amasis' footpan."¹² Although there is something to this explanation, it is not sufficient, for it does not account for the fact that Amasis gains the consent of the people and solidifies his rule

emphasizing the conventional aspect of the discussion, but acknowledges Aristotle's remarks about men being natural leaders. However, she downplays them, arguing that, as in the case of slavery "nature . . . may or may not realize its intention, and there are different ways in which human beings can lead" (*Citizens and Statesmen*, 30, 188n37).

¹⁰The story comes from Herodotus, *Histories*, II.172. Both Herodotus and Aristotle leave open the possibility that Amasis' claim that the statue is really his footpan is only a story invented for the people. Dobbs, among others, ignores this possibility ("Family Matters," 78).

¹¹Herodotus, *Histories*, II.172.

¹²Saxonhouse, "Family, Polity and Unity," 206.

by revealing rather than hiding the conventional nature of the footpan. We are therefore faced with the following difficulty: Aristotle claims that he points to the story that Amasis tells the people in order to illustrate that “the ruler seeks to establish differences in external appearance, forms of address, and prerogatives.” But in Herodotus’ account, the opposite seems to occur: the story that Amasis tells the people undercuts rather than establishes the external appearance of things, for it reveals that the divinity of the statue is an illusion. On the other hand, it is by revealing this fact (and by claiming that his authority is the equivalent of the statue’s false divinity), that Amasis convinces the people that he should rule, and that the people should accept conventions that support that rule. Amasis’ story about the footpan therefore reverses Aristotle’s assertion about manly rule. Aristotle declares that the rule of men is natural and justifies it by appealing to convention. Amasis claims that his rule is conventional but justifies it by showing himself capable of gaining the people’s consent and of ruling over their passions and conventions.¹³

The example of Amasis is compatible with Aristotle’s account of the male’s natural leadership in the sense that both show that it is necessary for rulers to justify their rule to the ruled. Aristotle, who emphasizes Amasis’ use of speech, uses speech (which partakes of both nature and convention), in the form of writing the *Politics*, to justify the natural rule of the male. Contra Saxonhouse, it is Amasis’ story about the footpan (rather than the footpan itself) that Aristotle says is representative of the relationship between

¹³Dobbs disagrees, arguing that, while the distinction made by the Egyptians is merely temporary since it is made on the basis of a distinction in forms and titles and honors, the distinction “is permanent (*aei*) in the case of male and female,” who are limited by their bodies (78). If this is the case, however, it is not clear why Amasis and the Egyptians are an appropriate example of the relationship between male and female.

female and male. If rule requires speech and consent, then biological nature is not a sufficient ground upon which one rules: one rules because he is able to justify his rule to others. In other words, men should not rule by force, but by speech, and their speech must justify their rule to the ruled in a way that gains their consent. Insofar as a man cannot or does not justify his rule to his wife and achieve her consent, his rule is despotic rather than political rule and therefore is not satisfactory. Likewise, by the standard supplied by Amasis' story, a woman (like a man) should rule in those things that she can justify through her words and deeds. Of course, in order for this to take place, men would have to listen to women, a task that is especially difficult given that men have constructed "differences in external appearance, forms of address, and prerogatives" in ways that, as we will see, tend to silence women.

The fact that Aristotle's own account of nature and convention seems to reverse the example of Amasis at the very time that he cites that example, throws light on his claim at the end of the passage that "the man always stands thus in relation to the female." The tension between the two forms of rule (Aristotle's original version and the version he points to in Amasis' use of the footpan story) that are "always" in effect, might lead us to suppose that he must favor one or the other. But this would be a mistake, for the two versions are finally compatible. The original version claims that the man asserts his superiority by nature and justifies it by conventions that he mistakenly takes to be natural (such as the silencing of women), while the example of Amasis offers a type of rule that asserts natural inferiority on conventional grounds in a way that allows his natural superiorities to finally rule. In other words, Amasis' type of rule does not

directly contradict the original account of man's natural rule provided by Aristotle: the two differing forms of rule can occur simultaneously and always.

Political rule between men and women can therefore occur without the formal changing of positions. Because Amasis is their equal, the common people, relying on established conventional differences between classes, consider him unfit to rule them. In response, instead of asserting his superiority, Amasis secures his position by affirming his origins and implying that he is no more fit to rule than anyone else, that he is merely the equal of the people: he asserts his right to rule by downplaying his superiority.¹⁴ The recognition of equality, in effect allows for the recognition of superiority. Amasis tells the people he is their equal, gains their consent, and rules them as king. Although Amasis establishes his rule by disclaiming his natural talents, his disclaiming is proof of those talents. Once recognized and allowed to rule, those talents prove to be useful to his rule, for Herodotus claims that Amasis made Egypt more prosperous than ever before.¹⁵ As Herodotus sums up the story of Amasis, "at the first the Egyptians despised Amasis and held him in no great regard, because he had been a man of the people and was of no

¹⁴Amasis used a similar method when he became king by overthrowing the tyrant Apries. According to Herodotus, Apries thought his rule so firmly established that not even a god could challenge him. And when the Egyptians grew dissatisfied with Apries rule, "Apries sent to them Amasis, to cause them to cease by persuasion; and when he had come and was seeking to restrain the Egyptians, as he was speaking and telling them not to do so, one of the Egyptians stood up behind him and put a helmet upon his head, saying as he did so that he put it on to crown him king." Herodotus, *Histories*, translated by G. C. Macaulay (New York: Macmillian Company, 1904), II.169. Here, as in the episode that Aristotle cites, Amasis disavows a claim to rule in a way that allows him to gain the people's consent. Note that his use of a helmet as a crown foreshadows his claim that the gold statue is no more than a footpan: both undermine ruling conventions in a way that establishes Amasis' authority at the very time that he uses conventions to support it.

¹⁵Herodotus, *Histories*, II.177.

distinguished family; but afterwards Amasis won them over to himself by wisdom and not willfulness.”¹⁶

Women find themselves in the same position as Amasis—after all, the abilities of neither are recognized by convention.¹⁷ Although they deserve to rule, their rule is offensive to man’s tendency to see himself as superior, a tendency reinforced by established convention. To rule absolutely, men justify their rule by cultivating conventions that both support their claim to rule, and make that claim appear to be grounded in their natural superiority. For example, in order to assert what they hold to be their natural superiority, men may enslave or silence women, while falsely justifying these deeds on natural grounds. The more these conventions appear natural, the more they thwart women’s ability to rule and therewith the possibility of political rule.

Thus we may conclude that when Aristotle claims that “the male *always* stands thus in relation to the female,” he is referring on the one hand to the difficulty posed by the man’s natural desire to be superior and to rule absolutely, and the possibility of the women exercising her natural ability to share in rule, thereby making that rule political. Aristotle, then, indicates the need for the woman to rule in a way that does not assert her superiority, for her doing so would be unacceptable to the man who wishes to hold himself superior to her. Although the man’s natural desire to rule is an obstacle to political rule, he can rule a woman politically if the woman lets him believe that she consents to his rule on natural grounds in a way that causes him to consent to her rule. Here we might recall Aristotle’s description of friendship, which he showed to stem from

¹⁶Herodotus, *Histories*, II, 72.

¹⁷The typical reading assumes that it is only men who are in the position of Amasis. But it is not clear that the reference is only to the rule of men.

the affection that the wife has for her husband's superior virtue, and, in turn, the husband's recognition of the value of his wife's affection for him (a recognition that is tied to his high judgment of himself). As we saw, the recognition of his wife's merit was the very thing that led to their friendship and therewith the turning over of at least part of the household's rule to her, thereby setting the stage for the further recognition of her virtues. By consenting to her husband's claim of superior virtue, the woman paves the way for her own rule of the family.

In sum, the conventional Greek relationship between men and women can be changed, and Aristotle shows the importance of transforming the model of rule for *both* men and women. Although the friendship between husbands and wives form the basis of this transformation, since the conventions justifying the absolute rule of men are an obstacle to political rule, the realization of that rule (and the woman's rightful share in it) also depends upon the at least partial removal of the conventional understanding that is held to be natural.¹⁸ When conventional justifications of rule that are held to be natural are replaced with the understanding that one must rule by consent, the natural ability to gain that consent becomes a ruling standard that takes the appearance of convention. And once women have the opportunity to gain consent to their participation in political rule, they can prove the natural worth that justifies and strengthens that consent. The woman, for instance, whose ruling husband agrees to give her responsibility for the

¹⁸When Aristotle says that the man rules by nature, the natural aspect could in part be understood to refer to the fact that it is the natural development of the city (rather than any innate talent that proves him superior to the woman) which leads to his rule. This explanation is supportive of the interpretation I give of the *Politics* in Chapter Three. Pre-political life, which does not include political rule, gives a particular advantage to man's natural desire to rule, for it allows his desire to be fulfilled far beyond any standard of natural right.

household, by exercising of her particular excellences, shows that she is equipped for such a role.

The Authority of Reason and Ethics Book VII

But does not Aristotle's claim that the woman's reason lacks authority indicate that the ruling virtues belong particularly to men and that men should therefore rule women simply? Does not the inability of the woman's reason to rule make her the natural servant of the man? In response to this line of interpretation, Arlene Saxonhouse points out that when Aristotle says that the woman's reason lacks authority, he may be referring to the lack of authority the woman's reason has over men (and, one could add, her children), rather than to reason's authority over her own soul.

In addition to Aristotle's use of Amasis, this reading is supported by Aristotle's quoting of Sophocles' Ajax to the effect that "silence gives grace to women" (*Pol.* 1260a30). Ajax is angered because he considers himself unjustly slighted by the Greeks, who have not given him Achilles' armor. Ajax speaks the words to his wife (and slave)¹⁹ Tecmessa, when she attempts to reason with him about his mad pursuit of honor, a pursuit that eventually leads him to commit suicide. As Nichols notes, here we see proof that the woman's reason lacks authority over men, and that men are not the better for it.²⁰ Thus, although the woman possesses reason, the anger of the man poses an obstacle to his listening to his wife. And when the man is unwilling to acknowledge the reason that belongs to women, he rules despotically rather than politically. As a result, women are silenced. And since "speech allows for the consideration of justice" (*Pol.* 1253a14-15),

¹⁹Davis, *The Politics of Philosophy*, 26.

²⁰Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen*, 31-32.

silent women cannot participate fully in justice, a virtue Aristotle explicitly says that they have.²¹ The male dominated household is restrictive of considerations of justice because it is defined by the woman's silence.

It would be a mistake, however, to simply characterize the example of Ajax and Tecmessa as proof that Aristotle is referring *only* to the lack of authority that the woman's reason has over men. For, as we saw, Aristotle also suggests that the woman's reason is lacking authority within her soul, and characterizes the leadership of the man over the woman as natural. According to Leah Bradshaw, this can be explained by turning to Book VII's account of continence, a kind of rule of the soul that Aristotle ties to prudence, and a kind of rule that he suggests belongs to men over and above women.²² While I agree with Bradshaw that Book VII's account of continence helps explain the man's natural leadership, as I will show, Aristotle's analysis also contains a critique of continence and therewith the authority of the man's reason. Aristotle's account of continence and incontinence, softness and endurance, is more supportive of the woman's—and far less supportive of the man's—claim to rule than it first appears.

²¹Note that in Sophocles' *Ajax*, we learn of Ajax's line about silence giving grace to women from Tecmessa herself, who is telling the audience of the night's events: our consideration of the justness of the quote depends on women being allowed to speak.

²²Leah Bradshaw points to Aristotle's claim that "household management differs for a man and woman as well, for it is the work of the man to acquire and of the woman to guard. But prudence is the only virtue peculiar to the ruler" (*Pol.* 1277b23-26). Using this remark as a guide, Bradshaw connects Aristotle's discussion of the reason of women to his account of continence (*egkrateia*) and endurance in *Ethics* Book VII. On her reading, Aristotle's claim that softness (*malakia*) "distinguishes the female from the male" (*NE* 1150b15), and that it arises in the male congenitally or through disease means that continence is a characteristically male quality, and that the male's endurance makes him superior to the female, who suffers from softness. Moreover, she notes that Aristotle's claim that incontinent people "deliberate but do not abide by the results of their deliberation, because they are overcome by emotion" (*NE* 1150b19-21) is wholly compatible with Aristotle's argument that the reason of the woman is sound, but lacking in authority. For Bradshaw, this conclusion is reinforced by Aristotle's remark that incontinent people are incapable of prudence (*NE* 1152a6), a remark consistent with the argument that the woman's reason lacks authority and that the man leads according to nature (565-566).

Aristotle's discussion of appetite and anger in *Ethics* Book VII formally provides two sets of categories: the attributes of softness and endurance, and the attributes of incontinence and continence. Moreover, Aristotle distinguishes anger from appetite, arguing: "while anger [*thumos*] somehow follows reason, appetite [*epithumia*] does not. Hence appetite is baser. For when a person is morally weak in anger, he is in a sense overcome by reason but the other is not overcome by reason but by appetite" (*NE* 1149b1-3). As we have noted, in *Ethics* Book II Aristotle ties the anger of men to their authority: "when we praise violently angry (*chalepainontas*) persons, we call them manly" and think them capable of ruling (*NE* 1109b18; see also 1126b1). Aristotle also ties anger to men in Book VII, for when he characterizes women as soft, he contrasts their softness with anger: "persons who indulge in bodily pleasures are called 'soft,' but not those who indulge in feelings of anger [*orgēs*]" (*NE* 1148a12-13).²³ Thus, the ground for Aristotle's distinction between the authority of men and the authority of women appears to be men's greater capacity for anger, for anger is manly, authoritative and reasonable, and distinguished from the softness belonging to women.

But while Aristotle certainly claims that anger follows reason, his evidence that anger is more reasonable than appetite is hardly convincing:

Anger seems to listen to reason, but to hear wrong, like hasty servants, who run off before they have heard everything their master tells them, and fail to do what they were ordered, or like dogs, which bark as soon as there is a knock without

²³Although here Aristotle uses the Greek *orgē* for anger, in Book VII he almost exclusively uses *thumos* (I note any exceptions). In his Book IV discussion of the virtue associated with gentleness he uses *orgē* (*NE* 1125b32, etc.). The context and use of *thumos* in Book VII makes it difficult to translate the word in any way other than anger. Nevertheless *thumos* does contain broader connotations than *orgē*, for beyond its narrow definition of anger, *thumos* is famously one part of Socrates' tripartite soul in the *Republic*. The shifting of terms reminds the reader of anger's connection to the soul, a move that is important because continence is concerned with the rule of the soul. For a good discussion of Aristotle's interchanging of *thumos* and *orgē* when discussing anger, see Barbara Koziak, *Retrieving Political Emotion: Thumos, Aristotle, and Gender* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 83-84.

waiting to see if the visitor is a friend. . . . Reason and imagination [*phantasia*] indicate that an insult or a slight has been received, and anger, drawing the conclusion, as it were, that it must fight against this sort of thing, simply flares up at once (*NE* 1149a26-39).

The examples provided by Aristotle work to undermine his claim that anger listens to reason, for the servants are characterized as not listening to their commands, and the dogs bark before knowing whether their doing so is reasonable. Even in the example of a slight being received, Aristotle both notes the possibility that it is imagination rather than reason which determines that it is a slight, and claims that anger rather than reason draws the conclusion (or gives the command) that one should fight. In sum, Aristotle's examples indicate the danger of anger overcoming reason. Indeed, on his account, it is appetite rather than anger that better listens to reason since appetite rushes off to enjoy something only after having been told by reason that it is pleasant.

Reason and anger are conflated in another way, for consistent with his claim that reason is diametrically at odds with the appetites, when Aristotle defines continence as mastering the appetites (*NE* 1150a34), he formally excludes anger (*thumos*) from its horizon, asserting that if one is incontinent in regards to anger, he is incontinent only in an analogous sense (*NE* 1148b12; see also 1149a15-25). The continent man is therefore defined strictly in terms of reason and appetites, with the former ruling the latter in every way.

On the other hand, the exclusion of *thumos* from the consideration of continence may only be illusionary. Since anger is excluded from the realm of appetite that continence is concerned with ruling, there is no reason why the continent man cannot be angry, and even out of control in regards to anger. Indeed the possibility that the continent man is angry, even though he is described solely in terms of reason, would

explain why Aristotle associates anger with reason. For although the continent man who masters his appetites would appear to be defined wholly by reason, his mastery of the appetites would be impossible without *thumos*, for as Aristotle notes in the *Politics*, “spiritedness [*thumos*] is a thing expert at ruling and indomitable” (*Pol.* 1328a7). Without *thumos*, reason would lack the means with which to rule. Its reason would be lacking authority, or even wholly without it.

As we saw however, the continent man’s tendency to conflate reason and anger is itself unreasonable. The continent man may rule his appetites despotically, but it is questionable whether his doing so is fully reasonable, even if he thinks it is. As Aristotle himself points out, reason should rule the appetite, not despotically, but politically (*Pol.* 1254b4-60). The possibility of anger of being confused with reason is further emphasized by Aristotle’s claim that “anger and ill temper are more natural than are the appetites which make us strive for excess and for what is not necessary” (*NE* 1149b6-7). As an example of such anger, Aristotle cites the example of father-beating (*NE* 1149b8-13). But the example is oddly chosen, for even if father-beating is common, unlike the desires for food and sex, which define the horizon of continence, it is hardly an example of moderation or of what is necessary.

The example of father-beating illustrates the danger of conflating *thumos* and reason. As we noted, the source of father-beating appears to be the despotical rule of the father over the son, with the son rebelling against the father’s domination. In the son’s defense of father-beating that Aristotle gives, reason is put in the service of anger rather than anger in the service of reason, for the son turns to reason only to defend himself against the charges of father-beating (*NE* 1149b9-11): anger, not reason initiates the

practice.²⁴ Here it is worth noting that, in Book I, Aristotle used fathers as a metaphor for the reasonable and ruling part of the soul, and distinguished the other parts of the soul in terms of their capacity to follow the advice of reason.²⁵ This characterization is striking, for Aristotle later indicates that it can be unreasonable to accept the advice of one's father, since a father's advice can be unreasonable (*NE* 1164b23-27). If reason attempts to beat the rest of the soul into submission, then the rest of the soul may respond with an anger that rebels against reason in an attempt to assert itself. Just as anger uses reason to defend the practice of father-beating, reason must use anger or *thumos* to defend its despotical rule over the soul. In sum, the attempt to define one's soul in terms of the despotical rule of reason over the rest of the soul requires uniting *thumos* and reason. It is not surprising, then, that when anger manifests itself, the continent man claims that his

²⁴The son's reason for beating his father is that father-beating runs in the family (i.e. that it is natural and thus reasonable). In contrast the father claims that his son is beating him in response to the beatings the son has received from him (i.e. the son is beating his father because he is angry). As Aristotle notes in his discussion of justice "acts due to anger are rightly judged not to be committed with malice aforethought. . . . Feelings of anger are aroused by an apparent injustice" (*NE* 1135b26-28). That the father believes that the son is beating him for a perceived injustice is clear when he appeals to his son's sense of (contractual) justice in an attempt to limit the beating (*NE* 1149b12-14). The father who is being beaten by the son, turns to reason to attempt to restrain the anger of his son (*NE* 1149b11-13).

²⁵Aristotle uses the metaphor of a father when he divides the soul into rational and irrational elements. Of the two parts of the irrational element of the soul:
the one is vegetative and has no share in reason at all, the other is the seat of the appetites and of desire in general and partakes of reason insofar as it complies with reason and accepts its leadership; it possesses reason in the sense that we say it is "reasonable" to accept the advice of a father and of friends (*NE* 1102b31-33).

Aristotle gives a second version, writing: "if it is correct to say that the appetitive part, too, has reason, it follows that the rational element of the soul has two subdivisions: the one possesses reason in the strict sense, contained within itself, and the other possesses reason in the sense that it listens to reason as one would listen to a father" (*NE* 1103a1-4). Thus, Aristotle seems to describe the same part of the soul as rational and irrational. Interestingly, when he labels that part as irrational, he claims that it is reasonable in the sense that it accepts the advice of the strictly rational part of the soul. On the other hand, when he labels it rational, he claims that it does not necessarily accept the authority of the part of the soul that is strictly reasonable. Aristotle might imply that it is unreasonable for the appetitive part of the soul to simply comply with reason and accept its leadership. Indeed, this would explain why he characterizes their doing so as irrational. Likewise, by labeling full submission to reason irrational and the only partial submission to reason as rational, Aristotle indicates that the lower parts of the soul have their own reason, a fact that makes the partial rule of their soul (or the political rule of their soul), rational.

anger is reasonable. Just as anger mistakes itself for reason, reason mistakes its anger for reason. The attempt to collapse *thumos* and *logos* unreasonably denies the unreasonableness of *thumos*.²⁶ The claim of thumotic reason and of reasonable *thumos*—that they are self-sufficient, and that they deserve to rule absolutely—is finally unreasonable, for both represent the triumph of *thumos* over reason.²⁷

Anger and the Appetites

When Aristotle distinguishes anger from appetite he claims that anger is open, while appetite is underhanded. But while anger is open in the sense of not being underhanded, as we have seen through the example of Ajax, because it is so sure of its own authority, it has difficulty being open to reason and has difficulty being persuaded by others. Indeed, since it appears that manly anger makes the male unwilling to acknowledge any challenge to the authority of his reason, we might wonder whether the tendency toward anger in the men is not at least partially the cause of the appetite's use of underhandedness in women. This possibility fits with the Homeric example Aristotle uses to show the underhandedness of appetite. "Appetite," argues Aristotle, "has the same attribute as Aphrodite . . . as Homer says: cajolery [*paraphasis*] that steals the mind [*nous*] away even from the prudent [*phroneontos*]" (NE 1149b15-17).

²⁶This account fits with Book I's use of a father as a metaphor for the reasoning part of the soul (NE 1103a4): since the discussion of father-beating is placed in the context of a discussion of three parts of the soul (anger/*thumos*, appetite, and reason), Aristotle's description of angry father-beating implicitly shows *thumos* to be the part of the soul that attempts to overthrow reason.

²⁷It is noteworthy that when Aristotle writes that the strictly reasonable part of the soul is like a father, he claims that that part is "contained within itself." The strictly reasonable part of the soul is therefore like the magnanimous father, whose perceived self-sufficiency and completeness is the equivalent to reason contained within itself. But if reason is strictly contained within itself, it is not clear how it rules the appetites (or why it would want to). Moreover, the self-contained aspect of the reasonable part of the soul would not be complete, for it would offer no consideration of what lies outside itself, a lack of consideration that would make it impossible to judge its own reasonableness.

The reference is to the Iliadic episode in which Hera procures the charms of sexual desire and persuasion from Aphrodite in order to seduce Zeus, with whom Hera is quarrelling. Hera, in possession of Aphrodite's charm, makes herself visible to Zeus, who declares: "never has such desire . . . overwhelmed my heart [*thumos*]." Despite Hera's initial protests, they make love in the clouds (*Iliad* 14.315-350). As they rest together, Sleep, working at the behest of Hera, puts a spell upon Zeus, thereby allowing Hera to rally the Greeks.

The source of the quarrel that leads to Hera's deception of Zeus is the episode at the beginning of the *Iliad*, in which Zeus, at the bequest of Thetis, promises to honor Achilles by letting the Trojans win victory in battle. When Hera (who favors the Greeks) asks Zeus about Thetis' visit and angrily accuses him of being an arch-deceiver (*Iliad* 1.649-652), Zeus replies: "Hera—stop hoping to fathom all my thoughts. You will find them a trial, though you are my wife. . . . Whatever I choose to plan apart from the gods—no more of your everlasting questions, probe and pry no more (*Iliad* 1.655-660). And when Hera responds by correctly discerning the meaning of Thetis' visit (Homer says that she "knew everything"), Zeus complains:

you and your eternal suspicions—I can never escape you. Ah but tell me Hera, just what can you do about all this? Nothing. Only estrange yourself from me a little more—and all the worse for you. . . . Now go sit down. Be quiet now. Obey my orders, for fear the gods, however many Olympus holds, are powerless to protect you when I come to throttle you with my irresistible hands (*Iliad* 1.672-682).

The quarrel illustrates the complicated relationship between anger and underhandedness. Zeus first defends his unwillingness to tell Hera of his meeting with Thetis on the grounds that, since she would find the knowledge difficult to bear, he cannot allow her to learn about his decision. But Hera proves herself more than capable

in reasoning out the context and content of much of Zeus' decision without his help. And when Hera does so, rather than subjecting his decision to his wife's reason, Zeus angrily silences her, and threatens her with violent anger if she continues to demand his reasons. Just as Zeus' anger leads to Hera's later underhandedness, here Hera is in a sense responsible for the initial anger of Zeus: it is her remark that he is an arch-deceiver that enrages Zeus, perhaps because it consists in the accusation that he is unmanly (for manly anger is open).

While Zeus fails to recognize the capacity of Hera, his failure to do so stems partly from Hera's attempt to directly confront and challenge his manliness. She is unlike Thetis, who knew well enough to remind Zeus only of the good deeds she had done for him without enumerating them, but like Tecmessa, whose challenge of Ajax only enrages him. Hera's direct attack on Zeus' self-sufficiency is a failure. Hera's anger overwhelms her consideration of the need for underhandedness. Yet, as we have seen, Hera learns her lesson, for she later successfully seduces Zeus. By recognizing her limits, and by recognizing the limits that Zeus' anger put on him, Hera deals with her husband, and shows herself to be superior to him in at least this one episode.

The success of Hera's maneuvers depends upon her arousing Zeus' appetite: it is not that appetite is underhanded, but that appetite falls for underhandedness, and allows itself to be deceived. By arousing his appetite, Hera steals the mind (*nous*) away from Zeus, which (according to Zeus) turns out to be the equivalent of overthrowing his *thumos*.

When Zeus awakes from the slumber produced by Hera's seduction, he is angry at his wife for interfering with his plan, thereby repeating his earlier anger at Hera's

suggestion that he has been manipulated by Thetis. When confronted with his appetite—or the suggestion that he is not sufficient to himself—Zeus responds with anger. This time, however, Hera craftily deflects his anger toward Poseidon, and Zeus in turn explains to her his plan to reconcile Achilles with the Greeks, and accepts her suggestion that she play a role in its execution.

We may infer from Aristotle's reference, therefore, that the woman's greater awareness of the appetitive part of the soul allows her to better manipulate the appetites of the man. This awareness appears not simply to be attributable to a lack of anger (or to an excess of appetite) in her soul, but rather from the excess of anger (and desire) in the man, anger that compels her to seek less direct ways of influencing him and of moderating his anger.

To a certain degree, Aristotle follows the example of women, for he moves to overthrow the excessive authority of anger, not by challenging it directly, but by subtly pointing to the need to recognize and moderate the dangers that accompany it. And although his discussion in Book VII clearly indicates that there is a proper and necessary relationship between reason and anger, it also illustrates the difference between two, and allows readers to discern the dangers involved in equating them.²⁸ Thus, thumotic men who are more inclined to rule than to follow anyone's (including Aristotle's) direction, might come to see the all-too-obvious inconsistencies of equating reason with anger, a move that allows them to more properly distinguish their reason from their *thumos*. So too in Book IV, Aristotle teaches that gentleness is the mean in regards to anger, even though he had earlier made clear that anger (*thumos*) is a passion supportive of courage.

²⁸Aristotle allows *thumotic* men who want to rule (rather than to follow the Aristotle's direction) to grab hold of and expose the all-too-obvious inconsistencies of their equating reason with anger, a move that allows them to more properly distinguish their reason from their *thumos*.

He thereby shifts the foundation of the virtue from a passion (which cannot be a virtue), to a characteristic: he transforms the violent passion associated with war into a social virtue.²⁹ In the same way, the danger of angry *thumos* dominating the souls of men can be moderated by the work of women and by the consideration of the ways that her reason manifests itself, a consideration Aristotle encourages by emphatically pointing out that reason belongs to women as much as to men, a fact that is hardly apparent to men, who in their overvaluation of their own reason, have difficulty seeing the value of the reason that belongs to women.

In sum, the mastery of the soul by reason is unreasonable for it attempts to conflate reason with *thumos*.³⁰ The continent man mistakes *thumos* with reason, and in doing so cannot account for his rule or for his desire to rule. To maintain that illusion, the continent man unreasonably collapses the distinction between *thumos* and reason. The attempt to conflate of *thumos* and reason is finally thumotic rather than reasonable, for *thumos* aims at defending the self-sufficiency or completeness of one's identity. When Aristotle says the reason of the woman lacks authority in her soul, he does not claim (as is sometimes supposed) that the reason of the man has complete authority in *his*

²⁹This does not contradict my claim in Chapter Five that Aristotle is critical of Hector turning the passion of shame into a virtue. The passion of anger (unlike shame) does not become the virtue, but rather is replaced with gentleness.

³⁰Cropsey also questions the "rule" of the continent man over his own soul: "the *enkrateis* [continent man] is he who is at one with himself, in whose soul reigns that concord of parts described only metaphorically (i.e. incorrectly) by Plato's conception of justice. It should be remembered that book VII goes on to conclude with a section (4 chapters; 1152b1-54b35) that anticipates the rehabilitation of pleasure. . . . This section begins by assigning the contemplation of pleasure and pain to the philosophical—called so by name. It ends by referring to our twofold nature, a nature that demands change and that is, as not simple, not good" (258).

soul.³¹ Reason's lack of authority in the man is due to a thumotic overvaluation of his own reason and therewith the overvaluation of his claim to rule. It is not surprising, then, that Aristotle finally claims that the mastery of the appetites is not satisfactory, and that the mind should rule the appetite, not despotically, but politically" (*Pol.* 1254b4-6).

Thus, as Nichols points out, reason's lack of authority in the woman's soul need not be understood negatively, since it allows for the political rule over the soul that Aristotle says is preferable to the despotic rule of reason.³² The political rule of the soul is not dependent on the absence of authority, but rather on the recognition that the ruling authority is insufficient or incomplete, a recognition that, in the case of the soul, depends upon reason rather than emotion.

Thus, the limits of human reason are discovered by reason, making reason the ruling principle. On the other hand, reason cannot acknowledge its own insufficiency if it does not acknowledge the claims that the appetites and desires put upon reason: the difficulty reason has accounting for the appetites and emotions can be the impetus for discovering the limits of one's reason. Ruling oneself and others properly requires more than the reasonable part of the soul, for the human soul contains more than reason. The art of the ruler may be defined by reason, but his craft properly recognizes that it is limited by the material, and that the material does not always fit with the reason of his task.

Given manliness's tendency toward thumotic anger and self-sufficiency, the redirection of the man's reason toward a consideration of the lower parts of the soul is

³¹Saxonhouse and Salkever assume that he does so (Saxonhouse, *Aristotle: Defective Males, Hierarchy and the Limits of Politics*, 38). Salkever uses this assumption to argue that "males should rule over females" in matters of reason ("Women, Soldiers, Citizens," 241-42).

³²Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen*, 32.

difficult. On the other hand, reason's lack of authority in the woman's soul is conducive to a fuller account of human nature, for it encourages reason to account for the emotions produced by social interactions and the appetites produced by the body—appetites that, as we saw, Aristotle ties to reason.

When Ajax speaks the lines commanding Tecmessa's silence, he is pursuing godlike honors literally outside of the city in a way that fits with Aristotle's claim that a man who is without a city is isolated, without clan, law and hearth, and (in contradistinction to Tecmessa) desiring of war (*Pol.* 1253a3-7). As the example indicates, the man's tendency to think his anger perfectly reasonable can make him unwilling to acknowledge the reason that belongs to women, an unwillingness that is itself unreasonable. While the man's confidence in his reason provides him with the material necessary to lead, and allows him to assert his reason over both his appetites and others, that same confidence poses the danger that he will rule both his soul and others despotically rather than politically. Earlier we noted that the male dominated household, by silencing women, restricts considerations of justice. When the man's excessive spiritedness comes to involve silencing women, it is responsible for injustice.

The man who fails to see the value of the reason belonging to women, or who over-asserts his authority over women, does not assert proper authority over his own soul. In order for men to rule reasonably or with prudence, they must take account of women, and in order for women to develop their prudence they must be allowed to partake in rule, since "prudence is the only virtue peculiar to the ruler" (*Pol.* 1277b25).

Book VII therefore provides further ground for understanding Aristotle's seemingly opposed claims in the *Politics* that men rule by nature, and that their rule is

justified by convention. When Aristotle claims that men are by nature rulers, we can understand him to mean that, since they are more thumotic than women, they are by nature more interested in asserting their claim to rule than are women. In other words, the natural basis of their rule is not their superiority, but rather their belief that they are superior, a belief to which they are naturally inclined.³³ By implication, men rule by nature not only because their soul provides the support need for that rule, but also because they naturally have difficulty understanding the nature of women, including women's ability to rule. In sum, the man's greater desire to rule makes him both more likely to wrongly consider himself to be superior, and more likely to assert this conclusion to those whom he rules or wishes to rule.

Men, Women, and Softness

Aristotle's distinction between continence and incontinence on the one hand, and endurance and softness on the other, is relevant to his view of men and women inasmuch as he claims that softness characterizes women. Aristotle argues that while continence and incontinence involve pleasure, endurance and softness involve pain (*NE* 1150a23-14). Thus, while continence consists in mastering, "endurance [*karterein*] consists in offering resistance. . . . Resistance and mastery are two different things, just as not being defeated differs from winning a victory" (*NE* 1150a33-35). Softness, in contrast, is a deficiency in offering resistance (*NE* 1150b2).

As we saw, Bradshaw's claim that Aristotle excludes women from the virtue of prudence puts together Aristotle's argument that incontinent people are incapable of prudence (*NE* 1152a6) with his accompanying claim that women are characterized by

³³Nichols argues (on different interpretive grounds) that Aristotle means to show that the ruling male "seeks greater authority than his similarity to his subjects warrant" (*Citizens and Statesmen*, 30).

softness rather than by continence. Aristotle, however, does not make the corresponding claim that the prudent man must be continent. Moreover, he distinguishes between softness and endurance, incontinence and continence. In other words, the softness that characterizes women does not by definition exclude them from the virtue of prudence.³⁴

Book VII is not the first time that Aristotle discusses the endurance of pain. In Book III Aristotle discussed the endurance of the courageous man. There Aristotle noted that “men are called courageous [manly] for enduring [*hupomenein*] pain” (*NE* 1117a33-35), and claimed that the courageous man endures pain for the sake of nobility (*NE* 1117b9, 14). Aristotle also noted that courage’s pursuit of nobility (and therefore the enduring of pain) is supported by spiritedness (*thumos*) (*NE* 1116b30-31). But, as we have seen in our analysis of continence, spiritedness poses the danger of overthrowing reason and the political rule in the soul, just as the pursuit of noble courage poses the danger of becoming rash and ignoring the requirements of political life. Softness may be a weakness in endurance, but it is not clear that Aristotle endorses perfect endurance.

That the complete resistance of pain is not necessarily reasonable is suggested by Aristotle himself, who writes:

If a person is overcome by powerful and excessive pleasures and pains, we are not surprised. In fact, we find it pardonable if he is overcome while offering resistance, as, for example, Theodectes’ Philoctetes does when bitten by the snake, or as Cercyon in Carcinus’ *Alpoe*, or as people who try to restrain their laughter burst out in one great guffaw, as actually happened to Xenophantus (*NE* 1150b7-12).

The examples provided underscore the danger of pursuing excessive endurance, for Philoctetes’ attempt to endure the pain in his hand leaves him demanding to have his

³⁴Although Aristotle writes that continence “is more desirable than endurance” (*NE* 1150a35-b1), one should not simply conclude that he prefers the realm of continence to that of endurance and softness, for the claim depends on a desire that is not necessarily endorsed by Aristotle.

hand cut off, and Cercyon's attempt to overcome his grief leads to his suicide.³⁵ The attempt at perfect endurance ends in the denial of oneself.

Aristotle expands the realm of softness to include the acceptance of certain pleasures, noting "a man who loves amusement is also commonly regarded as being self-indulgent, but he is actually soft. For amusement is relaxation, inasmuch as it is respite from work, and a lover of amusement is a person who goes in for relaxation to excess" (*NE* 1150b16-18). But, as I argued during my discussion of wit, in Book X Aristotle shows the possibility of integrating amusement and work with leisure. That discussion, I argued, especially employs wit (the social virtue concerned with amusement), and shows how wit can be useful to the work of the statesmen. Indeed, since Aristotle himself claims to practice a kind of politics in writing the *Ethics*, and since he at least sometimes employs the amusing virtue of wit, it appears that one can enhance the other: the work of the statesmen can be amusing, just as being amusing can sustain statesmanship.

Amusement is subservient to leisure in the sense that it provides respite from work.³⁶ It is no accident that Aristotle's recommendation to soften endurance in Book VII, depends upon references to plays—plays that have likely been seen or read by Aristotle himself (since he cites them). If endurance is necessary to manliness and the warlike virtues, softness may be necessary to the virtues concerning leisure. And leisure is linked to political life since "there is a need for leisure both with a view to the creation of virtue, and with a view to political activities" (*Pol.* 1329a1-3). Just as war is for the

³⁵Ostwald, 195n42, 196n43. According to Ostwald, we have no record of the episode involving Xenophantus.

³⁶Although Aristotle critiques the excessive love of amusement, his critique is aimed not at relaxation simply, but at those who take relaxation to be the end of life.

sake of peace, amusement (and work) is for the sake of leisure. Endurance and softness are subservient to the activities that belong to leisure.

Aristotle's account of endurance and softness sheds light on his discussion of friendship. To the extent that one does not have endurance, one is soft, and Aristotle indicates that one should not always resist those things which are painful, especially in regards to friends. For example, in Book IX Aristotle argues that whereas "manly natures take scrupulous care not to let their friends share their pain . . . women folk and womanish men enjoy it when others join their mourning and they feel affection for them as being their friends and sharers of their sorrow" (*NE* 1171b7-11). Here Aristotle suggests that the softness of women leads them to go too far in their willingness to enumerate their pains to their friends. The sharing of sorrow nevertheless is good in the sense that "pain is alleviated when friends share the sorrow" (*NE* 1171a29). In addition, sharing one's sorrow allows for deeds of friendship: Aristotle says helping a friend who is in misfortune "is the mark of a friend" (*NE* 1171b20). More importantly, the sharing of pain allows for friendship itself, for Aristotle writes: "if a friend is tactful, seeing him and talking to him are a source of comfort, since he knows our character and the things which give us pleasure and pain" (*NE* 1171b4-5). If pains are not shared with one's friend, one does not only deprive that friend of the opportunity to perform an act of friendship by coming to one's aid, one makes a meaningful friendship impossible, for it makes the knowledge of the friend's character—of what gives him or her pleasure and pain—impossible.

Softness, Endurance, and Luxury

Although Aristotle endorses softness in some forms, his discussion of softness is not always complimentary. He writes: “One who is deficient [in his resistance to pains] which most people withstand successfully is soft and luxurious, for luxury [*truphōn*] is a form of softness” (*NE* 1150b1). Indeed, Aristotle is especially critical of this form of softness, for, as we have seen, he links luxuriousness to oligarchic households and to tyranny (*Pol.* 1295b14-24). Moreover, in *Politics* Book II, he links luxuriousness to women, suggesting that their influence encourages oligarchy:

Laxness concerning women is harmful with a view both to the intention of the regime and to the happiness of the city. For just as man and women are a part of the household, it is clear that the city should be held to be very nearly divided in two—into a multitude of men and a multitude of women so in regimes where what is connected with women is poorly handled, one must consider that legislation is lacking for half of the city. The very thing has happened there [in Sparta]; for the legislator wished the city as a whole to be hardy [*karterikos*], and this is manifest in terms of the men; but he thoroughly neglected it in the case of women, who live licentiously in every respect and in luxury. Wealth will necessarily be honored in a regime of this sort, particularly if they are dominated by the women, as is the case with most stocks that are fond of soldiering and war (*Pol.* 1269b13-25).

The cause of luxury and oligarchy is the participation of women in rule. Noting that the Spartan women were especially unruly and difficult to rule, Aristotle concludes: “not finely handling that which is connected with the women would seem to not only create an inappropriateness in the regime in its own terms (as was said earlier), but to contribute to their greed” (*Pol.* 1270a10-12).

On the other hand, the luxurious form of softness is not particular to women.³⁷ As we saw, Aristotle’s critique of the oligarchic household claimed that its sons tend to be

³⁷Aristotle’s harshest criticism of women in relation to softness is sometimes wrongly taken to be his claim that “we are surprised if a man is overcome by and unable to withstand those [pleasures and pains] which most people [*polloi*] resist successfully, unless his disposition is congenital or caused by

luxurious. Here we may add that it is not clear that woman's luxurious softness is simply natural, for Aristotle implies that educating women will temper the problem of luxury. Indeed, he argues that it has been the failure of regimes to legislate for women that has resulted in their living licentiously and luxuriously. Aristotle traces the dominance of the women's luxuriousness over the man's virtue to the city's failure to educate women. As he notes, by neglecting the education, Sparta's laws are guilty of neglecting half the city. Women who have not been properly educated are inappropriately soft, and have difficulty honoring the male's military virtue (which would remove a cause of friendship between husband and wife). The result of this condition is that wealth is the governing standard and the rule is oligarchic. Under these conditions, the military virtue of the men is ruled by the oligarchic tastes of the women.

Since the cause of the woman's excess in ruling the man's virtue is rooted in the city's decision to leave women simply at leisure (rather than to educate them), the difference between men and women is partially due to conventional practices.³⁸ In his critique of the Spartan regime, Aristotle endorses what he says is Plato's criticism of Sparta in the *Laws*:

disease, as among the kings of Scythia, for example, in whom softness is congenital, and as softness distinguishes the female from the male" (*NE* 1150b12-16). Ostwald, for instance, interprets this passage to mean that softness is a "feminine disease" (196n45). But the more obvious reading (as well as being a physical fact) is that the female is distinguished from the male congenitally, and Aristotle distinguishes congenital softness from disease. Note that Aristotle characterizes the softness of the man as surprising only when it is greater than the softness that belongs to "most people," a category which would include women.

³⁸As Bradshaw points out, in the *Generation of Animals* Aristotle notes the difficulty women have in giving birth, a fact that would fit with the inability to resist pain that characterizes softness. However, as Bradshaw points out, Aristotle attributes this difficulty to their sedentary lifestyle, writing that when one looks at places where women perform hard physical labor or are used to hard work, women find delivery an easy business (*GA* 775a) (569). Aristotle himself recommends legislating exercise for women while they are pregnant (*Pol.* 1335b12-16). Aristotle therefore illustrates how education (or the lack thereof), influences the character of women.

The entire organization of the laws is with a view to a part of virtue—warlike virtue; for this is useful to domination . . . they [Sparta] came to ruin when they were ruling [an empire] through not knowing how to be at leisure, and because there is no training among them that has more authority than the training for war” (*Pol.* 1271b1-4).

Here, the inability of the legislator to properly educate women is said to result from giving prominence to the warlike virtue belonging to men. The result is the oligarchic regime, since “where virtue is not honored above all else, there cannot be a securely aristocratic regime” (*Pol.* 1273b1). In other words, because manliness is identified with virtue entire,³⁹ men only receive a partial education in virtue, and the education of women in virtue is wholly neglected.

Likewise, when Aristotle notes that the Spartan women were resistant to Lycurgus’ attempt to lead them to the laws, he says the deficiency rested not in the women, but in the laws. Here again the failure of the oligarchic regimes to educate women is linked to the men’s inability to practice civic virtue—the virtue belonging to leisure.⁴⁰ Even though, “legislation . . . is connected with matters related to war, it [legislation] is for the sake of being at leisure and of peace. . . . Once having acquired [imperial] rule . . . [most cities] come to ruin; they lose their edge, like iron, when they remain at peace. The reason is that the legislator has not educated them [men] to be capable of being at leisure” (*Pol.* 1334a5-10). In other words, the neglect of women is due to a lack of concern for civic life, and a lack of a concern for civic life is especially indicative of the warlike (or manly) virtues. The reason women have not been trained in virtue is rooted in the fact that those possessing military virtues are not properly

³⁹Salkever, “Women, Soldiers, Citizens,” 244.

⁴⁰When Aristotle writes that “courage and endurance are required with a view to occupation” (*Pol.* 1334a23), he ties these characteristics to military virtue and contrasts them with the virtues belonging to leisure.

concerned with the social virtues. Thus, while the *Ethics* focuses on the way friendship can overcome the excesses of manliness, to help solve these excesses, and to curb the luxurious excesses of softness, the *Politics* ends with a turn to the civic education of the youth.

Education, Prudence, and the Sexes

Aristotle, without distinguishing between the sexes, characterizes education in terms of gymnastics and music, with the latter being for the sake of leisure (*Pol.* 1338a11-29). Aristotle claims that music is appropriate to education because it may “contribute to pastime and prudence” (*Pol.* 1339a25-26). This remark is striking, for it is not the first time that Aristotle has connected music to prudence. In *Politics* Book III Aristotle used a flutist as a metaphor for the prudent ruler: “Moderation and courage differ in a man and a woman. . . . But prudence is the only virtue peculiar to the ruler. . . . Prudence is not a virtue of one ruled, but rather true opinion is; for the one ruled is like a flute maker, while the ruler is like a flute player, the user [of what the other makes]” (*Pol.* 1277b23-29; see also 1282b25-a5). It is surprising, then, that here in Book VIII, Aristotle begins his discussion of music education (which is for the sake of prudence) by rejecting the flute, which has thus far acted as a metaphor for the prudence belonging to the ruler:⁴¹

Flutes are not to be brought into education, nor any other instrument involving expertise in the art [of music], such as the lyre or any other that may be of that sort, but only those instruments that will make them good listeners either of music education or of the other [sorts of education]. . . . Let us add that the fact that the flute prevents speech also tells against its use in education. For when [Greeks] came to have more leisure through being better off and were more magnanimous in regard to virtue, and further, being full of high thoughts on account of their deeds both before and after the Persian Wars, they put their hand to every sort of learning, making no discrimination between them but seeking to advance further

⁴¹Our concern here is not with the musical reasons for Aristotle’s rejection of the flute, but rather with his earlier use of the flute as a metaphor for the prudence belonging to the ruler.

in all. . . . Later, it was rejected as a result of the experience of it, when they were better able to judge what contributes to virtue and what does not (*Pol.* 1341a17-37).

The flute, which earlier served as a metaphor for prudence, is here associated with magnanimity and the deeds of war. As we saw, Aristotle criticizes cities such as Sparta for organizing education and the laws with a view to wars rather than leisure (*Pol.* 1324b8-9), leisure that includes political education. Thus, by banning the flute in Book VIII, Aristotle suggests that the description of rule that was originally introduced in the *Politics* was misleading in the sense that it did not fully account for the possibility of an education that might affect the relationship between ruler and the ruled. We may therefore infer that, although the art of the flute player was said to be analogous to prudence, that analogy is incomplete: a fuller prudence (a prudence that involves practice or experience) dictates that the analogy be qualified on the grounds that it did not properly account for education. Aristotle means to provide prudence with a more appropriate foundation that requires not the magnanimous self-contained mastery of oneself, but rather uses the particulars of politics to check and limit and correct the knowledge of more universal properties.

Whereas Aristotle's education in music is meant for education in political virtue (*Pol.* 1341a1), the education in the flute that stemmed from magnanimity is prohibitive of speech. It is apt, then, that when prudence was described as exclusive to the flutist (the man), the woman was described as properly silent (even as Aristotle was undermining that description), especially when confronted with magnanimous or manly men such as Ajax. Understood metaphorically, the flute is prohibitive of speech because it is prohibitive of the speech of the ruled. And if the ruled cannot partake in speech, it is hard

to see how they can exercise the prudence necessary to political rule, or how the rulers can recognize their particular virtues. It is not surprising that Aristotle says that speech allows for considerations of the political virtue of justice, for, without speech, political rule—ruling in turn or in part—is impossible. Thus, it is fitting that a turn to education requires that the flute be removed as an analogy of rule, since it does not represent the proper relationship between ruled and ruler.

Education and Political Rule

Aristotle claims that the virtues concerning leisure are more important than the virtues concerning war and that speech provides the best basis for education aimed at women and men. He also suggests that the manly or warlike virtues obstruct the development of the political community by neglecting women and by not providing its citizens a proper education in leisure and speech. Since that education included both men and women, we may conclude that the success of the political community depends upon the speech of women as well as men.

The ruler who fails to consider the importance of listening to others ultimately denies any integrity in those who are ruled and thereby causes factional conflict. Mirroring the claim that the prudence belongs solely to the ruling man, the magnanimous Greeks failed to consider that not every citizen can learn everything. This failure poses a significant problem, for if a ruler considers his own virtue to be complete, he will judge the failure of the education he offers as due simply to the limits of those he is ruling, and may even come to define the ruled exclusively in terms of those limits, and therefore as unworthy of education. The resulting vast inequality between ruler and ruled would be destructive of the affection that defines political rule, for “factional conflict is everywhere

the result of inequality . . . where there is no proportion among those who are unequal” (*Pol.* 1301b28-29). By not recognizing their particular limits of his subjects—by overlooking the individual integrity of the citizens—the ruler ultimately closes himself to the knowledge of their virtues and therefore of what kind of education is possible. In so doing, he makes education, both of himself and of others, impossible.

When Aristotle discusses factional conflict, he writes: “the lesser engage in factional conflict in order to be equal; those who are equal in order to be greater” (*Pol.* 1302a29-30). By claiming that the lesser believe themselves worthy of equality, and that the equal believe themselves worthy of inequality, Aristotle shows that both the ruled and the ruler misunderstand themselves. The lesser deny the merit of their rulers and wrongly claim total equality. The greater (those who rule) claim an inequality that denies the integrity of the ruled and therefore the basis for equality in any form. They “claim to merit all things unequally” because “they are unequal in some respect” (*Pol.* 1301b37-38).⁴² According to Aristotle, such people cause factional conflict when they attempt to be “greater in power than accords with the city,” and “from such persons there customarily arises a monarchy or a dynasty” (*Pol.* 1302b16-17). Such a ruler governs only with a view to his own superiority and his own virtue. He has no desire to educate his citizens. When one applies this teaching to the rule of men over women, one notes the same problem: legislators have been guilty of neglecting the education of women, with the effect that luxurious women have attempted to rule in a way that is unwarranted and that results in an oligarchic regime.

⁴²As noted earlier, oligarchic regimes—and the related oligarchic and kingly rule of the household—poses the danger of luxury, which Aristotle describes as the foundation of tyranny (*Pol.* 1295b14-24), on the grounds that the members of such households cannot rule politically, for they view the ruled with contempt.

In contrast, a ruler who recognizes a distinction between the virtue of the ruler and the ruled without denying the equality that allows for a common political bond can address the political problem of faction, which is opposed to affection. In *Politics* Book V Aristotle discusses equality of merit, a ratio between ruled and ruler in which the merit of the ruler is proportional (1:2, 2:4, etc.) to the merit of the ruled (*Pol.* 1301b30-40). While on the surface this ratio increases the differences between the ruler and the ruled, when contrasted with numeric equality, the standard of equality of merit encourages rulers to educate the ruled, for the ruler's appreciation of his own superiority to the ruled depends upon him identifying the virtue of his citizens: the better he thinks of those who he rules, the higher he may judge his own virtue (see also *Pol.* 1333b25). On this standard, the best rulers are those who recognize and desire the best for their subjects. The best of all rulers aim at as much equality between ruled and ruler as possible, even if the difference is never fully reconcilable, and even grows by virtue of his aim. Whereas the ruler who considers his government in terms of numeric equality claims "to merit all things unequally . . . [because] they are unequal in some respect" (*Pol.* 1301b38-39), those who rule by way of meritorious equality recognize that they merit things unequally because they are equal in some respect.⁴³ The ruler who judges his own merit in proportion to those who he is ruling therefore recognizes both the limits and potential of his subjects. Such a ruler, by recognizing the limits of those he is ruling, can provide an education that suits the ruled, thereby allowing them to expand those limits. The ruler who recognizes the integrity of his subjects, as well as their limits, makes possible the

⁴³As noted earlier, oligarchic regimes—and the related oligarchic and kingly rule of the household—poses the danger of luxury, which Aristotle describes as the foundation of tyranny (*Pol.* 1295b14-24), on the grounds that the members of such households cannot rule politically, for they view the ruled with contempt.

education of the ruled, an education that reveals the potential of those ruled in a way that may even be educative of the ruler himself.

This account fits with Aristotle's account of the need for men to recognize the integrity of their wives and their children. As we have seen in this and previous chapters, his failure to do so leads to oligarchic and factional conflict not only within the family, but also within the city. As we have also seen, the ability to recognize the integrity of others is especially rooted in the affection of the mother and wife, an affection that she cultivates in her husband.

The importance of women to the political community is further emphasized when Aristotle gives his reasons for banning the flute. He notes the ancient myth which held that "Athena, though she had invented the flute threw it away" (*Pol.* 1341b2). The ancient myth also held that the satyr Marsyas took up what had been discarded, and challenged Apollo to a musical contest. Apollo with his lyre triumphed over Marsyas and flayed him.⁴⁴ Aristotle's reference therefore raises our appreciation for the flute-maker, who, according to the myth (and according to Aristotle), is a better judge of the flute (or at least the limits of the flute) than is the flutist, a claim that again runs counter to Aristotle's earlier remarks in the *Politics* which tied prudence to the flutist. Likewise, the example of Marsyas corrects the example of the flute-player as simply the proper analogy for rule, uncovering the importance of the ruler recognizing certain limits to his virtue (prudence), and the danger of doing otherwise.

Although the original metaphor of the flutist as the prudent ruler sharply distinguishes between the ruled and the ruler, it also shows that that distinction was not sufficient. For if the woman is ruled like a flute maker, and the man rules like the flute

⁴⁴ See Hyginus, *Fabulea*, 165; Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliothèque*, 1.4.2.

player, the man's rule depends upon the material provided by the woman and her art. Taking the material provided by nature, the woman forges something new (but consistent with the natural principles of music), and so fulfills Aristotle's criteria of "initiating" or "beginning" that is connected to the ability to acquire, an ability that he ties to men. The man's rule would therefore be limited by the flute she provides, and he would be required to preserve the flute, and especially the flute maker, in order to effect his rule.⁴⁵ Just as the activity of the woman would lose meaning without the actions of the flute player, the art of the man depends upon the art of the woman. On the one hand, the flute is responsible for the flutist in the same way as the household is responsible for the city. On the other hand, the flute player without a flute would be like a man without a city. He would be like the man of noble courage or magnanimity, in the sense that he would be defined simply by his character rather than by his deeds.

The woman's ability to acquire depends on her willingness to preserve or guard, just as her affection for her children made possible the development of political life. In other words, the female's concern with preservation turns out to be concerned with preserving oneself in a way that allows for an acquiring that goes beyond oneself. This reading is consistent with Aristotle's claim that "the ruler must have complete virtue of character (for a work belongs in an absolute sense to the master craftsman, and reason is a master craftsmen) while each of the others must have as much as falls to him" (*Pol.* 1260a16-19). If rulers must share in the virtues mentioned, they must similarly share in

⁴⁵As we have seen, men often tend to ignore or abstract from the work of women, and therefore tend to take their own ability to rule as sufficient, without regard to what might be offered by the women. The ruler who is like the flutist takes himself as wholly reasonable, and those he ruled to be incapable of prudence. If (as I suggested in Chapter Three) the woman's work of preserving herself and her child is responsible for founding the family, she is like the flute maker in doing so. This work, however allows her husband to rule absolutely, a result that poses the danger of obstructing the development of speech, education, and politics.

the work belonging to men and women, since (as indicated by the connection between courage and acquiring) their work would be the fulfillment of their virtues.

If men rule women, then in addition to their ability to acquire, they should similarly possess the virtue that guards or preserves, just as women, in addition to their ability to preserve, should share in the virtue that lends itself to acquiring. Thus, the claim that prudence belongs solely to the ruling man is an insufficient explanation of their relationship in its proper form, for it ignores the talents belonging to the woman and denies that there is any virtue beyond that which belongs to men: it denies the need for education, and the need to be ruled in turn or in part. This reading fits with Aristotle's claim that, although magnanimous Greeks introduced the flute in order to promote "every kind of learning," practice revealed it to be unable to contribute to virtue. The political rule of husbands and wives, like the political rule of the political community, depends upon each party recognizing the limits of their own virtue and therewith the need for relationships with other human beings.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion: The Family and Political Life

This concluding chapter compares Aristotle's account of familial life to the understanding provided by John Locke. I then sketch out the possibility of using Aristotle's account in a way that illuminates and directs the current judicial engagement of the family, and in a way that acts as a corrective to the influence of Locke.

Aristotle on the Family and Political Life

Aristotle, I have argued, shows the co-dependency of familial and political life. The success of political life depends upon healthy familial relationships, and those relationships must therefore be encouraged by the practitioners of politics. To explore the connection between the family and political life, I traced the development of the household and of political life, while examining the relationship between parents and their children, and between husbands and wives.

The importance of manliness to the development and practice of politics is in many ways obvious. Manly spiritedness encourages men to acquire new things, to desire to rule, and to seek honor and nobility through virtue. Yet, as I have emphasized, Aristotle shows that these manly attributes, when brought to their extreme, can also pose significant obstacles to the development and practice of political life, problems that are difficult, if not impossible, to overcome without the contribution of women. For instance, Aristotle indicates that men who exist prior to the development of the household may have difficulty seeing the importance of familial or political community. Likewise,

the man who rules the household as a king, because of his spiritedness, tends to define his household wholly by himself and so come to see it as complete, making it difficult for him to recognize both the integrity of the other members of the household, and the need to move beyond the household and into political life. And insofar as the move outside of the family does occur, because of the father's tendency to dominate the household, the move depends upon faction between fathers and sons, and between brothers. Because these factions are characteristic of oligarchies rather than political life, they do not fully represent a move outside of the family (for in oligarchies private wealth rather than political excellence is the standard for rule).

According to Aristotle, these difficulties are best solved by the work of women within the family. As we have seen, Aristotle suggests that the mother's concern for her child plays an important role in the creation of the household. More emphatically, Aristotle shows how the affection that a mother has for her children enables her to recognize and affirm their integrity as individuals in a way that makes her see the importance of their participation in life outside of the family, and in a way that makes her willing to release them from the family. The father's domination of the family and resistance to his children's independence qualifies as a condition necessary for the mother's friendly willingness to release her children, and Aristotle shows that to move beyond the father-dominated family and toward the development of political life requires the mother's love for her children. Aristotle therefore suggests turning over part of the rule of the household to the wife, thereby allowing her to exercise her particular excellences (including her excellences as a mother) while ruling within the family.

By giving affection a central role within the family, Aristotle paves the way not only for life outside the family, but also for political life rightly understood. The release from the family made possible by the influence of the mother means that rule within the city will no longer be simply tied to one's familial connection. Not only does this pave the way for greater participation in politics for all citizens, it makes political virtue, rather than the household, the standard of rule. And because the rule of the city no longer depends upon the rule of factious families, and since entrance into political life is peaceful, there is more room within the civic sphere for the development of the political affection that Aristotle says is necessary to a healthy political community.

In Chapter Eight I explored the conditions necessary for effecting this move toward political life. The woman's influence depends upon men recognizing the importance of her affection and of her virtues, and Aristotle indicates that this recognition depends upon friendship between husbands and wives. This friendship is supportive of a healthy political community, not only because it helps to develop a family structure that allows for the influence of the woman, but also because it teaches rulers the importance of recognizing the integrity of the ruled, and therewith the importance of political rule. As we saw, however, the cultivation of friendship between men and women can be obstructed by the strengths and weakness of both sexes: manly continence and endurance abstract from the need for friendship, and womanly softness poses the danger of a luxuriousness that fails to see the importance of manly virtue. In response to this problem, Aristotle aims at educating both men and women. This education, by emphasizing the importance of speech, encourages friendship and political rule at the

level of both the family and the city, thereby providing a more just foundation for political life.

Once political life is established, the defining features of men and women take on different aspects. Political life creates space for men to exercise their spiritedness in a way that does not end in their dominating the family. While this creates space for the practice of virtue necessary to a healthy polity, it also brings with it the danger that men will excessively pursue the nobility promised by virtue in a way that will lead them to disengage from political life, and finally from human life itself. As we have seen, the family acts as an important check on this tendency, for it reminds men of their mortality and of their important connections to other human beings. It reminds them that they are not complete, but rather social and political animals who are fitted for friendship.

Aristotle and Locke on the Family

Aristotle's profound account of the family reveals the limits of Locke's political theory. Locke's system of government is famous for its concern for the protection of property and human rights, and I began this dissertation by analyzing Locke's account of both. Following Michael Zuckert's reading, we saw that, for Locke, there is finally no distinction between property and human rights. On Locke's teaching, all rights, like all external property, derive from self-ownership, an ownership that depends on one's reason. To achieve the self-ownership that is at the foundation of Locke's account of rights requires that one have no obligations to others, and especially not to one's family. This, of course, fits with Locke's claim that the foundation of society is the forging of a contract by completely free individuals.

In articulating his theory of rights and government, Locke presents himself as the destroyer of patriarchy and as the defender of sexual equality. But he achieves this equality by rejecting fatherly authority rather than by endorsing the mother's role in the family. By denying the natural family, Locke presents men and women as equal, or at least equal in the sense that they are both free from any familial obligations. Note that if Aristotle is right that the woman's political influence stems from (even if it is not limited to) her relationship to her children and her ability to rule within the household, Locke's undermining of the family turns out to be an attack on the influence of the woman rather than the influence of the man. Indeed, without the woman's influence, the man would be free to dangerously abstract from his children, and from social and political life.

Locke's account of rights, property, and government is not new. As we have seen, what he describes fits well with Aristotle's account of an unmitigated manliness that denies the integrity of the family. The tendency of manliness to view itself as complete and as even the source of one's own being—the very tendency that Aristotle critiques—forms the basis of Locke's doctrine. As Aristotle shows, what follows from this view of human life is the dismissal of the integrity of other human beings and therewith the importance of social and political life. It is not surprising, then, that Locke's doctrine of rights and politics depends on a radical liberty that denies the significance of, and is even antithetical to, the natural family. As we saw, Aristotle shows such an approach to be self defeating. We are therefore compelled to wonder whether Locke's assertion of individual rights, by proving inimical to community, does not finally prove inimical to rights themselves.

Aristotle, Locke, and the American Tradition

In my introductory chapter, I examined the ways in which Locke's radical individualism manifests itself in the contemporary practice of politics, focusing especially on the reasoning used by members of the Supreme Court in decisions that involve the family. As we saw, the turn toward a Lockean approach to the family began with the Court's articulation of a right to privacy in *Griswold v. Connecticut*. While the right to privacy was originally meant to defend the family, it was quickly used to free individuals from the family—most especially through the abortion decisions. That the right to privacy, which claimed to defend the family, culminates in radical individualism is not surprising to readers of Aristotle, who know that this privacy claim, by denying the crucial relationship between the family and political life, denied the very relationship that makes the family worthy of defense. Indeed, since this relationship is the very thing that Locke's liberty grounded rights undermines, it is not surprising that the Court finally transforms the privacy argument into one grounded on radical liberty. Here, one might even conclude that the Court was following in Locke's footsteps, affirming the family on the one hand while building its jurisprudence upon a theoretical foundation that cannot finally provide a coherent defense of the family over and against individual rights.

In support of this reading, one may point not only to the Court's defense of a woman's freedom to procure an abortion, but also to its articulation of rights expressed as individual autonomy in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey's* famous liberty phrase, a phrase repeated in *Lawrence v. Texas*. As I have indicated, the liberty phrase is striking in light of the work of Locke, not only because it is expressive of his theory of rights grounded in self-ownership, but also because Locke himself shows that the working out of his theory

depends upon overcoming the challenge posed by the natural family: we should not be surprised that the Court's most direct articulation of Lockean liberty-grounded rights occurs in decisions that support the most direct challenges to the natural family and its relationships. Indeed, as indicated by the writings of Ginsberg, some members of the Court have even been willing to confront the implications of their reasoning, admitting that their doctrine of rights is antithetical to the family.

The trend in the Court's opinions toward favoring radical individualism over and against a defense of the family raises the question of whether we are simply witnessing the working out of Lockean principles as Zuckert and Grant claim we must. The moves toward liberty-grounded rights and away from the traditional defense of the family would seem to confirm Zuckert's and Grant's claim that America is a regime concerned with Lockean rights, and that these rights always trump any appeal to tradition. Indeed, if only tradition is on the side of the family, it should not surprise us that the Court would side with individual rights, for the Court rarely finds tradition to be a sufficient legal argument.¹ Nor should it, for while the weight of tradition provides an appropriate check

¹This view would be consistent with the Court's argument in several cases. For instance in *Texas v. Johnson* the Court rejected Rehnquist's argument that flag-burning should be prohibited because tradition had established the flag as a unique symbol. Likewise, in *U. S. v. Virginia*, unlike Scalia, the Court did not find the tradition of accepting only men into Virginia Military Institute to control its decision. I am, of course, aware of the Court's appeal to *stare decisis* in upholding *Roe v. Wade* in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, but take this to be evidence that the Court breaks with its general approach to law while upholding its defense of abortion. O'Connor, in making the argument for *stare decisis* in *Casey*, claims that in highly controversial cases (she cites *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Roe v. Wade*) *stare decisis* must be controlling, since "the Court's interpretation of the Constitution calls the contending sides of a national controversy to end their national division by accepting a common mandate rooted in the Constitution." *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U. S. 867 (1992). But *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned the equally (or even more) controversial *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which dealt with the same question. Indeed, in *The Majesty of Law*, O'Connor herself implicitly admits that her use of that doctrine in *Casey* was inconsistent. There, citing *Brown v. Board of Education* as evidence, she argues that "the business of the Court is to resolve controversies, not to create them." Sandra Day O'Connor, *The Majesty of Law* (New York: Random House, 2003), 15. Yet soon after she writes: "no one it seems, considers the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* to have settled the issue for all time. Such intense debate by citizens is as it should be" (45). For a discussion of the Court's use of *stare decisis* in *Casey*, see James

on the temptation for radical judgments, and even provides a guide to proper judgment, the power of the Court rests not in the preservation of tradition simply, but in exercising judgment—the judgment of reasoned argument that says what the law is and how it applies in the particular.

Political Alternatives to Locke

On the other hand, the recent turn toward a Lockean view of the family in some judicial opinions is finally hard to reconcile with other important lines of judicial opinions.² For while Lockean views of human beings and their associations have found their way into Supreme Court opinions involving the family, there are other lines of judicial opinions that protect and support the family through appeals to political interests.

For instance, in *Akron v. Akron* the Court began to more strongly weigh the political community's interest in protecting life against the autonomy of the individual that serves as the basis of the right to an abortion.³ *Gonzales v. Carhart* went further, upholding a ban on partial birth abortion and checking liberty-grounded rights, on the grounds that: "respect for human life finds an ultimate expression in the bond of love the mother has for her child."⁴ On Justice Kennedy's reasoning in this case, the mother's

Stoner, "Common Law and Constitutionalism in the Abortion Cases," *The Review of Politics* 5, no. 3 (1993): 421-441, especially 431-432.

²Although Locke may have provided us with a theoretically consistent model of rights, we have seen that the consistency of his model depended upon the rejection of the family and its relationships as natural. But even Locke admitted the necessity of the family to his liberal project, and was therefore careful to obscure his criticisms of its natural ties. If the theory does not account for the practices it admits are necessary, might we not question the ground of its consistency? Moreover, if Zuckert is right that the issue of abortion reveals the essential character of Locke's theory, that theory finally requires even the public freeing of oneself from any natural obligation to the family. What is consistent in theory may not be able to sustain what is necessary in practice.

³*Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health*, 462 U.S. 416 (1983).

⁴*Gonzales v. Carhart*, 550 U. S. ____ (2007).

love for her child is connected to the state's interest in both protecting life and affirming it as good.

A strange claim to Lockean ears. Indeed, we may note that when Zuckert compares the Thomistic account that justice precedes right with Locke's argument that right precedes justice, the relationship between love and justice (as articulated by Aristotle) is nowhere to be found. It cannot be found because, as his account of radical liberty and self-ownership suggests, and as we have even seen, Locke finally denies the importance of our relationships with other human beings, except perhaps insofar as they are something to be overcome. If Justice Kennedy is right that the mother's love overlaps with the interest of the state, then it is not surprising that the Court's strongest defenders of the right to procure an abortion inevitably turn away from political and familial life, and toward individual autonomy. As Justice Ginsberg's account implies, even in the most extreme cases, the claim of liberty-based rights delegitimizes any and all appeals to the natural family. Such a view is difficult to reconcile with the Court's constitutional responsibility to exercise judgment.

The Family and Rights

Thus, while it is true that America is concerned with rights, and that this concern has always finally trumped any appeal to tradition, it is also true that the concern for liberty-based rights has not always trumped political interests, especially when those interests are bound together with the family.

In order to see more clearly the ways in which lines of judicial opinions affirm the integrity of the family by tying it to the political realm, it is useful to note that, when the Court overturned *Adkins v. Children's Hospital* in *West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish*,

Justice Hughes argued that the right to contract is not grounded in an absolute liberty interest, but is rather subject to the due process of law.⁵ As a result, the Court allowed not only for the institution of a minimum wage, but for distinguishing (under certain circumstances) between men and women in doing so, since the maternal role of women means that her physical wellbeing becomes “an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race.”⁶ Thereby protecting minimum wage legislation, Justice Hughes again strongly affirmed the legitimacy of laws aimed at protecting women’s role in the family, arguing: “freedom of contract is a qualified, and not an absolute, right. . . . Liberty implies the absence of arbitrary restraint, not immunity from reasonable regulations and prohibitions imposed in the interests of the community.”⁷

This approach to liberty and community helps to shed light on the Justice Kennedy’s claim in *Gonzales v. Carhart* that “respect for human life finds an ultimate expression in the bond of love the mother has for her child.” Indeed, here Kennedy’s

⁵While *Adkins v. Children’s Hospital* overturned the law providing minimum wage for women but not men, it did so on the grounds that the law did not accomplish its goal of protecting health and morals. *Adkins* did not deny that the States could, within certain bounds, effect acts meant “to protect the women and minors . . . from conditions detrimental to their health and morals, resulting from wages which are inadequate to maintain decent standards of living.” *Adkins v. Children’s Hospital*, 261 U. S. 561 (1923).

⁶*West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish*, 300 U. S. 379 (1937), 394. Since *West Coast Hotel*, the Court has, in accordance with the social progress made by women, has increasingly recognized the many capacities of women without denying their specific and unique contributions to family life. Even when the emphasis shifted toward individual rights in *Reed v. Reed*, which extended equal protection to women in a way that challenged traditional sex roles, the Court nevertheless continued to acknowledge that “the Court has consistently recognized that the Fourteenth Amendment does not deny to States the power to treat different classes of persons in different ways.” *Reed v. Reed*, 404 U. S. 75 (1971). Although the Court held in *Frontiero v. Richardson* that all classifications based upon sex, “like classifications based upon race, alienage, and national origin,” are “inherently suspect, and must therefore be subjected to close judicial scrutiny”, the Court in *Kahn v. Shevin*, *Stanton v. Stanton*, and *Craig v. Boren*, clearly asserted the possibility of legal distinctions upon sexual differences, especially grounding those differences in women’s ability to have children. *Frontiero v. Richardson*, 411 U. S. 677 (1973); *Kahn v. Shevin*, 416 U. S. 351 (1974); *Stanton v. Stanton*, 421 U. S. 7 (1975); *Craig v. Boren*, 429 U. S. 190 (1976).

⁷*West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish*, 300 U. S. 379 (1937), 394.

opinion goes so far as to remind us that the liberty protected by the 14th Amendment is accompanied by the protection of life, and even suggests that the respect for this right may depend on the love a mother has for her child.

These opinions in support of the family nicely fit with the understanding of the family and political life offered by Aristotle. Like Aristotle, these opinions recognize the need to ground liberty in our existence as part of a political community.⁸ And at the very moment they do so, they argue that the health of the political community is dependent on the integrity of familial relationships. The Court's answer to why the state must defend the family is its capacity to produce citizens supportive of the regime. For the American regime, the family is worth defending because (among other reasons) it produces citizens supportive of the regime's recognition of the equality, and therewith the rights, of other persons and citizens.

Liberty is directed by law and therefore by our obligations as citizens to the political community.⁹ The political community in turn, by recognizing the integrity of its citizens, simultaneously supports their participation in political life, and therewith their freedom. As Aristotle shows, a polity thus constructed depends on healthy families. These families affirm the goodness of human life by cultivating friendships within the family, friendships that help the family see the integrity of its members, and therefore the importance of releasing its members to freely participate in the political realm.

⁸Robert Araujo articulates the importance of the common good to the American regime through his analysis of the Supreme Court's decision in *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, and Kennedy's dissent in *Stenberg v. Carhart*, which argued for the need to submit individual rights to the common good. "The Legal Order and the Common Good: Abortion Rights as Contradiction of Constitutional Purposes," *Life and Learning* XI: 65-86. While I agree with Araujo that the Court does have room to weigh the common good in its decisions, I believe he fails to articulate the proper limits to this practice when he endorses Kennedy's appeal to international law (79).

⁹*Crowley v. Christensen*, 137 U.S. 86 (1890), 89-90.

Thus, in contrast to Locke's account, which attempts to ground politics, and therewith human life, on a theory of individual rights, *Gonzales v. Carhart*, in a way consistent with Aristotle's account of the family, suggests that respect for the individual must be grounded upon the goodness of life, a goodness taught and affirmed by political and familial communities. Unlike the Lockean account which fails to fully account for the affections that support familial relationships, Justice Kennedy suggests what is understood by Aristotle: that these relationships can work to cultivate a respect for the individual integrity of others, a respect that is needed to recognize rights and to develop and maintain a healthy and diverse polity.

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