# GUARDIANS OF MORALITY:
# A CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF VIRTUE IN RELATIONSHIP TO WOMEN AND MORAL AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

by

**JOCELYN MARIE BORYCZKA**

VOLUME I

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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## Abstract

**Guardians of Morality:**
**A Conceptual History of Virtue in Relationship to Women and Moral and Political Discourse in American Democracy**

**by**

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When women struggle for inclusion, freedom, and equality in American politics, they encounter the political concept of virtue that, this analysis argues, operates in political discourse to limit their success in achieving these goals. Although some feminists (Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Kittay, 1999; Tronto, 1993) and contemporary political theorists (Rawls, 1971; MacIntyre, 1981; Galston, 1991; Berkowitz, 1999) debate whether or not virtue should inform political life, a systematic analysis of this political concept remains absent from the literature. This dissertation begins to fill this gap, using James Farr's approach to creating a conceptual history. Specifically, this dissertation examine texts from three periods in American political history that highlight how virtue establishes women's relationship to politics: the eras of Puritanism, republicanism, and Jacksonian democracy (1630 - 1850), the sexual revolution (1963 - 1989), and the contemporary culture wars (1980 - Present).

These periods reveal that when America's exceptional future hangs in the balance, women's virtue and vice surface in the political discourse as a moral compass to guide the


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nation between the push of progress and pull of tradition. Virtue functions to cast American women as the nation's moral guardians - keepers of morality and religion in the private sphere - an identity designed to align them with protecting the nation during periods of pronounced political change. Alternatively, women's vice represents a challenge to the status quo that must be contained. By aligning women's virtue with the status quo and assigning them vice for advocating progressive change, these two moral concepts function politically to deny women full citizenship. Ultimately, this project argues that virtue is a political concept detrimental to feminist political theory and ethics as well as activism. As such, this project turns to the question, are there alternative ways of thinking about morality and politics that are more consistent with achieving the feminist goals of freedom, equality, and inclusion?

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## Acknowledgments

This project is dedicated to Anthony David Acevedo, my life partner and best friend whose unwavering support of this endeavor made it possible. His constant belief in me bolstered my confidence and gave me the strength to continue, particularly when it was the most difficult. Moreover, Tony performed more reproductive labor - from dishes to copying - than duty, friendship, or obligation require. Such labor freed me to focus on this project amidst incredible time constraints. Tony also acted as my intellectual sounding board, listening to me read chapters and flesh out ideas. Often his comments pushed me in a new direction. As such, in many ways, this project belongs to Tony as well. And now that it's done, *bon temps roulez*!

Joan Tronto acted as an intellectual partner in this project, a role that Joan played throughout much of my academic career at The Graduate Center. In my second semester, I took Joan's Feminist Theory seminar, one of those rare courses that actually changes the trajectory of a student's intellectual endeavors. There, I came to appreciate feminist theory as a critical perspective from which one can ask some of the most difficult and interesting questions about how to envision better - more equal, fair, and inclusive - political communities. This awareness and, oddly enough, a Tocqueville paper launched my commitment to feminist political theory. Throughout this project, Joan encouraged me to think "outside the box," to work against easy, pre-existing interpretations of material, and to seek out unusual locations for analysis. This more "organic" approach challenged me to explore ideas freely and gave birth to chapters such as that on the Lowell mill girls. I hope to impart this love of unfettered intellectual exploration to my students for many years to come. In the future, I only hope that I can live up to the standards of excellent scholarship, teaching, and active concern for the world that I learned from Joan.

Other members of my dissertation committee critically contributed to this project and my professional development over many years. Hester Eisenstein, an amazing activist, feminist, friend, and colleague, acted as a powerful mentor who modeled feminist practice for me and many other women at The Graduate Center. Her critical insights into this project, particularly from a Marxist perspective, sharpened its critical edge and strengthened the analysis. Burt Zwiebach, my first contact at The Graduate Center, helped me develop many of the ideas that coalesced into this project in his courses and through his detailed and thoughtful comments on earlier work. Ruth O'Brien offered solid advice and support on this project and others throughout my years at The Graduate Center. Initially as my "virtual mentor," Mary Hawkesworth modeled feminist practice as a scholar committed to cultivating the talents of other feminist theorists. Her scholarship, activism, teaching, and support of other feminist scholars, including myself, will help to shape the future of feminist political theory and Women's Studies.

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In addition, I owe a special debt of gratitude to my "sisters in struggle" - the women of WKWA, a dissertation group that formed to provide material and emotional support to feminist scholars at The Graduate Center. Although many of us were friends before the formation of WKWA, this "institutionalizing" of our labor established strong bonds that now shape our lives in a profound way. Collectively, WKWA represents an attempt to carve out a feminist space within the still oppressive constraints that academia places on women. Individually, each member of WKWA contributed in unique and critical ways to this project's development. Jen Disney, one of my first friends at The Graduate Center, offered years of support in numerous (and sometimes endless) phone conversations, dinners at Ollie's, and beers at O'Reilly's. Jen also encouraged me to do things outside my "comfort zone" such as serving as the DSC Co-chair for Communications. Dot Benz acted as my daily confident in the highs and lows of the dissertation struggle which we documented in the "morning reports." From this difficult process, I happily reap the rewards of our life-long friendship. In addition to offering critical insights into the dissertation (especially the breaking up of Part One), Susanna Jones always expressed a faith and belief in my ability to complete this project that served as a very real source of strength for me over many years. Dorinda Tetens always challenged me with her unique critical perspective on the world that helped me to see things differently on both an emotional and intellectual level. Dorinda's commitment to challenging the boundaries and oppression in this world serve as an inspiration in this project. Despite her claims not to know anything about political science, Ronni Greenwood offered excellent insight into this project and her participation in WKWA gave me the opportunity to become her friend, an invaluable gift. Tracy Steffy always made WKWA meetings intellectually exciting and motivated me to work hard the next day. Effie MacLaughlin, one of my oldest friends at The Graduate Center, closely read chapters, providing excellent insight, and, most importantly, made us all laugh when things got too serious. Together, these women represent a fearless and powerful force in the world and my life.

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Throughout this process and long before, members of my family, friends, and the

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Acevedos greatly facilitated this project's completion. My mom, Pat Michaels inspires me with her endless enthusiasm, love for life, and boundless physical and intellectual energy. She made her life what she wanted it to be which makes her a guiding light for all women who struggle to do as much. Her support through e-mails, visits, phone calls, and silly gifts helped ease the difficulties of this process. Russell and Tom came to visit and their general good-natured perspective on the world always helps me see things in a different way. Raymond Boryczka inspired my love of intellectual debate and teaching for which I remain eternally grateful. Neal and Susan Kennedy also helped along the way with much engaging conversation, many incredible dinners, and endless glasses of good wine. The Acevedos - Chris, Barrett, Avery, Andres, Olivia, Leslie, Yanai, Sevan, Jose, and Ruth - embraced me as a member of their family and gave material and emotional support when it really counted. In particular, Ruth Acevedo served as an early model of feminism in my life when I started graduate school at Wayne State University. Ruth broke ground for other women by starting a law firm when no others would hire a female attorney and then fighting to protect the rights of people often left at the margins of the justice system. Although an "unsung" hero in one sense, Ruth's memory and spirit act as an inspiration for continuing to overcome obstacles and pushing forward for the freedom, equality, and inclusion of women everywhere.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction:
## A Conceptual History of Women's Virtue In American Political Discourse

### 1.1: The Rising Tide of Virtue: Religious Fundamentalism, American Exceptionalism & Women's Moral Guardianship

When America's exceptional future hangs in the balance, women's virtue and vice surface in the political discourse to act as a moral compass to guide the nation between the push of progress and pull of tradition. Virtue historically functions to cast American women as the nation's moral guardians - keepers of morality and religion in the private sphere. In response to changing historical contexts, this political status takes different cultural forms ranging from the Puritan wife, Republican Mother, and pioneer woman to the Victorian Lady and Traditional Woman. Women's virtue aligns them with tradition as protectors of morality and religion, the bedrock of social institutions such as marriage and the family that anchor the nation at times of political change. Alternatively, their vice represents a challenge to the status quo that must be contained. Working in tandem, virtue and vice establish women's relationship to politics in terms of moral guardianship, a status that binds their citizenship to the legacy of American exceptionalism, making female virtue, despite women's relative lack of power, an important factor at moments of political change. To examine this dynamic, this project focuses on three periods critical to creating a conceptual history of women's virtue and illustrating how women's morality establishes their relationship to American politics. These periods include: the Puritan, republican, and Jacksonian democracy eras (1630-1850) that represent the construction of moral

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guardianship in American political discourse; the Sexual Revolution (1963 - 1989) when second wave feminists identified moral guardianship as Traditional Womanhood in order to embrace and challenge their political status; and the contemporary backlash (1980 - Present) against feminists discussed here in terms of communitarian and care theorists' responses to women's morality in a political discourse dominated by family values rhetoric. This conceptual history clarifies how the virtue-vice dualism operates to establish moral guardianship as a powerful force in denying women full citizenship throughout American political discourse.

The recent upsurge of religious fundamentalism and patriotism in the United States corresponds with increased attention to women's virtue and morality that parallels the rise of conservatism. The current backlash began in the mid-1970s when the Moral Majority, led by Jerry Falwell, formed in response to the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and the expanded freedoms and rights gained for women by second wave feminists. In time, the broader based Christian Right delivered two million voters to Ronald Reagan in 1980, helping him to win the White House and earning their movement a position of power in the Republican party. The Christian Right's rise and the nation's move towards religious fundamentalism parallels the so-called "death of feminism" that many proclaimed throughout the 1980s, a clear indicator of an anti-feminist backlash in full swing. Illustrating the continued power of moral guardianship in contemporary discourse, Jerry Falwell, for instance, announced on "The 700 Club," following the September 11th attacks, "'I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People

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for the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America. I point the finger in their face and say 'you helped this happen.'"[1] Such statements indicate the belief of social conservatives and religious fundamentalists that women's increased freedom, equality, and inclusion literally places America's future in jeopardy.

The culture wars over abortion, pornography, gay rights, and "family values" renewed virtue's prominence in popular discourse. William Bennett, for instance, published *The Book of Virtues* (1993), a primer to help parents train their children to lead a virtuous life by developing the proper morality and character for citizenship. Speaking directly to women, Wendy Shallitt's *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue* (1999) praises the feminine virtue of modesty to which women should return given the chaos and anxiety caused by the sexual freedoms granted in the 1960s and 70s. Other scholars such as Andre Comte-Sponville in his *A Small Treatise on the Great Virtues* (1996) draw on Western philosophy to offer a guide to the virtues critical to everyday life. Overall, such positions represent a call for Americans to virtue, the moral compass necessary for leading the good life and creating stability amidst the chaos and moral relativism generated by the 1960s and 70s when women, students, African-Americans, gays and lesbians, and the poor challenged prevailing moral standards and fought for inclusion in the American polity.

Contemporary virtue discourse parallels a rise in religious sentiment that now, as it has in the past, takes a fundamentalist turn. Today, journalists and commentators identify

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[1] "Falwell Apologizes to Gays, Feminists, Lesbians," 14 Sept. 2001. *CNN.com/U.S.* 4 Mar. 2004 <http://www.cnn.com/2001/US/09/14/Falwell.apology/>. In response to public outcry, Falwell did apologize for his remarks.

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the United States as perhaps the most religious of the Western democracies with "more churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques per capita in the United States than in any other nation on Earth: one for about every 865 people," and "more than 4 in 5 Americans say they have 'experienced God's presence or a spiritual force' close to them."[2] A resurgence in religious belief often transforms from personal faith to political practice during times of social upheaval such as that caused by September 11th, the longer term structural changes associated with the two-parent working family, and the shifting boundaries between public and private life accompanying women's increasing participation in the workplace and politics. Reaching for the stability of religion and the moral traditions embedded in family and marriage, Americans hope to stave off the inevitability of change. As a result, religion gains a central role in partisan politics. Commentator Nicholas Kristof, for instance, states that "America is riven today by a 'God gulf' of distrust, dividing churchgoing Republicans from relatively secular Democrats. A new Great Awakening is sweeping the country, with Americans increasingly telling pollsters that they believe in prayer and miracles, while only 28 percent say they believe in evolution."[3] On a local level, school boards push for school prayer and some aim to remove evolutionary theory from their curriculum. On the national level, abstinence and marriage education represent key public policy initiatives for preserving the traditional virtue of chastity and institution of marriage. Rising religious fundamentalism coincides

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[2] Jeffery L. Sheler. "The Ways of Worship," *U.S. News & World Report* 3 Feb. 2004: 7.

[3] "The God Gulf," *The New York Times* 7 Jan. 2004. <www.nytimes.com/2004/01/07/opinion/07KRIS.html>.

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with political attention to reestablishing women as moral guardians, protectors of virtue, tradition, and the status quo in order to anchor society and prevent further moral decay.

The heavy burden of moral responsibility emanates from women's virtue tradition that constructs them as moral guardians of American exceptionalism, a dominant cultural belief introduced by the Puritan minister and Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop who proclaimed to his brethren that their's would be a "city upon a hill" granted to them by God. Centuries later, conservative presidents draw upon the biblical justification for American exceptionalism to advocate America's "goodness" or virtue compared to its adversaries such as the "evil Empire" of the Soviet Union. Invoking this belief, President Ronald Reagan, for instance, echoed this biblical injunction in his farewell address, explaining that "I've thought a bit about the 'shining city upon a hill.' The phrase comes from John Winthrop, who wrote it to describe the America he imagined...I've spoken of the shining city all my political life...in my mind it was a tall proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace..."[4] Following in these footsteps, President George W. Bush, Jr.'s inaugural address also drew on this biblical discourse by telling Americans that "we must live up to the calling we share;" "when we see that wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not pass to the other side;" and concludes with "this story goes on. And an angel still rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm."[5] A "calling" or

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[4] In Kurt Ritter and David Henry's *Ronald Reagan: The Great Communicator* (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1992), 184-5.

[5] "President: 'I Ask You To Be Citizens," *New York Times* 21 Jan. 2001, L14 +.

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mission inspired by God, Jericho, a town of great biblical importance, and an angel all characterize an address calling for American greatness by intertwining religious faith with an exceptional political future that all citizens should embrace. This biblically inspired discourse portrays America as the democratic light of God that must, contrary to international opinion, save countries such as Iraq from evil dictators and lead the way to democracy. In line with this rhetoric, Bush declared Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, the "Axis of Evil," and essentially depicted Saddam Hussein as the devil.

Relying on moral dualisms such as good and evil to promote American exceptionalism tracks a religious fundamentalism antithetical to feminism. This ideological position contracts - not expands - women's equality, freedom, rights, and inclusion by championing a return to oppressive moral and religious traditions. Although Americans readily target Muslim countries for their cultural conservatism, the United States currently embraces similar positions. As Ellen Willis articulates, "the legacy of patriarchalism still weighs on us: Our institutions resist change, and our psyches remain more conservative than the actual condition of our lives. As a result we are deeply anxious and ambivalent about cultural issues, and one way to deal with this is to deny their importance, even sometimes their existence."[6] In this context, women's virtue and vice link their morality to religion and politics through their association with the biblical strand of American exceptionalism that should raise some serious concerns for feminists as these historical moments usually result in concerted and successful efforts to roll back advances towards

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[6] "Bringing the Holy War Home," in *Nothing Sacred: Women Respond to Religious Fundamentalism and Terror*, ed. Betsy Reed (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2002), 375.

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women's full citizenship. While virtue aligns women with the conservative status quo and traditional moral beliefs that oppress them and limit their full citizenship, their vice represents challenges to the reigning political order that labels women who resist the tenets of moral guardianship as "suspect" citizens working against the nation's exceptional destiny, a particularly dangerous status in the current political climate.

Women's virtue characterizes their central political status in terms of, what I call, moral guardianship, a status that links them to the broader cultural discourse of American exceptionalism and a burden of moral responsibility for their families, communities, and ultimately the nation's common good. As women fight to retain their current rights and to expand them to achieve full citizenship, the current resurgence in religious fundamentalism, cultural conservatism, and American exceptionalism constrain such efforts. Whether Bill Bennet, Wendy Shallitt, or President George W. Bush, these voices represent the fact that virtue and women's political function as the nation's moral guardians has returned to the forefront of American political discourse. This fact carries important political implications for women that this project explores in order to illustrate the serious limitations that virtue poses for advancing the feminist goals of freedom, inclusion, and equality, and the promise of vice.

## 1.2: The Project's Significance

Four questions focus this project's analysis. First, what conceptual mechanisms function in American political discourse to perpetuate the on-going cycle of backlashes against women's advances towards full citizenship? Second, what are the implications of

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framing moral and political discourse in terms of virtue for the democratic and feminist goals of freedom, equality, and inclusion? Third, is virtue more beneficial or detrimental to achieving these goals in the contemporary political context? Fourth, what alternatives to the virtue-vice dualism are there to thinking about the relationship of morality to a more feminist and democratic politics?

To answer these questions, this project systematically analyzes women's virtue in American political discourse at key moments in the development of women's moral and political status to create a conceptual history of women's virtue and, thereby, fill a gap in the literature of political theory on conceptual change. Although no such study exists, virtue represents a pertinent contribution to the wave of feminist scholarship that revisions a range of political concepts (Koggel, 1998; Hirschmann and Di Stefano, 1996; Tronto, 1993; Okin, 1989). Generally speaking, theorists approach virtue as an uncontested concept, one that is gender neutral and an assumed good or benefit for women and citizens more generally. Theorists of conceptual change, however, view many other concepts such as freedom, justice, power, care, and equality as "essentially contested,"[7] or those at the nexus of transformative political struggles that make them dynamic, without an essential meaning, and open to constant interpretation. Such concepts act as tools for debating or contesting the constellation of diverse and conflicting beliefs, opinions, and values that form an integral relationship between politics and concepts. As William

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[7] W.B. Gallie developed this term in "Essentially Contested Concepts," in *The Importance of Language*, ed. Max Black (Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1962), 121-146. William Connolly develops it further in *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

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Connolly describes,

> actions and practices are *constituted* in part by the concepts and beliefs the participants themselves have. The concepts of politics are, that is, part of the political process itself; they give coherence and structure to political activities in something like the way the rules of chess provide the content that makes 'moving the bishop' and 'checkmating' possible as acts in the game of chess.[8]

Despite its appearance as uncontested, virtue is an essentially contested concept that gives "coherence and structure to political activities" by working in conjunction with vice to create the moral rules for women's relationship to political life as moral guardians or suspect citizens. Framing virtue in these terms offers an excellent means for determining how the dynamics of political power operate through women's morality.

Approaching virtue from a feminist perspective reveals how this essentially contested concept functions as a mechanism for shaping women's primary political identity in terms of moral guardianship. This term, as used here, describes the political status assigned to women based on their double burden of moral responsibility for guarding or protecting virtue, morality, and religious belief in the private sphere as a means of preserving the status quo and the nation's exceptional future. Moral guardianship derives from the discourse of mid-18th century America during the Victorian era when society charged women with keeping morality in the home. This term captures how women's morality and virtue established their initial relationship to politics that continues to shape the limitations placed upon their citizenship and to generate backlashes against women's progress.

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville identified women's morality as

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[8] *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 36.

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politically significant to American democracy which makes his political thought that critically informs this view of moral guardianship important to this analysis. Tocqueville still possesses an undeniably authoritative voice in contemporary American political discourse and sets the tenor for debate on the nature of American political culture. Almost two hundred years after traveling to America, journalists, commentators, and scholars constantly turn to the *Democracy* for insights about, among other things, individualism, morality, racism, the tyranny of the majority, and other ailments that continue to plague American democracy.[9] As Sheldon Wolin notes, the two major American contributions to political theory arguably are *The Federalist Papers* and *Democracy in America.*[10] Despite his centrality in contemporary American political discourse, feminists, generally speaking, dismiss Tocqueville's political thought on women and the family.[11] Jean Bethke Elshtain in *Public Man Private Woman*[12] and Susan Moller

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9 A recent *New York Times Magazine* article even invoked Tocqueville to show that repression, the psychological act of denial, would contradict an individual's right to self-expression and, therefore, would be "anti-American." See, Lauren Slater. "Repress Yourself," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 23, 2003: 52.

10 *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3.

11 Feminists are not alone on this point. Tocqueville's contemporary John Stuart Mill also dismisses Tocqueville's thoughts on the private sphere as unimportant in his introduction to *Democracy in America*. Mill writes, "we must omit...the connexion which our author attempts to trace between equality of conditions and strictness of domestic morals, and some other remarks on domestic society in America, which do not appear to be of any considerable value" [*Democracy in America* (New York: Shocken Books, 1961), xxxii].

12 In "Women, Equality, and the Family," in *Journal of Democracy* 11 (2000): 157-163, Elshtain returns to Tocqueville's treatment of women and the family in the *Democracy*. Yet, Elshtain's analysis, I find, fails to challenge the conservative position on women's relationship to the family and religion in Tocqueville's thought. As such, I find

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Okin in *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, for instance, mention Tocqueville briefly, only to immediately dismiss him as uninteresting to feminist theorists because he sustains the traditional division of male public and female private life. More recently, feminists such as Laura Janara investigate the relationship between Tocqueville's views on family and women and democratic theory.[13] For the purposes of this analysis, Tocqueville's recognition of women as the "keepers of mores" and religion who, as such, play a central role in securing order amidst the chaos of democracy informs this portrayal of moral guardianship as integral to American exceptionalism.

Virtue and vice constitute the moral dynamics of women's guardianship illustrated in this analysis by the categories of infinite and finite virtue and vice. Finite virtue refers to the expression of moral behavior as established by the political community through physical activities in the material world. Cheerfulness, chastity, modesty, and fidelity, for instance, dictate acceptable behaviors for women in relationship to men, their husbands, and society. Infinite virtue applies to the spiritual, often religious dimension of moral excellence that transcends the material world and guides women's actions towards a higher purpose. Piety and sacrifice, for instance, direct women to possess a religious faith in God that empowers them to sacrifice worldly goods for Him and their families. By affiliating women with religion and a higher spiritual plane within a secular democracy, infinite virtue creates in women a capacity for maintaining the common good given their

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this piece more consistent with communitarian and conservative than feminist positions.

[13] See *Democracy Growing Up: Authority, Autonomy, and Passion in Tocqueville's Democracy in America* (Albany, NY: State University Press, 2002).

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ability to transcend this world and encompass the spirit of a nation. As such, infinite virtue associates women with the sacred and expresses the role of moral purity in the female character. Moreover, this dimension of virtue enables society to hold women to a double burden of moral responsibility for their families and the entire nation's exceptional future although they lack the political power to fulfill this duty. Infinite and finite virtue function together to form the moral character that denies women real political power while holding them morally responsible for the nation's well being. Female virtue protects against the decay of the common good by securing religion, moral traditions and institutions such as marriage and the family, pillars of society upheld by women.

Infinite and finite vice work in conjunction with virtue to create a powerful moral dualism that serves to limit the zone of women's action to that established by virtue. Finite vice applies to the range of immoral activities carried out in the material world that can justify and trigger punishment by the political community. Promiscuity, for instance, entails any deviance from sexual standards of behavior for women that can result in sexual harassment or social ostracism. Finite vice often applies to any attempts by women to challenge the status quo and its moral standards. While lists of finite virtues exist for each era in this analysis, few specific finite vices surface in discourses on women's morality, indicating that any deviation from virtue constituted a vice. Supporting this, infinite vice serves as the point of departure for the American woman's morality forever anchored in Eve's original sin that directly holds women responsible for the Fall of mankind into moral decay. Similar to infinite virtue, this form of vice translates into placing political blame on women for any decline in morality and social order, making them suspect citizens in the

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sense that their infinite capacity for vice enables women with the ability to derail the nation. Infinite and finite virtue and vice trap women in a double bind that denies them real political power while holding them morally responsible for the nation's success or failure as its moral guardians and most suspect citizens.

To appreciate the political implications of this moral situation, the dualistic nature of virtue and vice must be identified, a central task of this project. Extensive feminist analysis of dualisms illustrates their role in Enlightenment thinking to create hierarchies and exclude women from public life by establishing boundaries such as public and private, man and woman, reason and emotion, culture and nature.[14] Although feminists explore these and many other dualisms as well as moral boundaries,[15] virtue and vice never appear as a dualism oppressive to women. Identifying these moral concepts as such exposes the political double bind that it creates for women. Moreover, the virtue-vice dualism constrains women's freedom, establishes unequal relationships between men and women, and justifies their exclusion from political life. Given this situation, this project contends that, due to its anti-democratic and anti-feminist function, the political concept of virtue erects high, insurmountable barriers to reaching the goal of women's full citizenship. While this project examines virtue from a feminist perspective, this analysis also carries important implications for democratic theory that continues to rely on the virtue-vice dualism as a central pillar in its moral scheme whether identified explicitly or assumed

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[14] See, for instance, Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993) which is discussed further in this chapter.

[15] See Joan Tronto's *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), Chapter 1 especially.

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through the moral and biblical tradition upon which it rests. Moreover, relying on a dualistic morality limits the range of choices available to different classes of citizens and aims to solve the problem of politics by classifying people and issues into either/or categories. This logic diminishes moral ambiguity and political conflict, undermining the dynamic, deliberative potential of democracy. At the heart of American democratic theory, then, remains a moral dualism antithetical to freedom, equality, and inclusion.

Although the primary goal of this analysis is to show that the political concept of virtue is antithetical to feminist and democratic politics due to its role in perpetuating passive and submissive citizenship as well as undermining freedom, equality, and inclusion, the virtue-vice dualism also suggests alternatives to this moral belief system more conducive to democracy and feminism. Often overlooked in feminist ethics, vice offers a powerful means for opening up alternatives to this moral system. By locating women outside of moral guardianship, vice breaks with the status quo and reveals the oppressive structures framing American political discourse. Though a standpoint fraught with dangers for women, it opens up a moral middleground critical to realizing the fluidity between women's virtue and vice and the need for "double vision."[16] This perspective allows recognition of both sides of the moral equation at the same time, increasing ambiguity while retaining the ability to perform the necessary ethical function of determining right from wrong. In addition, analysis of finite virtues and vices illustrates

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[16] For uses of this term see Janice Raymond's *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986); Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989); and Nancy Hirshmann's *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

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the importance of practice and deliberative processes in establishing an ethic based on relations and material reality. Although these elements provide promising avenues of investigation, none offer an adequate alternative to the virtue-vice dualism. Yet, this analysis aims to clear the way for developing an alternative moral terrain consistent with a liberatory feminist politics.

## 1.3: Locating Virtue in the Literature

No systematic analysis of virtue appears in the scholarly literature. Here, "systematic" refers to examining virtue, first from a linguistic perspective and second, within specific historical and political contexts that indicate virtue's conceptual transformations. Indicating the absence of such a systematic analysis, *The Blackwell's Encyclopedia of Political Thought* lacks an article on virtue. Moreover, central texts on conceptual change that examine a range of political concepts from constitution to corruption such as James Farr et. al's *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* (1989) omit virtue. Feminist theorists of conceptual change also fail to analyze virtue as suggested by its absence from *Revisioning the Political* (1996), a collection of articles revisioning political concepts such as freedom, care, and power from a feminist perspective. Despite its omission from such conceptual studies, virtue does play a key role in social philosophy, political theory, American political culture, and feminist theory. Suggesting this concept's significance, Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981) established communitarianism, stimulated a major debate among scholars, and created the "multiple virtues" perspective on moral and political discourse that pertains to feminist political theory. Despite this,

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neither a linguistic analysis nor a study of virtue's usage in different political contexts has been done. As such, although virtue constitutes a central aspect of such arguments, its function, or conceptual purpose - how and when it is used - within moral and political discourse remains largely an unanswered question. Given this situation, one of this project's primary goals is to systematically analyze virtue when women struggle for freedom, inclusion, and equality in American politics.

Here, the question arises, why is virtue worth such a conceptual analysis if scholars generally omit it from their studies of conceptual change? To begin answering this question, this section reviews virtue's pivotal, though often underestimated, role in the communitarian, feminist, and republican motherhood literature. These three literatures reveal virtue's significance in contemporary debates, the absence of an analysis of virtue itself, and the problems that emerge from this absence.

Two general ways of thinking shape the debate about the relationship between morality and politics in contemporary political theory. The first, a "justice first" perspective, begins from John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971) where he claims that "justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought."[17] Responding to Rawls, communitarians offer a richer moral understanding of political community. In *Spheres of Justice* (1983), for example, Michael Walzer contends that society can uncover already-existing "shared understandings," including beliefs, morals, and ideas, hidden by the apparent moral neutrality of procedural justice. While Walzer's approach offers an alternative to inherited moral tradition, MacIntyre's work takes a more

[17] (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 3.

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central role in this analysis due to its explicit reliance on virtue and direct impact on this concept's role in contemporary political theory. MacIntyre's *After Virtue* not only put virtue back on political theorists' agendas but challenged Rawls on the issue of virtue and created an alternative perspective on morality and politics. MacIntyre holds an Aristotelian view of virtue where many virtues, in addition to justice, are necessary for a vibrant political community. One of MacIntyre's criticisms of Rawls' theory, in this regard, is that it attends only to the external goods distributed by social institutions, failing to account for the internal goods that make up each citizen's moral character. By revitalizing virtue and morality, MacIntyre ultimately hopes to reconnect people with politics, cultivating a strong sense of community. Basically, then, MacIntyre's view that many virtues, other than but including justice, should play a central role in politics represents the second way of thinking about these issues, referred to here, as the "multiple virtues" perspective. Together, these two positions of Rawls and MacIntyre generated a much broader discussion among scholars known as the liberal-communitarian debate (Taylor, 1985; Walzer, 1983; Sandel, 1982; Barber, 1984; Galston, 1991; Macedo, 1990; Berkowitz, 1999; Daggar, 1997; Burtt, 1992, 1993).

Communitarian views on virtue begin with MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. MacIntyre's interest in virtue emanates from his concern with the disorder of contemporary morality where individuals lack an understanding of their human *telos* and connection to community. In the end, MacIntyre hopes to expose the flaws of Rawls' "justice first" perspective as radically circumscribing morality in political life. Instead, he makes the case for turning to an Aristotelian virtue ethics that would establish moral standards based on

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human *telos*, connection to community, and a moral tradition involving multiple virtues, including justice. MacIntyre makes the invaluable contribution of challenging the "justice first" approach to moral and political discourse. While MacIntyre's view deserves much further attention,[18] the focus turns to the role of moral tradition in order to suggest certain limits that the "multiple virtues" approach poses for women's political inclusion.

Traditions play a key role in communitarian thought. MacIntyre aims to reconnect people with their moral traditions in order to secure a moral consensus, binding them closer to their political communities. Such an approach, it seems, raises important issues for groups such as women excluded from establishing these traditions, leading to questions such as whose traditions and who interprets these traditions?[19] Although communtarians such as MacIntyre hope to establish moral consensus through tradition, excluding groups and imposing the traditions of society's "more worthy" on them moves towards conflict, not consensus. Taking a different approach than MacIntyre, some communitarian scholars of virtue (Galston, 1991; Macedo, 1990; Berkowitz, 1999) attempt to locate virtues within the liberal tradition, somehow trying to close the gap between virtue's republican and justice's liberal traditions. They assert that certain virtues such as tolerance, independence, and self-restraint remain necessary to liberalism, and should be cultivated in families, religious institutions, and voluntary associations. This position highlights problems involved with integrating virtue into liberalism. Moreover, a

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[18] See Chapter Eight for a much more extensive discussion of MacIntyre's teleological argument for virtue.

[19] Susan Okin asks similar questions in *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1989), Chapter 3.

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deeper problem with liberal virtues arises from one of its traditional functions - establishing a moral consensus around a perceived common good. Liberal democracy does include independence and tolerance but it also remains open to diverse ways of life that often lead to conflict, not consensus, and multiple traditions, not one common good. This leads to an important question for communitarians - is virtue consistent with the historical and political circumstances of contemporary liberalism? By understanding virtue itself and its tradition, this project addresses serious questions about the viability of virtue's consistency with central tenets of the liberal tradition such as freedom, equality, and inclusion.

Contemporary feminist theorists find themselves struggling with their position in relation to these dominant ways of thinking about morality and politics. Many feminists recognize that "justice as the first virtue" excludes other dimensions of political life such as care (Kittay, 1999, Tronto, 1993; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Similar to communitarians such as MacIntyre, these feminists realize that justice is simply not enough and results in a thin conception of political life. Due to their misgivings about the justice paradigm, feminists who engage in the care-justice debate inevitably run up against the question, should care be considered a virtue? Some feminists (Sparks, 1997; Hoagland, 1992) ask similar questions about specific virtues such as courage, self-restraint, and altruism while others (Claudia Card, 1991; Sarah Hoagland, 1991) raise the issue of evil, a matter of critical importance that often remains on the margins of communitarian and feminist ethics. In response, a logical alternative could be a more complex understanding of the moral subject consistent with the multiple virtues perspective that could allow room for care, other

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virtues, and even vice in public life.

Feminist political theorists similarly struggle with virtue, though from a different perspective than the communitarians, in relation to the care-justice debate (Tronto, 1993; Sevenhuijsen, 1998) and specific virtues related to women's moral character (Sparks, 1997; Hoagland, 1992). Feminists involved with the care-justice debate generally try to determine if care, traditionally associated with the private sphere, is political and, if so, how it relates to the distributive justice paradigm. Since Rawls claims that justice is the first virtue of social institutions, care theorists often encounter the question, is or should care be a virtue? Virtue, on the one hand, provides a standard for meeting the goal of some feminists who want to establish a care ethic on an equal footing with justice in the distributive paradigm. Yet, on the other hand, virtue raises concerns for feminists who realize that Rawls views justice as the first virtue of liberalism, leaving care outside this paradigm. Other feminists turn attention to specific virtues. Holloway Sparks, for instance, revisions the traditionally masculine virtue of courage from a feminist perspective. In contrast, Sarah Hoagland shows the debilitating effects of feminine virtues such as self-sacrifice and altruism on feminist, especially lesbian, ethics in order to argue for abolishing these virtues. By looking at "multiple virtues," it seems that feminists are moving towards MacIntyre's view of morality and politics. Before this happens, however, feminists need to examine virtue itself - its theoretical and historical tradition and functions. In other words, instead of asking should care, courage, self-sacrifice, or altruism be considered virtues, feminists should ask, is virtue a concept consistent with the political circumstances and goals of contemporary feminism? By turning attention to

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virtue, not its various forms, it becomes more evident that feminists struggle with this political concept, perhaps in part, because it forces them into a logic that contradicts their epistemology.

In addition to MacIntyre offering the more viable alternative, feminists have another reason for moving in this direction, primarily their long association with virtue in the private sphere. As some feminist theorists explain, virtue, traditionally attributed only to men in public life, transferred to women at the inception of liberal democratic theory as a means of elevating them above vice-ridden politics (Okin, 1982). This move helped justify their exclusion from public life on the grounds that their "separate but equal" status contributed to democracy's stability by instilling virtues in their husbands and children. Feminist historians (Norton, 1980, 1997; Kerber, 1980) pick up on women's association with virtue and moral superiority, developing the republican motherhood thesis that claims women in early American history wielded political power through their elevated position. More recently, it becomes pertinent to address such claims as some political scientists (Skocpol, 1992; Sarvasy, 1992, 1997) extend this thesis to their analysis of the Progressive era and recommend that contemporary women return to their moral superiority as one means of leveraging political power. As feminists increasingly recognize the limits of the "justice first" perspective and gravitate towards "multiple virtues," even advocating a return to moral superiority, this side of the debate merits much closer inspection, especially to consider the implications of virtue for feminist political theory, a central goal of this project.

The republican motherhood literature stems from a debate parallelling that of liberals

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and communitarians in political theory. The liberal-republican debates among intellectual historians shape discussions about virtue in American political culture, an area critical to this analysis given its historical grounding and its response to the republican motherhood thesis as well as American exceptionalism.[20] This debate among intellectual historians speaks to the issue of American exceptionalism as these thinkers formulate different answers to the question, why did socialism fail to take roots in the United States? Liberals, following Louis Hartz,[21] maintain that a commitment to Lockean liberalism and the "lack of a feudal past" prevent Americans from embracing other political ideologies. Alternatively, republicans or civic humanists such as J.G.A. Pocock, Gordon Wood, and Bernard Bailyn[22] assert that America's secondary republican tradition addresses the need of the common good that fulfills the function of collectivism and even political change in socialism, making this ideology irrelevant in American political culture. Centering upon the issue of virtue, liberals such as John P. Diggins contends that America's founding entails virtue's transition into the private sphere where it becomes "feminized"[23] as self-

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[20] See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of this debate.

[21] See *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since The Revolution* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1955).

[22] See Bernard Bailyn's *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon S. Wood's *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969); and J.G.A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[23] *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), Chapter 8.

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interest, ambition, and natural rights replace civic virtue in the public. Instead of serving as the source of "the good life," the citizenry's connection to politics narrows to ensuring that the government perform its instrumental role in protecting political and economic rights. Although identifying its more secondary status in a liberal democracy, republicans such as J.G.A. Pocock assert that such a view fails to account for the moral component of political life captured by virtue, a moral concept that expresses an essential aspect of humanity and politics beyond the distributive function of rights which remains critical to holding a political community together. While generating two different responses to the socialism question, neither liberals nor republicans completely discount the importance of virtue or ultimately challenge the view of America as an exceptional nation that diverts from the Europe's ideological path. Maintaining this position locates both approaches within a long tradition of thinkers in American political culture.

American exceptionalism plays a central part in this project as a discursive theme critical to explaining how women's morality establishes their enduring, primary relationship to political life as America's moral guardians. Initiating this utopian vision of America, the Puritan minister and governor, John Winthrop proclaimed the New World to be a "City Upon a Hill" granted to them by God, a position that reflects the biblical dimension of American exceptionalism directly tied to religion's part in determining women's virtuous moral and political status. Related to this biblical tradition, American exceptionalism often frames the nation's choices in terms of the "good" path favored by God or the "evil" path.[24] Throughout the early stages of the nation's political

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[24] See Philip Abbot's *Political Thought in America: Conversations and Debates* (Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1991), Introduction and Chapter 1.

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development, many foreign visitors marveled at how the uniqueness of American democracy and the immense land and resources available to its people differed greatly from European societies. In 1782, Hector St. John de Crevecouer, for instance, wrote of Americans as "western pilgrims" who "have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed; we are the most perfect society now existing in the world."[25] Offering a less utopian perspective, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* compared France with America, articulating both its strengths and weaknesses that together constitute the unique features of American democracy to create a classic example of American exceptionalism. More recently, Seymour Martin Lipset contends that this dominant feature of American political culture acts as a "double-edged sword," generating intolerance and moralizing when political distress jeopardizes the nation's exceptional status, a response contradictory to the democratic values of openness and tolerance.[26] Generally speaking, women play a marginal role in this literature of American exceptionalism that primarily engages in the comparative analysis of ideological groundings between the United States and European nations. Unlike most thinkers on this subject, however, Tocqueville identifies women's role as the keepers of mores as so politically significant that their contributions to providing moral stability in a secular American democracy serve a necessary part in securing the nation's exceptional future.[27]

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[25] "Letter from an American Farmer," in *Political Thought in America: An Anthology* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1988), 46, 47.

[26] *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company 1996).

[27] See Chapter Four for a complete discussion of Tocqueville's views on the role of women in American democracy.

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Taking a cue from Tocqueville, this analysis explores how the unique role of American women as moral guardians of America's exceptional future places them in a political double bind that, in the long run, limits their access to full citizenship.

Focusing on American women as moral guardians offers an alternative to the republican motherhood thesis that constituted a feminist response to the omission of women in the liberal-republican debates among intellectual historians. For the purposes of this analysis, the republican motherhood literature also speaks to virtue's relevance in debates among American historians and political scientists. Siding against Lockean liberals such as historian John Diggins,[28] revisionist historians such as Linda Kerber (1980) and Mary Beth Norton (1980, 1997) approached republicanism from a feminist perspective to portray the American woman of the nation's founding era as a republican mother who served an important political function. The republican motherhood thesis then claims that long before the Nineteenth Amendment women wielded, previously unrecognized, political power through their association, as mothers in the private sphere, with morality and virtue. Located above the vice-ridden political world, this thesis asserts, women sustained morality in American society through their role in the family where they instilled virtue in their husbands and children, better enabling women to lend their moral voice to political issues such as abolition and temperance. Applying this thesis to Progressive era politics, political scientists such as Theda Skocpol (1992) and Wendy Sarvasy (1992, 1997) show how women successfully used their moral superiority to

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[28] Not all feminist historians sided with the republicans on these issues. For an alternative perspective, see Joan Hoff's *Law, Gender, and Injustice: A Legal History of U.S. Women* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1991) which is discussed in Chapter Three.

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establish America's first social welfare policies. In the end, they think that this success should instruct contemporary women to consider reasserting their political power from this virtuous position. Others such as Linda Gordon (1994), however, reject republican motherhood as beneficial to contemporary feminists by illustrating how the virtue and moral superiority necessary to republican motherhood depends on women's exclusion from public life and the perpetuation of their differences with men and other, especially poor and black, women. Such debates about republican motherhood indicate virtue's continued relevance outside political theory and, more importantly, the possible dangers of uncritically using this concept to advocate for a position of moral superiority, one that women struggled to overcome in order to gain formal political rights.

Unlike the largely positive portrayal of republican motherhood, framing American women as moral guardians exposes a more troublesome side to this moral and political status. In order to achieve the moral and political worth associated with virtue, women must embrace passivity and submissiveness as keepers of the status quo, a posture that ultimately undermines women's struggle for full citizenship. To appreciate the complexity of this situation, however, moral guardianship, in contrast to the republican motherhood thesis, relates to American exceptionalism in order to illustrate the heavy political burden assigned to women who, though lacking real political power, must - through their virtue - prevent the nation's deviation from the "good" path determined by God. This approach then links women's virtue and vice to a moral and political status determined by a broader, more structural, discourse in American political culture that functions to truncate women's access to full citizenship.

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Although some may contend that the liberal-communitarian and liberal-republican debates have largely dissipated, both remain an important framework for analyzing the role of virtue and vice within contemporary feminist political theory and ethics for a number of reasons. First, the liberal-republican debates among intellectual historians indicate virtue's importance in shaping American political culture and the role of women as republican mothers, or, as this analysis contends, moral guardians responsible for securing the nation's exceptional future. Both perspectives affect how feminist political theorists understand virtue's relationship to women. Second, the Rawls and MacIntyre approaches to virtue act as the point of departure for feminist theorists, indicating the need to comprehend the positions to which they respond. Second, the omission of women's virtue within the theories of Rawls and MacIntyre reveals a blind-spot within both which points to serious limits for their usefulness to feminists. Such omissions, usually under the guise of gender neutrality, generally reveal an important source of oppression for women. Virtue, it seems, creates such a blind-spot within feminist ethics, a situation indicative of how this moral concept operates to make women less visible within the American political context. Third, the liberal-communitarian debates, as Mary Dietz persuasively argues, inform the structure of contemporary democratic theory. As she states, "the conceptual apparatus of liberalism:communitarianism was simply transferred onto the terrain of democratic theory. There it resides today, threatening to subsume the latter into just one more subdivision of the by-now-vast and monotonously repetitive literature on liberalism,

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communitarianism, antiliberalism, and anticommunitarianism."[29] Dietz continues to argue that this debate's reliance on binary oppositions greatly limits the conception of politics inherited by democratic theorists. In a sense then, the liberal-communitarian debate established a monolithic approach to political theory that narrows politics down to either/or categories. In accordance with Dietz's position, the construction of the virtue-vice dualism within the liberal-communitarian debates transitions into feminist theory and shapes its relationship to democratic theory, greatly diminishing the complex dynamics of how women's morality relates to politics.

Despite its role in the literature of "mainstream" political theory and American political culture, virtue remains largely outside the growing body of literature in feminist political theory focused on revisioning political concepts ranging from freedom and equality to justice and care (Tronto, 1993; Okin, 1989, Hirschmann, 2003; Hirschmann and Di Stefano1996; Koggel, 1998). When feminist theorists do address virtue, usually they do so by referencing virtue's etymological roots in the Latin term *vir*, meaning "man." Some such as Bonnie Honig note the feminine root of *vir* in *virago*, a term to describe a strong woman with masculine characteristics. Indicative of the problems that arise from such oversights, Honig goes on to establish her theoretical framework on the categories of virtue and *virtu* without considering their gendered qualities and usages, ultimately displacing a major political issue pertaining to gender difference.[30] Others such

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[29] *Turning Operations: Feminism, Arendt, and Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 67-8.

[30] *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), Chapter 1 especially.

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as Selma Sevenhuisjen identify the negative implications of virtue for women, yet continue using it interchangeably with terms such as "values" and "perspectives," creating a "slippage problem" in which virtue, seemingly synonymous, appears as a gender neutral concept equivalent to these others.[31] Whether ignoring, dismissing, or equating virtue with other terms, feminist theorists avoid virtue's political implications for women and often import a problematic concept into theoretical frameworks such as the ethic of care literature that represents an important contribution to feminist political theory and ethics. In the end, marginalizing the gendered implications of virtue, this analysis contends, seriously impedes feminist political theory from reaching its transformative potential as a force of progress in democratic politics.

While feminist political theorists continue to overlook virtue's political significance for women, social conservatives such as William Bennett and Wendy Shallitt and communitarians such as Amitai Etzioni and William Galston promote virtue as necessary to reinvigorating the moral capacity of a decaying political community. As this analysis shows, such calls for virtue, often couched in "family values" rhetoric, entail the laying of blame for social problems on women who, as the nation's moral guardians, must return to their traditional roles in order to save the nation. Virtue serves as a powerful tool in American political discourse to promote positions oppressive to women. As such, feminists need to turn immediate attention to virtue, a political concept that functions to portray women's advances such as employment opportunities, reproductive freedoms, and

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[31] *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations of Justice, Morality, and Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998).

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political activism as detrimental to the nation's moral health and exceptional future. A range of questions surface for feminists to consider in this context. Whose virtue, if anyone's, will revitalize the bonds of political community? Is virtue necessary to sustaining the common good in the diverse American polity? What about vice? How does virtue affect the ethic of care's transformative political potential? Is virtue consistent with democratic and feminist goals of free, equal, inclusive, and active citizenship for women?

The fact that such questions remain unasked, much less unanswered, raises one final point of inquiry: why has virtue slipped off of feminist political theorists' radar screens despite their attention to so many other political concepts? Possibly, this situation arises from an acceptance of virtue as standard of moral excellence that enables women to translate moral superiority into political power as they did in the temperance, abolitionist, and suffrage movements. Such a position emanates from the republican motherhood thesis that fails to interrogate the negative implications of this political strategy for women's full citizenship. As such, moral superiority remains an aspect of contemporary feminist theory, often evident in maternalist arguments such as that of Sara Ruddick[32] and social feminism identified with Jean Bethke Elstain.[33] Given this positive assessment of virtue's role in women's political practices, perhaps feminists accept this political concept as beneficial to women and, therefore, not in need of revision. Alternatively, feminists

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[32] *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989).

[33] "Moral Woman and Immoral Man: A Consideration of the Public-Private Split and Its Political Ramifications," *Politics and Society* 4 (1974): 453-473.

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may recognize virtue as a concept rooted in a masculine etymology that, in the republican tradition, defines civic participation as a male activity. As such, virtue may force women into adopting a masculine approach to citizenship. Hoping to avoid taking this route and unsure of how to revise the concept, feminists may sidestep the issue of virtue by using alternative concepts, avoiding the term altogether, or identifying its masculine nature while continuing to employ it.

These two points speak to how virtue and, to an even greater degree, vice as a dualism operate to push women into the background of American political discourse, a function evident in the backgrounding of these important political concepts in contemporary feminist political theory. Marilyn Frye articulates how society backgrounds women who perform all the "behind-the-scenes" work such as cleaning, cooking, and having children while men take center stage as the main actors on the political stage.[34] Building on this metaphor, Val Plumwood specifies backgrounding as one of a dualism's five characteristics that entails the dominant group's denial of any dependency on the subordinate group in order to sustain their position in the foreground of society.[35] Applying this perspective to the on-going role of cultural assumptions in perpetuating women's inequality, Christine Koggel addresses the difficulties involved in identifying how informal rules, ideas, norms, and mores contribute to a group's oppression given their

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[34] *The Politics of Reality* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983).

[35] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993).

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deeply embedded role in constructing how people view the world.[36] In this sense, virtue may appear as an apolitical or even "innocent" concept, even an equivalent to "good," making its analysis better suited for abstract philosophical investigations than political theory.[37] Assuming virtue's innocence without further investigation, however, raises the red flag of a false gender neutrality that feminists such as Alison Jaggar[38] and Susan Moller Okin[39] identify as sites critical for exploring how social roles and their ideologies perpetuate women's oppression. Women's virtue plays such a part by creating the appearance of women's political inclusion and power through moral guardianship that, in reality, maintains their secondary role in the private sphere. Operating in a dualism with vice reenforces this status as women also retain moral responsibility for any political decay that makes them suspect citizens and less than worthy of full citizenship. As such, society grants women virtue for their role in sustaining the status quo as moral guardians and assigns them vice for deviating from this political responsibility which functions to keep women in the background of society. Although this analysis clarifies this process, the virtue-vice dualism when applied to women pushes them into the cultural, moral, and

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[36] *Perspectives on Equality: Constructing a Relational Theory* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998).

[37] Virtue ethics does constitute an area of analysis in philosophy. For a collection of articles from this field, see, for instance, *Virtue Ethics*, eds. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[38] "Feminist Ethics: Projects, Problems, Prospects," in *Feminist Ethics*, ed. Claudia Card (Lawrence, KN: University of Kansas Press, 1991).

[39] *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Chapter 1.

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political background which makes this oppressive dynamic difficult for feminists to see.

## 1.4: Methodological Issues

### *Conceptual History*

James Farr's approach of developing "conceptual histories" guides this project's substantive examination of virtue's relationship to women at transitional moments in their struggles for freedom, equality, and inclusion in American political history. "Conceptual histories," Farr explains,"tell the tales of conceptual change and political innovation. They narrate some stretch of human imagination - in belief, action, or practice - by tracing the emergence, transformation, and sometimes the demise of political concepts."[40] In developing this method, Farr joins a number of political theorists who adapted elements of Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis to the study of concepts in political discourse (Pitkin, 1972; Connolly, 1974; Farr, Ball, and Hanson, 1989). As such, Farr articulates the idea of the "linguistic constitution of politics" to express that language is not contingent upon the concrete world of observable behavior. It *constitutes* the political world as much as the observable actions of a voter pulling the lever on election day or soldiers going into battle. This reflects the view that political actors use language, and, particularly, terms or concepts to influence, negotiate, and generally change what occurs in the world where historical circumstances equally determine the direction of changes in language usage. In a sense then, such "essentially contested concepts" remain open to constant

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[40] "Understanding Conceptual Change Politically," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, eds. Ball, Terence, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 37.

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reinterpretation due to their location at the nexus of transformative political struggles. People use such concepts to debate the constellation of diverse and conflicting beliefs, opinions, and values embodied by political concepts such as freedom, justice, care, and equality. Designed to analyze such concepts as they undergo political change, the conceptual histories method guides this substantive examination into political contexts when women's virtue and vice became contested as part of broader changes in the political culture that entailed the denial of their freedom, equality, and inclusion.

To create a conceptual history, Farr outlines three steps that guide this project's construction of the conceptual history of women's virtue in American political discourse. First, the concept's point of emergence or pre-history and genesis must be told in varying degrees of detail depending on the conceptual history's form and length. Although virtue's long and varied history spans the length of Western political theory, this project narrows its scope to account for women's relationship to virtue in American political discourse. According to the parameters of this analysis, the Puritan era in American political history acts as the point of emergence, an issue addressed in greater detail shortly.

Second, this method requires that the concept be located in theoretical constellations, related to other concepts and political arguments. To do so, Farr suggests consulting, what he calls, "Great Political Theories" such as those of Aristotle, Hobbes, or Hegel and the "lesser ones" found in letters, speeches, and pamphlets.[41] Given the place of women's virtue and vice on the margins of American political discourse, this analysis

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[41] Ibid., 39.

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turns to sources less likely to be considered "Great Political Theories" in the canonical sense, largely due to the fact that texts by and about women largely remain outside that category. Instead, this analysis focuses on, what might be more aptly called, "central texts" identified as those that contributed significantly to given political debates in which women's virtue played a central role. During the republican era, for instance, prominent social critics turned to the issue of women's education in order to consider the extent to which women would participate in the nation's new political order following the ratification of the United States constitution. This debate played out between ministers such as John Fordyce who wrote sermons on the matter and reformers such as Judith Sargent Murray and Benjamin Rush. Although failing to qualify as "Great Political Theories," these writings remain central to understanding the political discourse pertaining to women's virtue and vice. As often as possible, this project turns to the voices of women in order to capture their responses to and participation in debates about their moral and, thus, political status. To do so often requires excavating "lesser" sources that, however, remain critical to giving voice to women on this matter. This issue becomes more pertinent when analyzing the early periods of American political history, particularly during the Puritan and republican eras when society pushed them to the political margins. During this earlier historical period, this analysis often relies on archival sources such as letters, diaries, manner books, and funeral eulogies by women. In contrast, during the contemporary era, feminist political theory begins to develop, enabling the analysis of texts that qualify as "greater theories" in the sense that they play a critical role in the theory-building of second wave feminism. To explore the role of virtue and vice in the Sexual

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Revolution, for instance, the analysis engages with a range of texts now considered central to the theoretical foundation of second wave feminism such as Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and bell hooks *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism.* Yet, capturing the richness of this era requires looking to "lesser" texts such as manifestos, speeches, and pamphlets to identify the smaller pieces in this bigger puzzle of theory-building. Examining the political discourse of women often requires blurring the distinction between "greater" and "lesser" texts given the important role of both in explaining how political concepts such as virtue and vice change in response to different historical contexts. This analysis finds both approaches equally valuable in developing a conceptual history of women's virtue which traverses political eras that gave women greater and lesser voice in American political discourse.

Examining these sources requires the more detailed work of linguistic analysis. Farr relies on Quentin Skinner's approach to develop this dimension of the conceptual histories method. Turning to Skinner specifically, he explains what a concept is and what, within the concept itself, actually changes amidst the debates, struggles, arguments, and general contests over conceptual meanings. To begin doing so, concepts must be differentiated from words. As Skinner explains, "the surest sign that a group or society has entered into the self conscious possession of a new concept is that a corresponding vocabulary will be developed, a vocabulary which can then be used to pick out and discuss the concept with consistency."[42] Words, in contrast, lack a "corresponding vocabulary."

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[42] "Language and Political Change," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, eds. Terrence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 8.

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Concepts then operate within a shared set of meanings, forming a constellation of beliefs that clarify larger political changes. Contested concepts, Skinner contends, possess normative values that shift over time and constitute a key point of contention in political struggle. Due to their normative value and place in larger moral and ideological belief systems, such concepts become highly unstable and intensely contested at politically transformative moments when groups battle over previously accepted beliefs, opinions, values, and, more generally, political power.

To identify what changes within the concept itself, Skinner focuses on the concept's role in this struggle by identifying three possible types of changes.[43] First, Skinner explains, "it is necessary to know the nature and range of the criteria in virtue of which the word or expression is standardly employed."[44] This step entails identifying how and when actors use a given term in order to specify a corresponding action. In the case of virtue, for instance, this term consistently appears to describe the morally appropriate behavior of women. Second, the term's range of reference or circumstances must be determined, Skinner explains, in order "to have a clear sense of the nature of the circumstances in which the word can properly be used to designate particular actions or states of affairs."[45] This step turns attention to the particular contexts in which a term is appropriately used as part of a shared set of understandings, more directly linking the term

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[43] Ibid., 9-11.

[44] Ibid., 9.

[45] Ibid., 10.

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to the material world. During the mid-1800s, for instance, virtue often appears in the political discourse about the virtues of American women who sacrificed their freedom, interests, and personal desires to join their families in pioneering the West. The third step in this process retains particular importance for this analysis as it relates to the range of attitudes or the normative value associated with a particular concept which connects it to a larger belief system. Political cultures communicate their moral evaluation of actions through such terms in order to establish standards by which they measure "good" and "bad" practices. Virtue and vice serve as central to this larger moral and political project which makes these concepts critical for examining the broader structure of moral beliefs and how they pertain to women in American political discourse. All three of these stages entail political contestation about a concept's usage that can generate change in its application and meaning to the point that renders the political concept unrecognizable to its users. Or, put another way, the historical and political circumstances and concepts can change significantly enough to render a concept's old usage unable to meet the demands of new contexts and belief systems. As Skinner asserts, when "appraisive terms" or those with values determined by their specific vocabularies, are "applied with unchanged meanings to new circumstances...such arguments fail [and] new meanings tend to arise."[46] At this point, conceptual change occurs.

James Farr articulates conceptual change as "one imaginative consequence of political actors criticizing and attempting to resolve the contradictions which they discover

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[46] Ibid., 15.

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or generate in the complex web of their beliefs, actions, and practices as they try to understand and change the world around them."[47] To do so involves something of a "problem-solving" strategy to resolve "a contradiction," a special class of political problem that "implies manifestly *inconsistent* beliefs *within* a system, such that holding or asserting one implies the denial or negation of another."[48] Accordingly, this conceptual history explores points in American political history when the moral belief system supported by virtue and vice generated inconsistent beliefs within the political system. To more fully understand this process, Skinner's method of examining change within concepts uncovers the role of the infinite and finite dimensions of virtue and vice that illustrates the changes within the concept and the political culture's belief system. In particular, this analysis focuses on historical contexts in which the moral belief system of virtue and vice come into contradiction with the political beliefs of freedom, equality, and inclusion in order to assess whether or not virtue and vice prevent or resolve the inconsistency between these moral and political belief systems that become evident in their application to women.

The third aspect of Farr's conceptual histories method demands that they "must *explain* the emergence and transformation of concepts as outcomes of actors using them for political purposes."[49] With the other two elements, the third guides this analysis in terms of case selection. As such, the cases met the criteria of historical moments that

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[47] "Understanding Conceptual Change Politically," 25.

[48] Ibid., 34.

[49] Ibid., 38.

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involved the generation of contradictions between belief systems impacting women's relationship to politics, and specific actors engaged in conceptual and political change. To meet Farr's criteria of starting with a concept's point of emergence, this analysis begins with how Puritan ministers and magistrates addressed women's virtue in the context of political and economic change within the communities since their beliefs represent the origins of American political culture, as distinct from its European heritage, that continues to influence the nation's morality and belief in its exceptional future. Next, exploring the republican era of America's founding grants the opportunity for examining how the political culture adapted the republican concept of virtue to the changing demands of an increasingly democratic nature that, for women, manifests in debates over their access to education given their new political role as the cultivators of the nation's future citizens. Consequently, the analysis then turns to the era of Jacksonian democracy when Victorian ideology took hold as a means of justifying women's continued role in the home as virtuous mothers despite the extension of the suffrage to all men. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville captures how the political culture solidified the American woman's construction as moral guardian as a means for resolving the contradiction between democratic equality and freedom, and the inequality and constraint of women. In contrast, the debates about and among the Lowell mill girls, who constituted the first almost all-female workforce in America during the 1830s, indicate the contradiction between Victorian morality and democratic values that some of these more radical Lowell mill girls began to identify as they entered the workforce and fought for economic rights and political recognition in their efforts to unionize in the textile mills.

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Turning to the contemporary era, second wave feminists clearly articulated how a Victorian belief system, left in place by first wave feminists, served as a powerful tool in preventing sexual freedom and, thus, women's liberation from this confining ideology that continued to deny them full citizenship and equal rights in relation to men. Feminists such as Mary Daly and Katie Cannon specify this contradiction in religious terms that draw back on the Puritan's biblical tradition whereas more politically oriented feminists such as the radicals, socialists, blacks, and lesbians focus on sexual freedom and liberation to resolve the conflict between these belief systems. Often their positions directly challenged moral guardianship and generated radical political changes, granting women greater educational and economic opportunities, sexual freedoms such as abortion and access to birth control, and governmental protections against sexual harassment, domestic violence, and rape. As a result, contemporary social conservatives and communitarians responded by reviving virtue and moral guardianship as a necessity to prevent the nation from spiraling further into moral and social decay. The last case analysis then turns to how this approach among political theorists such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Amitai Etzioni, and William Galston compares with that of feminist care theorists since both offer different perspectives on resolving the contradiction between needing a moral belief system in a political community and the moral impartiality promoted by the justice paradigm prominent in liberal democracy. Although each historical context reflects the changes within virtue and vice and women's political role in American society, a consistent pattern emerges in which the political culture constructs women as moral guardians upholding virtues and preventing the decline of American exceptionalism, or as falling victim to vice

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that leads to their portrayal as traitors to this cultural belief - "suspect" citizens. Given this pattern, virtue and vice, this analysis contends, fail to resolve the contradiction between this moral belief system and women's political struggle for full and active citizenship in American democracy. From this perspective, these "old" usages of virtue and vice appear to have outlived their usefulness. As such, this conceptual history indicates the need for developing alternative political concepts and approaches to morality more consistent with democratic and feminist beliefs.

***Feminist Approaches to Conceptual Analysis***

This analysis applies Farr's conceptual histories method within the framework of feminist theoretical approaches to conceptual change. Generally speaking, feminist theorists approach such a project from one of three perspectives for revisioning "old" concepts established in Western political thought (Hirschmann and Di Stefano, 1996). First, they work to politicize concepts such as care, community, friendship, and the family, previously identified with the feminine, private, and, thus, nonpolitical sphere. Feminists involved with this project generally approach it from two different directions. Applying the public concept of justice to the private concept of the family, Susan Moller Okin (1989), for instance, argues that gender equality in the home, or making families the "schools of justice," is a necessary condition for a more just public sphere while Joan Tronto (1993), among other things, takes the concept of "care," traditionally associated with women in the family, and explores how it might transform people's vision of public life. Second, feminists politicize "value-neutral" concepts such as freedom, autonomy, and justice, generally accepted as equally valued among democratic citizens regardless of race,

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gender, or class. Nancy Hirschmann (2003), for instance, asserts that a feminist conceptualization of freedom must transcend Isaiah Berlin's well-known distinction between negative and positive liberty in order to uncover the complex interrelationship of internal and external constraints, constituting the social constructions that erect complex, and previously unseen, barriers to women's freedom. Finally, some feminists rethink concepts viewed as essentially political such as power, authority, and legitimacy by deconstructing the masculine definition of these concepts and reconstructing them to include a feminist dimension. To illustrate the limits of defining power in masculine terms as one person dominating another, Nancy Hartsock (1996), for example, examines how power in caring relationships, usually associated with women and based on mutual-concern and connectedness, suggests a cyclical "exercise" of power given the ever-changing role of care-giver and receiver in the course of each person's lifetime.

Virtue qualifies as both a concept identified with women in the private sphere and a "value-neutral" concept in the sense that it communicates a moral excellence or "goodness" generally accepted as a positive value in a political community. Such ambiguity reflects the difficulty in pinning virtue down in order to identify its usage which this conceptual history aims to clarify in terms of how, when, where, and to what purposes women's virtue and vice operate within American political discourse. To do so, this analysis explores virtue's relationship to a constellation of political concepts reflective of feminist and democratic objectives: freedom, equality, and inclusion. Each of these concepts represent the goals of the first and second wave movements. To clarify their usage in this analysis, certain feminist political theorists revision these concepts.

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Transforming the dualism between negative and positive liberty established by Isaiah Berlin, Nancy Hirschmann revisions freedom as an inter-relationship between positive and negative liberty that reveals the internal and external constraints constituting a web of social constructions in which women, and everyone else must operate. Speaking directly to how this view of freedom relates to feminism, Hirschmann explains "that is, not just individual sexist acts perpetuated by particular individuals, but the entire cultural construct that assigns greater value to men than to women, that provides more options to men and supports men's pursuit of choice more than women's - in short, what many feminists alternately call male privilege or patriarchy - can restrict women's freedom."[50] Freedom for women then entails gaining the agency, autonomy, and power to participate in determining social constructions, a move designed to undermine male privilege and patriarchy. Christine Koggel offers a relational approach to equality that moves away from the justice paradigm's individualistic and distributive usage of this concept. Instead of equal opportunity, Koggel finds that "equality of respect" enables democratic society to more effectively overcome extensive inequalities and oppressions. As she explains, "the relational theory of equality I have defended has two foundational principles that have their source in classical liberal argument but are reconceived in terms of the starting point of relationships: we ought to treat everyone with equal concern and respect, and we ought to respect human diversity and ways of being."[51] Finally, Iris Marion Young

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[50] *The Subject of Liberty*, 23.

[51] *Perspectives on Equality*, 245.

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develops a broader view of inclusion in order to consider how democracy can achieve its deliberative potential. Instead of focusing narrowly on voting rights as the primary means of political inclusion, Young expands the scope of analysis to include modes of communication, operations of social difference, representation, and civic organizing. As she argues, "the model of deliberative democracy implies a stronger meaning of inclusion and political equality which, when implemented, increases the likelihood that democratic decision-making processes will promote justice."[52] These approaches to freedom, inclusion and equality capture the complex web of inequalities, constraints, and exclusions that ensnare women and deny them full citizenship. While each of these concepts is important independently, this analysis focuses on how they relate to women's virtue and vice in order to assess the implications of this concept for achieving these feminist goals.

***The Role of Dualisms***

Feminist political theorists also turn their attention to dualisms, an epistemological tool of the Enlightenment that feminists identify as particularly effective in excluding women from public life and generally diminishing their worth and part in society. Dualisms play a central part in this analysis. Despite feminists' attention to dualisms ranging from public-private, man-woman, culture-nature, and reason-emotion, the virtue-vice dualism remains excluded from such considerations. As such, one of this project's purposes involves showing how these two concepts qualify as a dualism that triggers the many oppressive mechanisms characterizing other dualisms. In particular, dualisms, as

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[52] *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

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conceptualized by Val Plumwood, translate old forms of oppression into new historical contexts. "But even the ancient forms do not necessarily fade away because their original context has changed; they are often preserved in our conceptual framework as residues, layers of sediment deposited by past oppressions," Plumwood continues, "So old oppressions stored as dualisms facilitate and break the path for new ones."[53] This dualistic function connects to the conceptual history method that together enables this analysis to trace how the virtue-vice dualism transfers "ancient forms" of "old oppression" into different political contexts. Qualifying virtue and vice as a dualism clarifies a critical means by which these two concepts perpetuate women's inequality, constraint, and exclusion in very different historical contexts ranging from the Puritans to the contemporary backlash.

Because Plumwood frames dualisms in these terms, this analysis primarily relies on her work in investigating virtue and vice as a dualism. Although feminists such as Alison Jaggar and Jean Bethke Elshtain recognize how dualisms shape the world into gendered either/or categories,[54] Plumwood offers a systematic means of identifying dualisms, a term referring to two oppositional categories that never overlap. To define dualism even more

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[53] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 43.

[54] In *Feminist Politics & Human Nature* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1983), Jaggar examines the dualistic way in which defining human nature falls into masculine and feminine categories. Elshtain's *Public Man Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981) establishes the centrality of male public and female private life as an organizing concept within feminist political theory. Neither, however, offer a systematic review of dualisms.

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specifically, Plumwood distinguishes it from its close conceptual cousins, dichotomy and difference. Dualisms entail a greater degree of the following three characteristics than dichotomies or differences: range or an extensive number of differences, permanence or apparent inability to change, and intensity or how embedded such relationships are within a particular culture. Every dualism, then, involves dichotomy and difference, but not every, or even many, dichotomies and differences constitute a dualism.[55] In addition to clarifying what a dualism is, Plumwood identifies five characteristics that qualify a pair of concepts as a dualism: homogenization, incorporation, instrumentalism, hyperseparation, and backgrounding. Given the attention to dualisms during the Sexual Revolution, this project turns particular attention to qualifying virtue and vice as a dualism at that point although their relationship as such remains critical to the entire analysis.[56] Suffice it to say that, as part of a dualism, virtue helps to maintain women's subordinate position in the background of, what Plumwood calls, "the master's story" that illustrates how dominant groups control society's foreground by pushing subordinate groups such as women, blacks, "primitive people," and animals into the background, generally associated with nature. Although Plumwood focuses more on the relationship between nature and women

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[55] Differentiating the debilitating effects of dualisms from the often necessary and useful dichotomies and differences that shape one's identity, Plumwood ultimately makes an ecofeminist argument for transcending dualisms that associate culture with masculinity/reason/universal, and nature with femininity/emotion/particular. Without such categories, Plumwood thinks that nature and women's connection to it could be revalued without losing the benefits of rationality and the value of difference in determining identity.

[56] See Chapter 7 for an extensive explanation of these terms and their application to the virtue-vice dualism.

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to develop an ecofeminist argument, the present analysis explores how the virtue-vice dualism effectively backgrounds women in political life through moral guardianship.

The backgrounding function of the virtue-vice dualism applies to the relationship between women and men as well as between different groups of women. In particular, this aspect of dualisms draws attention to the role of race within this conceptual history. As bell hooks illustrates in *Ain't I a Woman?*, black women serve as the moral antithesis to white women's Traditional Womanhood, a pure moral status created in juxtaposition with the immorality, sin, and sexuality of black women, particularly as Jezebels. While hooks speaks specifically to the context of slavery, such cultural assumptions operate throughout American political discourse. The relationship between black women and the virtue-vice dualism reveals another level to this conceptual history that remains under-developed in this project. In part, this dualism functions to background black women even further than white women by establishing the moral differences between these two subordinate classes. Consequently, black women's absence in the discourses of Puritans, republicans, and democrats that constitute this project's first half results in their omission here, a reflection of white women's dominance as moral guardians and black women's near invisibility as slaves in this political discourse. Due to the development of black feminism during the Sexual Revolution, the racial dynamics between white and black women play more of a part in the second half of this conceptual history that explores some aspects of race through the work of bell hooks and Katie Cannon, a black womanist ethicist. Despite this project's neglect of this issue, a full examination of how virtue and vice constructed women as moral guardians does require an account of how this dualism

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functions in relationship to white and black women as well as within the black community. A valuable starting point, for instance, would be a study of black women's relationship to virtue and vice within the context of slavery. This oversight speaks to the powerful operation of backgrounding between groups of women perpetuated by the virtue-vice dualism that also plays out in this analysis.

Dualisms create other problems within feminist thought. Mary Dietz identifies an important political problem in contemporary feminist theory made evident by difference feminists who sustain the public-man/private-women dualism. Viewing the world in these terms locks feminists into a dualistic framework that prevents a reconceptualization of politics by maintaining old, traditional understandings of political life. Central to this process, Dietz explains, is the

> simple reversal (a mere turning upside down) that difference feminism exacts upon the tradition of Western political thought renders its positively valued elements (for example, biology, nature, labor, nurturance, mothering, and the maternal) exceptionally agreeable to the purposes of traditional 'family values' conservatism with its ingrained hostility toward the aspirations of women and its commitment to the sovereign patriarchal family...In so doing, difference feminism reduces the actor to 'man' or 'woman,' thereby making it difficult to find within it the vision of an alternative politics that resolutely resists the simple reformulation of the existing gendered status quo.[57]

Val Plumwood similarly identifies this problem as "uncritical reversals" in which women, or subordinate groups more generally, assign positive value to the very elements, ideas, and concepts devalued by a male-dominated society. As this conceptual history reveals, the dualistic framework of moral beliefs in American political discourse frequently trap women in uncritical reversals that prevent them from seeing and challenging larger

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[57] *Turning Operations*, 6.

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structures of their oppression. Although dualisms and simple or uncritical reversals remain a well-examined area of feminist political theory, moral dualisms such as virtue and vice, good and bad remain unaccounted for as such. Yet, they deserve much more scrutiny in order to understand how deeply embedded these structures are in political practices and belief systems that constitute an entire range of assumptions functioning in the background to perpetuate women's oppression.

While dualisms illustrate the powerful inequalities maintained by this epistemological mechanism, when applied to women, the boundaries between oppositional categories become more dynamic as the dominant society shifts its application of virtue and vice to women in response to changing political contexts. In this sense, women serve as conduits between the moral and political realms associated with public and private life due to their responsibility as moral guardians for maintaining virtue in society by cultivating it in the private sphere where they socialize future citizens. Assigning women virtue for this duty veils their lack of real political power and portrays their political contributions as dependent on their exclusion from public life, trapping them in a powerful double bind. Yet, this situation also indicates a fluidity between static moral categories and locates women on the boundary between public and private life, a location that points in the direction of a moral middle ground, a complicated space or epistemological context in-between oppositional categories. Although this middle ground fails to offer an alternative to the virtue-vice dualism, it provides a means for considering how women can reconceptualize morality's relationship to politics in such a way as to overcome the profound limitations that dualisms place on more active and inclusive democratic

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practices. Speaking to a similar desire to overcome the dualisms perpetuated within certain areas of feminist thought, Dietz states that "I want to leap beyond this confinement and see what happens when a dynamic concept of politics as citizenship is inserted into the staid and stabilized discourses of 'public,' 'private,' 'man,' and 'woman' that control so much of feminist political theory. From this perspective we might consider whether these discourses and their attendant dichotomies, once scrutinized and challenged, can (or should) be dismantled or overturned."[58] This project shares Dietz's sentiment to "want to leap beyond this confinement" in order to achieve a more "dynamic concept of politics as citizenship." By scrutinzing and challenging the virtue-vice dualism, its detrimental impact on women's freedom, equality, and inclusion collectively indicates how virtue and vice undermine women's full citizenship. In order to achieve broader goals of a more dynamic and active politics for women, this barrier must be "dismantled or overturned."

***The Dilemma of Internal Critique***

Creating a conceptual history of virtue and vice engages this analysis in an internal critique of these political concepts that presents the inherent dilemma of failing to establish critical distance from these moral concepts. Other ways of investigating virtue and vice, for instance, might include the human needs approach taken by thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum, or a socialist feminist perspective focused on economic and material concerns. Neither these nor other external approaches, however, enable this analysis to examine how virtue and vice actually operate within political life to construct women as moral guardians. Before moving on to other alternatives, determining the detrimental function of

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[58] Ibid., 7.

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women's virtue and vice in American political discourse remains an essential task, especially given their continued usage in generating anti-feminist backlashes.

As a result, however, this project confronts the criticism that this approach perpetuates moralism by engaging with the virtue-vice discourse in order to explore its theoretical potential for developing a more complete feminist ethics. This critique raises a valid though perhaps unavoidable problem since this analysis argues that the failure of feminists to articulate the operations of virtue and vice results in leaving unquestioned an oppressive moral belief system that undermines women's full citizenship and integrates detrimental concepts into feminist ethics and politics which limits its theoretical potential. Within the highly moralized, fundamentalist context of conservative politics, women's virtue and vice continue to justify a return to traditional social functions for women as a means of stemming social and moral decay. As such, abandoning morality and its central concepts leaves this important arena of political contestation to social conservatives. Given the centrality of morality to women's political status, such a strategy seems irresponsible and incapable of mounting a serious challenge to these arguments, allowing, for instance, the "family values" rhetoric to dominate contemporary political discourse.

To offer an alternative perspective on morality, feminists need to address virtue and vice's powerful role in American political discourse that reveals their serious limits for advancing women's freedom, equality, and inclusion. As such, instead of perpetuating moralism, this analysis directs attention to the critical role of morality in determining women's citizenship in order to illustrate the need for a clear alternative to virtue and vice as pillars of a socially conservative political discourse. In addition, ignoring morality, a

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critical aspect of the cultural assumptions, turns a blind eye to a key source of women's oppression and returns to the false moral neutrality associated with Enlightenment thinking. Such an approach contradicts feminist efforts to overcome this legacy and develop a fuller concept of the moral subject as an emotional, relational being who reflects actual, lived experience. Although an internal critique entails certain important limitations, these aspects far outweigh the costs of ignoring women's morality, a critical element of their political identity, cultural assumptions, and conservative rhetoric that generate anti-feminist backlashes and deny women full citizenship.

## 1.5: Defining Virtue and Vice

Following the lead of James Farr and Quentin Skinner, this analysis focuses on the usage of virtue and vice within political discourse as opposed to identifying central definitions of these concepts. This approach differs from that of thinkers such as Alasdair MacIntyre who offers the following definition of virtue: "*a virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goal.*"[59] Whereas such a definition reflects MacIntyre's teleological argument for virtue, this analysis remains less concerned with such endeavors. With this said, understanding the etymology of virtue and vice represents an important point of departure for conceptual histories by providing a means for illustrating the broader scope of a concept's usage. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) provides a snapshot of

[59] *After Virtue*, 191.

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virtue's etymology that highlights important dimensions of this political concept. Most generally, the *OED* defines virtue as "conformity of life and conduct with the principles of morality; voluntary observance of the recognized moral laws and standards of right conduct; abstention on moral grounds from any form of wrong-doing or vice." This definition immediately draws attention to virtue's antithetical relationship with vice. More generally, thinkers from various perspectives used this concept as the foundation for establishing moral standards. Ancient Greek theorists such as Plato established the four key virtues as justice, courage, wisdom, and temperance that medieval thinkers translated into the Judeo-Christian context as the four Cardinal Virtues. The Catholic Church then added the Three Divine Virtues of faith, hope, and charity; and thinkers such as St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* codified the Seven Deadly Sins of vainglory, covetousness, lust/sexual desire, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth. In ancient and medieval times, the moral standards of virtue determined who participated in public life on the grounds that only those with enough reason to control their emotions and instincts could cultivate the virtue necessary to contribute to a stable, orderly political community. Accordingly, these societies claimed that women, children, and slaves lacked sufficient reason to engage in politics. Jumping to modern liberalism, virtue takes a different turn to the same ends. Though liberal thinkers attributed some virtue to women, they then used it to justify their continued exclusion from public life in order to elevate women above the vice-ridden public and to preserve morality in the private sphere (Okin, 1982).

Virtue's etymology reveals its gendered nature. In the English language, virtue originates in the Latin root *vir*, meaning "man." While most feminist references to virtue

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stop here, a closer look reveals an etymological family tree with two distinct branches: a feminine and masculine. Each of these branches grows from the etymological root, *vir*. The masculine branch consists of "virile," a characteristic of man marked by strength or force, and "virility," the time of man's life when he is sexually mature, fully developed in his masculine vigor, able to procreate, and engage in sexual intercourse. These two aspects of virtue clearly identify masculine physical strength, particularly expressed in terms of sexual potency. Alternatively, the feminine branch consists of terms that describe qualities of women as they relate to men. This branch begins with "virgin," a term referring to unmarried, chaste women who devote themselves to God in a manner similar to the Madonna. As such, "virgin" relates to the only virtue consistently applied to women - chastity, the denial of sexual desires that ensures a pure, excellent moral character "unstained" by sexual activity. This leads to the feminine branch's origins in "*virago*," which means a man-like or heroic woman, a female warrior. Similar to "virgin," *virago* indicates the overall quality of *vir*'s relation to women who only gain value or status for their ability to adopt masculine traits such as physical, warrior-like strength or by exercising just enough control to repress sexual pleasure with men. Any moral virtue for women then depends on their relationship to men, never for their qualities as independent women.

In contrast, vice lacks separate gendered regions and the broader development of virtue. The *OED* defines vice as "depravity/corruption of morals; evil immoral or wicked habits or conduct; indulgence in degrading pleasures/practices; a habit or practice of an immoral, degrading or wicked character." Originating in the United States, vice also

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references certain crimes, especially organized prostitution which reflects a degrading vice for women based on their sexuality. This limited reference to vice, in comparison to virtue, reflects its more marginal role in ethical and political discourse. Essentially, any behavior that fails to fit the standards of virtue represents a vice, a catch-all moral category. Yet, politically, vice plays a critical role in determining the moral justification for the government's exercise of punishment against its citizens.

This brief overview suggests three important dimensions of virtue that reveal important aspects of its gendered meaning and usage in relation to women and men: citizenship, sexuality, and religion. These three dimensions inform this project in two central ways. First, these aspects played a part in selecting the historical contexts for analysis. Each era of political discourse included in this project met the criteria of addressing these different dimensions of virtue. Second, citizenship, sexuality, and religion reflect key aspects of women's virtue that, together, illustrate important operations in its gendered meaning and usage in different political contexts. To further specify the dynamics of virtue and vice, this analysis specifies the two components of this concept: the infinite that refers to the spiritual, religious, Other-oriented aspect of virtue directing women's attention to God as their moral guide or their failure in doing so, and the finite that defines the material behavior of women in relationship to others according to the parameters of society's moral standards, directly pertaining to their citizenship and sexuality. Together, these elements capture the ways in which virtue and vice shape women's moral and, thus, political identity in the American political context.

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## 1.6: Chapter Overview: From Puritans to the Contemporary Backlash And Beyond

Broadly speaking, this project consists of two parts. The first half focuses on the construction of moral guardianship in American political discourse as the means by which women's virtue and vice shape their political status by tying their fate to that of American exceptionalism. Chapter Two analyzes Puritan discourse from 1620, when the *Mayflower* arrives on the east coast, to 1730 when their political authority essentially ends in New England. According to James Farr, a conceptual history must begin with its point of emergence which, in the American context, is the Puritan era that establishes religion and morality as elements critical to the political discourse and introduces American exceptionalism into the culture. This chapter focuses on the writings and sermons of the Puritan minister and political leader Cotton Mather who participated in the Salem witch trails and took the unique position of granting some women access to virtue. Before the late 1600s, Puritans portrayed women's morality as evil since, as the daughters of Eve, they remained responsible for original sin and the Fall of mankind, a contributing factor in the witch trials that swept through their colonial villages, peaking in the now infamous Salem witch trails of 1692 and 1693. Looking at the operations of virtue and vice in the political discourse of Puritan ministers and magistrates such as Cotton Mather indicates a differentiation between infinite and finite virtue and vice that inform the rest of this analysis to explain significant shifts within the usage of these concepts in accordance with political and economic changes. Even in a context where women largely remained invisible, virtue and vice served a political function to retain the authority of the Puritan

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ministers and magistrates threatened by growing unrest in the community. Attributing virtue to women enabled the ministers and magistrates to align women with the status quo and to identify its challengers as witches, or the vice-ridden deserving of severe punishment. Adding further weight to women's morality, the Puritans linked their virtue and vice to America's exceptional future as well. Due to their reliance on religion, infinite virtue and vice play a critical role in this discourse although a secondary political relationship surfaces through the witchcraft trials and their part in associating women with American exceptionalism.

Chapter Three focuses on the changes in women's virtue that coincided with the second founding of the United States. In response to the dramatic changes that the American Revolution brought about in women's lives, virtue emerges as an explicitly political concept during America's republican period. "Conceptual change attends any *re*constitution of the political world," James Farr points out, "Revolutionary eras, say, or great awakenings, reveal this in a most dramatic way. As beliefs, actions, and practices face crises of the most profound sort, older concepts expire and others are born."[60] The American Revolution (1776-1783), the First Founding governed by the Articles of Confederation (1781-1789), and the Second Founding established by the U.S. Constitution's ratification in 1789 together qualify as a "*re*constitution of the political world." Between 1776 and 1789, the American Revolution also dramatically altered

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[60] "Understanding Conceptual Change Politically," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, eds. Terence Ball, James Farr, Russell L. Hanson (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 30.

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women's association with public life. As husbands, fathers, and sons left to fight the American Revolution, women, often by default, assumed more responsibility for running farms, negotiating family affairs, dealing with legal matters, and bargaining in the market. Some engaged more directly in political activity. Responding to the Townshend Act of 1767, fifty-one women from North Carolina, for instance, held the Edenton Ladies' Tea Party at which they signed a petition to support a boycott of tea and other items taxed by the British.[61] In 1780, amidst accusations of unladylike behavior, the Ladies' Association of Philadelphia carried out a door-to-door campaign that successfully raised $300,000 for General Washington's troops.[62] Such political activity, feminist historians Mary Beth Norton and Linda Kerber contend, marked a shift in American political culture as women's domestic role gained importance in the nation's future. During this period, the primary shift is that the political significance of women's virtue overtakes its alignment with religion as the finite virtues and vices play a more central role than the infinite and women's education and socialization of their children becomes essential to the future of the republic. To capture this, the chapter focuses on the debates over women's education. Those who promoted women's education as central to developing their virtue and ability such as Judith Sargent Murray and Benjamin Rush emphasized women's role in educating future citizens and sustaining religious beliefs as critical to the nation's future and stability. Detractors such as Reverends James Fordyce and John Bennett aimed to severely limit

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[61] For a complete discussion of this event, see Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750 - 1800* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), Chapter 6.

[62] Ibid.

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women's access to education. Examining this debate over women's education uncovers a different perspective than the one offered by the republican motherhood thesis, a literature to which this chapter directly speaks. Instead of the Republican Mother or Wife, this analysis identifies moral guardianship as a central means for understanding the more complicated relationship between women's morality and their political status.

In Chapter Three, the republican period begins in 1789 with the ratification of the U.S. Constitution and 1835 marks its end for three reasons. First, by this time, most states granted white male suffrage which extends the vote to all white males regardless of property ownership. This marks a key turning point away from the more exclusive republic and towards the relatively inclusive electorate of American democracy that also puts women's exclusion from politics *as women* into stark relief. Expanding the suffrage then locks in a separate spheres ideology, a point illustrated by feminist historian Nancy Cott who explains that, by 1835, Americans drew a clear boundary between the male public and female private spheres that clarified women's domestic role.[63] Second, 1835 offers a logical analytical break since Alexis de Tocqueville's political thought on women and the family in *Democracy in America*, of which Volume I was published in 1835, constitutes Chapter Four's theoretical investigation into virtue's relationship to women during Jacksonian democracy. Finally, by 1835, debates about women's moral guardianship shifted from the republican era's focus on education to women's increasing

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[63] See Nancy Cott's *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). For a political institutions approach to the separate spheres thesis, see Paula Baker's "The Domestication of Politics: women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *The American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984) 3: 620-647.

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labor market participation in the textile mills, particularly those in Lowell, Massachusetts where owners claimed to uphold the virtues of American women, the topic of Chapter Five.

Chapter Four focuses on Alexis de Tocqueville's discussion of women and the family in *Democracy in America* which he wrote following his travels to America in 1830 to 1831 during the Jacksonian era. Tocqueville's political thought plays a central role in this analysis because he captures the political significance of women's moral guardianship at a point when the nation shifted politically from a republic to a democracy through white male suffrage that coincided with establishing the separate spheres ideology to justify women's continued exclusion from the public sphere. In particular, Tocqueville expresses most clearly the political significance of women's role as keepers of society's mores and those who sustain stability amidst the chaos of democracy. Tocqueville's treatment of women reveals the gendered operations of virtue and vice in his political thought, women's double burden of moral responsibility for their families *and* the nation's common good, and the inverse relationship between women's virtue and their freedom. The feminist reading of Tocqueville offered in this chapter views this thinker as one of political change who expresses the complex relationship between women's morality and politics that significantly informs this analysis' framing of American women as moral guardians of American exceptionalism. In addition, Tocqueville's political thought remains a point of departure for much of the contemporary communitarian literature that continues to rely on women's virtue and guardianship, creating a continuity between these different political contexts.

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Chapter Five continues to investigate the Jacksonian era, yet it turns to a case study of the debates about and between the Lowell mill girls who constituted the first almost all-female labor force working in the textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts between 1830 and 1850. This case study offers the relatively unique opportunity of examining how the Lowell mill girls themselves used virtue and vice in developing their differing responses to women's activism in the growing union movement. Supporters of the corporation and its efforts to provide the mill girls virtuous lives such as Harriet Farley and the contributors to the *Lowell Offering*, a company sponsored magazine compiled of writings by the Lowell mill girls, upheld women's virtue and moral guardianship, staying within the parameters of the prevailing Victorian ideology. Challengers to the corporation such as Sarah Bagley voiced their position in the *Voice of Industry*, a key tool in their union organizing efforts. Although these "radicals" initially employed virtue and vice to show the moral degradation of the corporation's policies and to elevate the virtue of the workers, they eventually moved farther away from the virtue-vice dualism in order to focus on rights and social justice as more beneficial to their aspirations for female factory workers. In this moment, these women employ vice as a means of distancing themselves from the dominant moral paradigm for women and generating political change by moving away from this oppressive virtue-vice dualism, setting the stage for future challenges to moral guardianship.

Part Two of this project focuses on the deployment of virtue and vice in the political discourse of the Sexual Revolution and the contemporary backlash against women's advances made during the second wave as a means of sustaining women's

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subordination despite the attainment of formal rights such as the vote. Chapters Six and Seven address different approaches to women's morality during the Sexual Revolution (1963-1989). Chapter Six returns to religion by examining the work of Janice Raymond, Mary Daly, and Katie Cannon that revisits some of the issues raised by the Puritans, particularly that of infinite virtue and vice which play a critical role in religious moral discourses pertaining to women. Chapter Seven focuses on the political dimension of radical feminism during the Sexual Revolution that begins from the premise of abandoning Traditional Womanhood, a serious challenge to moral guardianship. This chapter also illustrates how virtue and vice meet Val Plumwood's criteria as a dualism, an important tool in the era's feminist analysis. In particular, this analysis turns to the feminist debates over pornography in which anti-pornography feminists claim virtue and moral guardianship in their efforts to protect women from the dangers of male sexuality. Feminists who rejected their position became identified as pro-pornography and, as such, the representatives of vice who endangered women and promoted a masculine sexuality. This debate exhibits the way in which dualisms lead to uncritical reversals within feminist discourse that deflect attention away from the larger moral and political structures of women's oppression. Along with the pro-pornography feminists, lesbian feminists articulated a position of vice as those who deviated from heterosexual norms and cultural assumptions which enabled them to begin identifying the serious limitations of the virtue-vice paradigm for women's liberation. Overall, this chapter finds such feminists as inheritors of the radical Lowell mill girls who used their social relation to vice as a source of powerful political change.

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Chapter Eight attends to the contemporary debates about virtue in political theory, focusing on the communitarians and feminist care theorists, two areas in which this political concept plays a central role. Communitarians and feminists represent two central alternatives to the liberal approach to morality as premised on universality and a "thin" moral subject. Communitarians, represented by Alasdair MacIntyre, William Galston, and Amitai Etzioni, hope to rebuild American society on a virtue foundation that essentially resurrects women's moral guardianship and implies the need to return to the traditional institutions of family and marriage. Also aiming to develop a "thicker" conception of the moral subject, care theorists approach the issue of virtue from two different perspectives. Maternalists such as Sara Ruddick, Eva Kittay, and Nel Noddings conceive of care as part of women's virtue tradition that sustains its intimate relationship to women's mothering capacity. Alternatively, others such as Joan Tronto, Selma Sevenhuijsen, Julie Anne White, and Christine Koggel take a political approach to care that results in a varied reliance on virtue within their ethical theories, giving rise to alternative options to the virtue-vice paradigm. Both communitarians and feminist care theorists exclude vice from serious consideration within their development of a less impartial, "thicker" moral subject, revealing its continued "thinness" and a reluctance to deal with the political concept that justifies the exercise of political authority and meting out punishment.

Chapter Nine concludes by exploring the possibilities for change revealed by this conceptual history of women's virtue and vice that suggests avenues for developing a democratic and feminist ethics to correspond with a transformative and progressive politics freed from the confines of dualistic thinking. To indicate such possible

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alternatives, this chapter focuses on the moral middle ground, "double vision," practice, and vice as different elements excavated from the virtue-vice paradigm that offer clues for developing options to this dualism. In particular, vice acts as a central means for leveraging the critical distance from virtue to see how it operates to align women with moral guardianship, protectors of the very status quo that oppresses them. Embracing vice places women in the position of challenging the system, yet it does not sufficiently challenge the moral boundaries of virtue and vice. In the end, the political approach to the ethic of care offers a promising means for achieving a more feminist and democratic ethics that, coupled with a deliberative approach, indicates an alternative means for determining a society's ethical standards. Moving away from the virtue-vice dualism reveals a range of transformative possibilities for addressing the reality of morality in politics while redefining both in liberatory ways consistent with the freedom, inclusion, and equality necessary for women's full citizenship.

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## PROLOGUE TO PART I

### The Frontiers of Moral Guardianship: From Puritan Women to Lowell Mill Girls

In late July of 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville and his companion Gustave de Beaumont arrived at the Territory of Michigan's frontier. There, they hoped to gain rare, first-hand experience of the "edge of civilization" where pioneers, hoping to carve out a life in the wilderness and find their fortunes, emigrated to from the East as Native Americans escaped further West. Traveling into the forest, Tocqueville encountered the quiet, rugged pioneer and, more importantly for our purposes, his wife who, in many ways, represents the ideal woman of early America: what I call, the moral guardian. Impressed by her enduring spirit, Tocqueville describes her at some length in his travel journal:

> The wife of the pioneer has torn herself in one instant and without hope of returning from that innocent cradle of her youth...To devote herself to austere duties, submit herself to privations which were unknown to her, embrace an existence for which she was not made, such was the occupation of the finest years of her life, such have been for her the delights of marriage. Want, suffering, and loneliness have affected her constitution but not bowed her courage. 'Mid the profound sadness painted on her delicate features, you easily remark a religious resignation and profound peace and I know not what natural and tranquil firmness confronting all the miseries of life without fearing or scorning them...'Around this woman crowd half naked children...To see their strength and her weakness one would say that she had exhausted herself giving them life and that she does not regret what they have cost her.[1]

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[1] George Wilson Pierson. *Tocqueville in America* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 245. Tocqueville also included this selection from his

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The pioneer wife embodies the feminine virtue of self-sacrifice. First, she leaves "that innocent cradle of her youth," even the comforts of "civilized" life in the East, to follow her husband into the wilderness. Then, the pioneer wife literally sacrifices her self by transferring her physical strength to her children. Moreover, the "profound" nature of her sadness and peace, and "religious resignation" imbue these sacrificial acts with an other-worldly, spiritual quality. Though rooted in religion, such sacrifices serve a political purpose. Tocqueville indicates this by attributing the traditionally masculine virtue of courage to the pioneer wife who valiantly sacrifices herself to maintain a stable family with a "natural and tranquil firmness" amidst "all the miseries of life." In the process, she performs an invaluable political service by enabling her husband and children to meet the staggering challenges of pioneering essential to nation-building in early America. While women such as those on the frontier continued to play the traditional roles of mother and wife and to possess feminine virtues such as self-sacrifice, they simultaneously acquired an unprecedented political significance as moral guardians whose virtue made them responsible for protecting the family and ultimately democracy. Seen in this light, Tocqueville's pioneer wife symbolizes the American woman who emerges from Puritan and republican political discourse as the moral guardian of democracy's future.

More specifically, this pioneer woman acts as a window into seeing how virtue and vice shape women's political identity in the Puritan and republican eras and the early days of democracy in the 1830s when Tocqueville comes to America and moral guardianship

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travel diary in *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer's (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), Appendix I, 731-33.

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defines women's relationship to politics. Pioneering itself parallels the experience of Puritan women who, escaping religious persecution in England, settled in America to establish an ideal religious community in the wilds of the New World. Similar to the pioneer woman's "religious resignation" and "profound peace" in the face of poverty, isolation, and danger, Puritan women held fast to their faith in God, exhibiting the feminine virtue of piety. In this historic moment, religion remains the driving force of virtue and vice as the biblical and patriarchal origins of women's morality transfer into the American context. Framing women's morality in religious terms locks women into a double burden of moral responsibility for family and nation that links their individual virtue and vice to the nation's collective success or failure. This degree of responsibility stems from the often overlooked relationship of women's morality to American exceptionalism that originates in John Winthrop's biblical declaration of America as a "City Upon the Hill" in 1629 that portrays America as always facing a choice between following the righteous path of God or turning away from Him and towards the vice and political decay that afflict other nations.[2] As women's religiously grounded morality gains more political significance from the Puritan and republican to the early democratic period, their political identity as moral guardians increasingly burdens them with the responsibility for keeping America on the righteous path of God.

During the republican period, the religious character of women's virtue and vice moves into the background as the young nation endows American women with the reason

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[2] On the biblical origins of American exceptionalism, see Philip Abbot's *Political Thought in America: Conversations and Debates* (Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1991), Introduction and Chapter 1.

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necessary to cultivate the virtue that their children need in order to become good citizens. Women's education and their political significance as wives and mothers shift to the forefront of defining their moral character. Similar to Tocqueville's pioneer woman who abandons the culture and knowledge of the East for the frontier, republican and democratic women sacrifice their intellectual pursuits and public activities upon marriage in order to support their husbands' endeavors. In democracy, as Tocqueville reveals, education and access to public life even endow the American woman with the capacity to identify and protect their families and the nation from the vice that threatens political decay. Starting from the vantage point of Tocqueville's pioneer woman then introduces the religious, educational, and political dimensions of women's virtue and vice as they evolve from the Puritan and republican to the democratic era, coalescing into the moral guardianship that shapes women's political identity.

In particular, Tocqueville's discussion of women and the family in *Democracy in America* (Volume II)[3] informs this analysis of women's virtue and vice because he grants American women great political significance and clearly identifies how women's morality links to the nation's political success or failure. In the *Democracy*, Tocqueville warns that "soft" despotism threatens democracy because the American passion for equality permits government intervention into private life and erodes personal freedoms. American wives

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[3] Tocqueville discusses women and the family elsewhere. See Tocqueville's *Journey to America*, ed. J.P. Mayer (Westport: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1971), 42-45, 109-110, 157, 168-171,189, 226, 230-232, 364-365; and George Wilson Pierson's *Tocqueville in America* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1959), 44-46, 96, 157-160, 215, 246-249, 306-307, 313-315, 398.

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and mothers, Tocqueville observes, protect democracy against "soft" despotism by preserving family and religion from public vice and government intrusion. Their domestic role serves such an important political purpose that Tocqueville declares, "it is women who shaped mores. Therefore, everything which has a bearing on the status of women, their habits, and their thoughts is, in my view, of great political importance."[4] Women acquire the power to establish and maintain the mores that determine "the whole moral and intellectual state of the people,"[5] and often direct and influence the lives of Americans to a much greater degree than their formal laws. Since "it is women who shaped mores," they can possess enough political influence to outweigh even formal laws.[6]

Although Tocqueville never uses the phrase "moral guardian,"[7] his political

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[4] *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer, 287.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 590. Tocqueville adopts Montesquieu's expansive understanding of how laws relate to mores and mores relate to women. In *The Spirit of the Laws*, for example, Montesquieu states, "laws are established, mores are inspired; the latter depend more on the general spirit, the former on a particular institution;" and "laws regulate the actions of the citizens, mores regulate the actions of the man" (314, 317). In terms of women, Montesquieu comments that "in republics women are free by the laws and captured by the mores; luxury is banished there and with it, corruption and vices" (*The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, Harold Samuel Stone [NY, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989],105). For a feminist reading of Montesquieu, see Michael A. Mosher's "The Judgmental Gaze of European Women: Gender, Sexuality, and the Critique of Republican Rule," *Political Theory* 22 (February 1994) 1: 25-44.

[7] Often seen as his protege, Montesquieu greatly influenced Tocqueville's political thought. As such, it is worth noting that in *The Spirit of the Laws* Montesquieu employs the language of guardianship when discussing women. He states that "the laws that give guardianship to the mother are more attentive to the preservation of the person of the ward; those that give it to the closest heir are more attentive to the preservation of the goods. Among peoples whose mores are corrupt, it is preferable to give the guardianship to the mother" (*The Spirit of the Laws*, 323).

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thought on women and the family in *Democracy in America* strongly informs this term's meaning here. Moral guardianship is defined as the historical and theoretical process by which the interplay between virtue and vice bases the American woman's political identity in a double bind by granting her the virtue to protect democracy from decay and the vice to cause it while denying her the political power to meet the double burden of moral responsibility. Approaching women's virtue and vice from this perspective shows how these moral standards operate to shape concrete political action, bridging the gap between the abstract arena of discourse and the practice of politics to identify virtue's significance in the real world of political strategy. By examining virtue and vice at key historical moments when women's morality gained political meaning, it becomes evident that masculine *virtu*, the moral standard for active citizen participation in the republican tradition, transitions into virtue, a moral standard of excellence that places a premium on the passive preservation of the status quo in the American context. As virtue shifts from the public domain to the private where family and religion act as the primary sites for preserving traditional moral beliefs, men retain some virtue, but women become its guardians who use their domestic role to defend the family and, thereby, the nation's moral fabric from the threat of moral corruption and vice. At the same time, women, as the daughters of Eve, retain their responsibility for vice, thus embodying the very moral corruption against which they must guard the family and nation. The American woman ends up in the untenable position of staying the narrow course of virtue or accepting blame for giving into the temptations of vice that will destroy the nation as Eve brought ruin upon the Garden of Eden. This double bind translates into women's political status as

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moral guardians, premised on their passivity, submission to oppressive traditional institutions, and protection of the status quo, a political posture contrary to the dynamic, active qualities of full democratic citizenship.

Part One argues that as women's virtue gains political significance, virtue becomes the animating force of moral guardianship, a political status anchoring women to a passive and defensive relationship to politics that diminishes the impetus for political change. As such, focusing on virtue helps to reveal how moral guardianship grounds women in a passive, defensive political identity antithetical to the dynamic, action-oriented character of the full citizenship that contemporary feminists hope to achieve. Describing full citizenship as democratic, feminist theorist Mary Dietz states that

> for a concept of citizenship, feminists should turn to relations and practices that are expressly contextual, institutional, and political, informed by and situated within particular cultures, and histories, and *oriented towards action*...And only when feminist theorists declare *citizen action a value* will they be able to claim a truly liberatory politics as their own. To bring citizen democracy to feminist politics is to make feminist politics more democratic [emphasis mine].[8]

Dietz then sets forth the admirable and realistic goal for feminists to declare "citizen action" as essential to democratic citizenship and a "truly liberatory politics." As the animating force of women's political status as moral guardians, virtue and vice create an obstacle to achieving women's full democratic citizenship in the contemporary context. To overcome this obstacle, feminists must first identify how virtue and vice emerge to define women as moral guardians and the detrimental political outcomes of this status, and then find alternatives to virtue and vice in order to reconstruct women's citizenship on

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[8] *Turning Operations: Feminism, Arendt, and Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 34, 37.

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democratic grounds.

To begin exploring alternatives, Part One concludes by investigating the role of virtue and vice within the political discourse between different factions of the Lowell mill girls, female factory operatives who worked and even organized in the textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts between 1830 and 1850. Constituting an almost all-female labor force at the height of the Victorian era, these women, merely by walking onto the factory floor, challenged moral guardianship. Yet, the Lowell mill girls' differing responses to paid labor and organizing reflect deeply conflicting views about their role as moral guardians in American society. Most importantly, however, the Lowell mill girls who organized a union and even went on strike seriously threatened moral guardianship and, as we shall see, even tried to escape the traditional virtue-based discourse available to women in order to argue for equality, freedom, and economic justice. In this exciting historical moment when women begin leaving the private sphere to work in factories, some Lowell mill girls affect political, economic, and social change by breaking free of the constraints that virtue and vice impose on them as moral guardians of American democracy in order to seek alternative grounds for an active, even aggressive political identity for women.

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# CHAPTER TWO

## Living in the Shadows of the City Upon a Hill: A Pre-History of Women's Virtue & Vice in Puritan Discourse

### 2.1: Introduction

Aboard the *Arbella,* heading to Salem in 1629, Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony John Winthrop proclaimed to his fledgling Puritan community, "we must Consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the Eyes of all people are upon us; so that if we shall deal falsely with our god in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us."[1] Winthrop articulates the Puritan vision of America as a utopia for God's people and sets in place the biblical standard for American exceptionalism. In villages dotting New England's coastline, these settlers established a theocracy premised on the rule of God's elect over the masses, and the rule of men over women. Based on the biblical injunction that God made women to be the help-meets of men, the Puritans, borrowing from English common law, continued a tradition of patriarchy in which the laws of coverture stipulated that husbands and fathers legally "cover" or represent their wives and daughters. In this context, Puritan women acquired virtue by performing their duties as daughters, mothers, and wives, adhering to the strict moral and legal codes of magistrates and ministers, and essentially remaining invisible in

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[1] "A Modell of Christian Charity," in *Political Thought in America: An Anthology,* 2nd edition, ed. Michael B. Levy (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1992), 12. Winthrop draws on the biblical passage referring to a "City Upon a Hill" in Matthew 5:14. To facilitate the reader's accessibility to the material from this period, I translate the Puritan's English usage into its contemporary version.

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their communities. By and large, then, women lived in the shadows of the "City upon a Hill," or so it would seem. From the start, however, the Devil, sin, evil, and vice threatened to tear down the walls of Winthrop's city. On occasion, the Devil took the shape of Indians who attacked and killed the settlers. Though most often, Satan possessed women, the daughters of Eve, who, particularly as witches, represented the disorder and chaos always looming at the edges of Puritan society. Dating back to the colony's beginning, charging defiant women with witchcraft served important political purposes. In the early 1630s, Governor Winthrop, for instance, accused Ann Hutchinson, who he banished for her Antinomian teachings, and two Quaker women, who he deported, of witchcraft in order to serve the political ends of squelching nascent alternatives to the Puritan religion and its leaders' governing authority. While Puritans used witchcraft to subdue social disorder throughout the 1600s, this strategy came to a head during the Essex County, home of the Salem epidemic, and Connecticut trials of 1692 and 1693. Between 1620 and 1725, magistrates and ministers accused 344 people of witchcraft in New England. 267 or 78% of them were women.[2] In contrast to the invisibility of virtuous women, those accused of witchcraft became the focus of attention in their communities and ultimately history. From behind the images of the virtuous woman and the witch emerges the dynamic interplay of virtue and vice in Puritan discourse that reveals how women acquire a level of moral responsibility and, most importantly, political significance either as threats to or guardians of the "City upon a Hill." In this unlikely

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[2] Carol F. Karlsen. *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 47.

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historical context, the initial conditions that shape the future of women's political identity as America's moral guardians become evident.

As the Puritan discourse reveals, virtue and its counterpart vice operate in tandem to create a dynamic that characterizes how women's morality defines their political role in America's utopian project. To start tracing this dynamic, this chapter acts as a "pre-history" of women's virtue and vice within American political discourse. As James Farr explains, "for a conceptual history to be a genuine history, the concept's genesis must be told; and this requires an understanding of its pre-history...How concepts (and words) emerge - sometimes explosively, usually rather more glacially - out of earlier conceptual material is itself an essential part of the story."[3] In this case, the "pre-history" is America's colonial period preceding the American Revolutionary War and the subsequent establishment of the United States in the 1780s. Although only one aspect of America's political culture during the colonial period, the Puritans play a critical role in this analysis for three reasons. First, the Puritan theocracy transferred Old World moral and legal codes into the New World, essentially creating America's common law tradition that directly impacts women's political fate. Speaking to the interconnectedness of morals and the law, historian David Flaherty explains that "for the seventeenth century the divine moral law was necessarily binding on all persons in all times. The moral law was the equivalent of natural law" and the Bible acted as the source of basic wisdom about

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[3] "Understanding Conceptual Change Politically," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, eds. Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38.

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morality.[4] In particular, Puritans regulated sexual immorality such as fornication and adultery through stiff legal sanctions. Of course, prosecutions of women far outnumbered those of men.[5] Second, while Puritans left an indelible mark on America's moral and legal codes, they also founded America's belief in its exceptional future as a nation chosen by God. As Winthrop's speech suggests, the Puritans aimed to carve a religious utopia out of the heathen wilderness. Third, women surprisingly play a central role in this utopian project not only as vice-ridden witches but as moral guardians of their community's future. Puritanism, in short, entails strict moral codes of virtue and vice, emanating from religious beliefs, that form the first link between women's morality and politics in such a way that their political character becomes critical to America's exceptional future.

As such, the time period covered in this chapter coincides with the rise of the Puritans beginning with the signing of the *Mayflower Compact* in 1620 and their fall in 1730 when Puritan religious and political authority essentially ends in the northern colonies. Particular attention is paid to the early 1690s when ministers such as Cotton Mather tried to explain the contradiction between the dramatic increase in women's

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[4] "Law and the Enforcement of Morals in Early America," *Perspectives in American History*, Vol. V, eds. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 207-8. Ultimately Flaherty argues that even the Puritans failed to enforce moral codes through the law, a lesson for contemporaries who, he argues, should leave issues of sexual morality to the social, not legal sphere. While this argument certainly makes a solid point, it is more complicated for women who become keepers of morality in the private sphere, a position that holds serious political outcomes for their citizenship, a point made more clear in Chapter 2. In the end such boundaries between the social and political are much more permeable than Flaherty would allow though the premise of granting individuals the right to make choices regarding their sexuality is one with which I wholeheartedly agree.

[5] Ibid., 229.

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church attendance and the witch trial epidemic sweeping villages from Massachusetts to Connecticut. Their explanations reveal a clear example of the political power exercised by attributing virtue and vice to women. It is noteworthy that from 1730 into the 1770s, the First Great Awakening, a period of evangelical, populist religious revival, constituted another historical period marked by women's increased participation in religious activity. Although the First Great Awakening may prove an interesting point of comparison with the Puritans, this analysis focuses on how American exceptionalism, a cultural belief established by the Puritans, shapes the relationship of women's morality to politics that leaves the First Great Awakening outside the scope of this study. Instead, the Puritan founding or "pre-history" is compared with the republican founding of the 1780s, another period central to women's role in the development of American exceptionalism.

Since women generally remain silent in Puritan discourse, the sermons of Puritan ministers serve as the means for piecing together their political culture's views on women's morality. Although many ministers' voices are included, Cotton Mather's work takes center stage due, in part, to his numerous sermons on women's virtue and writings on witchcraft that remain central to the history of colonial America's women.[6] Additionally, Mather's work provides the opportunity for investigating how a prominent

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[6] Indicating Mather's prominence, Charles Evans' *American Bibliography: A Chronological Dictionary of all Books, Pamphlets and Periodical Publications Printed in the USA, 1639-1820* (New York, NY: P. Smith, 1941) accounts for 70 elegies, memorials, funeral sermons, and works on practical piety pertaining to women. Mather authored 27 while the remaining 43 belong to 21 other authors. For a discussion of this literature on vertuous women, see "Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668-1735," in *Women in American Religion*, ed. Janet Wilson James (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 67-88.

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religious and political figure struggled with women's role in Puritan society by examining their relationship to virtue and vice, ultimately setting the tone for Puritan discourse and our understanding of their political culture.

Born in 1663 to a dynasty of Puritan founders, including his father Increase Mather and grandfathers Richard Mather and John Cotton, Cotton Mather, perhaps even more than his forefathers, lived at a time of heightened political change. The French and Indian wars raged, a rising mercantalist class challenged the landed agrarian elite, and the clergy even split as an anti-Mather group established the Brattle Street Church in Boston, Mather's hometown. With the theocratic utopia of John Winthrop under heavy siege, Cotton Mather stood against the forces of change to defend the Puritan vision for the Massachusetts Bay colony. Part of his political battle engaged Mather in an ongoing debate about women's role in the community. This debate began at the inception of Puritanism in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century England when the British argued over women's nature, the value of marriage, and the propriety of their social roles.[7] In America, patriarchy ironically caused the greatest conflict for the Puritans who needed to join their opposing views of women as the daughters of Eve, the source of mankind's original sin, with the daughters of Zion or Heaven who sustained marriage and family, two institutions critical to Puritan theocracy. Entering the debate, Mather comments extensively on women and virtue in well-known works such as *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* and lesser ones such as *Tabitha Rediviva* and *Bethiah,* and vice in his works on witchcraft such as *On Witchcraft: Being the Wonders of the Invisible World.*

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[7] Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 160.

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Reading these works against each other reveals a contradictory picture of the Puritan woman. While Mather, on the one hand, grants a very few women of pure and excellent character the capacity for the virtue that will enable them to enter God's Kingdom, he, on the other hand, maintains women's inherent link to vice and their responsibility for man's original sin. Given the dualistic moral calculus of Puritans who categorized all people as either good or evil, Mather's position in which women naturally inherited Eve's sin and could acquire the virtue necessary to be good mothers and wives contradicted the traditional views on women and destabilized the Puritan's moral universe.

The contradictions within Mather's work suggest that a moment of conceptual and political change was underway for the Puritans in the 1690s. Specifically, attributing virtue to women, this chapter argues, acts as the lynchpin for establishing their relationship to politics and the pre-history of virtue as a *political* concept in relation to women. By assigning a range of virtues to women, the Puritans link them to the very survival of their political community and begin to construct women as moral guardians. Puritan women made undeniable contributions to their community. They immigrated to and pioneered in the New World where the community's very existence depended on every person's labor, and they bore children, endangering their lives to ensure the colony's collective future. While these circumstances surely contributed to a shifting view of Puritan women, the political significance of women's virtue becomes clearest when seen from the perspective that Puritans envisioned their society as a godly utopia under attack by an evil that women personified, particularly during the witchcraft epidemics of the mid to late 1600s. As *the* active force of evil, Puritans granted women virtue in order to save them from the

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increasing power of the Devil who lured them into witchcraft. Virtuous women, then, guarded against Satan on a spiritual level and disorder and chaos on a political level. As virtue acquires the political significance of enabling women to defend the Puritan community against vice and evil, Puritan women transform into moral guardians, an identity that enlists them on Heaven's side of a cosmic battle being waged against Hell on America's shores.

In order to understand the formation of women's first political identity as moral guardians, this chapter develops three arguments. First, women acquire the initial attributes of moral guardianship through the relationship of their virtue and vice to the Puritan vision of American exceptionalism that begins to explain the heavy political weight placed on the American woman's morality. Second, the Puritan discourse reveals the need for a typology of women's virtue and vice that consists of two categories: the infinite or religious and spiritually oriented virtues and vices, and the finite or earthly, political and social moral traits. This typology tracks how the infinite virtues and vices anchor women's morality in religion that then determine their finite behavior in the political community. By primarily defining women's virtue and vice in infinite terms, the Puritans locate women's morality on a spiritual plane that associates them with the common good and American exceptionalism. Third, virtue and vice operate in tandem to create the following political dynamic for women. Virtue establishes submissiveness and passivity at the heart of women's initial political identity as moral guardians who defend the nation's status quo, particularly from the threat of vice-ridden women who represent political order and chaos. As such, this moral dualism holds serious political implications for women's

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full, active, and participatory citizenship in America.

To develop these arguments, this chapter first examines the infinite and finite virtues of women in Puritan discourse to illustrate the beginnings of moral guardianship. Turning next to the period's witchcraft trials, the chapter focuses on women's infinite and finite vices in order to identify the exercise of political power involved in attributing virtue and vice to women. Finally, this analysis concludes by introducing how women's moral guardianship ties into American exceptionalism and creates serious impediments to the future of women's active citizenship.

## 2.2: Daughters of Eve and Zion: The Infinite and Finite Virtues of Puritan Women

Before turning to the Puritan woman's virtue, it is critical to recognize that vice acts as the backdrop against which all Puritan virtue operated. Synonymous with sin or evil, vice carries a heavy moral weight for Puritans who believe that "SIN...is what separates between God and us...SIN alienates from the *Love* and *Life* of God."[8] As the barrier between man and God's love, vice as sin indicates how Puritans framed morality in extremely dualistic terms. Vice, evil, and sin essentially constitute man's natural condition. As Cotton Mather explains, "We have in our own *Corrupt Nature*, a Disposition of Sin. We brought into the world with us, a *Corrupt nature*, a *Carnal Mind*, an *Evil Heart*, which is always Disposed to *Sin*. In this *Corrupt Nature* we have a

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[8] *Nicetas. Or, Temptations to Sin, and Particularly to the SIN wherewith Youth Is most Usually and Easily Ensnared; Well Answered & Conquered, in a Sermon, Directing and Engaging young People to the Resolutions of EARLY PIETY* (Boston: Timothy Green, 1705), 23. Massachusetts Historical Society.

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continual *Temptation*."[9] Although the Puritans believed all humans to be disposed to the seven deadly sins, sexual desire or lust was the strongest "carnal" temptation, often leading to adultery, fornication, and immodesty, acts that jeopardized the key institutions of marriage and family. Emphasizing the punishment for sexual sins, Mather warns young people, "Yea, let not only your *Bodies* be preserved from *Fornication*, but study your Preservation from all things that have any *Tendency* to *Unchastity*...And your *Hands* be rather *Cut off*, than that you should be pull'd by them into the *Fire of Hell*...*Be not Deceived; neither Fornicators, nor Adulterers, nor Effeminate*, (ie. Self-polluters) *nor Sodomites, shall inherit the Kingdom of God*."[10] All young people and Puritans, for that matter, must fight the temptations of fornication, masturbation, and sodomy to keep the Devil at bay.

The sexual aspect of sin becomes more evident when applied to women. Puritans used God's punishment for Eve's sin that made women child-bearers and men's help-meets to legitimize patriarchy and to establish vice as women's given moral condition. In *Genesis* 3:16, God commands, "Unto the woman...I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." This alone erects a high barrier to women achieving virtue by linking a woman's two primary social roles as wife and mother to Eve's original sin. Some ministers such as John Sprint used Eve to chastise disobedient wives; "Adam was not first deceived immediately by the *Serpent*, but only enticed and deceived by the

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[9] Ibid., 8-9.

[10] Ibid., 38-40.

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Woman, who was the Tempter's agent," a "Seduction of Man" for which God made woman's punishment obedience to male authority, for which women could "thank your Mother *Eve*."[11] In Mather's work on women and virtue, Eve most frequently appears in the phrase "daughters of Eve" to contrast women as naturally sinful with the "daughters of God, Zion, or Heaven," or those few capable of virtue. In the beginning of *Bethiah*, Mather frames this sermon on women's virtue in terms of Eve and original sin, declaring at the start, "Ah! *Sin*; What hast thou brought us to! O Mankind, *Son of the Morning, How are thou fallen from Heaven!* And all thy *Daughters* with thee!"[12] Throughout the sermon, Mather explains how women can overcome their sinful condition to become daughters of God. For Puritans, invoking Eve as the original sinner associated women explicitly with vice and responsibility for the Fall of mankind. As such, women's vice serves as the backdrop against which Puritan ministers worked when attributing virtue to women.

Opening the door to women's virtue, Mather's reinterprets Eve in order to turn God's curse on women to bear children into a blessing. Essentially, Mather argues that women's fear of death in childbirth powerfully motivates them to find God:

> The *Curse* is turned into a *Blessing* unto them. God Sanctifies unto them their *Fear of Death*, and thereby renders them the more acquainted with the way of *Living unto Him*; the fitter to *Dy*, by consequence, the fitter to *Live*...The *Dubious Hazards* of their Lives in their *Appointed Sorrows*, drive them the more frequently,

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[11] *The Bride-Woman's Counsellor* (Boston, MA, 1709), 6. Rare Books Division, New York Public Library.

[12] *Bethiah. The Glory Which Adorns the Daughters of God, and the Piety, Wherewith ZION wishes to see his DAUGHTERS Glorious* (Boston: Printed by Franklin for Gerrish, 1722), 11. Massachusetts Historical Society.

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> & the more fervently to commit themselves into the Hands of their Only Savior. They are *Saved thro' Childbearing*; inasmuch as it singularly obliges them to *Continue in Faith, and Charity, and Holiness, with Sobriety.*[13]

Eve's "*Curse*" turns into a "*Blessing*" as women "are *Saved thro' childbearing.*" No longer is a woman's possible death in childbirth seen only as punishment for original sin, but delivers her into God's hands, and grants the virtues of faith and charity that permit sober holiness.[14] Mather interprets Eve as giving birth to mankind, virtue, and goodness: "As far as we can Learn, the *first Believer* of our Saviour, that ever was in the World, was, *A Woman.* And that brave Woman, being Styled, *The Mother of all the Living*, it has induced Learned Men to conceive, that *EVE* was, by being the *First* of them all, in a peculiar manner, the *Mother of all that Live unto God*; and that she was on this Account, [Oh! Most Happy Woman!] a *Mother* to her own *Husband*, and the Instrument of bringing him to Believe in the *Great Redeemer.*"[15] Here Eve becomes "the mother of all the living" and "all that Live unto God;" and instead of tempting Adam to sin, she is an "Instrument" of his salvation and the "*Mother*" to her own "*Husband.*" As the "*first Believer* of our Saviour," Eve is the mother of goodness and even virtue, not evil, in the

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[13] *Tabitha Rediviva. An Essay to Describe and Commend the Good Works of a Vertuous woman; Who therein approves her self a Real DISCIPLE OF AN Holy SAVIOUR. With some Justice done to the MEMORY of that Religious and Honourable GENTLEWOMAN, Mrs. Elizabeth Hutchinson. Who Expired, 3d. 12 m. 1712, 13* (Boston: J. Allen, 1713), 22. Massachusetts Historical Society.

[14] Showing the value placed on childbirth, John Oliver published a popular tract in which he articulates why a husband's duty to his pregnant wife is to be kind, comforting, and understanding of her pain instead of dismissing it as punishment for her sin. See *A Present for Teeming American Women* (Boston, 1694). Massachusetts Historical Society.

[15] *Tabitha Rediviva*, 23-4.

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world. Such a position transforms Eve from the source of original sin into the means for humanity's salvation. This radical reinterpretation of Eve enables Mather to overcome an important obstacle to granting women virtue. Yet, he never abandons women's affiliation with Eve's original sin, a prominent theme in his work on witchcraft. As such, Mather finds himself in the same conflicted position on women's morality as his peers in which he adheres to the doctrine of original sin and portrays women as capable of virtue.

Mather's position challenges the unequivocal virtue-vice dualism that shaped the Puritan moral universe and even male authority by making Eve God's first believer and Adam's means to salvation. Although Puritan morality usually leaves little room for moral ambiguity, women's virtue locates them in a middle ground as the daughters of Eve who serve as "the Mother of all that Live unto God" and the cause of original sin and the Fall of mankind. Reinterpreting Eve, the dominant image for Puritan women, then enables ministers and their flock to lay moral responsibility for vice and virtue at women's doorstep. This position paves the way for moral guardianship since this contradictory moral status of Eve associates women with virtue and creates a double bind in which society holds women responsible for humanity's sin *and* their salvation.

Attributing virtue to women gains further significance since the Puritans believed that only the few elected by God could possess the virtue necessary to enter heaven. In *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, Mather emphatically asserts women's virtue by declaring that, "*Virtue* it self, and the *Names* of all particular *Virtues*, are grammatically of

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the *Female Gender.*"[16] Though well-acquainted with Latin, Mather ignores the fact that virtue emanates from the Latin term "*vir*," meaning "man." Perhaps the grammar to which Mather refers is the term's feminine etymology stemming from virgin, virginity, and the Virgin Mary, concepts that dominate Puritan religious views of women's piety and chastity. Regardless, Mather identifies virtue as inherently feminine. To achieve virtue, women must perform good works done in "*Obedience* to the *Law* of the Holy God" that creates "this *Moral Law"* as "the everlasting *Rule* by which we are to Live unto God. If our *Works* do in any point fall short of that Rule, they are not *perfectly Good.* Indeed none of our *Works* do perfectly come up to it, while we sojourn in our *Corrupt Flesh*, in an *Evil World.*"[17] Despite absolute obedience to God, the harsh realities of the Puritan moral calculus already prevent humans, while trapped in the body's corrupting temptations, from fully achieving perfect moral excellence in this life. Mather advises virtuous women to live by the "motto" of all good Christians: "*Live Soberly, and Righteously, & Godily. Good Works* are the Actions of a *Sober*, a *Righteous*, a *Godly* Life."[18] Furthermore, he stipulates how women acquire virtue by baptism, accepting the word of God, using Him as protection from temptation, studying God in all relations and conditions, and marrying Him before a man. In return for living a virtuous life, women

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[16] *Ornaments for the daughters of Zion. Or the Character and happiness of a vertuous woman: in a discourse which directs the female-sex how to express, the fear of God in every age and state of their life; and obtain both temporal and eternal blessedness* (Cambridge, MA: Printed by S.G. & B.G. [Samuel & Bartholomew Green] for Samuel Phillips at Boston, 1691), 10. Massachusetts Historical Society.

[17] Ibid., 6-7.

[18] Ibid., 8.

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receive the ultimate happiness in God's praise: "And this Happiness is here summed up in that Word, *She shall be praised*...Truly where there is *Vertue*, there will be *Praise*; and the *virtuous Woman* will have her *Fear* of God, recompensed with *Praise* from God, and be forever *glorious*."[19] In sum, God then animates women's virtue, establishes a relationship between women and their moral character on the spiritual plane of the infinite, and gives them their key to eternal happiness.

Examining the virtues attributed to women reveals, what I identify as, their "infinite" quality that creates a category important to understanding women's virtue throughout American political culture. Infinite virtues refer to those necessary for virtue to exist, or the core moral characteristics of a woman who does good works in the spirit of God. As such, infinite virtues relate to a woman's internal world where she devotes her very being to a relationship with God and directs her gaze to the spiritual after-life beyond this temporal world. These virtues collectively represent the source for the transcendent aspect of female morality that associates women with a higher, spiritual plane. More importantly, these virtues reveal how Puritans permitted women's entrance into the spiritual community of believers who conformed to God's will, an important political step within a theocracy. To investigate this category further, this analysis now turns to each of the four infinite virtues: piety, sacrifice, humility, and modesty.

Piety serves as the source for all virtue according to the Puritans. Requiring an absolute conformity to God's will, piety represents the highest moral principle for Puritan

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[19] Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, 31.

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men and women.[20] Describing this virtue, Mather preaches that:

> A *Daughter* of GOD is by a *Principle* of PIETY quickening of her made all *Glorious within*...There is no one Thing, wherein a Principle of PIETY is more notably and more certainly discovered, than in labouring after a *Conformity* unto our SAVIOUR...*A Soul full of a* CHRIST, and the PIETY that will fill you with the *Glory of the Lord*, This, this is that which above all the Things in the World, it is our *Hearts Desire* and *Prayer* for you, that you may be beautified withal.[21]

Mather further specifies how piety operates in a woman's life when she loves God, prizes Christ, hates sin, flees this world, endures hardships, forgives adversaries, is a blessing to all relations, and focuses on eternal life. Overall, the virtue of piety enables women to gain access to glory and the Kingdom of God, generally thought to be the realm of man. Piety takes a more explicitly political turn in Mather's declaration that "When we read in the Book of God concerning, *A Vertuous Woman*, the Word which we render *Vertuous*, carries *Courage* in it. Some note that it implies a *Piety* Embued [sic] with such *Fortitude*, as to do *Good Works*, when one shall be despised, and abused for the doing of them."[22] By associating women with courage, traditionally a masculine civic virtue, and fortitude, one of the four cardinal virtues, Mather affiliates women with two male virtues that usually involve the physical strength and political integrity to defend their community. In contrast to the masculine power inherent to these virtues, a woman's strength derives

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[20] For an account of male virtue, see Mather's *Benedictus. Good Men Described, and the Glories of their Goodness, declared. With Some Character & History of One who belonged unto the tripe; Namely, Mr. Thomas Bridge, a Late Pastor of the First-Church in Boston; Who Expired 26 d. VII m. 1715* (Boston: B. Green, 1715), 41. Massachusetts Historical Society.

[21] *Bethiah*, 42, 44, 45.

[22] *Tabitha Rediviva,* 40.

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from her piety or conformity to God's will, empowering her with the "fortitude" or endurance and will power to do His work even in the face of abuse. Through this formulation of women's virtue, Mather enlists them alongside men in the Puritan struggle for godliness on earth.

When speaking about women's piety, Puritan ministers often used the metaphor of marriage to describe the regeneration or complete moral reform of men and women who accept God into their hearts and conform to His will. Since men and women must marry God before each other, Margaret Masson, a scholar of Puritan sermons, argues that men and women acquire some level of gender equality as both sexes become subordinate to God.[23] Such a perspective suggests men's acceptance of women, at least to some degree, in the Puritan community of God. The marriage metaphor illustrates the strong sexual character of women's infinite virtue even in the context of the Puritan's most morally pure realm of piety. A highly sexualized language characterizes Mather's lengthy description of woman's marriage to God - the essential act of piety - in *Bethiah*, for instance. Before entering "Temporal Marriage," Mather implores the young maid *"as a chaste Virgin to CHRIST...*to be solicited and importuned for this *Mystical Marriage."*[24] If the young woman resists the Lord's solicitation of her love, then "Satan has *blinded* thee, if thou canst say of Him, *He hath no Form nor Comeliness; there is no Beauty in Him, for which*

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[23] "The Typology of the Female as a Model for the Regenerate: Puritan Preaching, 1690-1730," *Signs* 2 (Winter 1976) 2: 304-315.

[24] *Bethiah*, 23-4.

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*He were to be desired.*"[25] In this courting period, Mather portrays God as displaying some sex appeal, "Comeliness" and "Beauty" that make Him "desired" by the young maid. Ultimately, Mather believes that the Lord's potency and desire will seduce the woman, exclaiming "And what Reception with thee, has the *Desire* of the *King*, who *greatly desires thee*, that he may put his Beauty upon thee? Methinks, Thou canst not but say, *I am overcome, I am overcome: Lord, Thou art stronger than I, and thou hast prevailed.*"[26] The mating ritual comes to a climax as the young maid opens herself to her Savior and allows Him to enter her body, crying out, "*O my SAVIOUR, Thou hast made me willing!...Oh! How can I do any other than comply with the Demands of my Glorious Lord! Lord, I am amazed, that thou wilt accept of any Service from me! To be as one of thy hired Servants, is more than I am worthy of.*"[27] After He accepts her "Service," they can be married and she can "*cleave* to him, with *full purpose of Heart*; a full and fixed Purpose, to be *for him, and not for another*. Behold, the *Knot* is now tied. It will not be long before the *Consummation of the marriage*; thy eternal *Cohabitation* with thy SAVIOUR."[28] Of course, "Consummation" involves the first sexual act between a husband and wife that completes their bond for life and eternity. As in her marriage to man, a woman fully accepts God's will and her subordinate status in the face of superior strength. The marriage metaphor for a woman's absolute conformity to God's will locates

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[25] Ibid., 24.

[26] Ibid., 26-7.

[27] Ibid., 27-8.

[28] Ibid., 31.

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sexual subordination at the heart of woman's piety and, thus, her virtue. In a sense, spiritual salvation requires a woman's sexual subordination to God and, by extension, to a man whose conformity to God entails a spiritual marriage, but not sexual submission. Despite the religious and moral purity espoused by the Puritans, their treatment of women's infinite virtue of piety reveals how sexual submissiveness characterizes their morality.

Sacrifice represents another infinite virtue that further links women to the Puritan religious and political struggle. A woman's essential sacrifice involved giving her self, her will, over to God, an act that could directly or indirectly benefit her people. Mather provides an exceptional model for female virtue in "the *young Daughter of Jephtah*; who when she understood that her *Life* must be the *Price*, of a *Redemption* for the People of GOD, and of their *Victory* over their Enemies, the lovely Creature willingly submitted unto it, and said, *Well then let me be made a Sacrifice! Let my Life go for it, if the Israel of God may but life and flourish!*"[29] In Judges 12 and 13, Jephtah literally sacrifices the life of his virgin daughter and only child to the Lord as a means of keeping a vow to save his people. His daughter then willingly sacrifices her life for her religious community. Such a role model for Puritan women highlights how sacrifices made by virtuous women benefit and help save their community. Recognizing that very few, if any, Puritan women could or should live up to the model of Jephtah's daughter, Mather offers the average woman a more accessible means for achieving the virtue of sacrifice: "Most of all, if thou canst submissively come to any *sacrifice*, wherein thy *Conformity* to thy SAVIOUR is to

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[29] Ibid., 44.

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be carried on, thou wilt be a *Glorious Daughter*; and there will be that Voice from Heaven to thee; *My Daughter, Thou are one of them that Comfort me!*"[30] Any sacrifices for conformity to God's will become realistic and sufficient acts of virtue for women. While this virtue entails women giving the self directly and completely to God, not husband or family, these sacrifices allow for the spiritual salvation necessary to the survival of Puritan beliefs, and begin to link women's virtue, particularly in the case of Jepthah's daughter, to the community's survival.

Humility, the third infinite virtue, appears throughout Mather's work on women and virtue. Closely related to modesty, humility entails lowliness, meekness, and submissiveness before the Lord. This virtue counters one of the greatest Puritan vices, pride. Indicating virtue's significance, in a rare work by a Puritan woman, the Eminent and Pious Matron Grace Smith stresses to her children the importance of humility and keeping a lowly heart, loathing the self, and valuing meekness as the greatest ornament of the soul.[31] While all Puritans were expected to be humble, its association to women helps to ensure their submission to patriarchy, a system based on God's creation of women to serve man.

Modesty, the fourth infinite virtue, overlaps with humility. Although Puritans also expected men to act and present themselves in a modest manner that reflected humbleness

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[30] Ibid., 45.

[31] *The Dying Mothers Legacy. Or the Good and Heavenly Counsel of that Eminent and Pious Matron, Mrs. Grace Smith, late Widow to Mr. Ralph Smith of Eastham in New-England. Left as a Perpetual Monitor to her Surviving Children; as it was taken from her own Mouth a little before her Death, by the Minister of that Town where She Died* (Boston: Timothy Green, 1712). Massachusetts Historical Society.

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before the Lord, modesty takes on a heightened intensity in discourses on women who seem particularly susceptible to the temptations of beauty and vanity. In each of Mather's sermons on women, he emphasizes a woman's modest dress, frequently quoting the Savior's command in Timothy II. 9 "*That Women Adorn themselves in modest Apparel, with Shame-facedness and Sobriety, not with broidered hair, or Gold or Pearl, or costly Array; but as becomes Women professing of Godliness, with good Works.*" By modest apparel, Mather meant a lack of adornment such as scarves or jewelry as well as the covering of a woman's entire body with the exception of her face and hands.[32] Furthermore, wearing make-up desecrates God's natural work and represents evil. As Mather declares, "the *virtuous Woman* has against the *Painting* of her Face in any Part of it; *it is the Guise of an Harlot.*"[33] Finally, modest and virtuous women should never engage in "promiscuous dancing" which lacks gravity, may induce lust, and reflects temporal happiness.[34] Immodest dress, make-up, and dancing represent a focus on the physical realm of the City of Man when women's attention should always be on the City of God. The soul, not the body, should be the ornament for the daughters of Zion who shun physical adornment and wear the spirit of the Lord, making external appearance and action a reflection of a woman's humble and pious spirit. For Mather, immodest clothing puts a woman's virtue and moral status in jeopardy: "If you will be *well-advised*, you will have the *Wisdom* to abandon such *Apparel*, as may render your *Virtue* questionable...But you

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[32] *Ornaments for the daughters of Zion*, 58.

[33] Ibid., 17.

[34] Ibid., 12-13.

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are to be well-advised unto this further *Wisdom*; That your *Apparel* be not a Thing of more Account with you than your *Virtue*."[35]

Similar to the marriage metaphor in discourses on women's piety, sexuality plays a dominant role in Mather's sermons on modest dress and virtue. To communicate the sin of immodesty, Mather draws upon the dualism of virtue and vice symbolized by the virtuous woman and the Harlot:

> But it may be more easily decided, what *Fashions* are *Immoderate* ones; what *Fashions* are for the Hurt of those that use them; what *Fashions* are the plain *Badges* of a corrupt and vicious Mind; and hang out a *Sign*, whereon every Beholder may read, *There dwells a proud, vain, light, giddy, trifling Soul in that Carcase*...We read, concerning the *Attire of the Harlot*...That there might be a conspicuous Difference of *Attire*, between the *Handmaids of GOD*, and the *Handmaids of the Devil*.[36]

Clothing indicates women's virtue as "Handmaids of GOD" or vice and sin as "Handmaids of the Devil." Referring to the biblical image of "*the Harlot*," Mather associates immodestly dressed women with whores who exchange sex for money. To prevent such vice, Puritans penalized women for immodesty severely. In some colonies, magistrates fined women for wearing scarves or jewelry. But the greatest punishment, of course, was eternal damnation where, Mather declares,"thou wilt have *Burning instead of Beauty*; so it will be, if thou art thrown down into a *Devouring Fire*, into *Everlasting Burnings*."[37] Deviating from the virtuous standards of modesty carried a heavy price for Puritan women. Essentially a nicely dressed, beautiful woman became visible in this world and

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[35] *Bethiah*, 48, 50.

[36] Ibid., 49.

[37] Ibid., 53.

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could incite men's lust, a deadly sin for which women remain responsible in the Puritan moral calculus. Additionally, although quite prominent in Christian discourses on women's morality, this dimension of modesty suggests a reason for the conspicuous absence of the female virtue of chastity in Mather's work. Modesty, it seems, stands in for chastity in the sense that Mather equates modest dress and behavior with a chaste soul. A woman's modesty brings together the three other infinite virtues by reflecting her humility and piety that require the sacrifice of temporal temptations for God's glory and eternal happiness. Overall the four infinite virtues grant women access to the Puritan spiritual community that, in a theocracy, also indirectly connects them to the political sphere.

Puritan discourse also reveals a second category of women's virtue - the finite, or those related to the nature of the godly woman's relationship to the tangible, material world. More explicitly linking women to the political sphere, finite virtues characterize women's social roles as mother, wife, and daughter in the moral terms of guardianship that contribute to the larger community. The finite virtues include: sincerity, cheerfulness, gentleness, meekness, being peaceable, tender-heartedness, patience, goodness and respect to equals, reservedness, equanimity, purity, ingenuity, candor, prudence, thriftiness, fidelity, charity, industry, and courage. The first ten virtues from sincerity to equanimity characterize a woman's morality as passive, reflected by the virtues of gentleness, meekness, being peaceful, patience, and reservedness; kind, indicated by cheerfulness and tenderheartedness; and temperate toward others, suggested by sincerity, patience, good and respectful to equals, equanimity, candor, and prudence. These ten virtues clearly communicate traits valuable to social relationships that often entail some passivity,

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kindness, and temperance. Yet, more importantly, they express how women's moral worth depends on their passivity and goodness in submission and service to others, predominately in their social roles of mother and wife. Emphasizing the degree of passivity desired by Puritans, Mather describes a virtuous woman's life in the following terms:

> The Name for you in the Original of the Bible, signifies, *Hidden ones*. Be thoughtful for nothing but this, that you may get the *inward Glory*, whereof you are to be ambitious; And be willing to pass thro' the World, without much *Observation*, under much *Obscurity*; to pass *Hidden*, and after a sort *Ingonito*, thro' the World, and with very little Notice taken of you.[38]

To some degree, the Puritan focus on God and their rejection of the material world made invisibility valued in men and women. By coupling together their infinite and finite virtues, women's invisibility gains an intensity and range much stronger then men's. Reflecting the difference, funeral sermons for men such as the pastor Thomas Brown includes a lengthy discussion of his entire life, starting from birth, that includes his missionary work around the world and service as pastor at the First Church in Boston.[39] Those for women, in contrast, never describe the specifics of a woman's life, focusing solely on good women as virtuous mothers and wives generally, suggesting that a woman's identity stemmed entirely from service to her family in these roles. Overall, women's invisibility and passivity served the political ends of patriarchy, premised on women's subservience to men. In terms of finite virtues, the origins of the virtues that assign moral value to women for their service to men essentially guarantee their complicity in preserving patriarchy.

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[38] Ibid., 32-33.

[39] See *Benedictus.*

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Attributing virtue to women for accepting this subordinate position enlisted them in the Puritan vision of a community built on the word of God that commanded women to be help-meets to men.

Finite virtues establish a woman's moral character as a wife and mother. In particular, the virtues of fidelity and purity pertain to the wife, further indicating the sexual content of women's virtue. Purity stems from a wife's marriage to God that grants her piety through His will. After her Mystical Marriage, Cotton Mather hopes "it will not be long before she becomes a WIFE; which will render her a *Mary*, that is, an *exalted one*; and let us now see, what a *virtuous* one."[40] By affiliating the Puritan wife with the Virgin Mary, Mather implies a level of sexual purity for the earthly woman whose marriage to God before any mortal man acts to ensure a cleansing of her soul and a level of purity that would make sex as close to the Immaculate Conception as possible. In addition, fidelity requires the wife's complete physical and emotional commitment to her husband to the extent that she banishes all adulterous thoughts from her mind. "Such a *Fidelity* to her Husband, as that she will not give a *Lodging* to the least straggling and wandering *Thought* of Disloyalty in his *Bed*;" Mather explains, "left by her parlaying with wicked *Thoughts*, the Devil should insensibly decoy her to the *Deeds* which *God will Judge*."[41] Fidelity then demands the absolute purity of mind and body. A wife's fidelity also entailed a commitment to her husband's spiritual salvation. In his description of a virtuous wife, Mather sees that "her *Fidelity* is no where more signalized, than in her Sollicitude [sic] for

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[40] *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, 85.

[41] Ibid., 94.

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the *eternal Salvation* of her Husband."[42] Even though Puritans denied women the right to speak in Church, they should deliver the minister's message to their husbands in the home. Despite her submission to him, a wife remains morally responsible for her husband's soul. Even within the oppressive virtue of a Puritan wife, moral guardianship surfaces as a wife's virtue depends on her taking moral responsibility for her husband.

These virtues indicate the subservience expected of women in the Puritan patriarchy. Ministers often resorted to arguments that women must obey their husbands, not only due to God's commandment, but because of their emotional and intellectual weakness. John Sprint, in *The Bride-Woman's Counsellor*, a popular tract in colonial New England, for instance, admonishes disobedient wives to obey God's commandments and accept their subservient role "because Women are of weaker Capacities to learn than Men," and must rely on men's judgment and guidance.[43] As Benjamin Wadsworth quotes from I. Corinthians 11.3, "*the Head of the woman is the man.*"[44] Mather avoids such arguments, perhaps due to his efforts to salvage women's virtue that required them to have sufficient reason to obey God's law. Yet, he would agree with Sprint that a wife's central purpose was to obey her husband, please him, and take responsibility for marital problems. Emphasizing the level of wifely obedience demanded by Puritans, Wadsworth even blames wives for their husbands' discontent that drives them from the house to drink,

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[42] Ibid., 96.

[43] 4.

[44] *The Well-Ordered Family*, 34.

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gamble, and generally bring shame and poverty to their families.[45] Mather advises that "it is the highest *Ignominy*, not of the *Wife*, but of the Man for a *Man* to beat his *Wife*. But if thou haft an Husband that will do so, bear it patiently; and know thou shalt have *Rewards* hereafter for it, as well as *Praises* here."[46] In exchange for bearing her beating patiently, she receives praise in this life and the rewards of heaven in the next. Codifying their moral beliefs, Puritans adopted the "rule of thumb" that grants a husband, as the legally responsible party, the legal right to beat his wife with a stick no thicker than his thumb in order to control and punish her.[47] For a wife to achieve virtue, she must absolutely obey her husband, submitting mind and body to his will and authority as she spiritually does the same for God. The interplay of this patriarchal discourse is perhaps best summed up in Wadsworth's position, "The Husband's Government ought to be gentle and easy, & the Wife's Obedience ready and cheerful."[48] Virtue functions to secure the wife's submission to her husband, even his abuse, women's service to men, and male governance. Examining the finite virtues associated with the Puritan wife establishes her subservience to her husband and assigns her moral worth premised on her acceptance of patriarchy.

While a Puritan wife's virtue requires her obedience, the mother's entails the guardianship of her family's morality and the cultivation of her children's virtue that grants

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[45] Ibid., 40.

[46] *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, 98.

[47] For further discussion of the "rule of thumb" and its impact on women within the social contract tradition, see Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), Chapter 5.

[48] *The Well-Ordered Family*, 35.

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women some limited authority in the domestic sphere. In the discourse on mothers, virtue intensifies in its frequency of usage and its reference to the most virtuous woman, the Virgin Mary. Exclaiming the glories of the virtuous mother, Mather declares that

> We have otherwise *Learned CHRIST*, than to Idolize His *Virgin Mother*...This otherwise when the Mothers of *Hero's* [sic] and of *Extraordinary Men* have done something towards fitting them for their Achievements. There are some *Rays* of no contemptible *Glory*, to be struck back upon the *Mothers* when the *Sons* have been *Vertuous Men*, and the *Heirs of Glory*...And for the most part, the World which has been the *better* for these *Good Works*, have been much Indebted unto their *Mothers* for them.[49]

As Christ idolized the Virgin Mary who gave birth to and raised Him, virtuous men owe their glory and virtue to the nurturing of virtuous mothers who model moral excellence and educate their children to read the Bible, write, and accept her authority and discipline. Echoing Mather's sentiment, minister Thomas Foxcroft articulates how mothers serve as models of virtue for their children: "*LET us also remember her Pious Example*, (in which was given us a fair Copy of every Christian Grace and Virtue), *and be imitators of her as dear Children*...To tread in Her steps, to transcribe Her Virtues, and exhibit the Image of Her Perfections in our own Lives...She was a Pattern of strict Virtue, Morality, and good Carriage."[50] Although indirect, depicting the Puritan mother as a model of morality for virtuous, even heroic, sons links them to the realm of action where their community's fate plays out. At this point, Foxcroft even grants mothers responsibility for guarding the family's moral welfare from:

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[49] *Tabith Rediviva*, 27-8.

[50] *Sermon Preach'd at Cambridge after the Funeral of Mrs. Elizabeth Foxcroft*, (Boston: Printed by B. Green, for Samuel Gerrish, at h's Shop nigh the First Brick Church, 1721), 33, 38. Rare Books Division of the New York Public Library.

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> an Increase of *moral Evil*...often consequent on such a Providence. At the Gap, which Death of a wife and good Mother makes, do many times enter in a Torrent of Impieties and Vices. It is very grievous to think, what Ungodliness, what Unrighteousness, what Contentions, what Intemperance, and other foolish Lusts, has found their Way into Families, after the Removal of the pious Mother; whose grave Presence, as prudent Counsels, and Reproofs, together with Her holy Example, had a Check on the vicious Dispositions of the Children, and Others, while She was alive.[51]

Moral guardianship characterizes this sermon. Despite patriarchy, women as mothers acquire the power to guard their families from vice, evil, and sin. Although a mother's moral responsibility may seem reasonable within the Puritan belief system, Foxcroft goes one step further to link a woman's moral guardianship to the political community, stating that "The Health, the Estate, Reputation, good Order, Virtue and Religion of the Family, and Place are all greatly subserved by Her. - When therefore our gracious Mothers die, the *Town* and *Family*, (Which have enjoy'd their Presence) are so much *Impoverish'd*, and the common Treasure sunk."[52] The death of a virtuous mother equates with a loss to the "Town" and even sinks the "common Treasure," a phrase that resonates with "the common good." Although still in service to the family, mothers act as moral guardians by modeling virtue for their children, nurturing heroic sons, and protecting family morality, all of which make them assets to the "common Treasure." As wife and mother, a virtuous woman as moral guardian also takes moral responsibility for her husband and children. Given the patriarchal emphasis on male superiority, particularly in the family and over women, such recognition of a woman's contributions in Puritan discourse is relatively

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[51] Ibid., 14.

[52] Ibid., 6.

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astonishing.

The political contribution of virtuous women that links them to the American exceptionalism inherent in the Puritan's religious project becomes more evident by looking at the three finite virtues of courage, industry, and charity. Although Puritan society defined women as mother, wife, and daughter, their affiliation with these three virtues indicates a more independent woman who contributes to the political community. Courage, similar to piety, grants women the fortitude to persevere in hardship and abuse by relying on God's strength. Cotton Mather further elaborates on the courage of Puritan women who immigrated from England to pioneer the American wilderness:

> Very many of those *Matrons* who cheerfully bore their part, in the terrible Transportation over the huge *Atlantic* Ocean, into this horrid and howling Wilderness, were such Patterns of *Patience* and of *Courage* in going thro' that Glorious Undertaking to take *Possession* of these *Uttermost parts of the Earth*, for our Savior, that wherever the *Gospel is Preached* in Foreign Countries, what they have done ought to be *told for a Memorial of them*...The *Vertuous Women* in this Land, have been some of its Brightest *Glories*; and so they will be Esteemed, in the Day *when the Lord of Hosts will make up His Jewels*.[53]

For Mather these forgotten women should be models of virtue for his flock almost seventy years later. A precursor to Tocqueville's pioneer woman of the 1830s, Mather's praise for these pioneering Puritan women similarly links women to America's nation-building process. Alongside husbands, brothers, and fathers, these women survived crossing the Atlantic and taking "*Possession* of these *Uttermost parts of the Earth*" while exhibiting the virtues of courage, patience, and even cheerfulness. Perhaps, most importantly, these women acquire virtue through the political act of pioneering and establishing territory

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[53] *Tabitha Rediviva*, 27.

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under Puritan authority that simultaneously engaged them in the spiritual project of creating a kingdom of God on Earth. By attributing the virtues of charity and industry to women as well, Mather indicated two other ways in which women contributed more directly to the political community and shared virtuous traits with men. Mather advises virtuous women to perform charity, one of the divine virtues, in the form of being compassionate to the poor and afflicted, giving them alms, and volunteering to help the sick. Industry, the efficient use of labor, suggests a valuing of women's work that was necessary to a pioneering agrarian community's survival. Women then gain their virtue within the context of performing the spiritual and political acts necessary for achieving Winthrop's "city upon a hill." Through such recognition of their efforts, Puritans located women as women, not solely as mothers and wives, in relation to the broader political community, establishing the initial condition of moral guardianship by linking together infinite and finite virtues.

## 2.3: "Dancing with the Devil:" The Infinite and Finite Vice of Puritan Women

Virtue, however, only explains one side of the Puritan woman's story. To understand the political significance of the shift in women's morality, their relationship to vice requires further attention since it created the context in which Puritan ministers deemed it necessary to grant women virtue in order to protect the community. The witchcraft epidemics of the mid to late 1600s provide an excellent opportunity for exploring the role of Puritan women's infinite and finite vice. These two categories mirror those of infinite and finite virtue though infinite vice refers to the spiritual orientation

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towards evil and the Devil often symbolized by Eve and original sin whereas finite vice pertains to the immoral and corrupt daily activities of women usually expressed through immoral sexual behavior, independence, and discontent. Taken together, infinite and finite virtue and vice establish women's initial association with American exceptionalism that entails the dualistic choice between the virtuous path of Heaven and the vice-ridden journey to Hell.

While contemporary historians offer many explanations for the witchcraft trials, they essentially agree that these events arose from religious, social, political, and economic forces. In *Salem Possessed* (1974), Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum argue that economic conflicts between the landed agrarian elite and rising mercantalist class generated intense political tensions that manifested in witchcraft accusations and trials. Yet, Boyer and Nissenbaum overlook the question, why were *women* primarily those accused of witchcraft? Scholars of women's history, of course, closely examine this question. In *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (1987), Carol Karlsen finds that widows who, under dower right, inherited one-third of their husbands' property became targets of witchcraft accusations as their neighbors attempted to lay claim to their estates. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English see the witch trails as part of the battle to replace women healers and midwives with professional doctors of the elite class and eradicate a source of pagan religious power among the poor.[54] Emphasizing the role of Puritan religious beliefs,

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[54] Although Ehrenreich and English are not historians, their work is referenced extensively by scholars of women's history. Additionally, their work remains central to contemporary feminist understandings of women and witches. See *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (New York, NY: The Feminist Press, 1973); and *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts' Advice to Women* (New York, NY:

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Elizabeth Reis argues that they led women to accuse other women of witchcraft and to accept these accusations of themselves as the daughters of Eve and keepers of original sin.[55] Most recently, Mary Beth Norton places the Essex County witch epidemic in the broader context of the French and Indian wars that destabilized Puritan communities as Indian raids frequently decimated their villages on the frontiers, and inspired fear in the whole area, a fear that played out in witch trials where women personified the unknown evil that lingered in the wilderness.[56] Together, these different perspectives depict the Puritan society of Mather's day as one at a climax of change generated by external forces such as French troops and Indian attacks beyond its control. Within the community, women's roles experienced some change as ministers recognized the dramatic increases in women's church attendance that raised the religious community's awareness of them. As women gained virtue and religious status, fears about preserving patriarchy and, thus, the Puritan utopia, under siege by external forces, manifested in the witchcraft trials. Accusing women of vice and evil involved Puritan attempts to preserve their delicate moral universe. To do so, they reverted to Eve as the original sinner and portrayed some women as her daughters, making them pawns in a patriarchal power struggle.

Although the Puritan case may be extreme, it starkly reflects how women's virtue and vice links them to the exercise of patriarchal political power. A virtuous woman

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Anchor Books, 1978). Both books look to the European and American contexts.

[55] See *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[56] *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

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received the rewards of praise and eternal happiness for defending the status quo whereas the vice-ridden endured punishments ranging from social ostracism to domestic violence and even accusations of witchcraft. Though most accused escaped execution, these women often lost most or all of their estates if widowed, endured imprisonment, remained targets of further accusations, and lost all status within their community. In short, women associated with vice suffered dire consequences for real or perceived deviations from Puritan moral standards. As the most vulnerable to patriarchy's authority, women offered easy targets for the political power struggles of ministers and magistrates. "People who did not accept their place in the social order were the very embodiments of evil," Carol Karlsen explains, "Disorderly women posed a greater threat than disorderly men because the male/female relation provided the very model of and for all hierarchical relations, and because Puritans hoped that the subordination of women to men would ensure men's stake in maintaining those relations."[57] It is no mere coincidence that Cotton Mather's first sermon dedicated to women's virtue, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, appears in 1691 on the eve of the Salem epidemic that began in 1692. By examining how Puritans addressed their community's problems through witch trials, a pattern emerges in which women who submissively accept patriarchal power acquire some moral and political status through virtue whereas those who resist, refuse, or challenge it become affiliated with vice and, thus, vulnerable to punishment.

Explicitly linking women to witchcraft raises certain difficulties since ministers' sermons, as historians of the era note, never refer to the fact that the overwhelming

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[57] *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 181.

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number of witches were women. Despite this, Puritan ministers pepper their writings on witchcraft with references to Eve, who "was the main symbol of woman-as-evil in Puritan culture," Carol Karlsen explains, "She was, in many ways, the archetypal witch. Whatever the new beliefs affirmed about women's potential goodness the persistence of Eve as a figure in the Puritan cosmology signals the endurance of older if more covert beliefs."[58] As such, Eve encompasses the infinite vice of women whose very nature embodies original sin and the Devil, thereby associating women with the path to Hell. Regardless of his attempts to reinterpret Eve for the benefit of virtuous women, Mather defines "*Witchcraft*- What shall I say of it! It is the furthest Effort of our *Original Sin*; and all that can make any Practice or persons odious, is here in the *Exalt[at]tion* of it."[59] Of course, "original sin" references the vice-ridden Eve. Going further, Mather preaches that "*Satan* is the Grand Manager and Fomenter of these *Temptations* which we have to Encounter withal. There are Multitudes and legions of *Devils*, under a *Prince* called, *Satan* who are perpetually *Tempting* all the Children of men to be the *Children of Disobedience*."[60] While the "Children of men" come from Adam, Eve gives birth to those of "*Disobedience*" who become the witches belonging to the "legions of *Devils*" attacking the Puritan utopia. The terms "*Temptations*" and "*Tempting*" accompany the symbol of

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[58] *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 177.

[59] "A Discourse on Witchcraft," originally published in *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* (Boston, 1689). Cited here in *What Happened in Salem?* ed. David Levin, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1960), 99.

[60] *Nicetas*, 9.

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Eve throughout witchcraft discourse, indicating, once again, the sexual content of Puritan discourse about women's morality that, in this context, takes on cosmic proportions by linking women to Satan and their political community's demise.

Having tempted Adam in the Garden of Eden, Eve represents the seductive nature of all women whose sexual behavior encompasses their finite vice. Those accused of actively asserting their sexuality, even in a dream or vision, often found themselves tried for witchcraft. Puritan ministers and magistrates based their legal arguments on the medieval code used to try witches, *The Malleus Maleficarum* that captures the intersection of women, sexuality, and witches in the following statement: "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable...Wherefore for this condition the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort even with devils" and this condition emanates from Eve's seduction of Adam.[61] Illustrating the sexual aspect of women's finite vice, Mather's account of Bridget Bishop's trial on June 2, 1692, in Salem, for instance, speaks to the role of carnal lust in witchcraft accusations as different male witnesses describe their sexual encounters with Bishop. John Lounder testified that Bishop appeared in his bed and "the likeness of this Woman grievously oppressing him; in which miserable condition she held him, unable to help himself, till near Day."[62] In the trial of Susanna Martin in Salem on June 29, 1692, Bernard Peache similarly testified how Martin scrambled through his bedroom window in the night, "took hold of this Deponent's Feet, and drawing his

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[61] (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971), 47.

[62] "The Tryal of Bridget Bishop, Alias," in *On Witchcraft: Being the Wonders of the Invisible World*, first published in Boston, 1692 (New York, NY: Bell Publishing Company, 1974), 110.

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Body up into a Heap, she lay upon him near Two Hours."[63] Descriptions of alleged witches sneaking into men's bedrooms, subduing them, and laying on them frequently appear in accounts of their trials where accusers portrayed women as sexual predators who force men to submit to their powers and even overcome male strength. Quite unlike Eve, "*The Mother of all the Living*" who brought salvation to her husband, this Eve foments rebellion among the people, primarily women, who engage in disobedience by challenging the virtuous standards of modest and pious behavior. Moreover, this conflicting view of Eve indicates how ministers such as Mather moved Puritan women into a moral middle ground where they became responsible for virtue and salvation in one moment, and vice and damnation in the next, creating a powerful double bind for women.

Witchcraft essentially represented an act of rebellion by the discontented against Puritan society and God. Women's discontent, often expressed by acts of independence, represented another finite vice that held larger political implications for the Puritans. Whether real or perceived, women's sexual aggression towards men indicates only one form of rebellion in a political culture shaped by political discontent. As rebels in England, Puritans came from an anti-authoritarian tradition in which they fought against the persecution of their religious beliefs. On this side of the Atlantic, however, Puritans persecuted others, particularly those engaged in witchcraft which symbolized the disorder and sin threatening the stability of Puritan patriarchy. Speaking to witchcraft as rebellion, Mather quotes from Samuel I. XV. 23 to begin "A Discourse on Witchcraft" with "*Rebellion is as the Sin of Witchcraft,*" a theme that he returns to, stating "*that* may be a

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[63] "The Tryal of Susanna Martin," in *On Witchcraft*, 115.

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*Caution* to every one of us. *This*, in short, Since *Rebellion* is like *Witchcraft*. *O let us not make light of any Rebellion against the Almighty GOD.* First, let not a *course* of Rebellion be followed by us."[64] In a society premised on women's infinite and finite virtues designed to ensure their submission and passivity, female discontent symbolized by witchcraft served as a primary finite vice that Puritans encountered in their daily lives. Summarizing the source of discontent, Mather states that "It is not Irrational, to ascribe the late Stupendious growth of *Witches* among us, partly to the bitter *discontents* which Affliction and Poverty has fill'd us with: it is inconceivable, what advantage the Devil gains over men, by *discontent*."[65] These "bitter *discontents*" include the hunger for preferments, employment, cash, land, trade, merriments, diversions, and a wish for deliverance to God. Those who challenged the elite, resented their poverty, and wished for a better life embraced the finite vice of discontent that ushers in the infinite vice and evil associated with the Devil. As Mather states, "When the Devil is come down in *great Wrath*, let every *great Vice* which may have a more particular tendency to make us a Prey unto that *Wrath*, come into a due discredit with us."[66] This view indicates the infinite aspect of women's vice that emanated from the affiliation with Eve and original sin, establishing a direct link to the Devil and an immense capacity for evil that translated into a threat to the community's hopes for Heaven on earth.

Discontent often registered as a wife's disobedience to her husband, another finite

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[64] "A Discourse on Witchcraft," 105.

[65] *On Witchcraft: Being the Wonders of the Invisible World*, 81.

[66] Ibid., 79.

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vice, that not only challenged God's command that woman be man's help-meet, but jeopardized patriarchal authority more generally. Expressing the widely held view of a Puritan wife's level of obedience, John Sprint exclaims "*That 'tis a Duty incumbent on all married Women to be extraordinary careful to content and please their HUSBANDS.*"[67] Under a patriarchal regime then, a woman's failure to obey her husband amounted to an act of political rebellion. Sprint, for instance, calls undutiful wives, "Traitors to their Husbands, whose Authority they usurp...Rebels to the great Monarch of the World, whose Sacred Laws they Impiously violate."[68] Wives who resist complete submission and even exercise some independence are "traitors" and "Rebels" who reject God's law and threaten patriarchal order. Their finite vice then holds implications for the infinite power of God and men. Although ministers often focused on disobedient wives as a primary source of women's vice, this charge emanates more from their status as women who exercised a degree of independence that undermined the infallibility of male authority. In other words, these women challenged more than their role as keepers of family and husband; they challenged their evolving status as moral guardians whose infinite and finite virtue and vice enlisted them in preserving the Puritan utopia. The following three cases of witchcraft illustrate how women's independence constituted the sinful, vice-ridden behavior associated with rebellious acts of discontent and witchcraft that, Puritans believed, jeopardized Heaven on earth.

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[67] *The Bride-Woman's Counsellor, Being a Sermon Preached at a Wedding at Shrbourn in Dorsetshire* (Boston, 1709), 5. Rare Books Division, New York Public Library.

[68] Ibid., no page number available.

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The case of Katherine Harrison indicates how an independent woman without a husband or male heir threatened Puritan patriarchy. In 1666, Katherine's husband John died, leaving her an estate of 929 pounds, making her one of the wealthiest people in the Connecticut colony.[69] Immediately, Katherine experienced attacks on her property, including slaughtered cows, damaged oxen, and burned crops, that she blamed on her neighbors and filed grievances with the authorities. Not surprisingly, her neighbors retaliated by accusing Katherine of witchcraft on various occasions. Katherine never received compensation for her loses and instead, lost much of her estate to fines and fees paid to the neighbors and local magistrates. Eventually, Katherine left Connecticut for New York. This story resonates with that of many women accused of witchcraft. As Carol Karlsen finds, women from families without male heirs made up 64% of the females persecuted, 76% of those found guilty, and 89% of those executed.[70] Clearly, an economically independent woman without a husband who tried to protect her property represented a level of independence and degree of discontent that seriously threatened male authority.

Mistress Ann Hibbens' case indicates the threat posed by a woman who acts independently of her husband and demands legal protection of her property. In 1640, Ann Hibbens took her grievance that some joiners (carpenters) did unsatisfactory work on her property to the local authorities. At the trial, Governor John Winthrop and others accused

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[69] For a complete account of Harrison, see Karlsen's *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, Chapter 3.

[70] *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 102.

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Hibbens of the sins of discontent and contentiousness. In response, Hibbens defends her position against the joiners as legally valid, a stance that greatly offends the authorities such as Brother Penn who claims that "our Sister hath an incorrigible spirit. We see the Lord hath not yet broken her spirit, nor there is nothing comes from her that tends to satisfactions."[71] Then the authorities move to the crux of their case: Ann Hibben's disobedience to her husband's counsel on this matter, a sin against God's law. "God hath put another law upon women: wives be subject to your husbands in all things," Mr. Cotton declares.[72] For the sins of disobedience and discontent, Hibbens "is found leprous, and diverse spots are risen," Sargent Oliver states, "therefore according to the law of god I think she ought to be pronounced unclean and as a leprous person, to be put out from amongst us."[73] As a result, the ministers excommunicated Hibbens from the church. In 1656, two years after her husband's death when Hibbens becomes financially independent, the authorities accuse, convict, and execute her for witchcraft.

Ann Hutchinson's well-known case further depicts how Puritans used witchcraft charges to control disorderly and independent women. This case particularly reflects the link between women as witches and political rebellion. In 1637, when trying Hutchinson in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Puritan leaders felt the pressures of religious diversity from

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[71] "Church Trial of Mistress Ann Hibbens," in *Roots of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women*, ed. Nancy F. Cott (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1972), 53, 57.

[72] Ibid., 55.

[73] Ibid., 57-8.

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the Quakers and Hutchinson's growing sect that led to the "Antinomian crisis."[74] Both groups, not coincidentally, encouraged women to preach God's word. Throughout her testimony, Hutchinson defends her position, often quoting scripture, and refuses to plead guilty to the charges which greatly disturbs the authorities. First they accuse her of dishonoring her parents, a punishable act for the Puritans, by practicing another religion. Then Governor Winthrop moves to the central charge - the meetings of women in Hutchinson's home; "it will not well stand with the commonwealth that families should be neglected for so many neighbours and dames and so much time spent, we see no rule of God for this, we see not that any should have authority to set up any other exercises besides what authority hath already set up and so what hurt comes of this you will be guilty of and we for suffering you."[75] These meetings challenge patriarchal and religious authority by providing a community for women who, simply gathering together, neglect their family duties and ignore God's law to be men's help-meets, serious forms of disobedience and vice. In her defense, Hutchinson appeals to a central tenet of Puritan faith, claiming that God came to her in a revelation and told her to hold meetings and teach others. Failing to do so would break God's command, Hutchinson explains. Governor Winthrop proclaims the revelation a "delusion" and the Deputy Governor is "fully persuaded that Mrs. Hutchinson is deluded by the devil," sure signs of witchcraft.[76]

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[74] The term "antinomian" refers to Christians who believe that they are free from the moral law by virtue of the grace granted to them in the gospels.

[75] "Examination of Mrs. Ann Hutchinson," in *Roots of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women*, 37.

[76] Ibid., 45.

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As a danger to their society, Winthrop banishes Hutchinson from the Massachusetts Bay colony. The "Antinomian crisis" ends shortly thereafter.

In accusing women of vice, the Puritans associated them with discontent and rebellion against God's will and patriarchal authority. Harrison, Hibbens, and Hutchinson stood up to their accusers and, in Hutchinson's case, even defended herself using God's law. Witchcraft historian Jane Kamensky argues that female speech held much power among the Puritans who viewed the spoken word as defining the self and even holding magical power. "Speaking out, stridently and publicly, challenging the sole right of male authorities (magistrates, ministers, and husbands) to speak to them: This was the essence of the witches' challenge to the elite. Witches and their possessed victims personified the danger of female verbal authority."[77] Simply having their voices heard by the Puritan community then constituted acts of rebellion. Moreover, their words accompanied rebellious acts: petitioning courts for grievances, accusing joiners of poor workmanship, and holding religious meetings with other women. Accusations of witchcraft served as a powerful political tool for linking women's infinite capacity for vice to finite acts of exercising independence as women who engaged with the public sphere and broke with patriarchal authority.

Although women accused of witchcraft may or may not have seen themselves as participating in rebellion, Puritan ministers and magistrates certainly did. For the Puritans, witches threatened their earthly community and God's triumph over Satan. Cotton

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[77] "Female Speech and Other Demons: Witchcraft and Wordcraft in Early New England," in *Spellbound: Women and Witchcraft in America*, ed. Elizabeth Reis (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1998), 31.

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Mather captures the cosmic proportions of this battle between good and evil, stating:

> WITCHCRAFT is a most Monstrous and Horrid *Evil*. Indeed there is a vast Heap of Bloody Roaring Impieties contained in the *Bowels* of it. *Witchcraft* is a Renouncing of *God*, and Advancing of a filthy *Devil* into the Throne of the Most High; 'tis the most nefandous *High-Treason* against the MAJESTY on high. *Witchcraft*, is a Renouncing of *Christ*, and preferring the Communion of a loathesome lying *Devil* before all the Salvation of the Lord Redeemer; 'tis a Trampling under foot that *Blood* which is more precious than *Hills* of *Silver*, or whole *Mountains* of *Gold*. There is in *Witchcraft*, a most explicit *Renouncing* of all that is *Holy*, and *Just* and *Good*...*Witchcraft* is a Siding with *Hell* against *Heaven* and *Earth*.[78]

The dualistic nature of Puritan morality emerges as Mather locates witches on the side of "*Hell* against *Heaven* and *Earth*," a phrase that indicates the material and spiritual implications of a witch's infinite and finite vice. Women as witches then tip the spiritual and moral scales in the Devil's favor, bringing humanity closer to the brink of destruction, and politically they placed the Puritan utopia in jeopardy. Echoing John Winthrop, Mather frames *On Witchcraft* in utopian terms: "a squalid, horrid, *American* Desart [sic]" that many "Such great Personas as *Budoeus*, and others, who mistook Sir *Thomas Moor's* UTOPIA, for a Country really existent, and stirr'd up some Divines charitably to undertake a Voyage thither, might now have certainly found a Truth in their Mistake; *New-England* was a true *Utopia*" and a "City of God."[79] The witchcraft epidemic of the late 1600s represented the Devil's renewed battle to stop God's people from conquering the last bastion of evil in the American wilderness. As Mather states, "The *New-Englanders* are a People of God settled in those, which were once the *Devil's* Territories;

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[78] "A Discourse on Witchcraft," 98.

[79] *On Witchcraft*, 13, 64.

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and it may easily be supposed that the Devil was exceedingly disturbed, when he perceived such a People here accomplishing the Promise of old made unto our Blessed Jesus, *That He should have the Utmost parts of the Earth for his Possession.*"[80] Defending New England villages from witches equates with protecting the Puritan utopia from the Devil, as Mather exclaims, "But such is the descent of the Devil at this day upon our selves, that I may truly tell you, *The Walls of the whole World are broken down!*"[81] Within a theocracy, the apocalyptic view affiliated with witchcraft located women at the center of a political battle for the Puritan utopia and a spiritual battle between Heaven and Hell.

This polarized context where women's morality takes on biblical proportions shapes the American woman's initial relationship to virtue and vice which began to develop into political concepts during the colonial period. Women's virtue and vice became intricately linked with the fate of mankind in the Puritans' eyes. Puritan elites intensely feared that more women would transform into witches and tear down their utopian walls. To fight the Devil and put down a growing sense of civil disorder, Puritans enlisted women on the side of virtue as a means of preventing them from embracing vice and allowing the Devil to recruit them. In this context, virtue translates into a political concept used to defend the status quo. Throughout Mather's *On Witchcraft*, for instance, "vertue" appears in descriptions of elites or good neighbors, those who protected the status quo against the vice of discontent. Yet, Mather explains, even the virtuous fell under the Devil's power: "There is a Number of our good Neighbours, and some of them

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[80] Ibid., 14.

[81] Ibid., 67.

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very particularly noted for Goodness and Vertue, of whom we may say, *Lord, They are vexed with Devils.*"[82] Indeed, at the peak of the Salem trials, authorities accused the governor's wife Lady Mary Phips, minister John Hale's wife Sarah, one of Massachusetts' wealthiest women Margaret Thatcher, and the most prominent minister Samuel Willard of witchcraft. With the elite itself, and his wife, under attack, Governor Phips suspended the Salem trials since *these* virtuous people must be innocent. Attributing virtue to women served the political purpose of subduing the disorder in the Puritan political community and preserving Winthrop's utopian vision. Due to the heightened concern about evil and vice, Puritan ministers assigned virtue to women in order to secure their allegiance to the status quo of the patriarchal power structure. Virtuous women acted as moral guardians against the Devil. Alternatively, vice belonged to discontent and even mildly assertive women who exercised some degree of independence. A great threat to Puritanism, women's vice transforms into the language of rebellion.

## 2.4: Conclusion

More than any other colonial community, the Puritans established the biblical standard of American exceptionalism which the nation still uses in determining and justifying its courses of action. Given their exclusion from public life and general invisibility in political affairs, women's role in securing the nation's exceptional future usually goes unnoticed. Yet, this analysis of the Puritan woman's infinite and finite virtue and vice reveals how women's morality gains political significance despite their lack of

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[82] Ibid., 82.

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formal power and explicit patriarchal oppression. Because Puritans ground morality in a religious tradition committed to enacting God's law on earth as a means to eternal salvation, women's virtue and vice locates them in the shadows of Winthrop's "City Upon a Hill" where, despite relegation to its periphery, their moral status carries important spiritual and political ramifications for the community. Through infinite and finite virtue, women acquire their initial political identity as moral guardians whose virtue defends the status quo against the vice that threatens to destroy the Puritan utopia while their infinite and finite vice simultaneously holds them responsible for causing such political decay, leaving women in a powerful double bind.

As such, this pre-history establishes women's infinite and finite virtue and vice as a point of departure for tracking the changes in these political concepts at different periods of American political history and is critical to understanding how women's morality continues to inhibit their full citizenship today. As Val Plumwood contends, dualisms store old oppressions that can be used as conceptual weapons in different cultural contexts, a position that pertains to women's virtue and vice. Transferring ancient biblical views of women and the English common law tradition of coverture from the Old World into the New, the Puritans embedded oppressive patriarchal conceptions of women's virtue and vice within the biblical origins of American exceptionalism, one of the most enduring and powerful themes in the culture's political discourse. Analyzing Puritan writings and sermons on women's morality reveals three dimensions of their virtue and vice - the dualistic, sexual, and political - that characterize this conceptual history in which these concepts serve as weapons used repeatedly throughout American political discourse

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to deny women full citizenship.

Dualisms characterize Puritan morality which revolves around a profound belief in good versus evil and virtue versus vice as defined by God's law. Living up to His moral standards determines eternal happiness or damnation and carries cosmic implications in the battle between Heaven and Hell for human souls. Each individual's moral character decides the fate of the Puritan's utopian vision since any deviation from virtue opens the door to vice, evil, and the Devil. Within such a context, each person's moral choice between virtue and vice leaves little room for negotiation given its serious political and spiritual implications for the entire community. Yet, women challenged the absolute nature of moral dualisms. Although Puritans fought to sustain women's primary association with Eve as original sinner, the Devil's attack on their utopia forced ministers to grant virtue to some exceptional women and hold it out as a possibility to the rest. In this way, ministers kept women from the Devil by fortifying the wall between believers and non-believers. Although granting women virtue served to maintain the virtue-vice dualism, this shift undermined the Puritan belief that as the daughters of Eve, all women embodied evil. Granting women virtue opens the gates to Heaven and enlists them in the earthly fight to protect their utopia. To meet their immediate political needs, Puritan authorities found themselves in the contradictory position of upholding the view of women as the daughters of Eve and of Zion. Allowing for both possibilities in an attempt to squelch disorder required the Puritans to alter their absolutist moral universe by grudgingly granting women virtue, a shift that enlisted them in the defense of the political community and its exceptional future.

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Sexuality also defines women's infinite and finite virtue and vice, illustrating the embedded nature of this quality in women's moral character. Although the Puritans maintained the biblical view of Eve as a temptress who seduced Adam, ministers such as Mather also portrayed Eve as the mother of all the living and the first believer in God. To follow in this Eve's footsteps, women, similar to the Virgin Mary, must enter into a mystical marriage with God, a highly sexualized process by which women obtain piety, the essential infinite virtue for Puritans. To do so, women must master the virtue of sacrifice by willingly relinquishing all earthly temptations, including sexual desire and carnal lust. Together, the sexual content of piety and sacrifice links women to a religious conception of the sacred. In Latin, "sacred" is *sacrum* which, for the Romans, referred to the temple where religious rites took place while the profane or *profanum* referred to the space adjoining the temple where priests performed sacrifices, including those of virgins, pure and chaste young women. Although Puritans rejected sacrifices such as those of Jepthah's daughter, a woman's virtue required conformity to God's will and a degree of sacrifice that reflects an ancient biblical notion of the sacred within women's infinite virtue that demands finite sacrifices of earthly temptations. Materially, achieving a sacred status demands sexual purity represented by modest dress, a face without make-up, restraint from lurid dancing, and absolute marital fidelity. Women who transgress against such virtuous standards become profane, or affiliated with the vice that justifies their punishment and, in the most extreme cases of those executed for witchcraft, their sacrifice.

Together, these sexual and dualistic dimensions combine to create serious political implications for women's virtue and vice that, in a theocracy, inherently intertwine with

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the religious. The sacred element of the infinite virtue of sacrifice associates women with a level of moral purity that puts the reified space of heaven within their grasp, linking women to the infinite while still grounding them in the material world of finite moral behavior. Consider how the infinite virtues - piety, sacrifice, humility, and modesty - define a woman's character in terms of her marriage to the spiritual realm. Alternatively, finite virtues such as passivity and meekness ground women in material social relationships although their gaze remains on heaven. As such, Puritan women straddle the middle ground of the finite and infinite, a space necessary for holding women morally responsible for the common good of their political community. Although Puritans remained conflicted about women's morality, the religious content of infinite virtue and vice associates them with the sacred and profane, and the battle between Heaven and Hell. Locating women on this spiritual plane above the finite material world serves as a critical step towards holding women morally responsible for the common good and its decay.

This double burden of moral responsibility correlates with the Puritan's introduction of moral guardianship into American political discourse by enlisting women in the defense of their godly utopia, a view that evolves into American exceptionalism. As moral guardians, women protect the "City Upon a Hill" with their moral purity that demands conformity to God's will and strict adherence to His moral codes as interpreted by ministers and magistrates. Simultaneously, women who expressed discontent and challenged virtuous standards embodied vice as witches who undermined God and took their community down the path of evil towards its destruction. Seeing moral guardianship's origins as integrated with the biblical roots of American exceptionalism

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reveals how the heavy political weight of the nation's success or failure is tied to women's virtue and vice that translates into a double burden of moral responsibility. It also foreshadows significant limitations on women's political identity. To attain virtue, women must embrace a passive political posture of guardianship as defenders of the status quo. To do otherwise equates with vice, discontent, and rebellion against America's exceptional future. The Puritan woman's initial link to politics through infinite and finite virtue and vice then bares the hallmarks of things to come, particularly in terms of a developing moral guardianship that defines her political character in terms of maintaining the status quo and accepting moral responsibility for the common good.

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# CHAPTER THREE

## The Republican Founding of Women's Moral Guardianship: "Wholesale" and "Localized" Conceptual Change in Virtue and Vice

### 3.1: Introduction

"Conceptual change," James Farr explains, "varies from wholesale changes across an entire constellation of concepts...to more localized changes in, say, the references or attitudinal expressiveness of a single concept."[1] During the republican period, virtue undergoes both "wholesale" and "more localized changes" that together mark virtue's emergence as a political concept explicitly affiliated with women. Following the dramatic changes of the American Revolution (1775-1783), a crisis of morality took shape as the nation and its founders struggled to create a government that could function independently of a virtuous citizenry and still retain some sense of the common good. To resolve the crisis, virtue undergoes a major transition. As American leaders tried to fit republicanism into the nation's postwar political context, feminist historian Mary Beth Norton explains, women's virtue captured their interest:

> And republican theorists, concerned about the future of the nation, invested new meaning in the traditional cliche that women were the source of virtue in a society. Since they thought that republics depended for their survival upon a virtuous citizenry, Americans in the 1780s and 1790s necessarily focused their attention upon women to an unprecedented extent. In short, in the wake of the war both men and women in America began to rethink the hitherto unchallenged negative

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[1] "Understanding Conceptual Change Politically," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, eds. Terence Ball, James Farr, Russell L. Hanson (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 31.

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characterizations of woman's nature and role.[2]

Such "localized changes" resulted from a new positive attitude towards women's virtue and domestic role, both of which acquired a political dimension. As Americans embraced the separation of church and state and religion and morality shifted to the private sphere, virtue moved away from its masculine, political orientation to a feminine, domestic location that broke the concept's direct link to formal citizenship. This process, moreover, leads to "wholesale changes" that redefined a range of concepts related to morality and politics, essentially altering traditional gendered dynamics and transforming American mothers and wives into moral guardians assigned political responsibility for repairing and sustaining the nation's moral fabric. Since women's virtue acquires a civic component that establishes their first explicit relationship to politics on moral grounds, this conceptual change constituted a wholesale revolution in the sense that the older concept of a more traditional, republican civic virtue expires and a "virtue of a different kind" is born.

This chapter focuses on the conceptual change in virtue during the republican period between 1789 and 1835[3] when changes initiated by the American Revolution translate into women's developing political status as moral guardians. Although the revolutionary period dramatically altered women's lives as they ran farms and family businesses, and dealt with family and legal matters as their husbands, fathers, and sons left for battle, the republican era offers a better opportunity for examining how American

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[2] *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 228.

[3] For a discussion explaining this time frame, see the Introduction.

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women transform into moral guardians. Republicanism dominates political discourse after the American Revolution as leaders attempted to hold a fragile coalition of independent states together. As foreign nations posed serious threats on the borders, former colonies fought to retain state sovereignty, the militia returned to bankrupt farms, and the economy barely operated, concerns about generating the sense of political community necessary to foster nation-building dominated political discourse. Expressions of the common good, virtue, and political decay permeate the period's public sermons, political speeches, and essays as well as private letters and personal diaries. In this context, women acquire an unprecedented political significance through their role in the domestic sphere, the new source of virtue and the common good. In part, this unique situation arises from patriarchy's decline in the republican period. As Mary Beth Norton states, "The old ways were by no means entirely displaced, but increasing numbers of American families no longer conformed to the previously dominant patriarchal style."[4] American women increasingly left patriarchal households for cities and wage-paying jobs, married later, exercised more choice in their marital decisions, and gave birth to fewer children, all indicators of patriarchy's disarray.[5] Such disorder within the traditional family structure intensified the need to bind the people to the common good through virtue in order to create social stability. At the same time, the spirit of independence, freedom, and equality, inspired by Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*, enveloped American men and women.

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[4] *Liberty's Daughters*, 229.

[5] See Mary Ryan's *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present* (New York, NY: F. Watts, 1983), Chapter 2.

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To navigate between independence and a commitment to the common good, virtue shifts to an increasingly identifiable private sphere as the morality emanating from family and religion became an effective means for establishing a sense of order. To do so, the founders created a "grammar of manhood" that, Mark Kann explains, encouraged men to reinstitute male control over the family and defined their citizenship, to a large degree, in terms of controlling women.[6] Though ostensibly under their husbands' control, women increasingly gain responsibility for cultivating the family's morality and religious beliefs, particularly as more and more men left home to work in a growing commercial economy. Explaining how this impacts virtue, feminist legal historian Joan Hoff states, "when the rhetoric about male virtue in the form of self-restraint ran headlong into the reality of economic opportunity in the 1780s and 1790s, the solution to this moral dilemma, in retrospect, appears quick and simple: assign virtue to the private sphere of women where it could do the least harm to the economy and individual self-interest."[7] As male citizens directed their public pursuits towards economic gain, virtue lost its republican affiliation with active masculine political participation as it shifted to the feminine private sphere.

In particular, the debates on women's education offer an excellent opportunity for examining how women's virtue gains a political dimension during the republican period.[8]

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[6] *A Republic of Men: The American Founders, Gendered Language, and Patriarchal Politics* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998).

[7] *Law, Gender, and Injustice: A Legal History of U.S. Women* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1991), 4.

[8] For an introduction to the literature of this period, see Linda K. Kerber's "Daughters of Columbia: Educating Women for the Republic, 1787-1805," in *The Hofstader Aegis: A Memorial* eds. Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 36-59.

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Stressing the general political implications of women's education, Linda Kerber states that "no social change in the early Republic affected women more emphatically than the improvement of schooling, which opened the way into the modern world."[9] Politicians, ministers, commentators, and social reformers put education on the nation's political agenda as they considered how wives and mothers best fit into the republic. As these social roles acquired a new civic orientation, women required enough education to teach their children basic skills and enough reason to guide their families along the good path towards virtuous citizenry. To accomplish this task, a curriculum of basic reading and writing, the standard fare for most American women, would no longer suffice. "The Americans' vision of the ideal woman," Mary Beth Norton explains, "- independent thinker and patriot, a virtuous wife, competent household manager, and knowledgeable mother - required formal instruction in a way that the earlier paragon, the notable housewife did not."[10] Despite strong opposition, the curriculum and educational opportunities for women expanded as they gained access to a more formal education. Some academies such as the Young Ladies' Academy, founded in 1786, opened and offered courses in fields previously deemed beyond women's intellectual ability such as natural philosophy, mathematics, and science. Reformers such as Benjamin Rush and Judith Sargent Murray spear-headed and supported women's increased access to education as beneficial to the American republic while opponents such as Reverends James Fordyce and John Bennett feared that a more rigorous curriculum would "unsex" women,

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[9] *Women of the Republic: Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 193.

[10] *Liberty's Daughters*, 256.

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deprive them of their "softer" nature, and distract them from their domestic duties. This debate on women's education illustrates the "localized" and "wholesale" changes in women's virtue that continue to work in tandem with vice. Similar to the Puritan discourse, virtue *and* vice operate here to establish women's first explicit relationship to politics as moral guardians, making this historical transition essential to understanding how morality shapes women's political identity and their citizenship.

Moral guardianship exposes the double bind for women's citizenship imposed by their double burden of moral responsibility for the common good and political decay. Examining the dynamic of women's virtue and vice reveals the immense moral burden placed on women to bind the nation together and, if they fail, to accept blame for its decay. At the same time as women gain this immense moral responsibility for the political community, they lose the few political rights that could empower them to meet these demands. In 1807, for instance, women lost the right to vote, which they had since 1776, in New Jersey.[11] Further diminishing women's chances of accessing political power, independence, an important qualification for full citizenship, increasingly became affiliated with the economic sphere. Explaining this shift's impact on women, Joan Gundersen states, "independence implied an economic status of independence, but the new role emerging for women after the Revolution presumed their economic dependence and asserted instead women's moral authority...Political independence for American men thus heightened and reinforced the view of women as marginal on the American political

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[11] In 1807, a disgruntled legislator John Condict, who lost an earlier election at the hands of female voters, took his revenge by blaming women and blacks for a fraudulent referendum on the location of the new Essex County Court House. The New Jersey legislature then rescinded the right to vote for women and blacks. For a concise discussion of this event, see Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters*, Chapter 6.

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frontier."[12] Women's increased moral authority corresponded with decreased political power. Stuck at this crossroads, women were ill-equipped to fulfill this newly imposed moral responsibility for America's success or failure, a moral double bind that comes to characterize women's political citizenship.

In order to illustrate the founding of women's moral guardianship during the republican period, this chapter moves through the following stages. First, a review of the republican motherhood literature shows how American women leveraged political power as Republican Mothers and Wives to forge the path to first wave feminism, a position that dominates how feminists understand the development of women's first relationship to politics through morality. The republican motherhood thesis, however, only captures half the picture by focusing attention on women's social roles and, most importantly, overlooking vice. Alternatively, moral guardianship explicitly identifies the dynamic interplay between virtue and vice, a perspective that opens a space for examining the long term problems that this moral relationship to politics creates for women's contemporary citizenship. Second, the debates about women's education illustrate how women's infinite and finite virtue and vice define their original political identity. Comparing the usage of finite and infinite virtues in Puritan discourse with the republic's debates on women's education tracks how the transition of Puritan morality into the republican context embeds patriarchal conceptions of virtue and vice in the American woman's political identity. Yet, unlike the Puritans, republicans place more emphasis on women's finite virtues, a measure of their growing importance within the political community. In addition, the religious and

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[12] "Independence, Citizenship, and The American Revolution, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13 (August 1987) 1: 77.

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political aspects of women's morality intensify the association between moral guardianship and American exceptionalism. The chapter concludes by investigating how women's moral guardianship entails a double burden of moral responsibility that not only traps women in a political double bind, but also indicates more general limits on their active democratic citizenship.

## 3.2: The Republican Motherhood Thesis and The Moral Guardianship Alternative

To begin seeing the alternative opened up by conceiving of early American women as moral guardians, the liberal-republican debate acts as a point of departure for understanding the context in which feminist historians generated the republican motherhood thesis. From the late 1960s into the 1980s, some intellectual historians revisited Louis Hartz's puzzling question, why did America, unlike Europe, reject Marxist and socialist alternatives to the dramatic social, political, and economic crises of the early to mid-twentieth century? Hartz's response - that America's deep commitment to Lockean liberalism and lack of a feudal past prevented any "foreign" ideologies, particularly Marxism, from taking root on this side of the Atlantic - had essentially settled the question until the late 1960s.[13] Amidst the civil unrest of the student, civil rights, and women's movements, historians revisited Hartz's question, turning to America's republican origins for answers. This set in motion a debate between liberals who supported Hartz's thesis and republicans who believed that America's indigenous

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[13] See *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since The Revolution* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1955). Recognizably, this is a cursory summary of Hartz, but the purpose is only to develop the point of departure for the republican response to his work.

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conception of the common good may constitute a secondary part of our political identity, but one essential to political cohesion and change. Virtue enters this debate as scholars such as liberal John Patrick Diggins and republican, or civic humanist, J.G.A. Pocock considered whether or not this political concept served as a possible source of America's common good that could occasionally generate the collective action necessary for sweeping political change.

On the one hand, liberals such as Diggins reassert the Hartzian thesis to show the enduring dominance of Lockean liberalism. "The classical idea of virtue as resistance to political corruption and a patriotic subordination of private interests to the public good," Diggins claims, "was an idea whose time had come and gone by 1787, when the Constitution was framed."[14] Instead of morality and virtue, natural rights and law, jurisprudence, individualism, and commerce bind the nation to a sense of the common good. The founders, according to this view, replaced virtue with self-interest and ambition as economic and materialist goals that bound citizens to their government as long as it secured property rights and the opportunity to pursue individual interests in the marketplace.

On the other hand, civic republicans such as Gordon S. Wood, Bernard Bailyn, and J.G.A. Pocock[15] see virtue and republicanism as America's source of indigenous ideas of

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[14] *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press), 12.

[15] See Bernard Bailyn's *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon S. Wood's *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969); and J.G.A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton,

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the common good as barriers to socialist or Marxist alternatives. In *The Machiavellian Moment*, Pocock particularly offers a critical response to the Hartzian thesis, essentially contending that a rights-based approach to American politics fails to account for the people's nature or shared capacity to overcome the barriers of individualism and self-interest. As "'nature,' 'essence,' or essential characteristic," Pocock states, "'virtue' cannot be satisfactorily reduced to the status of right or assimilated to the vocabulary of jurisprudence"[16] since "nature may be developed, but cannot be distributed; you cannot distribute a *telos*, only the means to it; virtue cannot therefore be reduced to a matter of right."[17] In addition, the way in which American virtue structures time and space prevents the revolutionary tradition of Marxist and socialist nations. In America, virtue delays the corrupting forces of decay, not through the moral cultivation of its citizens, but through commercial expansion that requires the people to look outward beyond its borders to the frontiers of the American West, Asian markets, or Middle Eastern oil fields. Americans, Pocock asserts, then do not see history dialectically, but in terms of spatial escape and return that always undermines progressive movements for change and tends to sustain the status quo within the nation itself.[18]

Despite their awareness of virtue's changing nature and shift to the private sphere during America's founding period, Wood, Pocock, and Diggins ignore women's part in,

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NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[16] *The Machiavellian Moment*, 357.

[17] "Virtues, Rights, and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought," *Political Theory* 9 (August 1981) 3: 357-359.

[18] *The Machiavellian Moment*, Chapter 15.

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what Diggins even calls, "the feminization of virtue."[19] In *The Creation of the American Republic,* Wood essentially argues that the American Revolution ends classical republican politics in America since "unlike the classical virtue of the past, which was martial and masculine, this new virtue was soft and feminized and capable of being expressed by women as well as men."[20] Regardless of the "feminized" nature of virtue, now attributed to women, Wood avoids a further analysis of women and the private sphere. Similarly, Pocock's description of virtue's shift from an ancient to a modern context implies women's association with the process. Pocock, for instance, states that "since these new relationships were social and not political in character, the capacities which they led the individual to develop were called not 'virtues' but 'manners,' a term in which the ethical *mores* and the juristic *consuetudines* were combined with the former predominating."[21] Social character, manners, and mores generally indicate the private sphere where mothers socialize their children to embrace the moral codes and political behaviors of their community. Despite this, Pocock essentially avoids women's role in the post-Revolutionary political transformation of virtue. Unlike Pocock, Diggins notes women's role in cultivating religious sentiments within the family, a point raised when he discusses Tocqueville on religion, stating that the family "was presided over by the American woman, the model of Christian principles of sacrifice, duty and compassion."[22] Women,

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[19] See *The Lost Soul of American Politics,* Chapter 8.

[20] *The Creation of the American Republic,* x.

[21] "Virtues, Rights, and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought," 366.

[22] *The Lost Soul of American Politics,* 247.

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their virtues, and religious association then immediately drop out of his analysis. Although these scholars recognize the shifting relationship between virtue and the private sphere, each disregards women's political significance as virtue transferred from male public to female private life during the republican period.

Within the liberal-republican debate's framework, feminist historians, in contrast, turned explicit attention to women and their relationship to virtue's transformation. Liberal feminist Joan Hoff essentially agrees with Diggins on virtue's dismissal from public life after 1787, stating that "while postrevolutionary republicanism enhanced the colonial meaning of personal morality and virtue for women in the United States, the same does not appear true for men. Instead, the classical male definition of public virtue became an increasingly irrelevant concept to the young nation's ambitious male leaders, especially after the drafting of the Constitution of 1787."[23] In Hoff's account, unlike Diggins', virtue remains part of the political culture, though relegated to the private sphere of women. Similar to Wood and Pocock's focus on republican virtue and the common good, feminist historians such as Mary Beth Norton and Linda Kerber develop the republican motherhood thesis that assigns political importance to the private virtues attributed to women and their domestic role. Following the American Revolution, Norton, for instance, states, "women became the keepers of the nation's conscience, the only citizens specifically charged with maintaining the traditional republican commitment to the good of the entire community."[24] While Pocock and Diggins debated virtue's role in American

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[23] *Law, Gender, and Injustice*, 38.

[24] "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," *The American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 3: 617. Although Norton's *Liberty's*

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political history after 1787, liberal and republican feminist historians agree that in post-Revolutionary America virtue, though losing its active, civic character, retains a political dimension as it transforms into a relatively more diluted form in the private sphere of women.

The republican motherhood thesis particularly plays a prominent part in explaining how virtue shaped women's emerging relationship to politics during this period. Defining republican motherhood, Linda Kerber states:

> Searching for a political context in which private female virtues might comfortably coexist with the civic virtue that was widely regarded as the cement of the republic, they found what they were seeking in the notion of what might be called 'Republican Motherhood.' The Republican Mother integrated political values into her domestic life. Dedicated as she was to the nurture of public-spirited male citizens, she guaranteed the steady infusion of virtue into the Republic.[25]

Here virtue stems from the modeling, teaching, and socializing of children by their mothers as a means of sustaining the nation's moral fabric and political community. The moral and maternal connection between women and politics generates a tension within the republican motherhood literature that emanates from the paradox of deriving political power and activism from the domestic duty of motherhood. "The ambivalent relationship between motherhood and citizenship," Kerber explains, "would be one of the most lasting, and most paradoxical, legacies of the Revolutionary generation."[26] Further specifying this tension, Norton concludes that "the legacy of the American Revolution for women was

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*Daughters* is central to this literature, her statements regarding republican motherhood are less clear there than in this article.

[25] *Women of the Republic*, 11.

[26] Ibid., 288.

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thus ambiguous. Republican womanhood eventually became Victorian womanhood, but at the same time the egalitarian rhetoric of the Revolution provided the women's rights movement with its earliest vocabulary, and the republican academies produced its first leaders."[27] As this suggests, republican motherhood creates a contradictory situation for women. On the one hand, women benefitted from their moral superiority in the private sphere that they leveraged to acquire political power within the public. On the other hand, using moral superiority as a source of political power demanded women's exclusion from the corrupt, vice-ridden world of formal politics. In keeping with other feminist historians of early American women such as Nancy Cott[28] and Carol Smith-Rosenberg,[29] republican motherhood scholars assert that, despite an ambiguous and paradoxical political status, American woman reaped mostly positive political rewards from a separate, domestic sphere where women developed the political identity, consciousness, and status necessary to jump start first wave feminism.

Although women's role as republican mothers probably contributed to first wave

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[27] *Liberty's Daughters*, 299.

[28] *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). Breaking ground in the study of women's history, Nancy Cott describes how "the doctrine of woman's sphere opened to women (reserved for them) the avenues of domestic influence, religious morality, and child nurture" between 1780 and 1835 that ultimately created a space where women became a separate, identifiable group (100).

[29] "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1 (1975) 11: 1. Smith-Rosenberg articulates how this separate sphere gave women the opportunity to develop close, intimate bonds with the same sex; "It was within just such a social framework, I would argue, that a specifically female world did indeed develop, a world built around generic and unself-conscious pattern of single-sex or homosocial networks" (9).

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feminism, the overly positive view embraced by these scholars marginalizes the short and long term negative implications of virtue in constructing women's citizenship. Looking at this relationship from the perspective of moral guardianship, however, clarifies the detrimental effects of this initial relationship to politics, lingering just beneath the surface of republican motherhood, by exploring how defining the origins of women's political activity, consciousness, and identity in terms of virtue and deference creates high barriers to women achieving full citizenship. By shifting attention from the social roles of mother and wife to virtue, vice, and moral guardianship, a space opens up for examining how virtue and vice infuse women's political identity with the negative aspects of passivity, defensiveness, and exclusion. Three aspects of the republican motherhood thesis pertain to developing the alternative of moral guardianship: its primary focus on social roles, female virtue as *virtu*, and deferential citizenship.

First, the Republican Mother, Republican Wife, and Moral Mother characterize the American women in the republican motherhood literature. Anchoring this perspective, Linda Kerber depicts the Republican Mother who socializes her children to be future citizens and holds the forces of corruption at bay through her moral superiority that protects the private sphere from vice and evil. Jan Lewis contends that women's post-Revolutionary republican status originates from the Republican Wife, not Mother, because marriage precedes motherhood, and dependence on their husbands determines access to political life.[30] Here virtue stems from a woman and man's chastity that acts as the model for republican behavior based on self-restraint. Ruth Bloch offers the Moral Mother who

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[30] "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (October 1987) 4: 689-721.

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represents the view that "it was above all as mothers that women were attributed social influence as the chief transmitters of religious and moral values."[31] While these accounts of the Republican Mother, Wife, and Moral Mother describe how virtue plays a part in shaping women's moral character and familial duties, virtue serves as an adjunct to the social roles that establish women's initial relationship to politics. In other words, the Republican Mother, Wife, and Moral Mother can only exercise their moral influence through these social roles. From this perspective, virtue is secondary to women's social role, a position that simplifies the complicated dynamics of virtue and vice that shape *women's* political identity, not only that of mothers and wives.

In addition to the Republican Mother, Mark Kann puts forward the Family Man, the ideal for the average American male of the republican period, who governed a family but largely left political matters to "the better sort" of leaders. Although Kann agrees that virtue transfers to the private sphere, he argues that men retain a relationship to virtue directly through their control over their wives. Kann contends that the founders appropriated women's virtues (and vices) for men to create what he calls a "grammar of manhood" that effectively cuts women out of the political picture:

> One of the most innovative aspects of the founders' gendered legacy was their expropriation for manhood of traditional female vices and virtues. The founders attributed disorderly passions and procreative potentials to both men and women...Men were just like women - *but more so*...The founders' legacy to posterity included the belief that disorderly men were the main problem of politics and procreative men were the nation's main problem solvers...Overall, the founders showed almost no interest in confronting issues involving women's

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[31] "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815," *Feminist Studies* 4 (June 1978) 2: 101.

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freedom, equality, or their citizenship and leadership.[32]

This suggests two things. First, men sustained a relationship to virtue and did not solely receive this from women in the private sphere. Second, the founders used virtue as part of a political strategy to tame the disorderly men in America, get them into families, and accept the rule of their leaders. In contrast to the republican motherhood thesis, men leveraged power by governing women in the private sphere, seriously challenging the view that women exercised political power as wives. The "grammar of manhood" helps to quell disorder after the Revolution by defining manhood in terms of controlling women. "Being a man," Kann explains, "meant governing female dependents and exhibiting the manly virtue and merit that controlled alleged female vices such as deceit and corruption. The consensual core of early American manhood was the conviction that young males should mature into independent family patriarchs who governed female dependents."[33] Kann's Family Man then illustrates how men retain an affiliation with virtue and use it to control women, two points important to revealing how virtue operates as a means by which a male-dominated society exercises power over women.

Second, the framing of female virtue as *virtu* by some republican motherhood scholars such as Ruth Bloch further illustrates the limits of this perspective. Bloch analyzes how the gendered meanings of virtue in Revolutionary discourse attribute greater political significance to women than that granted by republican historians such as Pocock, Bailyn, and Wood. While Bloch recognizes women's often ambiguous relationship to

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[32] *A Republic of Men*, 174-5.

[33] Ibid., 2-3.

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virtue, she ultimately maintains the republican motherhood line of argument by contending that this concept enables women to acquire the political power necessary to prepare the way for first wave feminism. Initially, Bloch recognizes the barriers erected to women's political participation through the gendering of virtue. "The new distinction between feminine virtue and masculine self-interest eased the process by which all white men (whether rich or poor, individually 'virtuous' or not) could become political actors and women could not," Bloch explains, "The transformation in the meaning of virtue during the Revolutionary period sharpened the social boundaries between the sexes in ways that continue to deny power to all classes of women."[34] Bloch is correct that virtue denies "power to all classes of women." However, she backpedals to insist that virtue enabled women to achieve a political identity, stating that "virtue, even if domesticated, still contained residues of *virtu*, which for a long time helped to legitimate women's activities in American public life."[35] Taking a closer look at "*virtu*" identifies a dilemma that arises from attributing political power to women through this political concept. Borrowing from Pocock and Hanna Pitkin, Bloch specifies the origins of *virtu* in the Latin *vir*, meaning "man," and refers to manliness whereas women appear as *fortuna*, the unreliable force of nature always threatening men's endeavors.[36] Bloch contends that granting virtue to women in the Revolutionary period also transfers some residues of *virtu*, or the active

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[34] "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13 (1987) 1: 57-8.

[35] Ibid., 58.

[36] Ibid., 43. For a complete discussion, see Hanna Pitkin's *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender & Politics in the Thought of Niccolo Machiavelli* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), Chapter 6 especially.

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participatory aspect of masculine citizenship in the classical republican tradition. Yet, using *virtu* here, even its residues, overstates the amount of political power women could leverage in the private sphere where their dependence on husbands and family defined their entire existence, and *virtu,* in its truest sense, communicates an independence and ability to exercise freedom and authority.

From another angle, however, Bloch may be right that women's virtue retains some residues of *virtu*. Yet, instead of its active political heritage, the patriarchal and medieval conceptions of how men controlled *fortuna,* a woman, through *virtu* operate in this context. As Mark Kann points out, American men exercised *virtu* by subduing women and reinstituting some form of patriarchal power after the Revolution. More importantly, as J.G.A. Pocock clarifies, *virtu,* in its medieval configuration, captures a timelessness that arises from preventing the change represented by *fortuna*. Over time, *virtu* evolves into virtue, the rational force of reason needed to stop the irrationality of change, or *fortuna.* From a religious perspective, *virtu* encompasses the sacred and divine acts of God that possess a universal and timeless, or infinite character. It is this aspect of *virtu* that translates into women's moral and political status during the republican period. At this time, the American founders develop the Puritan view of women as men's help-meets into a viable political status as mothers and wives whose role in the family acquires a "sacred" aspect as they become "angels on pedestals" in the private sphere beyond public vice. *Virtu* then enables women to act as guardians to prevent change and to protect the private sphere from morally corrupt influences. As men entered the dynamic public sphere of *fortuna* where politics and commerce generated disorder and chaos, women's *virtu* protected the traditional, even patriarchal, social institutions of religion,

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family, and morality in the private sphere. Instead of granting women active political power, the residuals of *virtu* enlisted republican women in the defense of the very means of their oppression that seriously impeded their full and active political citizenship.

Third, republican motherhood scholars such as Linda Kerber emphasize deferential citizenship that illustrates the passivity and defensiveness associated with women's political identity, though marginalized in this literature. Clarifying how women derived power from virtue, Kerber characterizes women's new role as deferential citizens and specifies the implicit power that women derived from passive domestic virtues:

> Deference was adopted and displayed by many women at a time when men were gradually abandoning that attitude; the politicization of women and men in America, as elsewhere, was out of phase. Women were thinking of themselves as subjects while men were deferential citizens. As men then replaced the restrained, deferential democracy of the Republic with an aggressive, egalitarian democracy of a modern sort, women invented a restrained deferential, but nonetheless political, role.[37]

Despite an apparent awareness that women gained passive, submissive, and deferential power from private morality, Kerber, like other republican motherhood scholars, assumes that virtue contributes to the positive end of republican women, leveraging political power. Embedded within this account of women's citizenship and political power is a sense that virtue simultaneously attributed some power to women while sustaining their exclusion from politics. In this way, virtue creates an illusion of power. It sustains women's exclusion from full political participation by premising access to citizenship on a passive, deferential power associated with motherhood.

Examining the "citizenship" component of Kerber's position illustrates this problem.

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[37] *Women of the Republic*, 285. For an earlier articulation of this position, see Kerber's "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment - An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28 (Summer 1976) 2: 187-205.

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Mark Kann illustrates how the grammar of manhood explicitly excluded women from citizenship. "Self-conscious or not, nearly all founders relied on the grammar of manhood to convey the message that manly courage in the struggle of liberty and manly self-restraint in the exercise of liberty were the essence of republican citizenship," Kann explains, "Women need not apply."[38] Though important to the republic, republican mothers remained confined by their dependence on their husbands whose very status required them to govern women. Even if republican mothers wielded some sort of political power in the private sphere, qualifying it as "citizenship" seriously overstates the case. As Kann states,

> A whole new language had to be devised even to contemplate women's citizenship. That language focused on the role of the republican wife and mother who served as a moral monitor and civic educator for her family. Whether this role afforded women significant influence in an informal 'fourth branch of government,' as Kerber suggests, or kept them 'locked in step behind the legal status of men,' as Joan Hoff argues, it certainly reflected the founders' consensus that the Family Woman was excluded from public deliberations and suffrage, as well as jury service and the militia muster.[39]

Kann makes the case for the failure of the republican mother, wife, or "Family Woman" to attain citizenship status defined by one's ability to exercise political rights and power, and to fulfill responsibilities and duties such as jury duty, voting, and military service. As such, characterizing women as deferential citizens overstates their political status as citizens. Further, "deference" suggests a dependence, submissiveness, and passivity contradictory to the independent, dominant, and active character of democratic citizenship. Deferring to one's husband or family in political matters certainly contradicts the independence

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[38] *A Republic of Men*, 3.

[39] Ibid., 100.

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necessary for expressing one's opinion and self-interest. In the republican period, virtue animates a citizenship based on action and independence. Speaking to the relationship between virtue and active citizenship in the Machiavellian tradition, Pocock explains, virtue "could signify a devotion to the public good; it could signify the practice, or the preconditions of the practice, or relations of equality between citizens engaged in ruling or being ruled; and lastly since citizenship was above all a mode of action and of practicing the active life, it could signify that active ruling quality - practiced in republics by citizens equal with one another and devoted to public good."[40] Although times and virtue changed, the act of citizenship retains a degree of action in political life and a level of independence to express one's self-interest. "Deference" undermines and contradicts the essence of citizenship. Yet, it also indicates how the republican motherhood thesis and its definition of women's citizenship as deferential establishes their political identity on the grounds of passivity, dependence, and deference, a position that contradicts active, democratic citizenship.

As an alternative to the republican motherhood thesis, moral guardianship reveals how morality - not social roles - define women's political identity as passive and defensive. This perspective specifies the paradox of basing women's political power on their exclusion from public life. Similar to the Republican Mother, Republican Wife, and Moral Mother, the moral guardian remains excluded from public life in order to ensure her the virtue necessary to defend against moral corruption. From a moral guardianship perspective, however, virtue, not the social role of Republican Mother or Wife, acts as the

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[40] "Virtues, Rights, and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought," 358.

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"controlling" mechanism, or pivotal component in determining women's political status. Moral guardianship focuses on how virtue translates into a passive political posture for women. Focusing on women's social role diverts attention away from the exercise of political power in granting women a virtue stripped of its republican means to engage actively in politics while retaining its ends, sustaining the common good. Though hidden by the republican motherhood thesis, moral guardianship exposes this paradox that the republicans expected women to sustain the political ends of the common good without empowering women with the means to do so, the ability to engage in politics. Women end up in a double bind that requires them to fulfill a political task of defending the common good while denying them the power to carry it out.

Moral guardianship consists of two components that illustrate its differences with republican motherhood further. First, the "moral" aspect of this term centralizes virtue's role and focuses attention on how women's moral character correlates with a political identity premised on passivity, dependence, and subordination. A "moral" perspective also broadens the scope of analysis beyond women as only mothers and wives to include women more generally. Such a move retains the importance of women as moral nurturers while opening the way to seeing how virtue and morality shape women's first explicit relationship to politics and its implications for women's future citizenship that transcends the confines of republican motherhood. Second, "guardianship" conveys a more accurate portrayal of women's political role: the duty of literally defending existing traditions and power structures by guarding the morally pure private sphere from encroaching public vice. Whereas a "guard" often refers to a soldier defending their country, republican women protected the private sphere and their families from moral corruption which, in

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turn, protects the nation from political decay. Together, the term "moral guardianship" communicates how the defensive posture that characterizes women's political identity is premised upon a passive moral character consistent with the political responsibility of defending the status quo.

Further, moral guardianship specifies the problem between women's virtue and political power that arises in a recent challenge to the republican motherhood raised by John Patrick Diggins in *On Hallowed Ground* (2000). Echoing his earlier position in *The Lost Soul of American Politics*, Diggins urges contemporary women to leave republican virtue behind in order to embrace Lockean individualism. "If women historians are right," Diggins states, "women in the past desired to be virtuous republicans when they should have been, if I am right, assertive Lockeans."[41] To gain full inclusion in American politics, Diggins wants women to escape the confines of the republican common good and morality. Rejecting the usefulness of contemporary feminist attention to women's morality such as the ethic of care, Diggins writes, "the moral sensibility that Gilligan describes has gone unrewarded in America's culture. It is only when women begin to move ahead politically and especially economically, only when they take individualism seriously, that gender distinctions start to disappear."[42] Women, in other words, will gain equality with men when they learn to play by their rules and assimilate into masculine paradigms based on power, individualism, and autonomy. Diggins ignores how the suffragist claim to moral superiority moved the fight for the Nineteenth Amendment

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[41] *On Hallowed Ground: Abraham Lincoln & the Foundations of American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 238.

[42] Ibid., 254.

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forward and he dismisses the value that women place on relationships and contexts. Despite Diggins' anti-feminist position, a kernel of truth about virtue and power emerges from his analysis. In the long run, virtue hides women's political power from them by sustaining their association with traditional feminine passivity and dependence, and moral responsibility for the common good, tradition, and stability. Making a similar point about women's moral superiority more generally, Emily Stoper and Roberta Ann Johnson claim that "the fundamental problem with basing our claims for political power and influence on traditional roles is that this claim tends to reinforce those traditional roles."[43] Ultimately, they argue that "the claim of superiority has perpetuated women's psychological weaknesses and reinforced their age-old Otherness. Thus it has worked to block the development of women's full humanity."[44] Stoper and Johnson echo Diggins' point that republican morality and virtue, the cornerstone to moral superiority claims, specifically hide political power from women by eliciting their participation in traditional roles that sustain their oppression. Virtue undermines women's capacity to define how they want to conceive of or reconstruct the relationship of women to morality and politics. Identifying how virtue operates according to hidden power dynamics that exclude women from full political participation, however, does not necessarily result in either a rejection of morality or an acceptance of Lockean individualism and Diggins' raw power politics that characterize a traditionally masculine outlook on public life.

Moral guardianship suggests a means of uncovering the exercise of political power

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[43] "The Weaker Sex & the Better Half: The Idea of Women's Moral Superiority in the American Feminist Movement," *Polity* X (Winter 1977) 2: 207.

[44] Ibid., 217.

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through women's virtue and vice from a feminist perspective without reverting to the constraints of liberalism, republicanism, or republican motherhood. The dualistic framework that dominates the literature about women's new political role during the republican period simplifies the complexity of women's developing citizenship. Invariably, these debates amount to either an acceptance or rejection of the republican motherhood thesis that emphasizes women's increased moral authority as mothers whose new status enabled them to leverage increasing amounts of political power that resulted in first wave feminism. Detractors from this position such as Joan Hoff focus on how American women lost their few political rights at this time while Mark Kann shows how patriarchy reemerged to close off any opportunities for the "Family Woman's" citizenship. Whether or not women gain political power, their association with virtue during this period establishes their first explicit relationship to politics and the character of women's political identity that transforms into citizenship. Moral guardianship decenters this dualistic framework that simplifies the complex dynamics of the republican woman's moral and political identity to allow for more interesting questions to surface about the long term impact of constructing women's citizenship on the moralistic grounds of virtue. Of course, one could contend that moral guardianship simply imposes one category instead of another. While this is true to some degree, moral guardianship offers some clear advantages for examining women's citizenship. Most importantly, it focuses attention on morality, not on how women's social roles as mothers and wives enabled them to cultivate morality in others. After all, motherhood and marriage defined women's social roles long before the revolution. The critical change is that women's morality became politicized, not only "feminized." Additionally, moral guardianship centers around the dynamic

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interplay of virtue and vice, a relationship generally missing from the republican motherhood literature that highlights the overall political benefits of women's virtue and their responsibility for the common good, thereby ignoring women's association with vice and, subsequently, republican decay. By recognizing how vice operates in tandem with virtue, a fuller picture of moral guardianship emerges that explains the problems arising from constructing women's citizenship on these moral grounds.

## 3.3: The Education of Republican Women: Debating Their Virtue, Vice, and the Nation's Future

To track how virtue and vice create a double bind for women's citizenship, this section explores how infinite and finite virtues, encountered in the Puritan discourse, operate within the debates on women's education that took place around the turn of the 19th century. Recall that infinite virtues such as piety, sacrifice, humility, and modesty relate to the transcendent, spiritual plane where humans connect with God, keeping their gaze on the heavens. Finite virtues such as meekness, courage, passivity, and kindness characterize woman's social relationships with family and community in the material world. Comparing the use of women's finite and infinite virtues in Puritan discourse and the republican era's debates on women's education traces how Puritan morality translates into the republican context, a process that embeds patriarchal conceptions of virtue and vice in the American woman's political identity.

The republican woman's infinite virtue maintains a moral and religious imperative that animates their responsibility for the common good while an increasing focus on women's finite virtues reflects their growing political significance in comparison to their

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Puritan counterparts. Advocates for reforming women's education such as Benjamin Rush and Judith Sargent Murray add an explicitly political dimension to the finite virtues that transformed women's domestic duties into patriotic acts that saved the republic from decay. Although their opponents to educational reform for women such as Reverends Fordyce and Bennett emphasized the finite virtues to a greater degree than the Puritans, they portrayed expanding women's education as a threat to God's natural patriarchal order that would cause America's downfall. Vice lingers on the periphery of both sides of this debate as Eve remains a central symbol of women's responsibility for original sin. While, like the Puritans, both groups allow for Eve's redemption, women's responsibility for the Fall remains evident and translates into the republican conception of political decay associated with women's vice. The debate on women's education captures how women's finite virtue and vice gain such a level of political significance through the religious origins of infinite virtue and vice. To an even greater degree than the Puritans, republican women's moral responsibility for American exceptionalism defines their relationship to politics.

The infinite virtues of piety, wisdom, and meekness dominate the opponents' discourse on the dangers of reforming women's education. While, similar to the Puritans, these thinkers see virtue as emanating from a spiritual commitment to God, they place much more emphasis on how the infinite shapes a woman's finite relationships. Take the case of meekness. In a sermon devoted to the subject, Reverend James Fordyce portrays meekness as a wife's submission to her husband's will according to God's command that women act as help-meets to men. A woman's commitment to God translates into a submissive acceptance of His command that she serve her husband. Moreover, God

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created women as meek and soft, and men as their valiant and courageous protectors. Describing the difference, Fordyce explains that "womanish softness... in the male composition...is certainly a blemish wherever found; in the female, a beauty."[45] This softness or meekness then becomes a virtue. "The basis of the virtue we now recommend is laid in the original make, or specific character of the sex," and Fordyce continues, a "Superstructure" of "Christianity raises upon it."[46] Because this infinite virtue emanates from a woman's devotion to God's law, her education challenges the natural order by emboldening her with the reason that undermines meekness. These opponents greatly feared that women would follow in Mary Wollstonecraft's footsteps. Echoing their concern, Mary Orne Tucker, an upper class, devout Christian from Massachusetts, writes in her diary that her cousin

> Sally [White] has passed her days in the shade of retirement but even these many virtues and graces have ripened to perfection; she has every quality necessary for a good wife, and the gentlemen of New England are so domesticated, that it is much more important a woman should shine in the nursery, than in the learned dispositions, which are not always profitable, and she is certainly much more lovely in the discharge of duties which Heaven and Nature point out for the sex than in aping that monster which Mary Walstomwaft [Wollstonecraft] has dress'd in a woman's garb.[47]

Women embracing and perfecting their domestic duties assigned to them by "Heaven and Nature" depict the "many virtues and graces" of their sex. As such, Christian women must avoid "aping that monster" Mary Wollstonecraft by pursuing unnatural and ungodly

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[45] "On Female Meekness," *Sermons to Young Women*, 14th ed. (London, 1814), 177.

[46] Ibid.

[47] "Diary of Mary Orne Tucker,"April 13, 1802, at Phillips Library, Salem, Massachusetts.

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"learned dispositions." To remain devoted to God, according to these opponents and their followers, women must denounce any learning that might jeopardize their natural, God-given meekness, and His natural order. To do otherwise challenges God's will and women's commitment to it.

In addition to meekness, the infinite virtues of piety and wisdom play a dual role within this debate on women's education. Retaining its identification with Puritanism, piety equates with a complete devotion to God. "Real piety is of a very different, and a much more animated nature," Reverend John Bennett explains, "It looks up to God, sees, hears, feels him, in every event, in every vicissitude, in all places, in all seasons, and upon all occasions."[48] The "animated nature" of this piety indicates the more finite orientation of even the most infinite of virtues that operate primarily within this material world's events, "places," "seasons," and "occasions," not those of Heaven and the After-life. Moving even further from the Puritan view, piety works in tandem with wisdom in the discourse on women's education. Opponents of reform accept education only as a means for developing women's wisdom enough to strengthen their piety and make them more socially appealing. Expressing the complementary relationship between piety and wisdom, Reverend Bennett explains:

> The piety I have recommended, will make you always happy in yourself, and respected by all the worthy and discerning, though you should happen to have none of those *intellectual* endowments, which procure a greater share of fame and *admiration*. But you may be *sensible* as well as *pious*; you may be *entertaining* as well as *good*. Your reason and understanding were given you to be *improved*; a *proper* pursuit of knowledge, at the same time, will aid and inflame your *piety*, and render you much more valuable and interesting to all your acquaintance. When the

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[48] *Letters to a Young Lady, On a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects*, 7th American ed. (Philadelphia, PA: William Fry, Printer, 1818), 28.

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> *foundation* is laid in virtue, the *superstructure* may have every graceful embellishment.[49]

In a sense then, "a proper pursuit of knowledge" tempers a woman's piety and renders her "much more valuable and interesting to all your acquaintance." Emphasizing piety's social advantages, Bennett also states that "knowledge will recommend you to many, over whom *mere* piety would have no power. It will give a greater energy to your goodness. The picture will be thus elegantly framed, and placed in the best point of view."[50] Referring to women as "the picture...thus elegantly framed" with "every graceful embellishment" resonates with the Puritan use of the term "ornaments" to describe the virtues that would adorn the daughters of Zion who devoted their entire being to God. The difference here indicates a key shift in republican finite virtues, even among the opponents of reform. The republican woman's "ornaments" not only include faith and belief in the spirit of God, but also the knowledge and reason that make them attractive to others. No longer is the focus of piety on woman's marriage to God, but on her marriage to man, a shift that indicates the republican commitment to building community and social bonds. In Puritan piety, women experienced something like a personal space that even made "closeting" themselves away to contemplate the love of God acceptable. For republicans, this internal space for spiritual contemplation nearly vanishes as piety's tie to wisdom makes virtuous women socially attractive and "entertaining as well as good."

Reformers of women's education also highlight the importance of piety and wisdom. Speaking on the type of education generally fit for a republic, Benjamin Rush,

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[49] Ibid., 109.

[50] Ibid.

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for instance, declares that "the only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in RELIGION. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments."[51] For women, whose "breast is the natural soil of Christianity," according to Rush, religion enables them to see the truth and fully experience real knowledge, first of God and then of His creation.[52] In a tract directed to other female educators of women's manners, Mrs. Mary Pilkington attaches "genuine piety to scientific knowledge" and contends "that piety towards God is the foundation of those virtues which will make you estimable in the eyes of men; and that to be void of it evinces a cold heart, destitute of the best affections which can give grace to a youthful character."[53] Though realizing the importance of "scientific knowledge," Pilkington, similar to Rev. Bennett, views wisdom as a means to temper piety and to make young women more attractive mates for men.

While Judith Sargent Murray sustains the relationship between piety and wisdom and women's marital prospects, she stresses wisdom's importance in the hopes that reason will enable women to build the self-confidence to see through unworthy, flattering suitors. Piety takes a more secondary role in Murray's work. Instead of devoting texts to the issue

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[51] "Thoughts upon the Mode of Education Proper to a Republic," in *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 10.

[52] "Thoughts upon Female Education Accommodated to the Present State of Society, Manners, and Government in the United States of America," in *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, 32.

[53] *A Mirror for the Female Sex: Historical Beauties for Young Ladies. Intended to Lead the Female Mind to the Love and Practice of Female Goodness* (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin for Oliver D. And I. Cooke, 1799), 60, 2. The Massachusetts Historical Society.

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like her opponents, Murray wrote essays dedicated to women's equal intellectual abilities. Piety, moreover, appears in descriptions of female models of virtue such as Mary II, Queen of England. This is not to say that Murray discarded piety. Indeed, she valued religion and devotedly promoted Universalism, a growing religion in the United States during her day, and held that piety without a virtue shaped by knowledge rendered women empty vessels. Arguing that mental ability should accompany physical charms, Murray explains "that sweet form, shall serve but as a polished casket, which will contain a most beautiful gem, highly finished, and calculated for advantage, as well as ornament."[54] Occasionally, Murray employs the Puritan term "ornaments" in reference to a woman's unblemished virtue and beautiful "exterior." This term's usage suggests a lingering connection with piety as *the* ornament for the daughters of Zion. Yet, the virtuous woman now possesses physical beauty and wisdom, two traits that break with Puritan morality. Wisdom gives women the ability to reject unfit male flatterers and to overcome their lack of self-worth. "I would be solicitous," Murray states, "to inspire the glow of virtue, with that elevation of the soul, that dignity, which ever attendant upon self-approbation, arising from the genuine source of innate rectitude."[55] Through wisdom, Murray hopes to "inspire the glow of virtue," emanating from a piety informed by knowledge that empowers women with the ability to determine the right principles of moral conduct. Ironically, Murray retains from Puritan piety a sense of independence or individualism.

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[54] "Desultory Thought Upon the Utility of Encouraging a Degree of Self-Complacency, Especially in Female Bosoms," in *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray*, ed. Sharon M. Harris (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 47.

[55] Ibid., 48.

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Yet, Murray transforms this infinite virtue into a means by which women can revere themselves, not only God or man. Though sharing a commitment to the infinite virtues of piety and wisdom with their opponents, reformers generally omit meekness, indicating their view of women's education as cultivating enough independence to, at least, enable women to choose better husbands, and, at most, to empower them to take the lead in domestic life.

Further reflecting religion's continued importance on both sides of this debate, reformers and their opponents also refer to and interpret the myth of Eve, a constant reminder of women's capacity for infinite vice, or their universal moral responsibility for plunging humanity into sin that effectively ends heavenly paradise on earth. Stressing the infinite dimension, this vice transcends time and space to encompass all women from Eve to the present, giving this moral concept a heavy moral weight within the harsh reality of finite politics. While the Puritans focused on the religious implications of women's infinite vice in the battle between heaven and hell, republicans brought this battle to earth as the political struggle between the common good and its inevitable decay. The religious formulation of women's infinite virtue and vice, tied to the cosmic war between God and Satan, infuses women's republican political character with an immense moral weight that ultimately characterizes moral guardianship. Turning now to the different interpretations of Eve in this debate clarifies women's continued identification with infinite vice as it takes on explicit political significance in republican discourse.

Judith Sargent Murray and her opponent, Reverend James Fordyce focus on Eve's motivation for eating from the tree of knowledge as a means of taking opposite positions on women's education. Rev. Fordyce interprets Eve's Fall in the following terms:

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> It does appear from the history, that 'the serpent'...'beguiled Eve through its subtlety:' and that the man, though aware of the deceit, was, by his fondness for his deluded yet still lovely partner drawn into the same transgression. But what was it that exposed the woman to that snare by which she was seduced? Passions, it must be owned, extremely culpable in their nature, and fatal in their consequences; but not the passions for which her daughters have been indiscriminately blamed. In reality, the resolute spirit and persevering vigilance with which great numbers of women preserve their honour, while so few men in comparison are restrained by the laws of continence, seem to me no slight proof that the former possess a degree of fortitude well worthy of praise.[56]

Similar to Cotton Mather's contradictory view of Eve as a source of virtue and vice, Fordyce identifies how the "passions" in women's nature, deserving of blame for their fatal consequences, coexist with a more virtuous side, a "resolute spirit," based on "a degree of fortitude" often stronger than men's and "well worthy of praise." Particularly, Fordyce refers to how "great numbers of women preserve their honour" more than men who apparently, like Adam, easily fall victim to carnal lust. Stressing women's capacity for temperance, Fordyce continues, "it is certain that the practices of real Piety requires no small resolution and perseverance...In the point to which I allude, you are often heroines. Your life is a series of self-denial. But self-denial from right principles is the perfection of Christianity."[57] Resonating with Puritan discourse, women's capacity for denying her self reflects feminine fortitude, the passive alternative to masculine courage that gives women the opportunity to become "heroines." In addition to denying their sexual passions, women must also deny their desire for knowledge. As the story of Eve shows, this passion led to mankind's downfall. As Fordyce explains, "the finest sentiments and the grossest passions have been observed to meet in the same mind; that our First Mother was

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[56] "Sermon on Female Piety," in *Sermons to Young Women*, 42.

[57] Ibid., 44.

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betrayed by the pride of knowing; and that the height of capacity in Lucifer only increased the fall of that son of the morning."[58] Eve, "our First Mother" was "betrayed by the pride of knowing." By defining wisdom or knowing, usually a virtue, as pride, one of the Seven Deadly Sins, Fordyce transforms women's desire for knowledge into a sin that caused the Fall. Fordyce's interpretation of Eve serves as a cautionary tale for women who must exercise their heroic ability of self-denial by developing only the reason necessary to temper the passions and strengthen piety, and denying their passionate desire for knowledge. To take a strong stand against women's education, Fordyce diminishes the sin of carnal lust and accentuates that of pride to highlight the threat that women's knowledge poses for humanity.

Judith Sargent Murray, in contrast, interprets the Eve myth to argue for women's mental capacity, desire for knowledge, and even sexual equality. Similar to Rev. Fordyce, Murray examines Eve's motives for eating from the tree of knowledge: "It doth not appear that she was governed by any one sensual appetite; but merely by a desire of adorning her mind; a laudable ambition fired her soul, and a thirst for knowledge impelled the predilection so fatal in its consequences."[59] Instead of characterizing Eve as giving into the sin of pride or the "grossest passions," Murray characterizes women's desire as "a laudable ambition' that "fired her soul." While Eve may have succumbed to "a desire of adorning her mind," Adam "was influenced by no other motive than a bare pusillanimous attachment to a woman! by sentiments so exquisitely soft, that all his sons have, from that

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[58] Ibid., 8.

[59] "The Myth of Eve Reinterpreted," in *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray*, 12.

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period, when they have designed to degrade them, described as highly feminine."[60] Looking to Adam, Murray and Fordyce agree that men easily fall prey to carnal lust, a sin wrongfully attributed almost exclusively to women. Murray, however, pushes the point further, stating that "it should seem, that all the arts of the grand deceiver (since means adequate to the purposes are, I conceive, invariably pursued) were requisite to mislead our general mother, while the father of mankind forfeited his own, and relinquished the happiness of posterity, merely in compliance with the blandishments of a female."[61] In comparison, Eve's fortitude and strength of character, her virtue, required Lucifer to use all of his sinful powers while Adam succumbed to a commonplace carnal desire for women. While Murray sees men and women as equally driven by passions, the objects of desire differ as women lust for knowledge, a virtue, and men lust for women, always a sin. The Eve myth reveals that Adam faltered in his ability to reason and control his lust, exposing man's vulnerability to passion. By identifying Adam's weakness and Eve's strength of character, Murray argues for an equality of the sexes: "lastly, let us turn our eyes to man in the aggregate. He is manifested as the figure of strength, but that we may not regard him as any thing more than a figure, his soul is formed in no sort superior, but every way equal to the mind of her, who is the emblem of weakness, and whom he hails the gentle companion of his better days."[62] Though men may retain physical superiority, their souls and minds remain equal to women's. On this interpretation, men and women

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[60] "On the Equality of the Sexes," in *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray*, 12, 13.

[61] Ibid., 13.

[62] Ibid., 13-14.

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share responsibility for humanity's Fall as both Adam and Eve gave into their passions, and thus the capacity for infinite vice. Given women's strength of character and desire for knowledge, Murray argues that these strengths balance out their weaknesses and make women no more or less capable to learn than men. And, as equal culprits in the Fall of humanity, women's education poses no greater a threat then men's.

This political end game for reformers plays out more clearly when Benjamin Rush references Eve in expressing his hopes that women's education would push America towards its exceptional future. Unlike Fordyce and Murray, Rush does not offer an extensive interpretation of Eve's motivations. To some degree, this suggests that Rush essentially agrees with Eve's responsibility for original sin and women's association with vice. Yet, Rush argues that women's education will develop their virtue and reason to the extent that it may save America from the Fall of mankind. Rush, for instance, emphasizes the dangers of women's vice and then declares, "But, I forbear. The prospect is so painful that I cannot help silently imploring the great Arbiter of human affairs to interpose his almighty goodness and to deliver us from these evils that, at least one spot of the earth may be reserved as a monument of the effects of good education, in order to show in some degree *what our species was before the fall* and *what it shall be after its restoration*" [emphasis mine].[63] Eve, of course, caused "the fall." Yet, women's "good education" could, with God's help, "deliver us from these evils." Rush integrates American exceptionalism into this position by referring to America as "one spot of the earth...reserved as a monument to the effects of good education" that takes a biblical turn

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[63] "Thoughts upon Female Education," 38.

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by showing the humans condition before and after the Fall. Women's education would redeem them for their original sin, cleanse humanity of its vice, and restore virtue to enable America to fulfill John Winthrop's hope for a Garden of Eden in the New World. To conclude his argument, Rush clearly places responsibility for this utopian goal on women: "It will be in your power, LADIES, to correct the mistakes and practices of our sex...by demonstrating that the female temper can only be governed by reason and that the cultivation of reason in women is alike friendly to the order of nature and to the private as well as public happiness."[64] Though Rush sustains the natural order of men's domination over women, he holds women responsible for "private as well as public happiness" by redeeming American virtue from Eve's sin and securing its exceptional future through their education. The religious dynamic of the Eve myth, initially cultivated in the Puritan's utopian vision of America, now takes on an explicitly political purpose. Women's infinite vice, symbolized by Eve, represents their continued association with original sin and the Fall that will ultimately translate into women's responsibility for preventing the finite vices that erode republican virtue and cause its decay.

To understand how the republican woman emerged from the colonial period as a moral guardian with an explicit political purpose, this analysis now compares how reformers and their opponents used finite virtues in their debate. Importantly, the language of "guardianship" emerges in this context. While the Puritans implicitly assigned women a moral guardianship status, these republican era thinkers explicitly linked women to the nation-building process. Although more explicit, the republican woman's moral

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[64] Ibid., 39-40.

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guardianship emanates from their location in the middle ground between the infinite realm of religion and the finite sphere of politics where one sphere infuses the other. As a result, women's status as moral guardian carries with it the double moral weight for religious good and evil, and political common good and decay.

Opponents of women's education used finite virtues to construct a form of guardianship consistent with their support of God's natural sexual order in which women submit to men's will. In particular, these opponents catalogue a list of finite virtues that would enable women to attain the infinite virtue of meekness. When outlining the need to expand the "morals of mankind" beyond the "beautiful forms" of "wisdom and virtue," Rev. James Fordyce characterizes women's finite virtues as follows: "decency of character, dignity of conduct, the honours due to temperance, integrity, benevolence, magnanimity, and other qualities of that order are ideas as solid as they are refined, and which ought certainly to be cherished by all who are capable of comprehending their moment."[65] The social orientation of "decency of character," "dignity of conduct," "temperance," "integrity," "benevolence," and "magnanimity" suggests their finite character. Specifically, "benevolence," or a desire to good for others, and "magnanimity," a generous, forgiving nature especially in response to an insult or injury, indicate how serving and forgiving others governs a woman's moral conduct. "Temperance," moreover, entails restraining the passions to portray "decency" and "dignity" while "integrity" requires adherence to the moral principles imposed on women. Together these finite virtues actuate the opponents' most important infinite virtue for women: meekness.

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[65] "Sermon on Female Piety," in *Sermons to Young Women*, 51.

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The submissiveness characterizing women's virtue translates into a conservative view of guardianship consistent with opponents' hopes of preserving the patriarchal status quo.

Women who broke with meekness and exhibited physical and mental aggression, these opponents asserted, posed a serious social problem that threatened the natural order. Rev. John Bennett, for instance, claims that "the truth is, some females have been *viragos* in their knowledge..."[66] The use of "*virago*" reveals Bennett's underlying concern that women who aggressively seek knowledge adopt masculine traits and abandon feminine virtue. Rev. James Fordyce fears that once women pursue knowledge aggressively, they will want to engage in military battle: "Neither do we, so far as I know, ever rank amongst feminine qualities Valour, strictly so called. A woman heading an army, rushing into the thickest of her foe, spreading slaughter and death around her, or returning from the field of battle covered with dust and blood, would surely to a civilized nature suggest shocking ideas."[67] Here Fordyce responds to claims by reformers that women, as history reveals, are *capable* of military action though no one argues for enlisting women in militias. Instead, Fordyce offers this picture of the proper women, "your best emblem, beloved, is the smiling form of peace, robed in white, and bearing a branch of olive."[68] To counter male valor and militaristic aggression, women represent peace and passivity, a view that balances male domination with female subordination in order to maintain the natural, harmonious order.

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[66] *Letters to a Young Lady*, 110.

[67] Ibid., 174.

[68] Ibid., 175.

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Women challenging their rightful place, however, stand to endure serious social punishments. Rev. John Bennett describes the fate of educated women in the following terms:

> *Learned* women, however, have been often a proverb of reproach, feared by their own sex and disliked by ours. A neglect of their person, and of family concerns, as of little things beneath a *superior understanding*, a vain ostentation of their abilities in *company*, and upon all occasions a supercilious contempt of their sister women in general, and an ungraceful avidity for the company of men, have been reckoned amongst their distinguished characteristics.[69]

For prioritizing intellectual pursuits and exhibiting knowledge publically, these women incur the punishment of social ostracism as other women fear and men dislike them. Fordyce takes an even harder position towards aggressive women: "a worthy woman, shrinking from manifest hazard, or threatened violence, we are always forward and proud to protect; while, on the other hand, an intrepid female seems to renounce our aid, and in some respect to invade our province. We turn away, and leave her to herself."[70] Women who invade the "province" of men face the danger of losing the community's protection, leaving them vulnerable to a range of abuses.

Alternatively, women who exhibit finite virtues that together constitute their infinite virtue of meekness receive the reward of male guardianship. "Nothing can be more certain than that your sex is, on every account, entitled to the shelter of ours," Rev. Fordyce explains, "Your softness, weakness, timidity, and tender reliance on man; your helpless condition in yourselves, and his superior strength for labour, ability for defense, and fortitude in trial; your tacit acknowledgment of these, and frequent application for his

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[69] Ibid., 110.

[70] Ibid., 175.

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aid in so many winning ways, concur to form a plea, which nothing can disallow or withstand but brutality."[71] Fordyce clearly draws the line between the sexes and, far from advocating a "separate but equal" position, he submits women, given their natural physical and mental weakness, to men's domination. Guardianship emanates from women's entitlement to men's shelter, their "tender reliance on man" due to their "helpless condition." Fordyce completes the argument for men's guardianship of women, stating, "your safety, I said before, lies in retreat and vigilance, in sobriety and prudence, in virtuous friendship and rational conversation, in domestic, elegant, and intellectual accomplishments; I add now, in *the guardianship of Omnipotence*, as that which must give efficacy to all the rest; but which can only be obtained by something more and better than them all, I mean, True Religion" [emphasis mine].[72] By accepting their God-given role as meek women, they receive "guardianship of Omnipotence" for following God's will and the beliefs of "True Religion." In this context, women's moral guardianship amounts to denying any desire for intellectual or physical pursuits that might undermine meekness and submission. Their guardianship amounts to a "retreat" from all male provinces that secures the protection of men and God in exchange for women's vigilant watch over *their* own virtue.

Reflecting their concern with changing the material world, reformers offer a more extensive catalogue of finite virtues for women that only begins to suggest how women moved from *being guarded* to *guardianship*. Such lists of virtues appeared in the explosion of manner books for women around 1800. The female finite virtues include:

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[71] "Sermon on Female Piety," *Sermons for Young Women*, 59.

[72] Ibid., 62.

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integrity, fidelity, chastity, benevolence, beneficence, industry, frugality, economy, charity, liberality, family governance, enticing discourse, fear of the Lord, compassion, cheerfulness, humility, beauty, humanity, and modesty. Overall these finite virtues define women in terms of their commitment to serving others through compassion, cheerfulness, charity, benevolence, and beneficence. Similar to the Puritans, fidelity and chastity remain central to a wife's devotion to her husband, as does a fear of the Lord. Indicating the overall shift from emphasizing infinite virtue in the discourse of Puritans and opponents of women's education, humility and modesty move to the finite category as they no longer require an absolute devotion to God, but a decency and restraint towards other people. Women's beauty, a sin of pride for the Puritans, becomes a feminine virtue and reveals the increasing moral value placed on physical appearance, particularly by writers of manner books for finishing schools. Additionally, the virtues of industry, frugality, economy, and family governance indicate the reformers' support for expanding women's domestic role. Together these suggest how a growing commercial economy demanded more of women's input into the family and its financial well-being. Though women's finite virtues continued to define their moral worth in terms of service to others, a capacity for some independence emerges.

Reformers particularly portrayed the need for cultivating women's reason through an expanded education that would enable them to exercise the independence necessary to meet the new demands on their domestic duties. Reason would strengthen women's ability to exercise their finite virtues and move towards women's moral guardianship that emanates from a "separate but equal" argument. In her essay "On the Equality of the

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Sexes," Murray describes women's equal intellectual powers of memory, judgment, reason, and imagination: "if we [women] are allowed an equality of acquirement, let serious studies equally employ our minds, and we will bid our souls arise to equal strength. We will meet upon even ground, the despot man; we will rush with alacrity to combat, and, crowned by success, we shall then answer the exalted expectations which are formed."[73] With knowledge, women could acquire "equal strength" to meet "the despot man" "upon even ground" and defeat him in "combat." Such aggressive language threatens the very natural order of the sexes. At moments, Murray seems to promote women's movement into male provinces. Seeing how domestic life limited women's imagination, Murray, for instance, states that "assuredly great activity of mind is thereby discovered, and was this activity properly directed, what beneficial effects would follow. Is the needle and kitchen sufficient to employ the operations of a soul thus organized? I should conceive not."[74] Just as Murray seems on the verge of suggesting roles for women outside the home, she quickly reigns herself in, stating that "nay, while we are pursuing the needle, or the superintendency of the family, I repeat, that our minds are at full liberty for reflection; that imagination may exert itself in full vigor."[75] Although women's imagination can develop while performing their domestic duties, Murray asserts a much more independent and assertive role for women in this sphere: "O ye arbiters of our fate! we confess that the superiority is indubitably yours; you are by nature formed for our

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[73] 10.

[74] "On the Equality of the Sexes," 5.

[75] Ibid., 7.

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protectors; we pretend not to vie with you in bodily strength; upon this point we will never contend for victory. Shield us then, we beseech you, from external evils and in return *we* will transact *your* domestick [sic.] affairs. Yes, *your*, for are you not equally interested in those matters with ourselves?"[76] Locked into the biological view of men's physical strength, Murray sustains the position of her opponents that men "are by nature formed for our protectors" who should "shield" women from "external evils." Yet, Murray adds a twist when stating that "in return *we* will transact *your* domestick affairs." Though still defining domestic affairs as belonging to men, women would take a much stronger hand in this domain's activities, indicating an increased independence based on reason and virtue that enable women to make the right moral and intellectual decisions for the family.

With these seeds of moral guardianship planted, reformers took their most radical step by adding a political dimension to women's finite virtues that breaks with Puritan tradition and the opponents of women's education. As the civic virtues traditionally associated with men's political participation lost its masculine, public orientation, virtue took on a secondary role in public life as commerce and self-interest dominate citizen concerns as it gained prominence in private life. Women's new virtue, however, retains a diluted civic quality ensuring their passivity. A more complicated picture emerges by looking closely at the finite political virtues attributed to women in the reformers' discourse that include: enduring, ingenious, fruitful in resources, fortitude, heroism, brave, patriotic, influential, energetic, eloquent, faithful or persevering in attachments, honorable

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[76] Ibid., 11.

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support in the toils of government, and literary acquirement. Clearly virtues such as "heroism," "bravery," "patriotism," "influential," and "honorable support in toils of government" explicitly link women to politics. Exploring the nature of this link through the lens of virtue, however, reveals the passive and submissive political identity embedded in moral guardianship regardless of this explicit political dimension.

A close look at Murray's essay "Observations on Female Abilities" illustrates the complex nature of women's moral guardianship. Murray clearly asserts a much greater independence and self-reliance for American women than other reformers, stating that "with proper attention to their education, and subsequent habits, they [women] might easily attain that independence, for which a Wollstonecraft hath so energetically contended" and "the Sex should be taught to depend on their own efforts, for the procurement of an establishment in life."[77] As such, women's greater knowledge should elevate her role in the family as one equal to, though still different from their husbands':

> The *united efforts of male and female* might rescue many a family from destruction which, notwithstanding the efforts of its *individual* head, is not involved in all the calamities attendant on a dissipated fortune and augmenting debts. It is not possible to educate children in a manner which will render them *too beneficial* to society; and the more we multiply aids to a family, the greater will be the security, that its individuals will not be thrown a burden on the public.[78]

Murray makes a pragmatic argument for the "united efforts of male and female" who together can save the family from economic calamity, perhaps by dividing labor into the female reproductive and male productive spheres, and empowering women to help educate the children. In any case, "two heads are better than one" for Murray who hopes

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[77] "Observations on Female Abilities," 39.

[78] Ibid.

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to alleviate the problem of poverty by strengthening the family as a resource instead of having its members turn to the state. This more independent "mother could *assist* her as well as *weep* over her offspring."[79] Though Murray sustains men's prominent familial role, education sufficiently develops wives and mothers' knowledge to the degree necessary to grant them the equality with their husbands to allow them to help raise the children and contribute to the family's economic security.

Such a degree of equality and independence sets the stage for Murray to add a number of explicitly political finite virtues to the republican woman's list. Using a style popular during the period, Murray lists the virtues and then describes women from history who should act as models of virtue for American women. In describing fortitude, for instance, Murray explains how the Roman matron Arria committed suicide to inspire her husband with a similar courage in the face of immediate political persecution. Lady Jane Gray also exhibited "*heroic fortitude*" by refusing to see her husband before her execution in order to prevent an emotional upsurge that would undermine her courage to face death bravely. Authorities executed Miss Anna Askew for heroically refusing to denounce her religious beliefs. In each case, women's fortitude requires the sacrifice of their lives for political and religious purposes. Turning to bravery, Murray describes Jane of Flanders and Margaret of Anjou, Henry VI's Queen, who fought in and even led military battles to defend their countries for which they also lost their lives. Although Murray realizes that "bravery is not a quality which figures *gracefully* in the list of female virtues, nor are we anxious it should take rank in the catalogue," she asserts that it is "necessary to prove the

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[79] Ibid.

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*capability* of the female mind, to rear to perfection whatever seeds may be adventitiously implanted therein."[80] Though most women will never lead men into battle or be executed for their religious beliefs, Murray realizes that she must prove women's "capability" for such acts to show how their strong minds and wills equal those of men.

While fortitude and bravery attribute traditionally masculine virtues to women, the specific feminine nature of these virtues culminates in the most political virtue - patriotism. Here Murray hopes to marry the social roles of Wife and Mother with a love for their county, contending that these roles in no way diminish "their sex's *capability* of experiencing without ardour *not to be exceeded*, the patriotic glow...the fine fervours of the *amor patriae*."[81] Women's patriotism, however, emanates from their sexually determined role that closes off most political avenues while opening another denied to men. Expressing her hopes for republican mothers, Murray explains women's relation to politics:

> Women are not usually exercised in those extensive contemplations which engage the legislator: They are not called on to arm in their country's cause; to appear in the well fought field, or to put their lives at hazard: But when they part with him in whom is centered their dearest hopes, who blends the characters over, friend, husband and protector - when they resign to the hostile career the blooming youth whom from infancy they have watched with all a mother's tenderness, and whose rich maturity hath become the pride and consolation of their declining life - in those moments of anguish, their heroism and their fortitude are indisputable evinced. Nor is the patriotism of the chief arrayed for the battle; not his who devotes himself with all a statesman's integrity to the public weal, condemned to an ordeal more severe.[82]

Such statements support Mary Beth Norton's claims that "in the 1780s and 1790s,

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[80] Ibid., 22.

[81] Ibid., 23-4.

[82] Ibid., 24.

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Murray was the chief theorist of republican womanhood."[83] Certainly, Murray establishes a woman's contribution to the republic as a mother who watches her son go off to battle and then endures the "anguish" of his death with "heroism" and "fortitude" that rivals any military chief or statesmen. A woman's initial direct link to politics demands her sacrifice of the self, indicated by the virtues of bravery and fortitude, and of her children, an extension of her self. Although the Puritans defined sacrifice as an infinite virtue, it disappears from this republican discourse even though this moral trait characterizes women's construction as patriots. A woman must sacrifice all to obtain a political identity as a patriotic mother who raises sons to fight her country's battles and, thereby, acquires political virtue. This dynamic constitutes a double bind of moral guardianship in which a woman earns some independence and a political identity at the cost of sacrificing herself and her children for the greater good of the nation.

This sacrifice gains a heavy moral weight as its Puritan religious origins translate into the republican context where it underlies the political finite virtues while retaining a sacred, infinite quality. An unlimited capacity for sacrifice and denial transfers into women's more expansive moral responsibility for the common good. The Puritan devotion of self to God transforms into the sacrifice of self for one's country. In a sense, women turn into "republican machines," a phrase used by Benjamin Rush in reference to men. According to Murray, women possess a unique, unlimited emotional capacity that she describes by quoting from a eulogist,

> 'The pleasures of women must arise from their virtues...These great expressions of nature - these heart-rending emotions, which fill us at once with wonder,

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[83] *Liberty's Daughters*, 238.

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> compassion and terror, always have belonged, and always will belong to Women. They possess, in those moments, an inexpressible something, which carries them beyond themselves; and they seem to discover to us new souls, above the standard of humanity.'[84]

Despite her emphasis on reason, Murray returns to these "great expressions of nature" and "heart-rending emotions" that "belong to Women" and "arise from their virtues." This "inexpressible something" seems to emanate from God who created women with strong emotions and passions. Here, they carry "them beyond themselves" indicating women's expansive capacity to encompass a whole community and to reveal new souls that can rise "above the standard of humanity." Women's virtue and unique emotional capacity combine to enable them to see humanity's better nature and to strive for the common good.

Such an ability is difficult to understand without seeing the connection between this implied role of sacrifice and the Puritan use of this infinite virtue to hold women, despite their lack of political power, responsible for achieving Winthrop's "City upon a Hill." Similarly, republican reformers such as Murray constructed women as uniquely capable of envisioning the common good, another elusive utopian political vision in which individuals sacrifice the self for the community. In this scenario, women sacrifice for everyone as men pursue their self-interest. Although unrealistic, holding women morally responsible for the common good held real political implications as they became the nation's moral guardians of this sacred vision, a position premised on the absence of any actual political power. This reveals another aspect of the double bind that virtue creates for women's moral guardianship. In contrast to the civic virtue granted to men in traditional republican

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[84] "Observations on Female Abilities," 42-3.

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thought, American women never acquire the political power necessary for them to meet their moral responsibilities since their political power derives from their morality that requires their exclusion from public life and their passive acceptance of the very system that denies them this power.

Still left unanswered is the question, what were republican women guarding against? Essentially, the answer is vice and its republican form, political decay. Whereas infinite and finite virtue translate into women's moral responsibility for the common good, republican thinkers also sustained women's relationship with Eve and infinite and, as we shall now see, finite vice. Finite and infinite vice combine to hold women morally responsible for the antithesis of the common good - republican decay.

Essentially, education, for men and women, created a barrier to protect the nascent American republic from the vice that would cause its decay. Speaking on formalizing male education, Benjamin Rush pragmatically outlines how knowledge and virtue, cultivated through education, provide a cost-effective means for decreasing vice and increasing political stability. In a speech advocating a public school system in Pennsylvania, Rush states,

> every member of the community is interested in the propagation of virtue and knowledge in the state. But I will go further and add [that] it will be true economy in individuals to support public schools...Fewer pillories and whipping posts and smaller jails, with their usual expenses and taxes, will be necessary when our youth are properly educated than at present...The confessions of these criminals generally show us that their vices and punishments are the fatal consequences of the want of a proper education in early life.[85]

"Virtue and knowledge," achieved through "a proper education," prevent the "vices and

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[85] "Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools," in *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, 6-7.

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punishments" of the youth who find themselves at pillories and whipping posts or in jails. As such, Rush clearly sees the social benefits of investing in education rather than the penal system as a means of stabilizing society. Moreover, reformers such as Rush believed that educating women who as mothers provided "a proper education in early life" and acted as a key means of squelching disorder and preventing republican decay.

Because Rush viewed European education and morality as sources of political decay for Americans, he argues that women must be educated to meet the unique political, social, and economic circumstances of the United States, a point that only begins to suggest his patriotism and promotion of American exceptionalism. Rush offers three reasons for the uniqueness of the American woman's education. First, Rush contends that since American women marry earlier, their curriculum should focus on the most useful areas of study such as the English language, geography, chronology, astronomy, and natural philosophy. Second, as indicated by his support of women's knowledge of figures and bookkeeping, Rush saw the need for women's help in the growing commercial economy that increasingly required husbands to work outside the home. Turning explicitly to guardianship language, Rush declares that "this cannot be done without the assistance of the female members of the community. They must be *the stewards and guardians* of their husbands' property"[emphasis mine].[86] Women then guard their husbands' property in his absence and help protect the family from economic cycles that endangered their financial well-being. Despite their increased responsibilities, women neither held legal rights to property nor actively contributed to the family's wealth. Third,

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[86] "Thoughts on Female Education," 27.

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and most important, women also guard their children's education as their first teachers, their most important duty. As Rush explains, "a principal share of the instruction of children naturally devolves upon the women. It becomes us therefore to prepare them, by a suitable education, for the discharge of this most important duty...our ladies should be qualified to a certain degree, by a peculiar and suitable education, to concur in instructing their sons in the principles of liberty and government."[87] Here, women gain their most active political role in preparing their sons for their future status as republican citizens. Rush explains further that "the influence of female education would be still more extensive and useful in domestic life...The patriot - the hero - the legislator would find the sweetest reward of their toils in the approbation and applause of their wives. Children would discover the marks of maternal prudence and wisdom in every station of life, for it has been remarked that there have been few great or good men who have not been blessed with wife and prudent mothers."[88] Despite the American woman's responsibility for contributing to the family's economic stability, overseeing property, educating children, and cultivating patriotism in future generations, these moral guardians remain politically powerless in relation to legal authority, a key element of their new political identity. Similar to Murray, Rush tempers women's active potential as educators by emphasizing their passive and marginal supporting role, applauding their husbands and giving prudent advice to their sons.

Moreover, Rush portrays America's moral guardians as passive subjects operating

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[87] Ibid., 27, 28.

[88] Ibid., 37.

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from behind the scenes in domestic life. His view resonates with Cotton Mather's statement nearly a century earlier that "there are some *Rays* of no contemptible *Glory* to be struck back upon *Mothers* when the *sons* have been *Vertuous Men* and the *Heirs of Glory*."[89] Despite the praise for virtuous mothers, republicans maintained women's powerlessness to affect social, political, and economic change. As bookkeepers and educators, women participated in supporting existing political and economic structures that perpetuated their oppression. Emphasizing this point, Rush states that men should support women's education as a means by which they can control them: "If men believe that ignorance is favorable to the government of the female sex, they are certainly deceived, for a weak and ignorant woman will always be governed with the greatest difficulty."[90] Educated women acquire the knowledge and virtue to behave rationally and apparently to accept their husbands' rule. Despite the relatively radical language of Rush that expands women's political and economic role in the home, virtue, combined with knowledge, strengthens women's passive position in the American republic while enlisting them in the nation's patriotic cause as educators and pillars of support for their husbands. In sum, even for reformers, education serves to shape a woman's morality and intellect to accept this role from which she derives the virtue necessary to act as a guardian against republican decay.

Even Rush's opponents recognized the need to grant women enough knowledge to strengthen their virtue against the ever-present dangers of vice, a position that breaks with

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[89] *Tabitha Rediviva*, 27-8.

[90] "Thoughts on Female Education," 39.

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Puritan views and reveals an important shift within republican discourse. Speaking to young women, Reverend Fordyce states, "I must again and again urge the culture of your Minds. Your Virtue, your Sobriety is intimately concerned with it...I begin with showing, that the Intellectual Accomplishments briefly delineated in the preceding discourse will have a tendency to exclude many temptations."[91] While Puritans would agree that cultivating women's virtue limits their vice, they saw God as the *only* source of virtue whereas ministers such as Fordyce accepted "Intellectual Accomplishments" or knowledge as an additional support in developing virtue. Indeed, Rev. Fordyce explains how knowledge enables women to discern virtue from vice:

> When Vice begins to unveil her darling front, Conscience is startled and shrinks from the monster...Of this internal light one of the great advantages is, to throw such illumination of virtue and vice through all their essential, and even many of their minute distinctions, as to make them to be discerned with clearness, and felt with conviction; while there rise up to view nameless beauties in holiness and nameless deformities in sin, that pass unheeded by the dim inattentive eye of an understanding uninformed.[92]

"This internal light" of reason greatly benefits women who can tell "nameless beauties in holiness" from "nameless deformities in sin" and avoid the latter. Accepting knowledge as crucial to women's virtue indicates the transition from an infinite, spiritually grounded virtue to its more finite political orientation during the republican era. Though much more muted than the apocalyptic Puritan discourse on vice dominated by witches and the Devil, these republican ministers still envisioned women's knowledge as enlisting them on the side of virtue and grace.

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[91] *Sermons to Young Women*, 3.

[92] Ibid., 4,5.

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## 3.4: Women's Vice and Political Decay: Threats to American Exceptionalism

During the republican era, the religious character of women's vice translated into a political justification for their moral guardianship over the nation's exceptional future and responsibility for its decay. Linking women's vice to the political entailed specifying its finite nature as the debates on women's education reveal.

Opponents of women's education identified how their finite vice contributed to pressing social problems that threatened the decay of America's moral fabric. In particular, the social problems of poverty and prostitution reflected the critical importance of women's virtue. Poverty accompanied America's growing commercial economy. "By 1800," Mary Ryan explains, "sizable numbers of women were unable to find any position whatsoever. The expanding economy unceremoniously deposited them in the class of paupers, simply judging them incapable of earning a living."[93] Throughout the Northeast, women joined the expanding ranks of the poor who swelled relief rolls and entered almshouses such as New York City's Bellevue. Not surprisingly, many women found work as prostitutes. Early in the 19th century, for instance, New York City authorities reported that between 1,200 and 7,000 prostitutes roamed the streets.[94] Vice manifested in poverty and carnal lust infested America's cities, indicators of the young nation's deteriorating moral fabric. Rev. Fordyce explains the problem in the following terms:

> The loss of virtue is, no doubt, often followed with extreme depravity in women. But is not the same thing to be seen among men; although it is not remarked with the same attention, or censured with equal rigour? If many unhappy females run into such 'excess of riot, and superfluity of naughtiness,' as seem to justify the

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[93] *Womanhood in America*, 52.

[94] Ibid., 49.

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> observation, that there is nothing so profligate as a vicious woman; may it not be frequently imputed to their being driven almost to a state of despair? Forsaken as they are by the wretches that ruined them, abandoned by their relations, if any they have, commonly dreading the scorn of their sex, and often too little considered by the virtuous part of ours; what can be expected, in general, from creatures who have put off the modesty of nature, and are propelled by evil habits, co-operating often with base associates and bitter poverty.[95]

Presumably Fordyce refers to prostitutes who represent the most "extreme depravity in women," exhibiting a "superfluity of naughtiness." In addressing this problem, Fordyce seems on the verge of a structural analysis by recognizing how women are "being driven almost to a state of despair" by society's scorn and families that abandoned them. Yet, ultimate responsibility for their condition rests upon women's moral choices as "creatures who have put off the modesty of nature and are propelled by evil habits" in conjunction with "base associates" and "bitter poverty." The warning to women is clear: "the loss of virtue is, no doubt, often followed with extreme depravity in women" and their ultimate destruction as the dregs of society. Christian women such as Mary Orne Tucker seemingly heed these warnings as suggested by her response to Nancy Herrod, a woman who Tucker once saw as a personal model for her virtue, who has "fallen indeed like Lucifer never to rise again...I feel the odium this woman casts on her sex and would double my diligence by a life of virtue, and spotless purity to save it from disgrace into which it would sink."[96] Like Tucker, each woman must guard her virtue to protect the entire sex. Though these vice-ridden women do not face banishment or execution like the witches of Puritan times, social ostracism and abject poverty act as important reminders of

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[95] *Sermons to Young Women*, 40-1.

[96] "Diary of Mary Orne Tucker," May 7, 1802.

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the punishments available for women who stray from the path of virtue.

Whether discussing the vice of prostitution, poverty, or even bad wives, each woman remains morally responsible for the devastating effects of wandering from the virtuous path. Sexuality continues to characterize women's finite vice that emanates from their affiliation with the temptress Eve and serves to blame women for their poverty. For instance, Mary Anne Radcliffe, a woman who struggled out of poverty to own the Ladies' Cheap Shoe Warehouse, argues that the social problems of prostitution and women's poverty can be solved by returning to women the jobs taken from them by men. Radcliffe even chastises Christian women who espouse virtue but refuse to help less fortunate women and "not only to give bread to poor females, but thereby to enable them to tread the paths of virtue" and to avoid "the absolute necessity of bartering their virtue for bread."[97] Instead of only blaming individual women, Radcliffe sees how economic structures force women to perform services out of necessity and survival. Yet, she maintains the power of vice in women whose seductive powers also draw men to evil: "what numbers of unguarded men, even with hearts inclined to virtue have unhappily been drawn to vice, by the powerful insinuations of these poor abandoned females, who, like Eve in Paradise, is no sooner fallen herself, than, by deceitful artifice, she spreads the net of destruction to catch others."[98] Through Eve, women sustain a great deal of power to pull men into sin and destroy others. Of course, men fail to possess moral responsibility for their actions or the power to control their urges. In this context, married women hold

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[97] *The Female Advocate: Or An Attempt to Recover the Rights of Women from Male Usurpation* (New York, NY: Woodstock Books, 1994, original 1799), 27.

[98] Ibid., 43.

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great power over their husbands and women without virtue and piety rise to the level of a social pariah. As Rev. John Bennett explains, "A bad *man* is terrible in society; but an unprincipled *woman* is a *monster*. The peace, happiness and honour of *our* sex are so very much in the power of *yours* after marriage, that the most abandoned libertine shudders at the thought of a union with a woman who has not piety and virtue."[99] The capacity to entice men to vice threatens society. As Radcliffe contends, "that political and private happiness are invariably connected, is beyond a doubt; and that morals of this nation are very corrupt, is but too visible, from the vast numbers of disgraceful women who infest the face of the country."[100] Though as prostitutes not witches, republican women retain a direct link to the nation's morality derived from Eve's original sin and God's command that women act as men's help-meets. As such, men still lack responsibility for controlling their passions and society saddles women with a double burden of moral responsibility for men and women's vice *and* for the entire nation's moral fabric. Women, as in Puritan times, act as markers of the nation's morality and its guardians. When numerous "disgraceful women" such as prostitutes and the poor "infest the face of the country" the political happiness or common good are undoubtedly in jeopardy of decay.

Benjamin Rush takes the issue of women's moral responsibility for republican decay to its most apocalyptic heights. Again, Rush seems to draw on the moral weight given to America's exceptional future in Puritan discourse where women's virtue and vice tilted the scales in the battle between Heaven and Hell. To drive home the necessity of women's

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[99] *Letters to a Young Lady*, 17.

[100] *The Female Advocate*, 47.

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education to America's future, Rush paints a devastating picture of the nation's future without its moral guardians:

> In the ordinary course of human affairs we shall probably too soon follow the footsteps of the nations of Europe in manners and vices. *The first marks we shall perceive of our declension will appear among our women. Their idleness, ignorance, and profligacy will be the harbingers of our ruin.* Then will the character and performance of a buffoon on the theater be the subject of more conversation and praise than the patriot or the minister of the gospel; then will our language and pronunciation be enfeebled and corrupted by a flood of French and Italian words; then will the history of romantic amours be preferred to the immortal writings of Addison, Hawkesworth, and Johnson; then will our churches be neglected and the name of the Supreme Being never be called upon in profane exclamations; then will our Sundays be appropriated only to feasts and concerts; and then will begin that train of domestic and political calamities [emphasis mine].[101]

As moral guardians of America's virtue, women act as "the first marks we shall perceive of our declension," and their vices of "idleness, ignorance, and profligacy" indicate the nation's fall into "our ruin." Without women's protection, European languages, theatrical entertainments, and romantic novels will infest the nation's morals and culture. In short, American sobriety and piety will be lost as the people will desert churches for "feasts and concerts." While Rush's view of Europe seems xenophobic, his historical context involved the reality that European powers still threatened the fledgling nation's borders. Yet instead of confronting such harsh political realities, he holds women who lacked any political power responsible for leaving America open to a moral invasion if they fail to defend their virtue that collectively constitutes the nation's moral fabric. For Rush, the fall of republican women would reenact the Fall of Eve in Eden. Through education, women strengthen their virtue to prevent the decay of America's common good, and keep the nation on its exceptional path. If women fail to protect the morals and religious traditions

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[101] "Thoughts upon Female Education," 37-8.

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of America, the nation holds them responsible for its political decline.

## 3.5: Conclusion: "Localized" and "Wholesale" Changes in Women's Virtue & Vice

The expansive nature of women's moral responsibility results from the "localized" changes to virtue and vice made evident by tracking the use of these concepts in Puritan and republican discourse. Puritan ministers and magistrates as well as republican reformers and their opponents help to integrate women into the religious and political foundation for American exceptionalism. This transition is critical for understanding how the double burden of moral responsibility defines women's initial relationship to politics as moral guardians, introduces serious limits to the future of their full democratic citizenship, and generates "wholesale" change in a constellation of concepts. To develop how conceptual changes in women's infinite and finite virtue and vice construct moral guardianship, "localized" changes are framed in terms of *finite* virtue and vice due to their basis in the concrete actions of human relationships that collectively amount to the "wholesale" changes associated with *infinite* virtue and vice. Specifically, this conclusion focuses on three "localized" changes that culminate in "wholesale" conceptual change during the republican period. First, women's infinite and finite virtue and vice gain *explicit* political power. Second, republican women, similar to their Puritans counterparts, continue to become politically visible through vice, solidifying the inversion of the dualism's masculine mechanism for bestowing public attention on exemplars of civic virtue such as military heroes or great statesmen. Third, the infinite, religious virtue and vice of Puritanism informs the republican woman's more finite virtue and vice, resulting in

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women's double burden of moral responsibility for securing the nation's common good or causing its decay. Together these "localized" changes result in "wholesale" change to a constellation of concepts, particularly the public and private spheres and citizenship.

The primary "localized" change of the republican era involves the transition from the Puritan's *implicit* to the republican's *explicit* political relationship between women's virtue and public life, a transition that sustains the sexual nature of women's virtue, a point critical to their future political identity. The Puritans permitted women some *implicit* political power through their virtue and vice that led governing authorities to try and execute some women as witches for what, in their eyes, constituted political rebellion, and to enlist other women as protectors of the status quo who could ward off the evils threatening their community. Yet, an intent focus on the infinite, spiritual aspect of virtue demanded that Puritan women remain in the shadows of the "City upon a Hill" in order to assure their attentiveness to God and submission to patriarchal authority. Though republican women still earn their moral worth through religion and their private roles in domestic life, their moral character acquires an *explicit* political value evident in the "localized" emphasis on women's *finite* virtue and vice. Shifting focus from women's infinite to finite virtue and vice tracks the foregrounding of economic and political life and the backgrounding of religion during the republican period. In particular, republican thinkers introduce a new category of finite virtues for women that illustrates this conceptual change. Though Puritans granted a range of finite virtues to women such as cheerfulness, gentleness, and meekness, these concrete moral traits exhibited in human relations were always directed toward achieving the ultimate infinite virtue of piety. While

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retaining elements of this religious focus, republican reformers such as Rush and Murray took the dramatic step of generating finite political virtues such as fortitude, bravery, heroism, and patriotism that explicitly assign to women a form of civic virtue and political status. Dramatically breaking with the spiritually grounded finite virtues of the Puritans who never conceived of a political role for women, these finite political virtues establish an explicit relationship between women, now among the republic's brave defenders, and politics.

Perhaps due to the masculine aspect of women's newly acquired finite political virtues, republicans simultaneously introduced other finite virtues with an explicit feminine sexual orientation. For the Puritans, character traits related to women's sexuality or external beauty amounted to the finite vices of immodesty and promiscuity that generally indicated the infinite vice of a fallen woman who failed to devote herself to God. Makeup, a pretty scarf, jewelry, or dancing could damn a Puritan woman for eternity. In contrast, republicans redefine such vices as virtues, specifying physical beauty or attractiveness and enticing discourse as finite female virtues. Generally, the republican debates on women's education emphasized how knowledge and virtue combined to shape a feminine moral character conducive to catching a husband and keeping him happy. Emphasizing this sexual aspect of women's moral worth helped to reinforce sexual difference as women gained some finite political virtues traditionally reserved only for men. From a broader perspective, this early connection between women's physical beauty and virtue foreshadows the increasingly sexual content of women's morality and, thus, their political identity in the Victorian era. Together finite political virtues and the developing sexual

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content of women's virtue mark the beginning of women's explicit relationship to politics, acting as a critical point of departure for understanding how women's citizenship emanates from "a virtue of a different kind."

The second "localized" change relates to the role of infinite and finite vice in this shift from women's implicit to an explicit relationship to politics that solidifies an inversion of masculine and feminine virtue and vice initiated during the Puritan era. While Puritan women's vice implicitly linked them to politics, republicans made the relationship explicit and created a means by which unruly women could be accused of betraying their nation. In both the Puritan and republican eras, vice-ridden women, whether witches, prostitutes, or beggars, gained the political spotlight not merely as social problems, but as causes of moral corruption precipitating the community's decline. Women's finite vice rises to this infinite level due to their responsibility for original sin that, during the republican era, translates into responsibility for the political community's moral corruption and subsequent decline. Those who strayed from the virtuous path, therefore, encountered severe social punishment ranging from execution, loss of property and social status to abject poverty, prostitution, and social banishment. Since the nation granted women moral guardianship, those who embraced vice challenged the political order and threatened rebellion. As such, women's vice made them objects of public scrutiny while their virtue secured their political invisibility as the quiet protectors of the moral and political order. This shift inverts the role of masculine virtue and vice in the republican tradition that bestowed political honor on courageous political leaders, brave military commanders, and loyal citizens who exhibited civic virtue and dismissed the vice-ridden to obscurity.

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Republican thinkers solidify this inversion in which women's vice equates with political visibility and their virtue, public invisibility. Given the heavy social sanctions for morally corrupt behavior, the republican woman's infinite and finite vice strongly reinforce the political invisibility and inactive, passive citizenship necessary for moral guardianship. Republicans translated the Puritan belief in women as the daughters of Eve responsible for original sin and the Fall into their political context by linking women's finite vice with an infinite capacity for sin that allowed the nation to hold them responsible for its decline. As a result, women's initial political identity ironically associated any female civic engagement with evil, sin, and immorality, leaving women open to charges of being "suspect" citizens whose very political participation links with vice.

The third "localized" change tracks how the Puritan religious and republican political dimensions of finite and infinite virtue and vice combine to bind American women in a double burden of moral responsibility for the nation's exceptional future or its decay. From the Puritans, republicans adopt women's infinite capacity for virtue and vice that links them to a higher or lower spiritual plane. This almost sacred, religious dimension of women's morality then infuses republican virtue and vice with a transcendent, Other-worldly quality that gives mothers and wives an unexplainable, seemingly spiritual, capacity to encompass the political community and to guide it along the path towards the common good or evil. Capturing the expansive powers characteristic of the republican woman's moral guardianship, Reverend William Lyman declares:

> Mothers do, in a sense hold the reins of government and sway the ensigns of national prosperity and glory: yea, they give direction to the moral sentiments of our rising hopes, and contribute to form their moral state. To them therefore our eyes are turned in this demoralizing age, and of them we ask, that they would

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> appreciate their real worth and dignity, and exert their influence to drive discord, infidelity, and licentiousness from our land - to train our sons and daughters for virtue and happiness, and, with the aid of the pious in the more vigorous sex, labour to form the world and ripen this earth for paradise.[102]

Although denied any formal political power, "mothers do in a sense hold the reins of government," "sway the ensigns of national prosperity and glory, and "give direction to the moral sentiments of our rising hopes," by training "our sons and daughters for virtue and happiness," a task that somehow empowers them more than voting rights or holding public office. As models of virtue and cultivators of morality, women inspire "our rising hopes" and reflect Judith Sargent Murray's belief in women's ability to transcend the standards of humanity and enable Americans to see the common good. The religious aspect of women's morality empowers them to "exert their influence to drive discord, infidelity, and licentiousness from our land" and to save the nation from "this demoralizing age." In the end, Rev. Lyman, reiterating a theme common to Puritan and republican discourse, enlists virtuous women in the utopian project to "ripen this earth for paradise." By affiliating women with the religious and political vision of American exceptionalism, their virtue and vice trap women in a double bind in which they acquire immense moral responsibility for the nation's future as they lose the political power necessary to fulfill it. As such, this initial construction of women's citizenship as moral guardianship sets them up to fail and to serve as targets for blame.

Also, accounting for how the Puritan discourse on women's virtue and vice informs republican political thought reveals how moral guardianship grants a different perspective

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[102] "A Virtuous Woman: The Bond of Domestic Union and the Source of Domestic Happiness," A Sermon, January 6, 1802. At the funeral of Mrs. Sarah Griswold (New London: S. Green, 1802), 22-3.

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from which to assess the dominant portrayal of this era's women as republican mothers. Recall Mary Beth Norton's summary of how American leaders focused on women's virtue in the late 1700s: "In short, in the wake of the war both men and women in America began to rethink the hitherto unchallenged negative characterizations of women's nature and role."[103] Sermons given by Puritan ministers such as Cotton Mather clearly challenge the "negative characterizations of women's nature and role" by arguing that women not only possess the capacity for virtue and spiritual salvation, but also to protect the community from decay. Identifying the relationship between the Puritan and republican discourses on women's virtue and vice opens the door to expanding our knowledge of women's initial relation to politics beyond the historical confines of *republican* motherhood in order to expose the full political implications of moral guardianship. The immense weight of moral responsibility assigned to republican women emanates from the combined religious and political forces of American exceptionalism, a cultural imperative that calls Americans to follow God's righteous path to preserve the nation from political decay. As Reverend Lyman's sermon above indicates, women's virtue and vice certainly possessed the finite political aspects that linked them to a broader, more infinite purpose of protecting the nation's common good. The religious imperative operates as the less obvious mechanism here, one derived from the Puritan heritage that informs republican conceptions of women's virtue and vice. This pre-history of conceptual change during the Puritan era helps to explain how women's role as mothers now empowered them with an immense responsibility for the common good. The religious grounding of virtue and vice

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[103] *Liberty's Daughters,* 228.

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grants women an infinite capacity for piety and original sin as moral guardians become empowered to guide the nation down God's path, a key aspect that escapes the more narrow scope of republican motherhood literature. Together the religious - derived from the Puritans - and the political - established by the republicans, constitute two key pieces in the puzzle of how women's virtue and vice fit their moral guardianship into the broader cultural discourse of American exceptionalism.

The three "localized" changes result in "wholesale" change to concepts within the constellation of women's virtue and vice, particularly public and private spheres and citizenship. Throughout the republican era, public and private life become increasingly distinguishable due to the growing commercial economy and definition of women's domestic sphere. In terms of morality, private feminine virtue gains a civic dimension traditionally associated with active engagement in political life. Alternatively, the public sphere begins to become the arena of vice and moral corruption belonging to men. Such a conceptual change holds important implications for women specifically and democratic citizenship more generally.

For women, moral guardianship frames their citizenship in terms of supporting the status quo which holds long term implications for women's political identity. Looking at the republican era from the perspective of women's virtue and vice broadens and deepens our understanding of how morality shaped women's initial explicit relationship with politics. To achieve virtue, American women became guardians of the nation's future by educating their children, socializing future patriotic citizens, aiding in family economic matters, and supporting their husbands. These private duties transform into moral

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responsibilities and political obligations that entail women's support for and perpetuation of the existing governing regime that excluded them from formal political power. The republican period marks the beginning of a lasting legacy for women's citizenship, premised on a passive moral guardianship of the very structures that oppress them. Trapped in this double bind, women who actively engage in politics or challenge society's virtuous standards also threaten the republic's common good with decay by straying from their posts as moral guardians of the nation's well-being. As a result, moral guardianship locates women behind a high, strong barrier to full inclusion in political life since this status also portrays them as traitors to the nation and its exceptional future if they actively pursue access to politics.

Constructing women as the nation's moral guardians operates in tandem with creating a form of democratic citizenship suitable for the era's republican politics. America's founders such as James Madison transformed traditional republicanism's emphasis on active citizen participation into a more passive model of citizenship designed to meet the lesser demands of representative government. In an analysis of "republicanism," Russell Hanson comments on Madison's political thought, explaining that "however, this 'honorable determination' in favor of popular rule emphatically did not mean that citizens were capable of self-rule in a democratic sense. That required virtue beyond what could safely be assumed in the constitution of politics. In that sense, Madison's interpretation departs from Montesquieu's assertion that virtue is the underlying principle of republican government."[104] Since, instead of running the *polis*,

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[104] "'Commons' and 'Commonwealth' at the American Founding: Democratic Republicanism as the New American Hybrid," in *Conceptual Change and the*

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American citizens limited their political activity to voting in the occasional election, the moral excellence of direct political participation transforms as virtue becomes the passive acceptance of decisions made by elected leaders. As moral guardians, women became the cultural markers of this new virtue by accepting political passivity, sustaining the status quo, and securing the nation's stability, and the symbols of the virtuous ideal of representative democracy which depends on a largely inactive, passive citizenry that permits politicians, not the people, to do the daily work of politics. Women who rejected this new political role by pursuing active citizenship jeopardized not only their virtue, moral worth, and political identity, but also the broader expectation of a more passive citizenry in the new republic.

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*Constitution*, eds. Terence Ball and J.G.A. Pocock (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1988), 183.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## Moral Guardians or Democratic Despots: The Double Bind of Women's Citizenship in Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*

### 4.1: Introduction

To explore the implications of moral guardianship for women's democratic citizenship, this chapter turns to Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America,* a text that captures America's democratic spirit and political imagination in a way that resonates with its citizens almost two hundred years after his arrival in the United States. Laura Janara, for instance, articulates how Americans integrate Tocqueville's thought into our understanding of ourselves as democratic citizens since his images "echo modern historical discourses that continue to shape our hearts and minds. In bringing to light this imagery in Tocqueville's work and discussing its implications, then, we create an opportunity to confront dimensions of ourselves, our social structure and our culture - including psychic dimensions heretofore buried in our collective unconscious."[1] Given Tocqueville's cultural prominence and political importance, his views on women and the family retain a significant place in understanding how women's moral guardianship relates to the development of their citizenship at the inception of democracy during the Jacksonian period and ultimately impacts contemporary feminism. To connect Tocqueville's work

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[1] *Democracy Growing Up: Authority, Autonomy and Passion in Tocqueville's Democracy in America* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 7. In this feminist reading of Tocqueville, Janara moves in a much more psychoanalytic direction than the one taken here.

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historically and theoretically with the preceding Puritan and republican discourses and their collective importance to contemporary feminism, this analysis relies on Tocqueville's method of moving back and forth between the general and particular. "I think that in all ages some of the happenings in the world are due to very general causes and others depend on very particular influences. These two kinds of causes are always in operation; only their proportion varies," Tocqueville explains.[2] Describing his theoretical standpoint metaphorically, Tocqueville concludes Volume I of the *Democracy* by stating:

> What I am going to say will be less detailed but more certain. Each object will stand out less distinctly, but the general lines will be clearer. I will be like a traveler who has gone beyond the walls of some vast city and gone up a neighboring hill; as he goes farther off, he loses sight of the men he has just left behind; the houses merge and the public squares cannot be seen; the roads are hard to distinguish; but the city's outline is easier to see, and for the first time he grasps its shape.[3]

Having detailed the intricate workings of American political institutions, Tocqueville climbs "a neighboring hill" for a bird's eye view of democracy. As particular men, houses, public squares, and roads fade into the background, Tocqueville sees the outline of democracy, enabling him to make broader generalizations about it. Reflecting this method, Tocqueville moves between the historical time of past and present and the space of the Old and New Worlds. His thinking on women and the family in the *Democracy* offers a particular means for understanding the more general phenomena of moral

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[2] *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 494-5. Sheldon Wolin discusses how this methodology shapes Tocqueville's personal and theoretical existence in *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Theoretical Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[3] *Democracy in America*, 409.

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guardianship introduced by the Puritans, cultivated by republican era thinkers, and integrated into democratic citizenship during the Jacksonian period. As Tocqueville stood on "a neighboring hill," here I stand on Tocqueville's shoulders, so to speak, to see the general contours of moral guardianship's theoretical construction throughout the early stages of America's nation-building process. Moreover, analyzing how women's virtue and vice operate within Tocqueville's *Democracy* reveals a moment in which this influential democratic thinker explicitly links women to politics through their morality. From this vantage point, the particular role of moral guardianship emerges within the broader context of Tocqueville's political thought.

This approach to Tocqueville contrasts with that of conservative scholars on women and the family in the *Democracy* who narrowly read Tocqueville as solely intent upon creating social stability through the family and religion.[4] The Tocqueville presented here is complicated and often contradictory, or as Sheldon Wolin explains, is "this bundle

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[4] Delba Winthrop, F.L. Morton, William Mathie, William Kristol, Sanford Kessler, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Dorothea Israel Wolfson are the conservative theorists who have written on Tocqueville's women and the family. I characterize them as conservative here because of their position that the institutions of family and religion must be sustained in their traditional form despite dramatic social changes in contemporary democracy. Central to this conservative scheme is keeping women in or returning them to private life since they traditionally maintain morality, religion, and the family in secular democratic society. See Winthrop's "Tocqueville's American Woman and 'The True Conception of Democratic Progress,'" *Political Theory* 14 (May 1986) 2: 239-261; Dorothea Isreal Wolfson's "Tocqueville On Liberalism's Liberation of Women," *Perspectives on Political Science* 25 (Fall 1996) 4: 203-207; William Mathie's "God, Woman, and Morality: The Democratic Family in New Political Science of Alexis de Tocqueville," *The Review of Politics* 57 (Winter 1995): 7-30; F.L. Morton's "Sexual Equality and the Family in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 27 (June 1984) 2: 309-324; Sanford Kessler's "Tocqueville on Sexual Morality," *Interpretation* 16 (Spring 1989) 3: 466-480; and Jean Bethke Elshtain's "Women, Equality, and the Family," *Journal of Democracy* 11 (2000) 1: 157-163.

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of contradictions, poses, anachronisms, absurdities, and willfulness, this 'Tocqueville,' represented not a single authorial self but a named being struggling, over time, to hold together an uncertain assemblage of wayward phenomena, of diverse impulses and frustrated ambitions."[5] Such a perspective reveals a thinker who held socially conservative views *and* studied revolutions, influenced Karl Marx, spearheaded French liberalism, and recognized democracy's dynamic nature. Tocqueville not only theorized revolution, authoring *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, but he lived it as well. Surviving both the 1830 and 1848 French revolutions, Tocqueville recognized the dangers and inevitability of radical social and political change. Indeed, Tocqueville led 19th Century French liberalism, a tradition distinguished for differentiating social from political and economic change, a point emphasized by Larry Siedentop who explains that "'change' is thus central to political theory for French liberals as for Marxists, and both offer a sharp contrast to the static model of argument which goes far back in the history of English liberalism."[6] Living at a time of dramatic historical change, Tocqueville's life and work reflect his struggle with the polarized worlds of France and the United States, aristocracy and democracy, and a desire for stability and an awareness of the inevitability of change.[7] Caught on the border of these worlds, Tocqueville often relied on dualisms to make sense

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[5] *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*, 561.

[6] "Two Liberal Traditions," *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin*, ed. Alan Ryan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 174.

[7] Sheldon Wolin identifies this aspect of Tocqueville's thinking as *anciennete*, a "pronounced strain of antimodernism" that "colors virtually all of Tocqueville's thinking, disposing him to dwell on contrasts between the Old and the New World, between past and present, between privilege and equality" (*Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*, 7).

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of a complex reality. In the context of women and the family, Tocqueville employs the oppositional categories of man-woman, public-private, and virtue-vice to order the chaos of Jacksonian democracy. A closer look, however, reveals that these dualisms lose their definition and become vague, even ambiguous, when examining how women's morality makes them indispensable to American democracy's success. Despite his attempts to the contrary, gender categories destablize the order that Tocqueville attempts to create through women and the family. Indicating this, Laura Janara states that "this whole dynamic - the looming multiplication of gender into erratic categories, an ensuing fear of chaos, and the reactionary deployment of rigidly dichotomous gender categories - is precisely found in the symbolic subtext of *Democracy in America*."[8] Complicating the matter, morality plays a key role in Tocqueville's use of gender to establish family and religion as a safe haven for democracy. As a result, women's virtue and vice excludes them from politics while directly linking them to it, a double bind inherent to moral guardianship that further integrated into women's political identity during the Jacksonian period.

By attributing great political significance to women's morality, Tocqueville creates a moral and political double bind for women's moral guardianship. The moral tension evolves from the fact that, on the one hand, moral guardianship requires that Tocqueville elevate women *above* the vice-ridden world of politics to protect their virtue. On the other, Tocqueville must also locate women *close enough* to the public sphere so that they can guard it from the excessive vice, individualism, and materialism that leads to

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[8] *Democracy Growing Up*, 23.

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democratic despotism. Somehow women must simultaneously be above and central to politics because their virtue limits them to the private sphere while guardianship implies a political role in public life. Virtue and vice locate women in the following political double bind. Either women sacrifice their freedom and accept moral responsibility to leverage limited political power as moral guardians; or they seek freedom in public life and society can label them democratic despots, or traitors who jeopardize the nation's moral health for their selfish freedoms. As democratic despots, women's political power is limited because they appear to be morally irresponsible, even "suspect" citizens ignoring their moral duty to democracy. Either as moral guardians or democratic despots, women remain excluded from full political participation as keepers of morality in the private or as "suspect citizens" vulnerable to blame for the social problems that accompany democratic change.

In order to flesh out this double bind and to identify how moral guardianship causes serious problems for women's democratic citizenship, this chapter explores three aspects of Tocqueville's political thought. First, this analysis begins the "separate but equal" argument and the elevation strategy that essentially separates men into public and women into private spheres, a move, in part, justified as protecting women's virtue by placing them above public vice. This construction of women's morality undermines Tocqueville's attempt to establish these separate spheres and opens the door to the double bind of moral guardianship. Second, comparing men and women's infinite and finite virtue and vice in Tocqueville's *Democracy* illustrates the double bind of moral responsibility assigned to women. Amidst the increasing secularization of Jacksonian democracy, women's association with religion infuses their morality with an infinite capacity that links

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moral guardianship with the entire nation's success or failure. Tocqueville's insights into the political dimension of women's morality also inform contemporary feminist discussions on the sexual division of moral labor. Third, Tocqueville's discussion of the American woman's marriage decision clarifies the inverse relationship between the presence of women's morality and the absence of freedom that characterizes moral guardianship. Examining Tocqueville's political thought on women in the *Democracy* then offers a vantage point for assessing how moral guardianship shapes women's citizenship at democracy's inception, ultimately trapping women in a double bind as either moral guardians or democratic despots.

## 4.2: The "Separate but Equal" Argument & The Elevation Strategy

Amidst the push for white male suffrage and the energetic, often chaotic, politics of Jacksonian America, dominated by calls of liberty and justice for all, two intertwining positions emerged to justify women's exclusion from politics: the "separate but equal" argument and the elevation strategy. Tocqueville's work on women and the family relies on these two positions that play a key role in constructing women's democratic citizenship. Most importantly, women's morality defines their initial relationship to the political world and carries with it serious implications.

The "separate but equal" argument permeated Jacksonian discourse to justify segregating women into the private sphere where they could act as moral guardians of democracy. Speaking to this aspect of Jacksonian political culture, Mary Ryan explains that "the notion of women's sphere, in sum, not only assigned distinctive roles,

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characteristics, and spaces to the female sex, but also construed this sexual division as a principal safeguard of social order. The inflated rhetoric of Victorian culture, in other words, signaled the emergence of a whole new sex/gender system."[9] Tocqueville adopts a Victorian view when articulating the "separate but equal" position, stating that "the Americans do not think that man and woman have the duty or the right to do the same things, but they show an equal regard for the part played by both and think of them as beings of equal worth, though their fates are different."[10] The different "fates" of American men and women emanate from the separation of church and state, and economic developments in a nascent capitalist market. As an increasingly democratic society relegated the church and its moral influence to the private sphere, Tocqueville argues that women assume responsibility for sustaining religion's role in the family and instilling moral virtues in their sons and husbands who then transfer them, in diluted form, into public life. Much like Republican Mothers, these American women, as wives and mothers, still act as society's moral pillar. In addition, Tocqueville transforms the biological and biblical position of Puritans and some republicans that God commands women to be men's help-meets into an economic and functional argument for separate but equal spheres:

> They [Americans] think that nature, which created such great differences between the physical and moral constitution of men and women, clearly intended to give their diverse faculties a diverse employment...The Americans have applied to the sexes the great principle of political economy which now dominated industry. They have carefully separated the functions of man and of woman so that the great

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[9] *Womanhood in America,* 77.

[10] *Democracy in America,* 603.

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work of society may be better performed.[11]

At this juncture, this division of sexual labor functions to allow men and women to exercise their natural abilities and fulfill their duties based on principles of natural equality and economic efficiency. In the process, Tocqueville erects a high barrier between public and private life by relying heavily on the male public-female private dualism to retain some sense of order in American democracy.

Coinciding with the "separate but equal" argument, the elevation strategy emanates from the religious responsibility associated with women's domestic role. As the bearers of religious morality in a secular society, wives and mothers, much like cloistered nuns, must be elevated above and beyond the public's many corrupting temptations and pleasures. Premised on high, permanent barriers between male public and female private spheres, the elevation strategy secures women's location above public vice. This elevation strategy mirrors the sentimental family, a tool that, Susan Moller Okin argues, theorists such as Rousseau, Hegel, and James Mill use to place women above public life based on their moral purity and to glorify the sentimental family, despite liberalism's emphasis on equality and liberty. Okin asserts that liberal theorists create the sentimental wife who, although "no longer commonly perceived as occupying a position somewhere between men and beasts in the great chain of being," was placed on "the pedestal" as the "'angel of the house'...a no less confining construct."[12] Although the American woman, unlike her

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[11] Ibid., 601.

[12] "Women and the Making of the Sentimental Family," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 11 (1982): 88.

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European counterpart, possesses a less "sentimental" or romantic disposition, according to Tocqueville, her religious and moral responsibility for the family similarly require her seclusion in the private sphere away from the rough and tumble world of politics. Together, the "separate but equal" argument and the elevation strategy appear to erect a high barrier between the gendered public and private spheres as women are not only separated from but located above the political world, a position that enables them to act as the moral guardians for democracy.

Despite his reliance on a separate spheres argument, Tocqueville's discussion of the family, women's political participation, and their role in maintaining mores and religion requires a more permeable boundary between the male public and female private spheres. This perspective reveals a contradiction in Tocqueville and exemplifies how gender and morality destablize his attempts to create order. Tocqueville grants women "great political significance"[13] through their ability to shape mores, a capacity that undermines the premise of the "separate but equal" ideology by permitting a public role for American women. Emphasizing their role in America's growing economic and political success, Tocqueville states that as "I come near the end of this book in which I have recorded so many considerable achievements of the Americans, if anyone asks me what I think the chief cause of the extraordinary prosperity and growing power of this nation, I would answer that it is due to the superiority of their women."[14] Because women's moral superiority secures private happiness, socializes future citizens, and stabilizes the family,

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[13] *Democracy in America*, 287.

[14] Ibid., 603.

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American women, for Tocqueville, act as the moral and, thus, political backbone for democracy.

Tocqueville's views on the changing American family, women's political participation, and religion further illustrate the permeable boundary between public and private life. Democracy radically transforms the American family. The driving force of equality, Tocqueville maintains, even dismantles the traditional hierarchy of the aristocratic family: "In America, the family, if one takes the word in its Roman and aristocratic sense, no longer exists."[15] The eradication of inherited wealth drives this radical change. Unlike the unequal aristocratic father-son relationship premised upon inheritance and life-long dependence, in America, sons gain complete independence upon reaching adulthood when they start earning a living and pursuing material wealth. This equality then permeates the entire family since "democracy," Tocqueville explains, "overthrows or lowers all barriers," including "age and sex."[16] Mothers and wives experience the equality that now "reigns around the domestic hearth."[17] Retaining his commitment to a patriarchal past, however, Tocqueville still insists that "the natural head of the conjugal association is the husband."[18] Yet, he recognizes that democracy's leveling capacity pertains to all spheres of life, stating that "democracy...destroys or obscures almost all social conventions and...makes it harder for men to establish new ones, [it] leads to the complete disappearance of almost all the

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[15] Ibid., 585.

[16] Ibid., 588.

[17] Ibid., 587.

[18] Ibid., 601.

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feelings originating in such conventions."[19] Despite a lingering attachment to patriarchal "social conventions," Tocqueville confronts the fact that the democratic principle of equality essentially dissolved the "traditional," hierarchical family by the 1830s. The transfer of equality from the political arena to the American family indicates a greater permeability in the public-private boundary than permitted by the "separate but equal" argument.

In addition, Tocqueville accounts for American women's political participation and how their domestic role protects democracy from despotism, linking private women directly to public life. In his democratic theory, Tocqueville asserts that political participation must increase in proportion to the equality of conditions in order to prevent the centralized state from intruding into private life. This also prevents democratic despotism, an insidious form of oppression resulting from the state's softening and bending of men's wills until "each nation is no more than a flock of timid and hardworking animals with the government as its shepard."[20] To protect against this threat, Tocqueville warns that democratic citizens must exercise their freedom in daily activities:

> I see clearly that by this means room is left for individual intervention in the most important affairs, but there is still no place for it in small or private matters. It is too often forgotten that it is especially dangerous to turn men into slaves where details only are concerned. For my part, I should be inclined to think that liberty is less necessary in great matters than in tiny ones if I imagined that one could ever be safe in the enjoyment of one sort of freedom without the other.[21]

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[19] Ibid., 589.

[20] Ibid., 692.

[21] Ibid., 694. Tocqueville develops this idea to a much greater degree in the *Old Regime and the French Revolution* where he pinpoints the threat that bureaucratic

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Failing to protect "small or private matters" from state intervention then fosters the danger of democratic despotism. Because the "tiny," "small," or "private" matters usually associated with the private sphere acquire such importance, women as guardians of home and family implicitly become significant to preserving political freedom. Such a reading corresponds with that of Tocqueville's contemporaries, the French liberals, who, as Larry Siedentop explains, "argued not so much for limited government as for the maximum sharing out of political power - so that devolution would in effect impose limits on the concentration of power and increase popular resistance to the infringement of civil liberties."[22] As such, Tocqueville reluctantly accepts, or at least does not criticize, women's participation in voluntary associations such as the temperance and abolitionist movements that, due to their heavy moral content, women strongly influenced.[23] Further, Tocqueville observes that "even the women often go to public meetings and forget household cares while they listen to political speeches" and they attend so frequently and enjoy the political meetings so much that "for them clubs to some extent take the place of theaters."[24] In this instance, Tocqueville's view that women's participation in public and

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centralization poses to the civil liberties necessary to democratic freedom.

[22] "Two Liberal Traditions," 172.

[23] See *Journey to America*, ed. J.P. Mayer (Westport: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1971), 219; and *Democracy in America*, 189, 242. As a student of Jacksonian politics, Tocqueville surely observed the growing number of moral reform associations populated by women in the aftermath of the Second Great Awakening, a religious revival that thrived around the turn of the 19th century and motivated women to cleanse society of slave owners, drunks, and immorality.

[24] *Democracy in America*, 243.

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private affairs lessens the threat of democratic despotism overrides his desire to retain the social stability derived from cloistering women away in the home. As a result, Tocqueville connects women to the public sphere to a much greater degree than permitted by the "separate but equal" argument or the elevation strategy.

Women's mores perhaps most explicitly link women to politics in Tocqueville's political thought. "Mores" or *moeurs* refer to "the habits of the heart, but also to the different notions possessed by men, the various opinions current among them, and the sum of ideas that shape mental habits...the whole moral and intellectual state of the people."[25] Connecting women's responsibility for mores to politics, Tocqueville declares that "it is women who shaped mores. Therefore, everything which has a bearing on the status of women, their habits, and their thoughts is, in my view, of great political importance."[26] Moreover, Tocqueville finds that mores often hold more power over the people than formal laws and, therefore, can prevent the tyranny of the majority that accompanies democratic despotism.[27] Given this, attributing to women the ability to shape mores clearly grants them political power. Women gain control over mores due to the shift of religion to private life where it retains political power. As Tocqueville explains, "one cannot therefore say that in the United States religion influences the laws or political opinions in detail, but it does direct mores, and by regulating domestic life it helps to

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[25] Ibid., 287.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 250-253.

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regulate the state."[28] Religion then operates through women to shape mores and regulate the domestic life that translates indirectly into influence in the state.

Moreover, religion binds women to the more infinite political responsibility for the common good and America's exceptional future in a fashion similar to Puritan and republican discourses. As passive help-meets to their husbands and keepers of order and stability in society, democratic women hold the chaos of public life at bay so that "when the American returns from the turmoil of politics to the bosom of the family, he immediately finds a perfect picture of order and peace."[29] The home offers the security and stability necessary to counterbalance the conflicts of the outside world, transforming the domestic sphere into a democratic version of the Garden of Eden. To achieve this idyllic space, Tocqueville uses the separate but equal argument and elevation strategy to create a sexual division of labor for religion and morality: "There religion is often powerless to restrain men in the midst of innumerable temptations which fortune offers...but it reigns supreme in the souls of women, and it is women who shape mores. Certainly of all countries in the world America is the one in which the marriage tie is most respected and where the highest and truest conception of conjugal happiness has been conceived."[30] Although men fall from grace due to their failure to moderate their passions amidst democracy's "innumerable temptations," religion "reigns supreme in the souls of women" who shape the mores that help their husbands to regain a moral compass.

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[28] Ibid., 291.

[29] Ibid., 291.

[30] Ibid.

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Women then assume moral responsibility for themselves and their spouses, making marriage essential to democracy's success since without it men would lack a moral anchor and democracy would drift into unchecked chaos. Through religion and mores, women become bound to securing America's exceptional future, indicated by Tocqueville's statement that "nonetheless, America is still the place where the Christian religion has kept the greatest real power over men's souls; and nothing better demonstrates how useful and natural it is to man, since the country where it now has widest sway is both the most enlightened and the freest."[31] Religion drives American exceptionalism by holding women morally responsible for keeping order amidst chaos and losing their freedom and political inclusion so that America can be "both the most enlightened and the freest." As the shapers of mores, women are central to American politics in a way defined by the double bind of moral guardianship: women remain responsible for maintaining the order and stability necessary for democracy to function while lacking any formal political power and drawing their authority from the apolitical source of religion.

Women's relationship to politics made them integral to democracy's success. Tocqueville, it seems, attempted to reconcile women's political significance with their private role by sustaining the "separate but equal" argument and the elevation strategy. As with other aspects of Tocqueville's thought, complexities and contradictions arise here. Tocqueville hoped that women in the family could act as a moral barrier to democratic despotism. Yet, his awareness of social change also forces him to recognize the dissolution of the traditional family, women's limited political participation, and the

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[31] Ibid.

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political power derived from the mores shaped by women and religion. Under the pressure of democratic equality, even the boundaries between public and private life became more permeable, creating the context in which moral guardianship characterized women's initial encounter with democratic citizenship.

Overall, Tocqueville's intense interest in the social sphere as an arena linked to political change opens up his theory to feminist inquiry. This point is critical for considering how his thinking on women and morality might inform feminist political theory. As a French liberal, Tocqueville differentiated social from political and economic change, and particularly explored the relationship between the political and social spheres. Emphasizing the social dimension of Tocqueville's thought, Cheryl Welch explores "the complex links - institutional, intellectual, and above all psychological - *between* social and political institutions."[32] Specifically, Welch identifies three different spheres that constitute Tocqueville's vision of the world: "political society" that centers around laws and the social supports for them, "civil society," or "the remaining relationships among citizens and the norms that structure those relationships,"[33] and "natural society" emanating from the impulses driven by the human heart such as the family and religion.[34] The "natural society," or the private sphere, identified with women overlaps with civil and political society. As Welch states, "Tocqueville believes that marriage, sexual morality, and family life are embedded in a civil and political regime, but are not essentially civil or

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[32] *De Tocqueville* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21.

[33] Ibid., 66-72.

[34] Ibid., 168-178.

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political matters. Rather, they exist in the realm of 'nature,' and as such are linked to some deeper transcendental reality."[35] Welch further recognizes the "spill over effect" from one sphere to the next, indicating the permeability of the public-private boundary discussed earlier. In the rapidly changing world of Jacksonian politics where equality even transformed patriarchal family life, women participated politically in clubs and reform associations, and religion's relegation to the private sphere granted women political power through mores, Tocqueville struggled to sustain the ordering principle of the male public-female private spheres even as he attributed political significance to women's morality. As an unexpected result, Tocqueville challenges the separate but equal and elevation strategies by linking women's "natural" sphere with the public, a position that resonates with the contemporary feminist view of "the personal as political," and introduces the possibility of feminist analysis.

## 4.3: The Double Burden of Moral Responsibility

Tracking how women's morality makes the public-private boundary more porous reveals a direct, though still informal, link between women and the political sphere. As such, Tocqueville's *Democracy* offers an opportunity for examining how morality comes to define women's democratic citizenship in terms of moral guardianship. To do so, this section turns to masculine and feminine, infinite and finite virtue and vice to analyze the double burden of moral responsibility that surfaced in Puritan and republican discourse and reappears amidst the fervor over equality, liberty, and inclusion during the Jacksonian

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[35] Ibid., 67-8.

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period.

To begin illustrating how the double burden of moral responsibility operates, this analysis first explores the finite masculine and feminine virtues in the *Democracy*. Tocqueville characterizes masculine virtue as a self-interested pragmatism. Quite unlike the republican virtue that entails individual sacrifice for the common good, democracy only demands a diluted masculine virtue that occasionally enables men to see the common good when it benefits them. Highlighting this pragmatism, Tocqueville states that "in the United States there is hardly any talk of the beauty of virtue. But they maintain that virtue is useful and prove it every day."[36] The self-interest driving masculine virtue resonates with Tocqueville's doctrine of "self-interest properly understood" that "every American has the sense to sacrifice some of his private interests to save the rest."[37] Integrating pragmatism and self-interest, Tocqueville explains:

> The doctrine of self-interest properly understood does not inspire great sacrifices, but every day it prompts some small ones; by itself it cannot make a man virtuous, but its discipline shapes a lot of orderly, temperate, moderate, careful, and controlled citizens. If it does not lead the will directly to virtue, it establishes habits which unconsciously turn it that way.[38]

American men achieve virtue almost by default as they freely pursue their self-interest, and make some small sacrifices that unconsciously shape virtuous habits. As such, masculine virtue essentially pertains to the finite world of material self-interest.

Specifically, men's materialistic pursuits in the public sphere demand two finite

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[36] *Democracy in America*, 525.

[37] Ibid., 527.

[38] Ibid.

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virtues: courage and hard work. Courage amounts to the tenacity to engage in the life-long pursuit of wealth despite poverty and financial loss. Since "industry appears as a vast lottery in which a few men daily lose," Tocqueville writes, Americans are "bound to look with favor on boldness in industry and to honor it," turning "speculation into a sort of virtue."[39] Unlike the military valor for one's country or willingness to take a political stand, men exhibit courage in the realm of immediate economic survival.[40] Hard work drives American men to achieve their self-interested, materialistic goals. In this context, Tocqueville attributes the finite virtue of chastity to men that amounts to keeping regular habits and striving for domestic harmony because family disputes and the purchase of luxury goods divert men's attention away from the hard work and accumulation of wealth necessary for economic prosperity. This relatively austere lifestyle, however, does not extend to a man's sex life. His sexual desires, often satisfied by prostitutes, are a necessary evil that Tocqueville does not think seriously threatens democracy's social fabric. With the limited exception of "self-interest properly understood," the materialism and individualism necessary to succeed in the capitalist market far outweighs political participation, sacrifice, or the common good. Despite white male suffrage and its infusion of political participation, Tocqueville defines masculine virtue in market or economic, not civic terms. In Tocqueville's estimation, freedom, even from active political participation, characterizes the finite masculine virtue of a democratic society that primarily values the

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[39] Ibid., 622.

[40] Such a view reflects J.G.A. Pocock's position on the Americanization of virtue in which commerce and self-interest achieve a standard of moral excellence.

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self-interested pursuit of material gain in public life. Without the forces of religion or morality, masculine virtue is finite and leaves men unable to make the "great sacrifices" required to achieve the common good. As a result, the infinite essentially disappears from masculine virtue.

Finite feminine virtue, in contrast, demands women's sacrifice of their self-interest and even freedom. To counter masculine self-interest and individualism, finite feminine virtue aims to secure the common good. Feminine virtue emanates from the American girl's sacrifice of her youthful freedom upon marriage. "One may say that it is the very enjoyment of freedom," Tocqueville states, "that has given her the courage to sacrifice it without struggle or complaint when the time has come for that."[41] As this suggests, two finite feminine virtues characterize Tocqueville's American woman: self-sacrifice and courage. Self-sacrifice requires women to abandon their youthful freedoms for the marital constraints that benefit the public good since wives and mothers, as shapers of mores, anchor democracy. To fulfill this duty, American women literally sacrifice their bodies much like Tocqueville's pioneer woman who selflessly transfers her physical strength to her children. Of course, self-sacrifice also denies American women any sexual freedom since they must embrace fidelity and chastity, the traditional feminine virtues that bind a woman to one husband and family. Unlike the masculine self-interest for material gain, the feminine virtue of self-sacrifice requires women to engage in the politically conscious act of giving up their freedom, interests, and individuality for the common good of democracy.

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[41] *Democracy in America*, 593.

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Feminine courage gives women the strength to make such sacrifices. Admiring the "resilience of their courage," Tocqueville describes the pioneer's wife in the following terms: "her whole physiognomy bore marks of religious resignation, a deep peach free from passions, and some sort of natural quiet determination which would face all the ills of life without fear and without defiance."[42] In contrast to masculine boldness and tenacity, women's courage involves the endurance and "quiet determination" to withstand the intense hardships of homesteading on the frontier, or, more commonly, the fluctuation of family fortunes:

> In no country of the world are private fortunes more unstable than in the United States. It's not exceptional for one man in his lifetime to work through every stage from poverty to opulence and come down again. American women face such upheavals with quiet, indomitable energy. Their desires seem to contract with their fortune as easily as they expand.[43]

Despite the political, social, and economic changes of Jacksonian democracy, women's finite virtue amounts to acting as help-meets to men while they chase their fortunes and even move their families to the frontier. Amidst it all, women passively follow and support their endeavors often with a "religious resignation" that transforms them into martyrs for the democratic cause. Like self-sacrifice, the moral value of women's courage emanates from passively accepting their dependence on spouses who actively engage in the freedoms of public life.

Comparing masculine and feminine finite virtues reveals two important problems with Tocqueville's portrayal of female moral guardianship. First, women's moral

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[42] Ibid., 594, 732.

[43] Ibid., 593-594.

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character requires the absence of freedom, an inverse relationship that serves an explicit political purpose. The masculine virtues of courage and hard work, premised on a self-interested pragmatism, may inadvertently benefit the public good, but lack any basis in political participation. Also, men's moral character involves the freedom to move independently in the public sphere. The feminine virtues of self-sacrifice, chastity, fidelity, and courage, in contrast, require women to remain in the private sphere, protected from vice and corruption, in order to ensure the stability necessary to weather the challenges of nation-building and market cycles. Their moral character demands the absence of freedom, constraining their behavior within the narrow confines of domestic life. Second, despite these imposing constraints, Tocqueville holds women morally responsible for the public sphere. He seems to hope that virtuous women can sustain a private sphere of republican common good to protect against the individualistic, self-interest of public life that erodes community and permits state intervention into private freedoms. Denying women freedom enables them to act as moral guardians who serve the political purpose of protecting democracy from despotism.

These finite virtues acquire such weighty political importance through the religious influence on women's infinite virtue and that of their education that teaches them how to protect against infinite vice. Although the finite virtues of self-sacrifice, courage, fidelity, and chastity possess a material dimension, each acts as a finite means to the infinite ends of women sustaining the nation's common good and preventing its decay by assuming responsibility for their families and nation's moral and, thus, political health. This expansive capacity emanates from women's intimate association with religion that lends a

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sacred aspect to their moral character, enabling them to become "angels on a pedestal." While religion links women to the common good to different degrees in the Puritan and republican discourses, the relationship intensifies in Jacksonian democracy due to the secularization of public life solidified by the separation of male public and female private spheres. Responsibility for religion and morality falls most clearly upon women's shoulders. As such, the American woman manifests the infinite within finite. In other words, she opens a window into the infinite space of religion through her finite acts of sacrifice in this world that, together, hold her morally responsible for the common good and its decay.

The infinite and finite also operate in female vice, an issue evident in Tocqueville's discussion of the young American girls' early education. Although Tocqueville recognizes that education cultivates women's virtue and reason, he, contrary to republican reformers such as Judith Sargent Murray or Benjamin Rush, focuses on how education teaches the young American girl about the finite vice of democracy's public sphere. While young American girls receive an education alongside boys, their most important knowledge comes from the school of public life. Unlike Europeans, the American girl enjoys a great deal of freedom and independence to explore the world beyond her doorstep. Permitted to see "all the doings of the world," the American girl learns the ways of democracy "so the vices and dangers of society are soon plain to her, and seeing them clearly, she judges them without illusion and faces them without fear, for she is full of confidence in her own powers and it seems that this feeling is shared by all around her."[44] This keen awareness

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[44] Ibid., 590.

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of vice combines with religion and "reasoning powers" to establish a powerful capacity for differentiating between vice and virtue in the finite world of democratic politics. The young American girl then cultivates the capacity for guarding against vice and identifying virtue. As Tocqueville explains, "she may avoid evil, but at least she knows what it is; her morals are pure rather than her mind chaste."[45] These formative experiences, observes Tocqueville, awaken young American girls to vice and make them astute enough to avoid it since "far from hiding the world's corruption from her, they want her to see it at once and take her own steps to avoid it, and they are more anxious to ensure her good conduct than to guard her innocence too carefully."[46] This expansive awareness of "the world's corruption" contains an infinite aspect as Tocqueville consistently portrays *all* public life as vice-ridden, dangerous, evil, corrupt, and immoral. Despite their awareness of vice, American women act morally, enhancing their angelic character without diminishing their responsibility for protecting democracy from the decay of vice.

Since men populate this morally bankrupt sphere and only possess the finite virtue necessary to pursue economic self-interest, women's infinite and finite virtue and awareness of vice act to secure stability in political life through morality and mores that preserve American democracy. Coupled with religion women achieve a seemingly infinite capacity for preserving the common good. First, women acquire moral responsibility for their family and nation, a double burden placed on their shoulders through their domestic role and religious affiliation. Second, this double burden of moral responsibility gains

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[45] Ibid., 590-591.

[46] Ibid., 591.

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explicit and weighty political significance as American society excludes women from politics as women when men gain white male suffrage, relegates religion to the private sphere, and defines the public-private boundary according the separate spheres ideology. Combined with an infinite capacity for seeing and cultivating the common good, Tocqueville's American woman, like the Puritan and republican, acts as a moral guardian who in the end becomes a martyr for democracy.

Tocqueville's discussion of finite and infinite masculine and feminine virtues and vices reveals a gendered "division of moral labor" and women's double burden of moral responsibility that can inform contemporary feminist political theory. According to Marilyn Friedman, the "division of moral labor has the dual function of preparing us each for our respective socially defined domains and of rendering us incompetent to manage the affairs of the realm from which we have been excluded."[47] Men's morality, Friedman continues, sustains the market's demand for productive labor while women's corresponds with the reproductive labor of the family and private life. This feminist perspective resonates with the "division of labor" implied in Tocqueville's account of the masculine finite virtues of hard work and courage that make men better workers and accumulators of capital, and the feminine finite virtues of self-sacrifice and courage that characterize good wives and mothers. While Friedman's perspective distinguishes the gendered spheres of moral labor, it, however, does not account for the most critical aspect of women's labor in

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[47] "Beyond Caring: The De-Moralization of Gender," in *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 667. Before Friedman, Virginia Held articulates the concept of "the division of moral labor" although she does not focus on its gendered dimension in *Rights and Goods: Justifying Social Action* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), Chapter 3.

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Tocqueville that emanates from their infinite virtue and awareness of infinite vice: their *political* responsibility for protecting the nation's moral and social fabric from the threat of democratic despotism.

To explore this political dimension of women's moral labor, it is helpful to turn to feminist discussions about moral responsibility informed by a gendered division of moral labor. Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* (1982) frames this discussion by introducing the difference between a male ethic of rights and a female ethic of responsibility. Focusing on Gilligan's female ethic of responsibility, Claudia Card articulates the implications of its uneven distribution; "different kinds of relationships have been differently distributed among women and men in patriarchal society: a larger share of the responsibilities of formal and impersonal relationships defined by social institutions to men. It is plausible that a result has been the creation of a significant ethical orientation."[48] Accordingly, moral responsibility is divided between women who maintain informal, personal relationships in the private sphere, and men who develop the formal relationships associated with social institutions in public life. Although feminist theorists such as Card do see the relationship between these spheres of moral responsibility, Tocqueville, surprisingly, recognizes a greater overlap between these two spheres that ultimately places a greater burden of moral responsibility for sustaining the political community on women's shoulders. Access to politics through moral responsibility, a feminist reading of Tocqueville shows, comes at a high cost to women that is not necessarily liberating or even desirable. As Tocqueville illustrates, women's moral responsibility extends to all

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[48] "Gender and Moral Luck," in *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, 648.

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areas of democratic life except the market. This imposes on women a double burden of moral responsibility for themselves, their families, the private sphere, democracy's well-being, and, generally, public and private life while denying them the power to carry out this duty effectively.

This is not to say that men have no moral responsibility for public or private life. Indeed, this double burden enables men to exercise what Joan Tronto calls "privileged irresponsibility." Tronto uses "privileged irresponsibility" to describe the unequal distribution of power that allows care-receivers (usually men) to ignore the needs of care-givers (usually women). "Those who are relatively privileged," Tronto states, "are granted by that privilege the opportunity simply to ignore certain forms of hardships that they do not face."[49] In this case, women's double burden of moral responsibility allows men to exercise "privileged irresponsibility" since they possess the freedom to determine how, when, and under what circumstances they wish to take moral responsibility for themselves, their families, and public life. The double burden of moral responsibility illustrates how men's freedom to exercise such "privileged irresponsibility" comes at a high cost to women who labor under the moral responsibility for family and nation, sacrificing much freedom in the process.

## 4.4: The Yoke of Marriage: Sacrificing Freedom for Morality

Freedom in the marriage decision reveals a critical contradiction within

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[49] *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 120-1.

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Tocqueville's political thought regarding how women's moral guardianship empowers them to protect American democracy from despotism. Before acquiring feminine virtue, the young American girl's life begins with a freedom-filled youth that empowers her with the independence and reason to make the marriage decision freely. Yet, "in America," Tocqueville states, "a woman loses her independence forever in the bonds of matrimony. While there is less constraint on girls there than anywhere else, a wife submits to stricter obligations."[50] After accepting the yoke of marriage, the American wife loses her freedom in order to gain the status of moral guardian. For Tocqueville, free choice is only critical at the moment of the marriage decision when women must voluntarily accept the double burden of moral responsibility for the private sphere and democracy. If women do not enter marriage freely, according to Tocqueville's logic, then their ability to fulfill their duty as moral guardians to protect against democratic despotism is undermined.

Despite Tocqueville's attempt to frame the woman's marriage decision as independent and free, he cannot ignore the public pressures driving it. Two pressures particularly influence the young girl: the Puritan religion that upholds marriage as the only means of securing a woman's moral purity, and an industrial economy that requires marriage, the family's cornerstone, in order to secure the social stability necessary for economic prosperity. These two cultural pressures, according to Tocqueville, generate an "inexorable public opinion [that] carefully keeps woman within the little sphere of domestic interests and duties and will not let her go beyond them."[51] Tocqueville even

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[50] *Democracy in America*, 592.

[51] Ibid.

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recognizes how the young American girl internalizes this "inexorable public opinion," stating that "she is soon convinced that she cannot for a moment depart from the usages accepted by her contemporaries without immediately putting in danger her peace of mind, her reputation, and her very social existence."[52] These internal and external pressures on the young girl actually contradict Tocqueville's position that she autonomously enters the marriage decision of her own free will. Despite his own evidence, Tocqueville still adamantly maintains that a woman's marriage choice is free:

> However, I am far from thinking that only the constraint of public opinion imposes this great change in the ways of women as soon as they are married. Often it is simply their own will which imposes this sacrifice on them.[53]

Tocqueville continues that "she knows beforehand what will be expected of her, and she herself has freely accepted the yoke. She suffers her new state bravely, for she has chosen it."[54] This contradiction between the "inexorable public opinion" that endangers "her very social existence" and the imperative of free choice in the marriage decision raises the question, why does Tocqueville insist that the woman's marriage decision be free?

In response, Tocqueville insists upon this point because the absence of freedom in the marriage decision would undermine his ability to portray women as moral guardians capable of saving democracy from despotism. The uneasy relationship between equality and freedom poses a threat to American democracy for Tocqueville who fears that America's passion for equality will outweigh freedom, resulting in tyranny of the majority

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[52] Ibid., 593.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

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and democratic despotism. Tyranny of majority squelches the spirit of freedom in American democracy by allowing the people to gain an omnipotent power that often succumbs to passions, silences minority voices, and rules by mores instead of formal laws. Unlike a king who rules through physical force, "the majority is invested with both physical and moral authority, which acts as much upon the will as upon behavior and at the same moment prevents both the act and the desire to do it."[55] Instead of one ruler, the majority holds the insidious power to control internal thought and external action that gives a new means of acting tyrannically and taking America towards despotism. To prevent this outcome for as long as possible, Tocqueville advocates a love of freedom to counter the tyranny of the majority. Seen from this vantage point, if Tocqueville fails to construct women's moral guardianship as free from "inexorable public opinion," then he cannot establish a critical distance between women and the tyranny of the majority, rendering women incapable of escaping public pressure and, thus, unable to prevent democratic despotism. In short, women in the private, removed from the public pressures of the majority, represent a last bastion against this tyranny as they sustain a separate domestic circle and hold the power to shape mores through religion, not the people.

Despite his attempts to the contrary, the women of Tocqueville's *Democracy*, however, lack the freedom necessary to act as moral guardians against democratic despotism. Women's moral guardianship is based on virtue. And, Tocqueville asserts that virtue requires freedom: "'[Political] freedom is, in truth, a *sacred* thing. There is only one other that deserves the name: that is *virtue*. Yet what is virtue, if not the *free* choice

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[55] Ibid., 254.

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of what is good?'"[56] Yet, women do not enter the virtuous state of marriage freely, jeopardizing this moral stature. Tocqueville compromises women's ability to be truly virtuous by articulating the internal and external constraints on the marriage decision. Moreover, the religious origin of women's morality further diminishes the freedom necessary for true virtue. Although the American girl's early education and experience certainly shape and inform her moral sensibilities, the content of this morality derives from religion not an innate feminine sense. Despite its spiritual orientation, religion operates within the complicated social and political contexts that generate the pressures of public opinion. As such, women's morality, rooted in religion, emanates from the public pressures that similarly generate the tyranny of the majority.

In the end, women appear to suffer under public pressures just like men. Compare the following statements. In describing the woman's marriage decision, Tocqueville states that "she knows beforehand what will be expected of her, and she herself has freely accepted the yoke. She suffers her new state bravely, for she has chosen it."[57] Towards the *Democracy*'s conclusion, Tocqueville uses similar language to describe how male citizens give their freedom to the tyranny of the majority: "each individual lets them put the collar on, for he sees that it is not a person, or a class of persons, but society itself which holds the end of the chain."[58] Women "freely accepted the yoke" and men let "them

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[56] See *Voyages en Angleterre,* in *Oeuvres, papiers et corrrespondances d'Alexis de Tocqueville*, ed. J.P. Mayer (Paris: 1951- ), 5:2, 91, quoted from Cheryl Welch's *De Tocqueville*, 51.

[57] *Democracy in America,* 593.

[58] Ibid., 693.

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put the collar on" while society holds the "end of the chain" for both. Because women suffer under the same yoke of the tyranny of the majority as men, the political power that Tocqueville attributes to women through their morality as "shapers of mores" actually prevents them from acting as moral guardians against democratic despotism. The "inexorable public pressures" during and after the marriage decision and the religious source of women's morality tie them to the same tyrannical forces as the majority. Without freedom from these ties, women lack the capacity for virtue and, thus, for moral guardianship. As such, Tocqueville must contend that women enter marriage freely.

Together the double burden of moral responsibility and the absence of freedom in the marriage decision reflect the inverse relationship between women's morality and freedom that actually moves democracy towards despotism, not away from it. In other words, Tocqueville's political thought places in stark relief the fact that the virtue required for women's moral guardianship is premised on the absence of freedom, a view consistent with women's morality in Puritan and republican discourses. The construction of women's political identity on virtue and vice ties them deeply into a political discourse based on denying women freedom through moral constraints.

## 4.5: Conclusion: Turning the 'Moral World Upside Down'

Why is it that Tocqueville struggles to legitimize the absence of freedom in arguing for what amounts to women's moral guardianship of democracy? One possible explanation carries with it important implications for contemporary feminist thinking on morality and political strategy. Tocqueville may recognize the potentially radical outcome

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of reconfiguring the inverse relationship between women's morality and freedom that would entail abandoning moral guardianship as critical to women's political identity. Tocqueville, and even his contemporary conservative followers, may then hope to prevent such radical change by preserving women's moral guardianship and to justify it as protecting democracy from decay. In Tocqueville's case, as Cheryl Welch points out, his knowledge about the inevitability of political change created in him a fear common to those who survived the French Revolution of 1789. To establish some preventative measure against this change, Welch continues, Tocqueville limits women to the private sphere where they sustain the traditional institutions of religion and the family amidst democratic turmoil. Another way to interpret Tocqueville's fear of the dangers that accompany political change is that despite his best efforts to protect democracy from despotism through women's moral guardianship, he recognizes that the inevitability of political and social change makes such efforts futile. Tocqueville already encountered women's increased attendance at political meetings, participation in voluntary associations, access to education, and role in marital decisions. Clearly he understood the radical implications of these transformations. As Welch says of Tocqueville, "in contrast, under the shock of the democratic revolution in France, Tocqueville adapted classical republican notions of the need for surveillance and control of women...to bolster his intuitions that women's freedom would turn the moral world upside down."[59] The fear that "women's freedom" will "turn the moral world upside down" helps to explain why Tocqueville, and even his conservative contemporaries, go to such lengths to justify the

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[59] *De Tocqueville*, 207.

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absence of women's freedom as necessary to preserving the moral and, thus, political order.

Ultimately, considering the relationship between moral guardianship and democratic despotism from this perspective suggests that freeing women from this constraining political identity may be more effective in protecting democracy from excessive and oppressive state intervention than maintaining it. Moral guardianship anchors women's morality to an absence of freedom by limiting their moral agency and diminishing their acceptance as full citizens, a status that requires the capacity to make moral decisions and act freely upon them within the political arena. Escaping the constraints of moral guardianship would enable women to move towards moral freedom and full citizenship, and undermine conservative, anti-feminist arguments that place women in the double bind of either returning to domestic life or being blamed for democracy's decay. To get out of this trap, the double burden of moral responsibility must shift in order to equalize the traditionally inverted relationship between women's morality and freedom, a step toward expanding active citizenship to women and strengthening the political participation necessary to prevent democratic despotism.

Moral guardianship, then, impacts women's citizenship specifically and suggests how this construction of political identity parallels representative democracy, lending some insight into how political *inactivity*, rather ironically acquired a degree of moral excellence during the Jacksonian era. During the republican period, *virtu* shifted from the public to the private sphere and transformed into feminine *virtue* premised on submissiveness, passivity, and a defensive political posture. Although virtue retains women's capacity to

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see the common good, the action traditionally associated with virtue is lost as women become moral guardians. Moving into Jacksonian democracy, male self-interest and commerce achieve the status of virtue indicating how economic, not political, activity defined public life. As white male suffrage expands male citizenship, the moral value of political activity diminishes, and, as Tocqueville explains, vice, corruption, and immorality come to characterize democracy's public sphere. Conversely, as women acquire virtue and solidify their responsibility for moral guardianship, any remaining political rights essentially disappear as society safely cloisters them away in the private sphere. As democracy takes hold, citizens gain moral status from *not* participating in politics. Since women's virtue emanates from their domestic role and men's comes from their economic pursuits, politics becomes the arena of politicians, not citizens. This is not to say that politics loses its moral imperative. Quite the contrary. The absence of active participation in politics attains the status of a moral virtue for democratic citizens. In part representative democracy demands this transformation in its citizens' moral character so that the people accept indirect participation. Yet, the long-term implications become quite serious as citizens lose touch with political activity and nearly leave it all to the politicians.

For women, another dilemma arises from moral guardianship. Not only are women morally valued for their passivity and support of the status quo, but the double burden of moral responsibility makes their active participation "suspect" since leaving behind their families and traditional roles put the democratic community in jeopardy. This outcome in Jacksonian democracy emanates from the role of infinite virtue and vice in constructing women's "citizenship" in terms of moral guardianship that started during the

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pre-history of the Puritan's biblical context and developed in the republican period. Throughout the Puritan, republican, and Jacksonian periods, the interplay of women's virtue and vice reveals how the infinite dimension of their morality, stemming from an association with the spiritual sphere of religion, shapes virtue and vice's operation in the finite sphere of the material and political worlds. As Tocqueville notes, "religion, therefore, is only one particular form of hope, and it is as natural to the human heart as hope itself."[60] After acquiring the capacity for piety and religion in the Puritan period, women sustain a close association with religion that transfers into their responsibility for the common good, a "form of hope" for the political community. Of course, this also links women inextricably to blame for political decay. As such, women's moral guardianship integrates them into the discourse of American exceptionalism cultivated throughout these three historical periods which helps to explain the incredible weight attached to this passive, submissive political identity designed to support the status quo amidst vast political change.

As the boundaries of public and private life emerged and then solidified throughout the Puritan, republican, and Jacksonian periods, the shifts in women's virtue and vice reveals the complexities involved in constructing women's political identity in terms of moral guardianship. Despite the nation's significant changes from colony to nation-state and republic to democracy, three attributes of women's political identity remain the same: the double burden of moral responsibility, the inverse relationship between freedom and morality, and the double bind inherent in moral guardianship. At each turn, women's

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[60] *Democracy in America*, 296.

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virtue and vice operate to value their role in protecting the political community from decay by sustaining the moral fabric and guarding its institutions from the corrosion of immorality. Women acquire moral and political status by investing themselves in the defense of the very status quo designed to maintain their exclusion from full membership in the political community that they are held responsible for protecting. Perhaps, Tocqueville's suspicion was correct: women's freedom from female virtue and vice, as constructed by the Puritan, republican, and Jacksonian discourses, will threaten to "turn the moral world upside down" and, thus, the political as well. As Chapter Five illustrates next, women who began to fight for greater freedoms started by struggling against the oppressive force of moral guardianship in order to work towards a full, active democratic citizenship.

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# CHAPTER FIVE

## The Virtues of Vice: The Lowell Mill Girl Debates of the Victorian Era

### 5.1: Introduction

Shortly after Tocqueville departed from America's shores, another Frenchman, Michel Chevalier[1] arrived to examine America's democratic and industrial experiment. Like other foreign visitors such as Charles Dickens and Harriet Martineau, Chevalier found the textile mills of Lowell, Massachusetts to be a superior alternative to the morally corrupt, degraded, and miserable conditions of European industrial centers such as Manchester, England. Owing much to this moral superiority, women constituted approximately eighty percent of Lowell's labor force. As Chevalier observes, "the rigid spirit of Puritanism has been carried to its utmost in Lowell, owing to the great number of young girls collected together in the factories...Seeing them pass through the streets, I said to myself, this, then is not Manchester."[2] Unlike such unruly, immoral workforces, the Lowell mill girls who adhered to Puritan moral codes and self-discipline brought virtue to Lowell, helping to create what many saw as America's utopian solution to the problems of industrialization. Similar to Tocqueville's pioneer woman, Chevalier's Lowell mill girls

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[1] Michel Chevalier fails to compare with the influence of Alexis de Tocqueville whose ability to analyze American democracy far surpasses Chevalier. Yet, Chevalier's description often plays an important role in historical accounts of Lowell due to his outsider's perspective on the mill girls.

[2] *Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America,* ed. and introduction by John William Ward (Glouchester, MA: Peter Smith, 1967), 130, 137.

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sacrifice their freedom and happiness to achieve virtue under the company's strict regulations:

> it must be acknowledged that under this rigorous system there is a somber hue, an air of listlessness, thrown over society; but, when one reflects on the dangers to which the opposite system exposes the daughter of the poor who has no one to look out for her, when one counts the victims however slight may be his sympathies for humanity, it is difficult to deny that Anglo-American prudery, all things considered, is fully worth our ease and freedom of manners, whatever may be their attractions.[3]

While the female operatives' sacrifice creates a "somber hue" and "air of listlessness," this strict morality sustains the social order that made Lowell representative of America's exceptionalism in industry, in part by elevating the workers and, thereby, the textile mills onto a high moral plane above their European competitors. This moral elevation becomes more evident when Chevalier depicts Lowell and the mill girls in religious terms that emphasize their moral character's other-worldly, spiritual dimension:

> Up to this time, then, the rules of the companies have been observed. Lowell, with its steeple-crowned factories, resembles a Spanish town with its convents; but with this difference, that in Lowell, you meet no rags nor Madonnas and that the nuns of Lowell, instead of working *sacred hearts*, spin and weave cotton. Lowell is not amusing, but it is neat and decent, peaceable and sage. Will it always be so? Will it be so long?[4]

Female factory workers transform into the "nuns of Lowell" whose "sacred" task is to "spin and weave cotton" in factories that resemble "convents" in "a Spanish town." Like Tocqueville's pioneer woman, their freedom and sacrifice acquire a religious quality that transcends their individual needs and allows for decency, wisdom, and peacefulness, or a

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[3] Ibid., 139.

[4] Ibid., 142.

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general sense of social order necessary for the industrial project to succeed. Even so, Chevalier asks how long can this last and concludes that as "the wages continue to be high in Lowell, the influences of a good education, a sense of duty, and the fear of public opinion will be sufficient to maintain good morals."[5] He was right. When wages fell in response to a glut in the textile market during the mid-1830s, many Lowell operatives, led by women such as Sarah Bagley, exchanged the yoke of constraint for the freedom to "turn-out" or strike for better wages and working conditions. As these Lowell mill girls fought against oppressive corporate policies, they moved further away from the virtue-based discourse of moral guardianship in the process of struggling for the democratic rights of freedom, equality, and independence. This chapter argues that this shift illustrates the obstacles that virtue places in the way of women's fight against their oppression.

The Lowell mill girl phenomena occurred within the broader political and cultural context of Jacksonian democracy when the Republican Mother fully transforms into the True Woman of the Victorian era. Women - as men voted, built businesses, worked on the docks, laid ties for the railroad, and pioneered the West - protected the home front and sustained the moral fabric necessary to bind an increasingly individualistic and materialistic culture together. Virtue continues to act as the animating force within women's political identity that empowers them to stabilize the society as it encounters major changes accompanying white male suffrage, early urbanization, migration to the West, immigration from Europe, and nascent industrialization. "The attributes of True Womanhood by which

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[5] Ibid., 143.

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a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society," Barbara Welter explains, "could be divided into four cardinal virtues - piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity...With them she was promised happiness and power."[6] These four virtues indicate the resurgence of Puritan morality during the Victorian period when women still derived political significance from religion and their domestic role as the nation's moral guardians. "From their little kingdoms, however, women were assured that they could dictate national morality, preside over the tone of American culture as surely as Victoria reigned in England," Mary Ryan explains.[7] Moral guardianship acquired renewed political importance as threats to the traditional order such as women working outside the home demanded a recommitment to the moral constraints and discipline rooted in American Puritanism.

More pointedly than in earlier periods, the Victorian era's moral discourse developed an explicitly economic dimension as the wealthy became the standard of virtue in an increasingly industrial society. True Women belonged to the upper and middle class and dictated what virtue meant for all women regardless of their economic status. Capturing how True Women acted as moral guardians, Patricia Branca explains that "as 'help-meet,' the Victorian woman was to provide the proper environment of respectability. She became the guardian of morality: righteous, gentle, sympathetic and

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[6] "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer, 1966) 2: 152.

[7] *Womanhood in America*, 76.

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most of all submissive."[8] Still excluded from formal politics, women continued to derive informal power from their moral guardianship status in the "separate but equal" sphere of the home. As volatile market cycles, increasing social mobility, and urbanization undermined traditional economic relationships, the ideal upper and middle class wife represented a pillar of stability that, as Barbara Welter explains, played a critical role in Victorian attitudes toward women:

> In a society where values changed frequently, where fortunes rose and fell with frightening rapidity, where social and economic mobility provided instability as well as hope, one thing at least remained the same - a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found. If anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as the enemy of god, of civilization, and of the Republic.[9]

Similar to the Puritan and republican periods, virtue and vice operate to make women more than "True Women" as moral guardians now responsible for sustaining order amidst *economic* and political disorder to ensure America's exceptional industrial future.

Challengers who "dared to tamper with this complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood," as Welter explains, became "the enemy of god, of civilization, and the Republic" since they threatened the core of America's social stability: women's moral guardianship. The Lowell mill girls, merely by leaving the family farm to work in the textile mills, challenge the Victorian era's belief in True Women as the nation's moral guardians. Throughout the 1820s, more and more women left rural Massachusetts,

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[8] "Image and Reality: They Myth of the Idle Victorian Woman," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, eds. Mary Hartman and Lois Banner (New York, NY: Harper Colophon Books, 1974), 180.

[9] "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 151-2.

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Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island to work for a wage in the textile mills springing up across New England. By 1860, the region's cotton textile industry employed more than 60,000 women.[10] Since stepping on to the factory floor alone defied True Womanhood, a cultural backlash emerged to uphold the Victorian belief system against this challenge. As Gerda Lerner points out, "It is no accident that the slogan 'woman's place is in the home' took on a certain aggressiveness and shrillness precisely at the time when increasing numbers of poor women *left* their homes to become factory workers...Idleness, once a disgrace in the eyes of society, had become a status symbol."[11] A moral tug-of-war ensued as industry leaders who required an available labor pool attempted to justify female labor as virtuous while American society held steadfast to the Victorian belief in women's domestic role as the source of virtue. Making matters worse, mill girls "turned out" and even organized collectively into unions. As early as 1824, women walked out of a mill in solidarity with their male co-workers in Pawtucket, Rhode Island to protest a wage cut and poor working conditions; in 1828, 700 women, independent of male operatives, walked out of a factory in Dover, New Hampshire, protesting a rigid time-discipline regimen. Despite moral constraints tying women to the virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, some working women

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[10] For further detail on the shift from household to industrial manfactures, see Thomas Dublin's *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell Massachusetts, 1826-1860*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1979), Chapter 1.

[11] "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," in *The Majority Finds Its Past, Placing Women in History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 26.

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miraculously managed to break free of True Womanhood and effect economic and political change, ultimately leading to an ideological shift that forged the way towards democratic citizenship for women by distancing them from moral guardianship and virtue.

In particular, the Lowell mill girls represent something of an historical phenomena since between 1826 and 1850 these women constituted the first all-white female work force, making up seventy-five to eighty percent of Lowell's laborers. As such, the Lowell mill girls and the debates among and about them provide a unique opportunity for exploring how virtue *and* vice operated within and against the Victorian belief system that makes them important to this analysis for three reasons. First, the Lowell mill girls, though a relatively small number of women compared with the thousands who entered the factories during the period, came to symbolize female labor in New England. As feminist historian Ardis Cameron explains:

> from the outset, the construction of the 'mill' or 'factory girl' was an act of social comprehension, a representation of female labor that sought to make 'sense' of rapidly changing arrangements in the family and in the world. As a kind of mental map that charted the alien terrain of industrial life, the 'mill girls of Lowell' helped normalize wage labor for women, bringing into high relief both the female operative and the new order from which she sprang. The 'factory girl' established sharp conceptual distinctions between a 'woman' and those *women* who worked.[12]

The Lowell mill girls starkly contrasted with the moral and social standards of True Women who performed unpaid reproductive labor in the home and generated national and international debate about the fate of womanhood, morality, and the family. Social commentators, ranging from Orestes Brownson and Harriet Martineau to a Lowell doctor,

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[12] *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1860 - 1912* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), xvi.

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Elisha Barrett, entered this debate that links the Lowell mill girls to a larger political discourse and suggests its broader significance. Second, as working conditions in the mills deteriorated throughout the 1840s, the Lowell mill girls debated their approach to the "labor problem." One camp, led by the editor of *The Lowell Offering,* Harriet Farley, supported the corporation and focused on the moral and intellectual cultivation of the mill girls whom they hoped would achieve True Womanhood. The other camp, under the direction of the *Voice of Industry* editor Sarah Bagley, upheld the mill girls' moral worth but rejected the corporation's failure to improve the material conditions of falling wages, speed ups of the machines, short breaks, poor ventilation, and exceedingly long work days. This debate, captured in these and other publications, gives voice to how the mill girls used virtue and vice to navigate between American society's ideological commitment to Victorian True Womanhood, their position as working women, and the fight against corporate policies. This case explicitly illustrates how virtue and vice operate as tools of political power when women challenge the ideology of moral guardianship. Third, the Lowell mill girls debate adds an economic dimension to the analysis of virtue and vice that, to this point, predominately accounted for the religious, educational, political, and familial aspects of these concepts as made evident in the Puritan, republican, and Tocqueville's democratic contexts.

Together these three reasons indicate why this study of the Victorian period focuses on the Lowell mill girls instead of the female moral reformers who participated actively in the temperance and abolition movements of the day. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg shows, Victorian era upper and middle class women used their social status as

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moral guardians to generate political change strictly within the realm of morality and to limit further moral freedoms, usually those of men. "I would like to suggest," writes Smith-Rosenberg, "that some nineteenth-century women channeled their frustration with women's restricted roles combined with a sense of superior righteousness legitimized by the Cult of True Womanhood into the reform movements of the first half of the nineteenth century; and in the controversial moral reform crusade such motivations seem particularly apparent."[13] Although politically engaged, the activities of these moral reformers remain consistent with the virtue-based premise of moral guardianship by limiting freedom and remaining dedicated to women's role as America's saviors from vice and decay. Though still operating within the framework of moral guardianship, the Lowell mill girls struggled to fit their lived experience as workers into the existing ideology of True Womanhood. Since their social location, unlike that of female moral reformers, bred contradictions and challenges to the prevailing belief system, the Lowell mill girl debates reveal an early challenge to the virtue-based discourse of moral guardianship that evolves into a democratic alternative for understanding how women's morality shapes their political identity.

The Lowell mill girl debate presents a closed system of inconsistent beliefs that become evident in their attempts to leverage political advantage, explicitly challenge, or fit into prevailing Victorian moral beliefs. As these female operatives navigate the web of virtue, vice and moral guardianship, contradictions abound that provide insights into the

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[13] "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985), 109.

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nature of political change during Jacksonian democracy. Contradictions, James Farr explains, represent a specific class of problem and offer a unique opportunity for examining the role of concepts in political transitions:

> contradiction implies manifestly *inconsistent* beliefs *within* a system, such that holding or asserting one implies the denial or negation of another...Contradictions are generally found not so much in the simultaneous profession of two directly and glaringly incompatible or negating beliefs. Rather they emerge in the extended implications or unintended consequences of two or more beliefs; or they emerge in the confrontation between (consequences of) actions or practices and the beliefs which inform them.[14]

As Farr predicts, the contradictions within the Lowell mill girl debate are not "two directly and glaringly incompatible or negating beliefs" since both camps believe that all female operatives deserve the moral dignity, respect, and guardianship attributed to True Women. As workers, however, mill girls' actions and practices contradict a woman's submissive place in the domestic sphere. In response, some mill girls try to fit female operatives into the prevailing belief system of True Womanhood by emphasizing their moral and intellectual elevation while others saw the inherent incompatibility between this belief system and their goals of human equality, justice, and freedom. Moving away from the Victorian framework to realize these goals transforms these women into "innovating ideologists" who, Farr explains, "faced with contradictions and incoherencies between prevailing beliefs and newly proposed beliefs, actions, or practices, ideologists may propose innovations of a conceptual nature in order to realize their political designs."[15]

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[14] "Understanding Conceptual Change Politically," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, 34, 35.

[15] Ibid., 35-6.

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The ideological innovation of some Lowell mill girls developed from the "extended implications or unintended consequences of two or more beliefs." They realized that their belief in human equality and freedom, especially in terms of decent working conditions and wages, contradicted the class inequality and moral constraints of a virtue-based discourse that assigned virtue to the wealthy and vice to the workers. Although they attempted to invert this dualism, these mill girls experienced how virtue and vice justified their oppression, inequality, and tight moral constraints. In response, they became "innovating ideologists" by shifting the virtue-vice discourse into the background, and equality, rights, and freedom into the foreground in order to overcome the barriers of inequality and constraint, and to begin constructing a more democratic political identity for women.

These "innovative ideologists" represent the "virtue of vice." Similar to the Puritan witches and republican foremothers associated with Eve's original sin, these Lowell mill girls who not only challenged the corporation but the prevailing Victorian ideology of True Womanhood also personified vice. As threats to the cultural bedrock of moral guardianship, they jeopardized the entire moral and political structure supporting American exceptionalism. Yet, it is exactly this association with vice that opens a "virtuous" space for challenging the inconsistencies between a virtue-based discourse and a more democratically oriented rights-based discourse grounded in equality, freedom, and justice. From their location outside the accepted moral order of the day, these Lowell mill girls unwittingly moved moral guardianship into the background in order to take the first steps towards staking out a different moral ground more conducive to women's democratic citizenship. The "virtue of vice" then is the power that this moral location

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grants to vice-ridden women to think outside and beyond prevailing moral ideologies where they can encounter political alternatives to moral guardianship and virtue. As some Lowell mill girls increasingly saw their battle against the corporation in broader democratic terms, they became "innovating ideologists" who saw the obstacles that virtue erects to achieving equality and freedom and moved towards a rights-based discourse.

To make this argument, this chapter moves through the following four steps. First, a short history of the Lowell mill girls establishes their historical context and significance to this study by focusing on how the corporation used virtue as a tool for sustaining social order and portraying the Lowell mill girls as socially acceptable, a prime example of how virtue and vice operate to create structures of oppression. Second, an account of the national debate about the mill girls captured by Orestes Brownson's article, "The Laboring Classes," the response of Lowell doctor Elisha Barlett, and Catharine Beecher's views on the topic links the specific Lowell mill girl debate to the broader political discourse, illustrating their significance to Victorian America's political culture. Third, an analysis of the Lowell mill girls' internal debate, captured on the pages of *The Offering* and *Voice of Industry*, illustrate how dimensions of moral guardianship - morality, individualism, passivity, and elevation - conflict with democratic principles important to activist operatives - material concerns, collectivism, aggressiveness, and equality. While negotiating this complex terrain, "innovating ideologists" moved away from the hierarchy and constraints of the virtue-based discourse anchoring moral guardianship. Finally, this chapter concludes by locating the Lowell mill girls within the broader evolution of moral guardianship that began with the Puritans, took on more

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explicit political importance during the republican period, and reaches its apex during the dramatic changes of the Jacksonian era. These periods reveal how virtue and moral guardianship develop into a high barrier to women's active democratic citizenship by trapping women in the double bind of either defending the status quo in order to maintain their moral status and informal power or pursuing change and being labeled "suspect" citizens who engage in the vice that will lead to the nation's demise. Despite this powerful construct of moral guardianship that links women's morality to the nation's fate, some Lowell mill girls reappropriate the moral imperative of the virtue-vice system by embracing the "virtues of vice" as a means of moving towards relocating women's morality to the more democratic grounds of equality and freedom.

## 5.2: How the Lowell System Guarded The Nation's Future Moral Guardians: A Brief History

Given True Womanhood's dominance during the Victorian period, recruiting young single women to work in the textile mills required Lowell's founders to navigate some difficult moral terrain. Essentially, the strategy of founder Francis Cabot Lowell and his partners who organized the Boston Associates after Lowell's death entailed extending a young woman's domestic responsibilities to factory life. In other words, temporary factory jobs could provide money to pay for the farm's mortgage or a brother's college tuition, to support an ill sibling or dying parent, or to contribute to the daughter's dowry. The young woman's wage met the virtuous standard of self-sacrifice when portrayed as being earned for the family, not greedy personal interests or the pleasures of city life. In

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addition to providing a decent wage, the Boston Associates implemented the boardinghouse system designed to keep the mill girls under strict discipline when they left the factory floor. Together, such measures assured parents that "their daughters would experience hard work and discipline in a healthy semi-rural environment" that "would make them better wives and mothers."[16] Instead of challenging True Womanhood, the Boston Associates fit the mill girls into the process of preparing them to take on the responsibilities of moral guardianship.

Francis Cabot Lowell and later the Boston Associates turned to a single female labor force due to a limited labor supply created by the large numbers of men who headed West between 1810 and 1830, the remote location of mill towns, and, in particular, the cheap labor of female operatives. Although Lowell's female operatives earned $1.85 - $3.00 an hour, initially the highest wages in the female workforce, they still made 50% less than male workers who held the more skilled and higher paying positions such as overseer and second hand in the mills.[17] Directly recruiting single women for factory work departed radically from the set of hiring practices adopted from the British that American companies called the Rhode Island system or "family mills" that attracted workers based

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[16] Alice Kessler-Harris' *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 33.

[17] In *Women at Work*, Thomas Dublin clarifies this division of labor, stating that "separate wage scales for men and women resulted from the division of labor along lines of sex. In 1836 men earned a daily wage that ranged between $0.85 and $2.00, while women received varying piece rates that made their wages proportional to the output of the machines they tended. Their daily earnings averaged between $0.40 and $0.80" (66).

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on the company's employment of men and their entire families.[18] Alternatively, the Waltham system, established by Mr. Lowell in Waltham, Massachusetts, and transferred to Lowell, relied on corporate paternalism and boardinghouses to guard the mill girls from the vice and temptation of city life. As the textile industry boomed throughout the 1820s and most of the 1830s, almost half of New England's mills adopted the Lowell model. Yet, Alice Kessler-Harris explains, "their influence far exceeded their direct impact on the women who worked there, for they introduced and sustained the possibility of well-paid, respectable work for women."[19] Even as Lowell declined amidst falling wages and deteriorating working conditions during the 1840s, the early model acted as a standard by which workers measured corporate policies and potential.

Since Lowell initially recruited unmarried women between 20 and 22 years old, corporate regulations and the boardinghouse system acted to guard the morality of the mill girls as they prepared to become moral guardians. "The Boston Associates," historian Benita Eisler points out, "resolved to create a labor force that would be a shining example of those ultimate Yankee ideals: profit and virtue, doing good and doing well."[20] To achieve this objective, the corporation established a rigid time-discipline regimen that required the Lowell mill girls to work 12 - 14 hour days, 6 days a week. The factory bells

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[18] Samuel Slater actually opened the first permanent spinning mill in the United States in Pawtucket, Rhode Island in December 1790. His labor force consisted of nine children, seven boys and two girls.

[19] *Out to Work*, 33.

[20] *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women (1840-1845)* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1977), 15.

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first rang at 4:30 a.m., the dinner bell at 12:00 p.m., and the evening bell at 6:30 p.m. Acting as surrogate parents, male overseers disciplined the mill girls and guarded over their behavior on the factory floor. Right outside its gates, the corporation built boardinghouses where the mill girls lived under the watchful eye of their landlady held responsible for ensuring her tenets' moral conduct. "Regulation papers," the corporation's rules for the mills and boardinghouses, dictated their behavior. Regulations varied yet included a 10 p.m. curfew, denial of visitors at "unreasonable" hours, regular church attendance, and complete abstinence from alcohol on all company property, including the boardinghouses.[21] Such regulations served the purpose of ensuring that mill girls met the standards of virtue, a point most explicitly made in the Lawrence Company's regulation papers:

> They [the female operatives] must on all occasions, both in their words and in their actions, show that they are penetrated by a laudable love of *temperance and virtue*, and animated by a sense of their moral and social obligations. The Agent of the Company shall endeavor to set to all a good example in this respect. Every individual who shall be notoriously dissolute, idle, dishonest, or intemperate, who shall be in the practice of absenting himself from divine service, or shall violate the Sabbath, or shall be addicted to gaming shall be dismissed from the service of the Company [emphasis mine].[22]

While external expressions of vice such as idleness, dishonesty, intemperance, or gambling would not be tolerated, the corporation seemingly expects workers to internalize the moral code to the point that the operatives "are penetrated by a laudable love of temperance and

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[21] For an example of a regulation paper from the Middlesex Company, see *The Lowell Mill Girls: Life in the Factory*, ed. JoAnne Weisman Deitch (Carlisle, MA: Discovery Enterprises, Ltd., 1998), 23.

[22] Quoted from Michel Chevalier's *Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States*, 140.

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virtue," quite an oppressive moral standard that presumes control even of a worker's internal character. To survey their behavior, boardinghouse keepers reported indiscretions to the overseers who could fire the mill girls and even blacklist them from working in area textile mills. Echoing the company's defense of such a restrictive environment, community leaders such as Unitarian minister Henry Mills justifies the system in the following terms:

> 'the existence of any great moral exposure in Lowell would cut off the supply of help from the virtuous homesteads of the country. Public morals and private interests, identical in all places, are here seen to be linked together in an indissoluble connection. Accordingly, the sagacity of self-interest, as well as more disinterested considerations, has led to the adoption of the moral police.'[23]

In their capacity as the mill girls' moral guardians, corporate agents, overseers, and boardinghouse keepers exercised so much power that many commonly referred to them as the "moral police." In this context, virtue became a prerequisite for employment and vice a just cause for terminating a worker's job. The corporation set the moral standards and used virtue and vice to exercise a great degree of power over the Lowell mill girls' lives. From their perspective then, virtue and vice clearly operated as a means of exercising power on behalf of the corporation.

Within the confining Lowell mill system, female operatives, however, managed to foment a rebellion. As historian Thomas Dublin argues, the "bonds among women that developed at the workplace and in the boardinghouses provided women with a solidarity that later played a major part in the growth of collective protest."[24] Close living quarters

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[23] Quoted from Thomas Dublin's *Women at Work*, 78.

[24] Ibid., 12.

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and constant contact between the mill girls unexpectedly forged the interpersonal bonds necessary for worker solidarity. Additionally, as Alice Kessler-Harris points out, "the existence of a homogeneous and highly sex-segregated labor force seems to have encouraged women to strike" since women's limited job mobility decreased competition for wages, allowing for more solidarity than among their male co-workers.[25] As a result, in February 1834, 800 Lowell mill girls "turned out" in opposition to a reduction in piece wages. While this protest lasted a few days and only included a sixth of the mill girls, an 1836 strike "turned out" 1500 - 2000 women, between 1/4th and 1/3rd of the female labor force who established the Factory Girls' Association, a formal organization to coordinate strike activities that successfully kept the mills operating below capacity for several months.

The depression of 1837-39, the first serious economic downturn of this early industrial period, however, marked the turning point when many female operatives sustained labor organizing and protest activities in Lowell.[26] Throughout the 1840s, the mill girls, working alongside male laborers, played an integral part in the Ten Hour Movement that fought for a ten hour work day in the New England textile industry. As labor unrest grew, the corporation funded *The Lowell Offering*, a monthly literary magazine of poems, short stories, and essays written by Lowell mill girls showcasing their moral and intellectual cultivation, female attributes far more valuable than better wages

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[25] *Out to Work*, 40-41.

[26] For an excellent discussion of this historical transition, see Alice Kessler-Harris' *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), Chapters 2 and 3.

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and a shorter work day. Unimpressed by this position, female operatives established the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA) in December 1844, a sister organization to the male Mechanics and Laborers' Association and the New England Workingmen's Association. *The Voice of Industry* acted as the primary voice for the "rebellious" Lowell mill girls who published articles so regularly that the paper created "The Female Department" to address women's issues specifically. In addition, these mill girls engaged in more formal political activity. Beginning in 1843, Lowell operatives collected 1,600 signatures for a petition supporting the ten hour day which they submitted to the Massachusetts state legislature. After receiving yearly petitions, the state legislature established an investigating committee that invited eight operatives, six of them women, to give testimony. Such an event marked the peak of political activity for the female operatives. Though never winning a ten hour day, these operatives won ten more minutes for breakfast and dinner in April 1847. By 1850, however, women's employment in the mills declined dramatically as Irish immigrants, the newest source of cheap labor, replaced them and labor protest participation dissipated with their declining numbers and the labor unions' integration into the legislative process, a change that marginalized women who still could not vote.[27]

Two Lowells appear in this brief account. The first looks like Chevalier's industrial utopia structured by strict morals and discipline under the corporation's paternal

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[27] For a complete account of the many factors that resulted in the decline of women's participation in the labor movement, see Thomas Dublin's *Women at Work*, Chapter 8 where he accounts for the departure of Yankee women from Lowell as wages declined, in part due to the market, Irish immigrants willing to work for lower wages, and teaching jobs that offered a more lucrative and attractive career.

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gaze. In this scenario, mill girls sacrifice freedom and happiness in exchange for good wages and relatively decent working conditions as well as the protection of their virtue. Instead of challenging Victorian True Womanhood, the textile mills prepare the Lowell mill girls for their future as wives and mothers who serve as America's moral guardians. The second Lowell portrays operative demands for better wages and working conditions as the vices of greed and idleness and a failure to appreciate the moral and intellectual opportunities available in Lowell. The corporation's moral guardianship fell into question as labor reformers emphasized how its policies denied workers the time to attend church or pursue education, clearly revealing that the Boston Associates did not have the workers' best interests in mind. The Lowell mill girls who pointed out such moral failings broke with the Victorian era's ideology of moral guardianship as they engaged in a political battle for women's economic rights that took them far afield of the domestic sphere. Indicating their threat to the corporation, women increasingly left the Lowell mills in the early 1850s as the teaching profession offered better wages and working conditions and wage labor became associated with vice as Irish immigrants, a group portrayed as morally bankrupt due to their poverty, replaced women at the looms. By this time, "republican virtue, once vested in the notion that women's economic contribution inside and outside the family would enhance the freedom of the nation, had utterly reversed itself. Women who had been told in 1820 that their economic independence would sustain the family discovered in 1840 that they would sustain the republic only by raising virtuous children."[28] Although women, of course, continued to work, strike, and organize

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[28] Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 71.

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throughout the industrial period, the virtue of wage labor associated with Lowell's early days disappeared and American society regarded women who worked with sympathy and pity, and, above all, without virtue. While the "rebellious" Lowell mill girls who fought for worker rights could not see this far down the road, the corporation's use of virtue and vice to leverage political power shaped how these women understood their morality's relationship to politics.

## 5.3: The National Debate on Women's Labor and Moral Guardianship

Throughout the 1840s, the growing labor movement generated a national debate about wage labor that often involved the Lowell mill girls who symbolized the female workforce during the period. Unlike the glowing reports of the early 1830s, social reformers, ministers, doctors, and operatives attacked and defended the Lowell mill system, often using it as a springboard for interrogating the structural implications of the wage labor system. Leading social reformer, Orestes Brownson's article "The Laboring Classes," published in his paper the *Boston Quarterly Review* in 1840, put forward a controversial argument against wage labor, igniting a national debate on the issue. Brownson argues that wage labor degrades the worker to a greater degree than slavery, explaining that "wages is a cunning device of the devil, for the benefit of tender consciences, who would retain all the advantages of the slave system without the expense, trouble, and odium of being slave-holders...The simple market wages for ordinary labor,

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has never been adequate to raise him from poverty to wealth."[29] As an example of the worker's moral, intellectual, and physical degradation under the wage system, Brownson briefly describes the Lowell mill girls' poor working and living conditions. Although only an example in his case for restructuring industrial America, his portrayal of the Lowell mill girls challenged the prevailing view of Lowell as a workers' utopia and, as such, provoked a strong defense of the female operatives from Lowell community leaders and even a few mill girls who rejected what they saw as Brownson's attack on their virtue. Other social reformers such as Catharine Beecher used the Lowell mill girl case to call for a return to the traditional sexual division of labor which, for her, meant that men should leave the teaching profession to women who, as part of their patriotic duty, should, in turn, leave factory work to men. To capture the basic contours of this national debate pertaining to the Lowell mill girls, this section focuses on the positions of Orestes Brownson and the Lowell doctor, Elisha Barlett whose views shaped this debate. Although other community leaders such as Unitarian minister Henry Mills defended Lowell and its mill girls, Dr. Barlett presents an argument that acts as the cornerstone of this defensive position. Additionally, Catharine Beecher's position explores the explicit use of moral guardianship in national political discourse. Since a challenge to Lowell and its mill girls equated with a challenge to the nation's industrial success, this national debate links moral guardianship to American exceptionalism. Their positions establish a backdrop against which the Lowell mill girls' internal debates took place, creating a means for determining to what

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[29] *The Laboring Classes (1840) with Brownson's Defense on the Article on the Laboring Classes*, intro. Martin K. Doudna (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1978), 12, 13.

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degree the Lowell mill girls moved away from the virtue-vice paradigm of moral guardianship that structured the Victorian political discourse about women during the Jacksonian era.

Virtue and vice operate at the core of Brownson and Barlett's debate as Brownson portrays the mill girls' working conditions as degrading while Barlett and a Lowell mill girl defend their virtue and the mill town's uplifting conditions. Challenging the idyllic view of the Lowell mill girls, Brownson declares that beneath the female operatives' well-dressed and cared for exterior, "there is a dark side, moral as well as physical."[30] Physically, "the great mass wear out their health, spirits, and morals...The average life, working life we mean of the girls that come to Lowell, for instance, from Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, we have been assured, is only about three years" after which time many go home to die.[31] In short, the factory system sucks the life out of innocent young women. Rejecting this position, Dr. Barlett declares that "the general and comparative good health of the girls employed in the mills here and their freedom from serious disease have long been subjects of common remark among our most intelligent and experienced physicians. *The manufacturing population of this city is the healthiest portion of the population,* and there is no reason why this should not be the case."[32] The

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[30] *The Laboring Classes*, 11.

[31] Brownson, *The Laboring Classes*, 11.

[32] *A Vindication of the Character and Condition of the Females Employed in the Lowell Mills, Against the Charges Contained in The Boston Times and the Boston Quarterly Review* (Lowell, MA: Leonard Huntress, Printer, 1841), 13. Massachusetts Historical Society.

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Lowell mill girls, the doctor continues, exercise very regular habits, presumably due to the company's strict time-discipline regimen and the boardinghouse keepers' watchful eye, that promote good hygiene and health. For women, external physical appearance reflects their internal moral condition. As such, Brownson then asserts that their poor physical condition indicates a deeper moral corruption caused by merely working in the mills which undermines a woman's virtue and jeopardizes her marital prospects. After serving their time in the factory, Brownson asks, "What becomes of them then?"[33] In response, he states, "few of them ever marry; fewer still ever return to their native places with reputations impaired. 'She has worked in a factory,' is almost enough to damn to infamy the most worthy and virtuous girl."[34] Here, Brownson draws on True Womanhood to show how wage labor perpetuates vice and undermines the nation's moral bedrock of marriage. Some Lowell mill girls perceived this as an attack on their virtue and general moral worth. One mill girl draws on moral guardianship to defend their virtue, stating that thousands of girls "come from quiet country homes where their minds and manners have been formed under the eyes of the worthy sons of the Pilgrims, and their virtuous partners, and who return again to become wives of the free intelligent yeomanry of New England, and the mothers of quite a proportion of our future republicans."[35] Impugning the Lowell mill girls' character then challenges the virtuous core of America, the Pilgrim's

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[33] *The Laboring Classes*, 11.

[34] Ibid.

[35] A Factory Girl, "Factory Girls," *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women (1840-1845)*, ed. Benita Eisler (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1977), 188.

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descendants who help sustain the nation's moral and political stability. Such a reliance on virtue locates such mill girls on the corporation's side of defending the status quo. Their position resonates with Barlett:

> the great preponderance of influence is enlightening, elevating and improving - not darkening, debasing and deteriorating. Their manners are cultivated, their minds are enlarged, and their moral and religious principles are developed and fortified. Hundreds and hundreds of these girls will long live to refer to the commencement of their best and highest happiness to the residence in this city.[36]

Lowell then elevates the mill girls who experience the moral, intellectual, and religious cultivation necessary for them to become wives, mothers, and the nation's moral guardians. In the dualistic logic of virtue and vice, Brownson appears to denigrate the mill girls as vice-ridden and unmarriable when, instead, his argument aims to expose the moral corruption of wage labor, a system in which the Lowell mill girls happen to work. More importantly, the virtue-vice discourse locates Lowell's defenders on the side of virtue and the status quo, and reformers such as Brownson on the side of vice in order to advocate for social change. Such a position immediately weakens arguments such as Brownson's that, given the dualistic logic of virtue and vice, opponents cast as attacks on working women's morality and their moral guardianship of the nation.

Instead of focusing on the vice generated by wage labor, Catharine Beecher stressed the moral corruption of urban life that undermined women's moral guardianship while Lowell's defenders continue to uphold how moral constraints maintain women's virtue as they prepare for marriage. During the early stages of urbanization, many held to

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[36] *A Vindication of the Character and Condition of the Females Employed in the Lowell Mills,* 21.

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the Jeffersonian view that the rural countryside cultivated virtue while cities bred vice and moral corruption.[37] Defenders of towns such as Lowell reject this position. As Dr. Barlett contends, "it is a very great mistake to suppose that the safeguards of virtue or the temptations to vice are less numerous and powerful in the country generally, than they are here. The difference in favor of the country, so far as its moral condition and influences are concerned is altogether overrated."[38] Although mill girls lack immediate parental supervision, Barlett emphasizes how the corporation guards their morality since "among these [influences] are the example and watchful care and oversight of the boardinghouse keepers, the superintendents and the overseers. The moral police of all the establishments is vigilant, active and rigid."[39] As suggested by the strong language of "moral police," female operatives' virtue requires the absence of freedom since without external constraints they would undoubtedly stray from virtue's narrow path. Moreover, Barlett explains that the mill girls' wages benefit rural life since "many an aged father or mother, in the country is made happy and comfortable, by the self-sacrificing contributions from the affectionate and dutiful daughter here. Many an old homestead has been cleared of its

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[37] For Thomas Jefferson's classic statement on the virtues of an agrarian republic, see "Letter to John Jay," and "Letter to Jean Baptiste Say," in *Political Thought in America: An Anthology*, ed. Michael B. Levy, 2nd ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1992), 97-98, 101. In these letters, Jefferson makes his case against Alexander Hamilton's argument for a growing manufacturing sector as essential to American economic and political development.

[38] *A Vindication of the Character and Condition of the Females Employed in the Lowell Mills,* 20-1.

[39] Ibid., 19.

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encumbrances, and thus saved to the family by these liberal and honest earnings."[40] Such a view indicates how the mill girls' factory work acts as a brief extension of her familial responsibilities for which she still sacrifices her freedom and self-interest. Drawing explicitly on moral guardianship language, Barlett contends that the mill girls police themselves:

> The strongest guardianship of their own character as a class, is in their own hands, and they will not suffer either overseer or superintendent to be indifferent to this character with impunity. Their censorship is despotic, and no superintendent nor overseer could keep his hands, if he failed to remove an obnoxious or suspected individual, when the finger of censorship had pointed her out.[41]

If corporate overseers and boardinghouse keepers were not enough, mill girls enforce "the strongest guardianship" over each other in order to protect their virtue as a class, even resorting to "despotic" censorship and turning the immoral over to the overseers.

In contrast, Catharine Beecher finds "moral policing" by corporate agents or fellow operatives insufficient protections against the inherent vice of cities, especially mill towns. Despite twelve to fourteen hour work days, Beecher believes that mill girls still enjoy too much freedom to explore the temptations of theaters, dance halls, and shops that sell fancy clothes and candy. Men and women publically mingle and boardinghouse keepers permit men to visit late into the evening, contributing to "the increase of *flirtations* between young men of that and of adjoining places and the women, whom they

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[40] Ibid., 21.

[41] Ibid., 20.

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would never think of marrying."[42] For Beecher, the urban setting of Lowell promotes the temptations of vice by disregarding the separate spheres ideology that appropriately keeps women tied to their domestic duties in the home. Instead of calling for women's return to the farmhouse, however, she wants factory girls to teach school in the countryside, asking "if it would not be *better* to put the thousands of men who are keeping school for young children into the mills and employ the women to train the children?"[43] This employment sustains women's virtue by extending their maternal duties. As Beecher explains, "when all the mothers, teachers, nurses, and domestics are taken from our sex, which the best interests of society demand, and when all these employments are deemed *respectable*, and are filled by *well-educated* women, there will be no supernumeraries found to put into shops and mills, or to draw into the arena of public and political life."[44] The "best interests of society" demand strict sex segregation into male public and female private life. If women must work, then it must be in professions consistent with the socialization and nurturing associated with domestic duties. Here Beecher uses virtue and True Womanhood to show how Lowell jeopardizes female morality, fails to prepare women for marriage, and threatens social stability by abandoning the separate spheres ideology. Appealing to virtue, Beecher portrays Lowell as a challenge to the nation's status quo that

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[42] *The Evils Suffered by American Women and American Children: The Causes and the Remedy*. Presented in an Address to the Protestant Clergy of the United State, Ladies in Cincinnati, Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Other Cities (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1846), 9.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 12.

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requires women in the private sphere to protect against vice and guard morality. Beecher then employs moral guardianship not to suggest any major reform, but to call women back to the private sphere where they perform the patriotic duty of teaching young children and sustaining the separate spheres that allow for social stability. By drawing on the republican version of virtue and moral guardianship, Beecher's argument transforms Lowell defenders such as Dr. Barlett into challengers to the status quo and moral principles anchoring the American republic, revealing the powerful link between virtue and the preservation of women's domestic role as essential to America's success.

Similar to its role in the Puritan and republican contexts, and Tocqueville's democratic theory, religion - the primary means of elevating women's souls above the vice-ridden world - remains the gateway to women's virtue in the Lowell mill girls case. Religion plays a central role in Brownson and Barlett's arguments, though to completely different ends. In his attempt to defend the Lowell mill girls' virtue, Barlett counts fifteen religious societies for Lowell's 20,000 citizens, 5,000 of whom participate in Sunday school programs as teachers and assistants. As such, the doctor states, "this is no place for invidious comparisons, and I will make none; but I may ask with some confidence I think, whether these facts are very compatible with the existence of a corrupt, debased, licentious, and morally deteriorating population."[45] Mill girls, including Harriet Farley, use Barlett's "data" to defend their virtue in the nation and other countries, upholding the corporation's position on their moral condition. Quite to the contrary, Brownson's

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[45] *A Vindication of the Character and Condition of the Females Employed in the Lowell Mills,* 18.

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argument for structural economic change rests upon religious grounds. Brownson sees the Church and its wealth as the root of America's structural economic problems since its actions and moral principles justify the inequalities between the rich and poor. Elevating priests to positions of moral authority acts as the origin of inequality for Brownson:

> The real idea at the bottom of these institutions, is the control of individual freedom by moral laws, the assertion of the supremacy of moral power over physical force, - a great truth, and one which can never be too strenuously insisted on; but a truth which at this epoch can only enslave the mass of the people to its professed representatives, the priests.[46]

Although Brownson takes too deterministic a view of the priests' role in causing economic inequality, he clearly sees how "moral laws" control "individual freedom" and allow "the supremacy of moral power over physical force." Looking at morality from the standpoint of vice, the use of virtue to establish unequal power relations comes into focus. To change this, Brownson advocates the return to Christianity in the spirit of Jesus who defended the value of the poor and meek and promoted equality. At this juncture, Brownson makes a move similar to one employed by some "rebellious" mill girls. Seeing how morality perpetuates constraint and inequality, Brownson shifts to an alternative discourse premised on the democratic principles of freedom and equality found in the teachings of Jesus Christ. While a traditional view of religion as cultivating women's virtue served Barlett's defense of the Lowell mill girls, Brownson moved to grounds more suitable for achieving his more democratic goals.

This national debate, as represented here, reflects the moral tug-of-war between True Womanhood and working women. Recognizing that this took place within a

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[46] *The Laboring Classes*, 17.

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political discourse premised on moral guardianship helps to explain why the political stakes were so high: challenges to women's virtue threaten the secure future of American exceptionalism. For Elisha Barlett, attacks on the morality of the Lowell mill girls equated with a challenge to Lowell's utopian symbol of American industrialization. To justify its moral excellence, Lowell's defenders such as Barlett tried hard to show how the mill girls fit into the process of True Womanhood that would enable them to marry and become the nation's moral guardians. The Lowell mill girls' virtue acts to defend the political status quo in which even factory operatives still develop into protectors of morality, and pillars of social stability. More than Barlett, Catharine Beecher identifies the challenge mill girls present to True Womanhood, and, most importantly, the nation: "This ladies, is the general outline of the plan in which you are now invited to engage - a plan which aims alike to promote private and individual comfort, and national safety and prosperity - a plan which claims your attention, not only as a benevolent and religious enterprise, but preeminently as a *patriotic* one."[47] Beecher links women's domestic duties in the separate spheres ideology to America's "national safety and prosperity" that enables her to draw on the republican version of moral guardianship. Mill girls must go into teaching for "*patriotic*" reasons - a devotion to one's country that requires their exclusion from public life to ensure its exceptional future. Yet, Beecher departs from republican moral guardianship by permitting women a continued role in the work force as teachers, indicating how this profession became morally acceptable for women. Finally, Brownson's position that Lowell morally corrupted the mill girls and jeopardized their

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[47] *The Evils Suffered by American Women and American Children*, 15.

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marital prospects located these women on the side of vice as a threat to True Womanhood, creating a breach in moral guardianship. While Beecher sees the Lowell mill girls as vice-ridden, she calls for their return to private life by employing the republican appeal to women's patriotic duty. Brownson, in contrast, uses this opportunity to show how virtue and morality create barriers to equality and freedom, ultimately calling for vast changes to the economic structure. Among these three thinkers, Brownson's departure from virtue and True Womanhood led to the most radical break with moral guardianship, suggesting why his piece generates such vehement responses. Together, Barlett, Beecher, and Brownson represent three important voices in the national debate over female labor that provides the framework in which the Lowell mill girls determined their position in the moral tug-of-war over their virtue and vice.

## 5.4: The Lowell Mill Girls Debate Virtue and Vice

As this national debate got under way, the Boston Associates provided the financial backing for *The Lowell Offering* that began publishing articles written and edited by mill girls in 1841. *The Offering* served as a testament to the moral and intellectual cultivation of the Lowell mill girls and quickly achieved fame in America, England, and France. In 1845, Sarah Bagley challenged Lowell's rejuvenated utopian image when she took the stage before 2,000 workers at an Independence Day labor rally and publically rejected *The Offering*'s claim to represent the views of Lowell's female workforce. Bagley asserted that *The Offering* refused to publish articles that addressed issues of wages and poor working conditions, essentially denying many operatives a means for

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expressing their interests and concerns. Bagley's speech, published in local papers such as the *Lowell Courier*, ignites a debate that came to define the two camps of Lowell's female operatives during the 1840s. This debate captures how the mill girls themselves experienced two levels of contradiction first between their lived experience and the predominant belief system of True Womanhood, and second, between this belief system and the democratic principles of freedom and equality.

The two parties to this debate fall into the "loyalists" and "rebels," categories often used by historians to describe workers of this period. As Thomas Dublin explains, loyalists who "saw the interests of worker and employer as joined," rejected the labor movement while rebels who viewed worker and employer interests as conflictual embraced collective action as the only means of securing a decent standard of living and level of independence.[48] Applying this typology to the Lowell mill girls, Dublin states, "loyalists and rebels there were aplenty, however, in the Lowell mills in the 1840s. In fact the more articulate members of the two groups engaged in a spirited debate over the impact of industrial capitalism while they worked in the mills. In the pages of the *Lowell Offering* and the *Voice of Industry*, the two opposing camps addressed each other and anyone else who may have followed the debate."[49] While Dublin focuses on the factors that facilitated women's collective action in the labor movement, this analysis focuses on

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[48] *Women at Work*, 122-123. Here Dublin adapts the typology created by Paul Faler and Alan Dawley in "Working-Class Culture and Politics in the Industrial Revolution: Sources of Loyalism and Rebellion." *Journal of Social History* 9 (1975): 466-480.

[49] Ibid., 123.

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the use of virtue and vice within this debate to compare how loyalists and rebels understood their relationship to True Womanhood and moral guardianship. Virtue takes center stage since women's productive labor disconnected them from their domestic role, uprooting them from their source of virtue, moral superiority, and informal access to politics - their link to True Womanhood.

The loyalists who published in the *Lowell Offering* and followed the leadership of its editor Harriet Farley embraced virtue as a means of elevating the mill girls to the status of True Womanhood. Loyalists emphasized individual responsibility and supported corporate policies, essentially acting as moral guardians of the status quo established by the Boston Associates. In keeping with women's moral guardianship and virtue, loyalists dismissed women's participation in the labor movement and politics as well beyond the scope of women's sphere, and instead believed that the corporation would look after the mill girls' best interests. In contrast, rebels rejected corporate paternalism since it clearly failed to provide decent wages and working conditions. Following Sarah Bagley, who Philip Foner identifies as America's first female labor leader,[50] rebels joined the labor movement to fight collectively for structural economic change in the textile industry. Actively engaging in a struggle for political change broke with the passive defense of the status quo associated with moral guardianship. Yet, the rebels' usage of virtue and vice in their political discourse contains a greater degree of complexity than one might expect, suggesting the powerful pull of moral guardianship on all women during this period. This

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[50] *The Factory Girls*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 58.

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complexity arises from the fact that, unlike the loyalists who tried to fit into the standards of virtue established by True Womanhood, the rebels struggled with the incoherencies between their activist beliefs and the dominant Cult of True Womanhood. This view contrasts with Thomas Dublin's that the rebels "felt no need to demonstrate their own morality and dignity but took these qualities for granted."[51] To the contrary, the rebels' use of virtue and vice reveals a more complex and contradictory process. Recognizing the inherent conflict between their developing commitment to freedom and equality and the virtue-based discourse of True Womanhood, the rebels became "innovating ideologists" who distanced themselves from the Victorian belief system as they moved toward a more democratic language based on individual rights and collective action. Overall, their innovation evolved less from intention and more from the necessity of finding a way to express their reasons for fighting for change, freedom, and equality *as women.*

With this said, this analysis intends to avoid oversimplifying the positions of the loyalists and rebels. Speaking to the need of preserving the complexity of these debates, Lise Vogel states,

> a more integrated view would try to include both the progressive aspects of life in the mill towns and the very real problems that went along with factory work. Such a perspective acknowledges that it was possible to enjoy the independence and opportunities provided by mill life and at the same time resist the oppression. It corresponds with the actual experiences of the women operatives as depicted in the writings by and about them.[52]

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[51] *Women at Work*, 125.

[52] "Hearts to Feel and Tongues to Speak: New England Mill Women in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker*, eds. Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 65.

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Here Vogel accurately expresses the conflicts within the Lowell mill girls' lived experience that then translated into the internal conflicts between action and language expressed by the rebels who became "innovating ideologists." Rebels certainly expressed the push and pull between appreciating earning a wage and resenting decreased earnings and deteriorating working conditions. As a result, rebels crossed back and forth between virtue and vice, often employing moral guardianship to their political advantage, and eventually turning away from these arguments to achieve freedom and equality more effectively. By examining this debate, the complexities of virtue and vice within a moral guardianship discourse emerge by exploring five oppositional categories. The loyalists employ morality, elevation, guardianship, individualism, and passivity to defend the Lowell mill girls' virtue and to support the status quo, a position consistent with moral guardianship. In contrast, the rebels focus on materialism, equality, freedom, collectivism, and aggression to develop an alternative, more democratic conception of women's political identity that moves the virtue-based discourse into the background, and freedom and equality into the foreground of their political discourse.

Igniting this debate, the initial exchanges between Harriet Farley and Sarah Bagley indicate the powerful push and pull of moral guardianship on both the loyalists and rebels. In Bagley's defense of her Independence Day speech, she begins by praising the *Offering*, stating "We hold the literary merits of the *Offering* in high esteem - it reflects much honor upon its talented conductors - but still we were pleased to hear this exposition in relation

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to its true character and standing."[53] Bagley who previously contributed to the *Offering* and even belonged to the Lowell Improvement Circle, a women's group for writers who formed the core contributors to the magazine, breaks with the loyalists but appreciates some of the publication's merits. Yet, she rejects Farley's claim that the *Offering* operates independently of the corporation and serves the mill girls' best interests, stating that "we wish to have the Offering stand upon its own bottom, instead of going out as a united voice of the Lowell Operatives, while it wears the Corporation lock and their apologizers hold the keys."[54] Bagley clearly takes a strong stance against Farley and the *Offering* by essentially declaring them mouthpieces for the corporation. Perhaps recognizing the assertiveness of her stance, Bagley ends the article, explaining that "we would not charge her [Farley] with telling any untruth either directly or *indirectly,* lest we should be deemed *unlady-like*."[55] This statement indicates Bagley's awareness of the assertiveness of her charges against the loyalists - a serious push against the boundaries of True Womanhood - that then pull her back into making a claim for ladylike behavior to sustain the legitimacy of her position. Clearly locating herself in relation to True Womanhood, Farley expressly claims her moral guardianship and absolute reluctance to enter such a public debate:

> And this I dislike because I know, and can know but very little about party politics, and could not do myself or my cause justice in a discussion of this kind. Party politics and party politicians, as such have ever been my aversion - but I see not now how I can well avoid coming forward, unless I would be recreant to my

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[53] "Sarah Bagley Defends Her Speech," *Voice of Industry*, July 17, 1845 in *The Factory Girls*, 61.

[54] Ibid., 61.

[55] Ibid., 62.

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cause, and a deserter of my poor Offering in its last days.[56]

By declaring her "aversion" to "party politics and party politicians," Farley expresses her commitment to being a True Woman who views politics as morally corrupt, repugnant, and contemptible. Yet, Farley makes an astute political move by suggesting that Bagley's public accusations forced her into a political debate, a move that puts responsibility for Farley's public participation on Bagley's shoulders and preserves Farley's virtue. Both Farley and Bagley find themselves navigating difficult terrain as two women engaged in public debate, the very act of which contradicts the Victorian standards of passivity and domesticity. Though both challenge True Womanhood, Farley represents the loyalist approach characterized by a strong commitment to these standards of True Womanhood and a reluctance to participate in politics. Alternatively, Bagley makes no apologies and takes an assertive position while moving True Womanhood and virtue into the background.

This position is further supported by the loyalist and rebel claims to the moral guardianship of the Lowell mill girls. Essentially Farley is right when she states that "I know that my aim was like hers [Bagley's], to raise the operative."[57] While both camps aim to protect the moral value of the Lowell mill girls, they approach the issue from opposing perspectives: the loyalists focus on moral and intellectual cultivation while the rebels attend to material concerns. Describing the *Offering*'s mission, Farley explains that

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[56] "Harriet Farley Responds to Sarah G. Bagley," *Lowell Advertiser*, July 15, 1845, in *The Factory Girls*, 63.

[57] Ibid.

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"factory girls have their faults, as well as their virtues. The latter we shall point out to the community, the former to themselves. We should like to influence them as moral and rational beings - to point out their duties to themselves and to each other."[58] In a sense, the loyalists hope to act as the Lowell mill girls' moral guardians by exhibiting their virtue to the public while pointing out "their faults" to them so that they can rectify their moral shortcomings and perform their duty to other female operatives to elevate their class. As moral guardians, Farley explains why the *Offering* attends to moral, not material, issues: "With wages, board, &c., we have nothing to do - these depend upon circumstances over which we can have no control. One thing we must observe, and it is that, in our opinion, it is much easier to instill a feeling of self-respect, of desire for excellence, among a well-paid, than an ill-paid, class of operatives."[59] Though decent wages make it "easier to instill" good character in the Lowell mill girls, such matters are beyond their control. As such, loyalists focus on reforming the individual's moral character. As the *Offering* prepared to shut down in 1845, Farley sums up the paper's overall purpose by declaring that the contributors

> have shown that their first and absorbing thought was not for an advance of wages or a reduction of labor hours. They have given the impression that they were *contented* even with their humble lot. They have implied that it was quite as important to be good as to have good. They have striven for improvement of head and heart before that of situation. They have attended more to self-reformation,

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[58] "Editorial by Harriet Farley," *The Lowell Offering and Magazine,* Volume 3, (November 1842): 48.

[59] Ibid., 48.

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than to the reformation of society.[60]

Assuming the passivity of moral guardianship, the loyalists appear "*contented*" even with "their humble lot" and properly strive "for improvement of head and heart before that of situation." Their goal was to reform the self, not society. For the loyalists, morality trumps material concerns. Instead of addressing "unladylike" issues such as wages and working conditions, the loyalists try to build a closer association with True Womanhood as the moral guardians of the Lowell mill girls whom they hope to elevate to this virtuous status.

Due to their emphasis on moral over material concerns, the loyalists maintain the primary importance of women's infinite virtue that places as great a distance as possible between the mill girls and vice. Recall that infinite virtues emanate from the Puritan context in which women's moral worth derives from their primary devotion to God and a spiritual life. Religion remains a central issue for the loyalists who emphasize Elisha Barlett's account of the great number of churches, religious societies, and Sunday schools in which the Lowell mill girls participated. Indeed, as noted earlier, the corporation made regular church attendance a stipulation of employment in their "regulation papers." While the loyalists support the corporate position and view religion as necessary to the Lowell mill girls' virtue, they employed the virtue of self-sacrifice as a central means of justifying women entering the work force and maintaining their True Womanhood. Using sacrifice in this context requires some manipulation of this infinite virtue that usually entails a

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[60] "Editorial," *The Lowell Offering*, Volume 5, 1845 (Lowell, MA: Misses Curtis & Farley, 1845), 263.

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woman's transference of her mental and physical self to husband and family, whereas the Lowell mill girls were single women living away from their families. As a result, loyalists continuously portray the operatives as working in the factory "to support a widowed mother, or invalid father, or a family in some way deprived of their usual means of support; or they come to redeem a mortgaged farm."[61] Invoking the virtue of self-sacrifice strengthens the link between the Lowell mill girls and their domestic responsibilities to sustain their role in moving towards True Womanhood by also collecting "a wardrobe, or a sum of money to attend school, or get married."[62] Loyalists advised a level of self-sacrifice for the Lowell mill girls that remains consistent with this infinite virtue's association with women throughout early American political discourse beginning with the Puritans. For instance, in one of the moral tales printed in the *Offering*, the author tells the fictional story of how a woman loses her husband to the intemperance of alcohol that ultimately results in her death after which the Washingtonians, a temperance group, save him by awakening her husband to the church and virtue.[63] While the tale emphasizes the vice of intemperance, a major political issue of the day, the wife epitomizes self-sacrifice, similar to Tocqueville's pioneer woman, since she loses her life, an event that leads to her husband's recovery and the family's prosperity. The loyalists draw upon the religious origins of women's infinite virtue that

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[61] Harriet Farley, "Editorial." *The Lowell Offering and Magazine*, November 1842, Vol. 3, 239.

[62] Ibid., 240.

[63] Elizabeth. "Intemperance and Its Evils," *The Lowell Offering*, Vol. 5 (Lowell, MA: Misses Curtis & Farley, 1845), 69-70.

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links their moral worth with an unlimited capacity to sacrifice for others.

Alternatively, infinite vice also operates in the loyalist discourse when they portray the Lowell mill girls' capacity for vice as an all-encompassing evil that transcends physical reality. Wealth acts as the key vice for the loyalists who see the desire for money as greed and, for the mill girls a focus on the material instead of the moral world. In a way that resonates with the Puritan emphasis on spirituality and God, these loyalists urge the mill girls to avoid the material world to focus on the abstract arena of morality and religion. One *Offering* contributor declares, "virtue, honesty, happiness, all these, and whatever else that is pure and lovely, that may happen to interfere with their all engrossing pursuit, must be sacrificed at the shrine of Mammon."[64] By portraying wealth as a vice, loyalists put the mill girls who fought for better wages in the position of being morally corrupt and greedy women who failed to focus effectively on the important issue of morality. Of course, the loyalists never connected the vice of wealth to its pursuit by the corporation at the worker's expense. Instead, the loyalists relied on infinite virtue to link the mill girls with True Womanhood by emphasizing their religious devotion and virtue of self-sacrifice and distancing them from worldly concerns such as wages that they equate with the vice of greed. Located firmly on the side of morality and virtue, loyalists supported the corporate status quo and worked hard to fit the Lowell mill girls into the prevailing Victorian stereotype of the True Woman by relying on infinite virtue and vice to direct their attention towards morality and away from material concerns.

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[64] M.A. "Wealth and Poverty," *The Lowell Offering*, Vol. 4 (Misses Curtis & Farley, 1844), 151.

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Rebels reject this deterministic emphasis on morality at the expense of material concerns, contending that moral conditions will not improve without better wages and working conditions, including shorter work days and better ventilation in the factory. By ignoring these material issues, the rebels view the loyalists as failing to act as moral guardians of the mill girls' interests. Bagley, for instance, explains this position:

> as a guardian and friend of the moral and intellectual prosperity of factory operatives, the Offering should have taken high and independent grounds, recollecting that tedious, protracted labor, in a confined and impure atmosphere, was not calculated to fill its bright pages with free, healthy, and virtuous sentiments, and that the physical and intellectual well-being of the operatives are so indissolubly connected that one cannot suffer without injury to the other.[65]

If the loyalists truly aimed to help their fellow operatives, Bagley contends, they would address material concerns. Alternatively, the rebels see the inherent connection between "physical and intellectual well-being," a position indicative of their continued, though secondary, attention to morality. Further, Bagley implies that those who defend the operatives on both fronts act as better guardians of their interests. Unlike the loyalists, rebels fought for better wages and a work day reduction from twelve and a half to thirteen and a half hour days to ten, an effort called the Ten Hour Movement that mobilized the New England labor force in the 1840s. Such a work day reduction, rebels contended, would permit the mill girls the time to pursue moral and intellectual opportunities in Lowell. Despite their focus on the material, rebels maintained support for the moral and intellectual development of the female operatives. Sarah Bagley, for instance, states, that

> our department ["The Female Department" of the *Voice of Industry*] devoted to woman's thoughts will also defend *women's rights*, and while it contends for

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[65] "Lowell Offering," *Voice of Industry*, January 2, 1846. Boston Public Library.

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> physical improvement, it will not forget that she is a social, moral, and religious being. It will not be neutral, because it is female, but it will claim to be heard on all subjects that effect her intellectual, social, and religious condition [emphasis mine].[66]

Though not radical, this position indicates how the rebels begin to distance themselves from moral guardianship. By taking on material concerns, the rebels abandon a passive acceptance of "their humble lot" and a position of political neutrality by challenging corporate policies. Indicating an increasing independence and shift away from a virtue-based discourse, the rebels become defenders of "women's rights." Though still couched in moral guardianship, introducing "rights" as belonging to women begins to establish a political identity that includes the independence and freedom to make claims against those in power based on the particular interests of women who have rights and will demand change. This shift towards materialism pushes morality into a less central position and opens a space for seeing women's relation to public life from a more assertive, rights-based perspective.

While materialism pushed rebels towards challenging True Womanhood, the power of moral guardianship that defined women in the Victorian period pulled them back into the virtue-vice discourse in order to leverage the political power necessary to have their voices heard. Failure to locate themselves within this discourse of virtue also would immediately identify the rebels with vice and undermine their cause. Rebels relied more heavily on finite virtues and vices that linked morality to economic and material issues. Similar to the loyalists, the rebels expressed the moral value of female workers whom

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[66] "The Female Department," *Voice of Industry*, January 9, 1846. Boston Public Library.

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society considered vice-ridden due to their participation in the paid labor force. Yet, unlike the loyalists, the rebels emphasized the finite virtue of labor and hard work. To assign women's work a virtuous status, the rebels inverted the portrayal of the corporation as virtuous and the worker as vice-ridden. As one contributor to the *Voice* explains, "it is the idlest of all follies to prate about improving the condition of the working man, while to all practical intents he is doomed to split the wood, thrash the grain, and weave the cloth for a privileged order of society, with whom exemption from labor is the badge of respectability, and often the test of morality."[67] For the worker's lot to improve, society needs to rethink its moral standards that grant virtue to the wealthy who do not labor and vice to the workers who generate the goods necessary to society. By inverting virtue and vice here, the rebels then shift the argument for better wages away from greed and vice and onto the virtuous grounds of the workers' morally valuable contributions to society. Unlike the loyalists, rebels openly challenged the virtues of the wealthy and assigned this moral value to the workers.

Reflecting the workers' association with virtue, Huldah J. Stone, secretary for the Female Labor Reform Association calls women to the side of virtue, "Every *Female* who realizes the great necessity of a *Reform* and improvement in the condition of the worthy, toiling classes, and who would wish to place woman in the elevated station, intellectually and morally which a bountiful Creator designed her to occupy in the scale of being, is most *cordially* invited to attend and give her influence on the side of *virtue* and *suffering*

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[67] Harbinger. "Attractive Industry," *Voice of Industry*, August 14, 1847. Boston Public Library.

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*humanity*."[68] This statement reflects the role of moral guardianship in claiming virtue for the Lowell mill girls *and* a new dimension that breaks with True Womanhood. Stone calls for women's intellectual and moral elevation that God created for her, invoking infinite virtue and the elevation strategy, two views consistent with True Womanhood. Yet, more in the vein of Brownson, she advocates that virtue, especially Christian virtue, emanates from the fight against human suffering. Stone inverts virtue and vice by placing women who fought for reform on the side of virtue while the wealthy and those loyal to them actually engage in vice. Though framed in the finite context of material concerns, this virtue also takes on an infinite aspect that relates to how women act as moral guardians of American exceptionalism. Consider the following statement by Sarah Bagley in an article explaining the *Voice*'s position on labor reform: "The standard of virtue in Lowell, is far above that of any city of its size in the Union; pray God it may so remain. How can I find language to warn all my sisters, of the sacredness, the high charge devolving upon us in this respect? With us and us alone, rests the great responsibility of *the standard of female virtue in Lowell*."[69] The link to exceptionalism emanates from the view of Lowell as a "city upon the hill" in the sense of its superior virtue that also reflected America's industrial supremacy on, at least, moral grounds. Then Bagley invokes the double burden of moral responsibility as the Lowell mill girls become the guardians of their morality, the town's virtue, and ultimately America as an industrial model for the world. As Bagley and

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[68] "Notice," *Voice of Industry*, January 9, 1846. Boston Public Library.

[69] "To the Editor of the Voice, and Ourself," *Voice of Industry*, May 15, 1846, in *The Factory Girls*, ed. Philip S. Foner, 165.

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Stone rely on moral guardianship to have their voices heard, infinite virtue comes into play and materialist concerns slip into the background as rebels lay claim to their moral guardianship over the Lowell mill girls, Lowell, and implicitly America's exceptional industrial future. Invoking virtue in their discourse distances the rebels from their material goal of change and locks them in a double bind where they claim virtue and charge the loyalists and corporation with vice, a position that sustains hierarchy and the moral constraints on women, contradicting their goals of equality and freedom. Although at times this inversion of virtue and vice proved to be politically expedient and strategically necessary, the rebels recognized this approach's dead end nature that trapped them into making moral claims and failing to affect material change.

Freedom and guardianship represent the second tension surfacing in this debate that, at this juncture, returns to a point evident in Tocqueville's political thought: women's morality requires the absence of freedom. The loyalist's position mirrors this aspect of moral guardianship and a virtue-based discourse. The loyalists expressed this through their support for the corporation's "regulation papers" and boardinghouse system. Indicating their unquestioned support, Harriet Farley used Elisha Barlett's response to Orestes Brownson as her response to Madame Dumas' inquiry into the necessity for such strict regulations on the mill girls. Completely in agreement with Barlett, Farley sees the "moral police" and "despotic" oversight that mill girls exercise over one another as necessary to protecting them from vice and keeping them on virtue's narrow path.[70] In

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[70] "Editorial," *The Lowell Offering* (Misses Curtis & Farley, 1844), Vol. 4, Nov. 1843-Oct. 1844.

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this sense, the entire Lowell community acted as a replacement for the girls' parents and kept them under tight control. Reiterating the Boston Associates' position, Harriet Curtis, a co-editor of the *Offering*, explains that "early in life is this necessity impressed upon their minds, and perhaps too early are parental restraints and guardianship cast aside, and the homestead left for the busy, tempting and dangerous scenes of active life...No parent would ever permit a young girl to come to this city without placing her in charge of some one of more experience, who will watch over and counsel her."[71] Taking such stances also reflects how the loyalists viewed themselves as guardians over the mill girls by showing the need to accept these constraints to achieve virtue. The absence of freedom extends to long work days and a strict time-discipline regimen that greatly limited any free time. Loyalists then supported the role of guardianship in constraining women's freedom as necessary to their virtue.

The rebels attempt to use moral guardianship in order to acquire more freedom for the mill girls in terms of a ten hour work day. Bagley asks the question that drives their argument, "of what benefit is it to a large portion of the Lowell operatives, that lectures, institutes, and other means of improvement, exist in the city, while they are confined from twelve to fourteen hours in the mills, which paralyzes all relish for mental and social culture?"[72] Essentially the rebels argue for a shorter work day that would not give the Lowell mill girls unrestricted leisure but enough time to cultivate morality and intellect.

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[71] "Editorial," *The Lowell Offering,* Volume 5 (Lowell, MA: Misses Curtis & Farley, 1845), 279, 280.

[72] "Lowell Offering," *Voice of Industry*, January 2, 1846. Boston Public Library.

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Ultimately Bagley draws on the republican motherhood vision of moral guardianship to show how the corporate policy ultimately prevents women from preparing to be educated and moral mothers:

> at one time, they tell us that our 'free institutions' are based upon the *virtue* and *intelligence* of the American people, and the influence of the mother, to form and mold the man - and the next breath, that the way to make the mothers of the next generations virtuous, is to enclose them within the brick walls of a cotton mill from twelve and a half to thirteen and a half hours a day. How is it about intelligence...There cannot be found an individual who claims for himself common observation, who will admit that the operatives of our country have a suitable portion of time for improvement.[73]

Such a position enables rebels to portray the corporation as challenging True Womanhood and, most importantly, the future generations that require virtuous women to maintain American exceptionalism. Moreover, Bagley draws on the constraints as necessary to her position since, "we have a 'moral police,' so vigilant that it is hardly possible for an operative to be vicious, (if she is kept upon the corporation day and night,) talk about the 'virtuous and puritanical daughters of the New England farmers,' being kept within the walls of a cotton mill, longer than is consistent with their physical or intellectual condition, to keep them virtuous."[74] If the Lowell mill girls are truly to achieve virtue, then they must be permitted time to access lectures, libraries, tutors, music recitals, and religious services. Finally, Bagley claims a moral high ground by calling the virtue of her opponents into question. Bagley demands that "ye sticklers for decency and propriety" give the operatives a few more minutes for their meals and treat them decently, claiming that "how

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[73] Ibid.

[74] "The Ten Hour System and Its Advocates," *Voice of Industry*, January 16, 1846. Boston Public Library.

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miserable such evasions of the real system of labor looks to one who has examined its relative claims to the morality of the masses."[75] In this context, Bagley reflects Catharine Beecher's use of moral guardianship, not to sustain the status quo, but to call for the moderate reform of a two hour reduction in the work day. This reveals the powerful hold of virtue on women's political discourse. Within the dominant framework of moral guardianship available to the rebels, their fight for freedom in the form of a ten hour work day required them to invoke support for the "moral police" and republican motherhood in order to create an argument for change. By remaining within this discourse, women's morality requires severe constraints on their freedom. Despite this, the rebels attempt to use moral guardianship to leverage the power to change corporate policy and grant the mill girls more free time for moral and intellectual development. Even though attempting to use the virtue-vice discourse to effect change, it contradicts freedom and undermines the rebels' efforts to achieve this goal.

This debate's third tension between elevation and equality reveals the first significant break with virtue and moral guardianship in the rebels' political discourse. Loyalists retain their commitment to women's moral guardianship by using the elevation strategy to explain their emphasis on cultivating women's morality and intellect. Outlining the *Offering*'s mission, Harriet Farley summarizes the loyalist approach to the mill girls' morality:

> We believed that its indirect influence would be to do honor to the laborer, and especially the female laborer - and, certainly, its direct influence must be to elevate her, who, among laborers has been considered the Pariah - one of the lowest caste

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[75] Ibid.

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> - we mean *the factory girl*...We wished to show the world, that labor which has been thought most degrading, was not inconsistent with mental and moral cultivation. We would have taught a lesson to those in the Old World, who say that democratic institutions level downward, but *never* upward.[76]

As Farley expresses, loyalists aimed to "do honor to the laborer...especially the female laborer...who...has been considered the Pariah," an admirable goal that entails showing the moral value of the factory girl. Indeed, the *Offering* acted as a testament to the "mental and moral cultivation" of mill girls who worked in the factories and wrote essays, poems, and short stories for the magazine. The goal, of course, is "to elevate" the degraded mill girl to the standard of virtue established by the upper and middle class' True Womanhood. Although trying to couch this approach in the democratic terms of equality, or *leveling* upward, the loyalists perpetuate inequality by maintaining the hierarchy of the virtuous True Woman and the vice-ridden mill girl. By implication, mill girls must be vice-ridden since their virtue arises from elevating the mind and morals, not wealth, to the level of True Womanhood. Emphasizing this inequality, Harriet Curtis states, "We would not pull down the superior to the position of the more humble, but would raise the humble to the elevation of the superior. And this, we feel assured, can never be done but by the moral means of education and the all pervading influence of true Christianity."[77] By "true Christianity" Curtis does not mean Christ's teachings of equality and valuing the poor and the meek who shall inherit the earth. To the contrary, loyalists clearly see the superior -

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[76] "Editorial," *The Lowell Offering and Magazine*, November 1842 Vol. 3, 282, 284.

[77] "Editorial," *The Lowell Offering* Vol. 5, (Lowell, MA: Misses Curtis & Farley, 1845), 284.

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the wealthy and well-educated - as the models of virtue for the humble, inferior mill girls. After all, the loyalists seem to ask, why would anyone want to be lowered to the Lowell mill girls' status? By employing the elevation strategy then, loyalists hope to fit the mill girls into the mold of True Woman, at least in moral and intellectual terms, that maintains inequality between the superior and inferior.

The rebels, in contrast, make their first significant break with moral guardianship and the virtue-based discourse by arguing for a greater degree of equality between the rich and poor. Indeed, rebels reject the wealthy as a standard for virtue that undermines arguments for elevating workers to this status. Rebels such as Hudlah Stone emphasize the irony of celebrating the leisure class and degrading those who perform labor:

> the elevation and promotion of the real producers of our country to that station and standing in society which they were by a beneficent God designed to occupy! Too long have the virtuous poor been looked down upon as a lower race of beings, while vice and crime of the darkest hue, rolled in luxury and splendor through our streets - too long have our females been treated like as many senseless automatons in the kitchens of the purse-proud aristocrats of our Republic - and as a *part* of the machinery in our manufacturing towns and districts throughout the Union.[78]

In this vein, rebels drew on the common man theme of Jacksonian political discourse that portrayed labor as a virtue and embraced equality. Leveling the inequality between rich and poor captured the attention of reformers, including Orestes Brownson who sees that "we should look upon him [the worker] as a brother, an equal, entitled to our love and sympathy. We would feel ourselves neither above him nor below him, but standing up by

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[78] "Letter to the Operatives of Manchester," *Voice of Industry*, December 26, 1845. Boston Public Library.

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his side, with our feet on the same level as his."[79] Echoing this broader discourse, Bagley states, "we would not seek to bring them down (God knows that all such are already low enough in the scale of moral excellence) but we would seek to elevate, to ennoble, to raise higher the standard of moral excellence and human attainments."[80] Given the vice rebels attributed to the wealthy who disregarded human dignity for greed, rebels aimed to raise the rich to a moral standard equal to the poor. Striving for equality leads rebels to distance themselves from the virtue-based discourse as their goal of human equality clearly conflicts with the hierarchies inherent to virtue and vice. Yet, the moral dimension of this discourse remains and sustains some inversion of virtue and vice that still hopes to elevate - this time the rich to the level of the worker's morality. Nonetheless, advocating leveling and equality, not elevation, moved the rebels further outside of moral guardianship and a virtue-based discourse.

Equality assisted in resolving an important contradiction between the Lowell mill girls' lived experience as workers in the public sphere and the "separate but equal" ideology of moral guardianship. In short, rebels adopted the idea of equality presented by the rights-based approach of the *Declaration of Independence* that sets forth man's inalienable rights. Borrowing from the abolitionist movement, labor activists often used natural rights to argue for improved working conditions, a position that they linked to the slaves who picked the cotton transformed into fabric in the mills. By doing so, the rebels

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[79] *The Laboring Classes*, 6.

[80] "Report of Female Labor Reform," *Voice of Industry*, June 12, 1845. Boston Public Library.

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located their struggle in this broader fight for human rights that encompassed female and male laborers and Southern slaves. In an article describing the rebels' cause, Hudlah Stone articulates how equality relates to the rights-based approach to labor reform. Invoking the *Declaration*, Stone states that "'All men are created free and equal;' not free to starve, or work for a mere pittance, but free to work reasonable hours and receive a reward proportionate with the real production of the labor performed."[81] Freedom and equality include the material well-being of the workers. Since workers lack decent wages and "reasonable hours," the factory owners, who compare to masters on a plantation, deny workers freedom and equality, and thus the inalienable rights granted to all by the *Declaration*. Explaining this point, Stone states that the *Voice* hopes to:

> show every workingman and woman, their true position in society - their state of slavery to capital and capitalists under existing circumstances...'Tis true we are not exposed to public sale or liable to be beaten without mercy, but we *are* liable to be treated like as many idiotic females not knowing their right hand from their left...Awake then, awake fellow mortals and spurn from our midst these gross and anti-republican practices! They are a libel on the name - a disgrace to humanity.[82]

The corporation, in the end, contradicts the democratic principles of freedom and equality, ultimately undermining workers' inalienable rights. The *Voice* then aims to rectify this situation. As Hudlah Stone states, "the good effects of establishing a paper devoted entirely to the cause of ***human rights***, is already being realized and appreciated by a large portion of the community."[83] Before the *Declaration of Sentiments* of 1848, these rebels

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] "Our Cause," *Voice of Industry*, January 30, 1846.

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located the female workers' cause in the broader fight for equal rights for all human beings as promised by the *Declaration of Independence*. Taking such a position made the boundary between the male public and female private spheres more permeable than permitted by the "separate but equal" ideology of True Womanhood. By calling for *human* rights, freedom, and equality for men, women, and slaves - rights granted to humans regardless of social location or biological nature, the rebels introduced an innovation in the ideology available to women by breaking with a central tenet of Victorian beliefs and championing the cause of equality using human rights.

Continuing along this line of argument, rebels began to assert *women's* rights and equality between men and women within marriage and, to some degree, within society. To do so, rebels challenged religion and its moral law as the grounds for happiness and a morality consistent with equality. Many rebels shifted the discussion of morality from religious tradition to natural law. As one *Voice* contributor contends, morality should emanate from natural law, claiming that

> if happiness is the great law of man's nature it is right for man to do that which gives him the greatest amount of happiness provided he does not interfere with or take away the natural rights of others...And in order for man to act in obedience with these laws he must have his natural and inalienable rights. Immorality consists in man's violating the laws that govern him.[84]

Yet, this author continues, the current laws governing man are immoral since they contradict the inalienable right to happiness, leaving workers particularly degraded and impoverished since these laws justify the murder and robbery of the working man who slowly dies due to poor and dangerous working conditions and earns a pittance while the

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[84] "Morality," Part I, *Voice of Industry*, April 16, 1847.

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owners line their pockets with money. Stating the inequality of this situation, the author concludes that "all Laws that are enacted by men are at variance with the laws of man's nature, and that they are calculated to protect and enrich the few, while they enslave and impoverish the many."[85] Such laws contradict man's natural rights and equality, and as such justify the workers' rebellion since this situation puts their self-preservation at stake. In relation to this aspect of the reform discourse, rebels move even further away from the religious grounding of moral discourse by locating their argument in natural law. These rebels see morality as a tool to exercise power through laws that - when seen from a rights-based perspective - contradict natural rights, freedom, and equality. By moving out of the virtue-based discourse, the rebels make a strong case for change by showing how laws "calculated to protect the rich and few" contradict the nation's democratic commitment to inalienable rights for all.

Shifting to a rights-based discourse led rebels to advocate for *women's* rights in the form of more equality between men and women in marriage and, to some degree, society. The Lowell mill girls fought alongside male union members for a ten hour day, an experience the probably contributed to a sense of sexual equality that could transfer to the domestic sphere. A rights-based viewpoint correlates with this perspective by providing an alternative to religious positions that still upheld women's status as men's help-meets. Expressing this, one author rejects religion as the basis of women's virtue, declaring, "we repeat, *it is on the degree of civilization and refinement to which a nation has arrived,*

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[85] J.J. M. "Morality," Concluded, *Voice of Industry*, April 23, 1847. Boston Public Library.

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*and not on this or that superstitious faith that their privileges have depended.*"[86] Instead of morality or religion, this rebel turns to reason, equality, and rights as the point of origin for virtue. Based on this position, the author then puts forward a list of five "indefeasible and inalienable rights" for all women: education; equal respect for their sentiment, judgment, opinion, and tastes; the right to buy and sell, solicit and refuse, choose and reject as men do; input equal to men in all domestic decisions; and freedom in friendship, affection, free intercourse, and unrestrained expression of language and address.[87] By taking such a position, this author puts the rights discourse in the foreground. Yet, virtue still lingers in the background when, for instance, the author closes the piece stating, "at the same time, as females and rational beings, be wise, discreet, kind, conciliating, affectionate, benevolent, just, and virtuous. This is the line of conduct which common sense, and the eternal and immutable laws of nature, in mind and matter, distinctly prescribe, and imperiously commend us undeviatingly to pursue."[88] Returning to women's virtue turns this demand for rights and equality into a limited call for change within the confines of women's role, now justified by natural, not divine, law. Nonetheless, rebels argued for some equality within marriage. One *Voice* contributor explains, "woman has lost her individuality, in the marriage relation, she is no longer a living soul self-centered,

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[86] Martha, "The Rights of Women," *Voice of Industry*, May 8, 1846. Boston Public Library.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

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and responsible in a straight line to her God."[89] Claiming individuality and an independent soul combines democratic and religious perspectives, yet breaks with moral guardianship by challenging the infinite virtue of self-sacrifice and granting women an independent self. Such individualism, the author contends, generates freedom and diversity: "the rights of the soul are infinite expansion for all and a free field for each particular individuality. One mold is not made for all...Indeed the very end of the organism is to produce diversity, so that no person's destiny is fulfilled in molding it by another's, or by any outward law."[90] This position reflects the democratic values of the rights approach that leads to this argument for equality in marriage: "no relation is true that *makes* one soul subservient to another, none is true which does not rather tend to the elevation and equalization of both parties. The same lie which reveals itself in slavery, is at bottom of our marriage institution."[91] The presumption of women's inferiority to men grounds marriage in the same unequal, constrained, and oppressive relationship as slaves, a condition rebels viewed as contrary to natural rights.[92] Such a position for equal rights in marriage broke radically with the virtues of moral guardianship that require submissiveness, especially to one's husband. The rights-based approach, however, leads to an argument for equality, not women's moral superiority, the hierarchical position generated by virtue and vice.

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[89] Lynn Pioneer, "Rights of Married Women, *Voice of Industry*, August 14, 1847. Boston Public Library.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

[92] J.S. Mill will make a similar comparison between women's condition in marriage and slavery in *On the Subjection of Women* (1869).

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Moving that discourse to the background enables the rebels to see their place in the broader democratic struggle for equality and to address some issues particular to women such as sexual inequality within marriage.

Turning to the fourth tension between individualism and collectivism reveals a further break with moral guardianship and virtue in the rebels' discourse. Loyalists focused on the individual mill girl's morality and intellect as the source of change through her elevation to True Womanhood. While loyalists occasionally admitted that decent wages benefit virtue, they place almost the entire responsibility for worker dissatisfaction with their jobs at the mill girls' feet to avoid implicating the corporation in any wrong-doing. In an editorial, Harriet Curtis addresses the evils of the mills in the following manner, indicative of their individualistic approach. In dealing with the ventilation in the mills, Curtis concedes that it could be improved and that bad overseers existed, but most were good. All other evils pertain to the mill girls' moral character. Operatives who fall under men's charms and even get pregnant deserve society's unrepentant ill-will and those who fall into bad health do so because they fail to care for themselves properly by seeing a doctor and buying the clothing necessary to endure the factory conditions. Curtis further finds that the mill girls fail to help each other since "selfishness we have often thought to be a vice increased if not engendered, by factory life. Where all are so isolated, so self-dependent, and so liable to be jostled by the bold and overbearing from their places, the degrading motto,'Take care of Number One.'"[93] Finally, the mill girls are influenced by

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[93] "Editorial," *The Lowell Offering* (Lowell, MA: Misses Curtis & Farley, 1845), 281.

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"pernicious readings" that "imply that *the laborers can do no wrong.*"[94] Such "readings" blame the corporation and ignore the evils and vice of the mill girls. Instead of focusing on wages and working conditions, the mill girls must accept responsibility for the many evils that could be rectified by overcoming their vice. As Curtis explains, "throughout the wide world there is wrong, injustice and oppression; and we have no hope but it will remain so, until sin and selfishness have ceased. But will injustice and unkindness beget love and equity? Are *these* reformers pure? Are their garments unspotted? And are they not exhibiting the very spirit which only lacks the power to become the very axle of anarchy and tyranny."[95] Before "wrong, injustice, and oppression" can be alleviated, individual "sin and selfishness" must cease. Attacking these broader issues, as labor activists did, could lead to "anarchy and tyranny." Virtue then resides on the side of those who accept moral responsibility for themselves and their working conditions, a position linked to an individualism that contradicts the collective effort necessary for social change and, thus, supportive of the status quo.

Alternatively, rebels take a collectivist approach to problems at the mills that enables them to see the structural economic issues driving low wages and poor working conditions and to locate responsibility for change with the corporation not the individual mill girl. To force the corporation to change its policies, the rebels asserted their collective power when making declarations such as "many have already said, 'What can the operatives do to change the conditions of industry and reduce the hours of daily

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[94] Ibid., 283-5.

[95] Ibid., 284.

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labor?' We answer, 'what cannot the operatives do?' Our oppressors well know our strength. Ask the capitalist, if you please, what the operatives have done for him. Then we will ask what cannot we do for ourselves."[96] As union organizers and activists, the rebels knew that effective change would only come from collective numbers that pressured the corporation through "turn outs," rallies, petitions, and publications, not individual moral development. Calling the Lowell mill girls to battle, one rebel exclaims, "Operatives! Let us not be discouraged! Our cause is a righteous one, and we have every reason to believe it must triumph...No never shall we hold ourselves exempt from responsibility, never shall we cease our efforts in the warfare against evil."[97] Instead of blaming the mill girls for their condition, the rebels held the corporation responsible for its "evil." This collectivism abandons the individualism consistent with moral guardianship that limits any notion of change to each woman's cultivation of her morality and intellect to achieve virtue. Women's virtue pertains to this private, individual pursuit that erects a high barrier to generating the collective numbers to affect structural change. For the rebels, the gap between their reality of poor ventilation in the mills, twelve to thirteen hour workdays, a strict time-discipline regimen, short work breaks, and declining wages pointed to broader material and structural problems that far surpassed the limits of individual women's moral improvement. Defending the corporation's policies certainly would not shorten the workday or improve wages. Neither working harder, attending church

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[96] "Female Influence," *Voice of Industry*, September 11, 1846. Boston Public Library.

[97] Ibid.

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services, nor listening to public lectures would improve ventilation in the factories or grant women more free time from their jobs. Essentially, the Victorian ideology of True Womanhood and moral guardianship failed to explain why this situation existed and how they could change it when, indeed, this ideology prevented women from challenging the status quo. As a result, rebels broke with virtue and moral guardianship to solve a key contradiction between their lived experience as individual workers who suffered poor treatment at the mills and an ideology that emphasized enduring these conditions and supporting the status quo. Material changes required collective pressure on the corporations to improve workers' lives, a realization that forced rebels to move further away from the virtue-based discourse.

The fifth tension between submissiveness and aggressiveness encapsulates the beginning of a new political identity for women such as the rebels in Lowell who broke with True Womanhood's passivity. The loyalists, of course, accepted corporate policy in their defense of the status quo. Explicitly defending the factory owners, Farley states that "we do not believe they possess these faults in the degree they would have us represent them; we believe they are as just, generous, and kind as other business men in their business transactions. Their own interest occupies their first thought, and so we find it elsewhere."[98] To defend the status quo, loyalists blame the mill girls for any evils in the mills, attribute calls for wage increases to the vice of greed, and refuse to see any structural economic problems due to their narrow focus on moral elevation as a means to

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[98] "Editorial," *The Lowell Offering and Magazine*, Volume 3, November 1842, 284.

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social change. The loyalists' submissiveness results in their claim to political neutrality that Farley explains in the following terms: "this was the first aim of the Offering - to prove to others that we could understand, reason, reflect, and communicate. To convince people we must gain access to them: to do this as universally as possible it was necessary that the magazine should be a neutral work."[99] The *Offering* typified a magazine by and for True Women with its literary and cultural essays that avoided any politically contentious issues. Emphasizing this last point, Harriet Curtis states that "we did trust to go on our way without giving offence to any, and without involving ourselves, or magazine, in the thousand and one questions which are exciting the public mind."[100] As such, the loyalists resent Sarah Bagley for drawing them into a public debate in which they had to defend their neutrality and try to deny the corporation's influence over their editorial decisions. Placing the loyalists in this position forced them to engage with politics explicitly. Expressing their anger at this situation, Curtis goes on the attack, declaring that "if they have been honest in their conduct, we sincerely believe them actuated by a fatal spirit of radicalism, which may destroy but never can elevate. And if they have been incited by impure motives, may they see and repent of their errors...our aim was 'to elevate the humble, and show that good might come out of even Nazareth.'"[101] Even if the rebels' motives are pure, their "fatal spirit of radicalism" challenges the status

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[99] "Editorial," *The Lowell Offering*, Vol. 5 (Lowell, MA: Misses Curtis & Farley, 1845), 264.

[100] Ibid., 284.

[101] Ibid.

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quo and, thus, leads to destruction of True Womanhood. Embracing an aggressive posture, the rebels expose the *Offering*'s neutrality as false given their clear political commitment to the corporation's position. As Bagley states, "the Offering has forgotten its *neutrality* and taken sides with the oppressor, in denouncing the operative's friends, as 'levelers,' 'exciters' and 'radical meddlers,' while it has glossed over and covered up the many gross evils which the factory system is entailing upon society and the world."[102] In defending "the oppressor" and attacking fellow mill girls, Bagley reveals a strong conservative position hidden by the loyalists' virtue discourse that promotes the status quo and gives its adherents the appearance of neutrality since their morally sanctioned view remains beyond question.

In contrast to the loyalists, the rebels engage in an aggressive discourse that often takes on a revolutionary overtone. Referring to the valiant spirit of the American Revolution, one *Voice* contributor captures the rebels' political posture, stating that "The blood of the revolution has not yet been washed from the hearts of our fathers and brothers. We look upon Labor Reform as that which tends to the elevation of our race in general and to the improvement of the condition of women in particular."[103] Not only will the rebels change the class structure through "Labor Reform," but they will fight to improve women's condition as well. Capturing the emphasis on collective struggle for massive change, another contributor calls for the workers to "strive more ambitiously to

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[102] "Lowell Offering," *Voice of Industry*, January 2, 1846.

[103] "Correspondence," *Voice of Industry*, November 13, 1846. Boston Public Library.

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reorganize society...Do not be discouraged at any obstacle which may be placed to frustrate your plans, but take courage; and let your motto be Onward! Onward! Until you see all ready and willing to join in the great and mighty work of National Reform; and may the fruits of your labor be rewarded by the hand of Omnipotent power."[104] Such an aggressive position operates to bring down "any obstacle" including the corporation's overwhelming power. One rebel fully expresses their break with the passive support of the status quo amidst so much injustice:

> And since in this reform movement our aid had been solicited, and our influence is so much needed, shall they be withheld from the side of truth and right? No, never while we have hearts to feel and tongues to speak will we silently and passively witness so much that is opposed to justice and benevolence; - never, while a wretched being is crying to us for succor, from the alleys and dens of our cities - from our crammed manufactories, and workshops, from poverty stricken garrets and cellars, - never, with the awful facts of female degradation, under our present system of industry, staring us in the face; never while we are conscious of powers undeveloped, affections hemmed in, energies paralyzed, privileges denied, usefulness limited, influence impaired, honors forfeited, and destiny thwarted.[105]

This passage reflects a shift away from virtue as the author frames this litany of poor social conditions in terms of truth, right, and justice not vice, evil, and sin. Such injustices require women to stand against the industrial system and refuse to "silently and passively witness so much that is opposed to justice and benevolence." Ultimately this fight entails women's freedom to develop their powers, express their affections, release energies, gain privileges and honors, exercise unlimited usefulness and influence, and pursue their

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[104] "To the Labor Reform Association in Manchester, *Voice of Industry*, November 13, 1846. Boston Public Library.

[105] "Female Influence," *Voice of Industry*, September 11, 1846. Boston Public Library.

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destiny. Taking collective action to fight aggressively against injustice broke the rebels free of virtue's confining construct that limited women to the passivity of morally guarding the status quo.

Differing responses to the contradictions of being mill girls in a culture defined by True Womanhood shaped the positions of the loyalists and rebels. Loyalists solved the contradiction by fitting into the virtue-based discourse of moral guardianship by focusing on morality, enforcing guardianship, employing the elevation strategy, and promoting passivity and individualism. Ultimately their position defends the status quo and locates those who did not assume this posture on the side of vice as threats to stability and social order. Despite their initial efforts, rebels found moral guardianship and virtue insufficient to the task of resolving the contradictions between their lives and True Womanhood as well as between True Womanhood and their democratic goals. At the outset, the rebels tried to invert the virtue-vice relationship by portraying corporate greed as immoral in comparison to the worker's virtue of hard work. Yet, this inversion essentially maintains the hierarchy of the superior virtuous class and the inferior and vice-ridden which contradicted the rebels growing hopes for freedom and equality from such confining constructs. At this juncture, the rebels became "innovating ideologists" who no longer tried to fit the mill girls into True Womanhood and turned towards democratic principles antithetical to the virtue-based discourse for women premised on morality, religion, and domesticity. To do so, the rebels adapted the Jacksonian era's democratic discourse to fit their particular context, focusing on natural rights, freedom, equality, and justice to begin creating a rights-based discourse geared towards social change. Though rebels drew on

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this democratic ideology, their innovation particularly surfaced when they applied these concepts to *women* whose specific condition differed from male workers and slaves. Rebels such as Bagley, Stone, and the *Voice*'s many contributors articulated a conception of *women's rights* independent of the labor, temperance, and abolitionist movements, carving out a space for a democratic ideology specific to women. Most importantly for our purposes, the rebels' shift towards rights reveals the high barriers to change, freedom, and equality erected by virtue and True Womanhood, an ideology incapable of meeting the democratic goals of the rebels who, instead, adapted a rights-based discourse to fight for the Lowell mill girls.

## 5.5: Conclusion: The Virtues of Vice

By 1850, Lowell no longer resembled the utopian mill town that Chevalier visited in the early 1830s. Most mill girls had left Lowell for better paying jobs in teaching and those who remained became alienated from the unions as politicians appealed to the male membership as a voting block, a move that excluded women who still lacked the right to vote, making them largely irrelevant to politicians and unions.[106] Labor leaders such as Sarah Bagley became the first woman to operate a telegraph, returned to the mills briefly,

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[106] Paula Baker. "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780 - 1920," *The American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984) 3: 646-7. Highlighting the gendered character of this context, Baker states that "the right to vote was something that men held in common. And, as class, geogprahy, kinship, and community supplied less reliable sources of identification than they had at any earlier time, men could at least define themselves in reference to women. Parties were fraternal organizations that tied men together with others like themselves in their communities, and they brought men together as participants in the same partisan culture" (628).

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and then departed Lowell forever.[107] In part due to the Lowell mill girls' labor activism, the Boston Associates abandoned recruiting single women and the boardinghouse system. Instead, they hired recent Irish immigrants who gladly worked for low pay and initially accepted the poor working conditions. Although the Lowell mill girls departed, their activism remained an inspiration for the female operatives who continued working in and striking at factories along the East coast. Moreover, the debate between the loyalists and rebels informs this analysis of how these working women navigated the terrain of True Womanhood that defined women in Victorian culture. The loyalists locate the mill girls in this belief system while rebels experience the push and pull of the virtue-based discourse, ultimately pushing it to the background and pulling a rights-based discourse into the foreground. The nature of this struggle between virtue and rights still shapes feminist approaches to understanding how women's morality defines their political identity. As such, this conclusion considers how the rebels' capacity to become "innovating ideologists" may inform contemporary feminist theory.

First, what can be learned from the innovation of the rebels who applied the Jacksonian era's evolving democratic ideology to women, effectively breaking with the tenets of moral guardianship and virtue? Clearly, the rebels recognized the serious limitations that virtue placed on their goals to achieve freedom and equality since this concept constrains women and triggers unequal power relations between the superior virtuous and the inferior vice-ridden classes. Even when the rebels tried to invert the

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[107] For an account of Sarah Bagley's career, see Bernice Selden's *The Mill Girls: Lucy Larcom, Harriet Hanson Robinson, Sarah G. Bagley* (New York, NY: Athenum, 1983), Book Three.

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relationship by claiming virtue for workers and vice for the wealthy, the debate devolved into one side claiming virtue and identifying the other with vice. Given the predominant view of working women as morally corrupt and the corporation's power to shape public opinion, the rebels found themselves on the side of vice despite their best efforts to avoid this situation. This context reveals how virtue discourse perpetuates inequality as each side must claim the dominant or subordinate moral position, constrains both groups to traditional virtuous standards, and prevents the independence and assertiveness to challenge this framework from the inside. Even as the rebels moved towards a rights-based discourse, they never escaped the pull of virtue and moral guardianship. Yet, they began to shift from religion to natural law as an alternative moral grounding, loosening the ties to moral guardianship that bind women to protecting America's exceptional future. Shifting to a rights discourse reveals the double standard operating in moral guardianship that assigns women a double burden of moral responsibility while denying them the political power to fulfill this responsibility. From a rights perspective, such responsibilities belong to all citizens who freely and equally engage in forging the nation's future.

Second, this debate makes the power dynamic of virtue and vice quite transparent. Identifying the power of virtue can be difficult because this concept appears to be neutral or a "given" since it represents the existing power elite's moral values. In this case, the Boston Associates granted virtue to the Lowell mill girls, despite the prevailing Victorian belief system, in order to establish a dependable, controllable, and inexpensive workforce. Loyalists accepted and supported their position that allowed them to claim neutrality on political issues since they agreed with the status quo. Those who challenge this position

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then challenge virtue and find themselves automatically associated with vice. Similar to Puritan and republican women, the political community attributed vice to the rebels who threatened Lowell's power structure and women's moral guardianship. Unlike their predecessors, the rebels turned to rights as a means to escape their association with vice that diminishes women's political power in a discourse defined by virtue.

This political moment illustrates the virtue of vice. When society labels women "rebels" or "witches," for that matter, this association with the immoral, vice-ridden, and evil, opens up a liberatory space that facilitates the opportunity for these women to become "innovating ideologists." Unlike virtuous women, those affiliated with vice experience the oppressive power of this dualism that perpetuates inequality and constraint, enabling them to see through the neutrality created by virtue's association with the status quo. As a moral standard, vice also represents the antithesis of virtue's political positions premised on passivity and individuality, fostering an alternative, active political identity for women. By default, assigning vice to women locates them outside the moral guardianship framework and puts them in a more active relationship with politics. Yet, vice does not enable an escape from the virtue-based discourse. Seeing the power dynamics in play however reveals the futility of trying to change this discourse from within that leads to "innovating ideologists." For the rebels, Jacksonian era democratic discourse offered a viable alternative to moral guardianship and virtue that they began adapting to solve the contradictions between their lives and the True Womanhood belief system and their belief in freedom and equality. Seeing the barrier that virtue erected to reaching their political goals, the rebels turned to a rights-based discourse. For women, then, vice possesses the

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virtue of clarifying how this moral discourse oppresses women *and* simultaneously creates a space for ideological innovation as the search for alternatives to virtue and moral guardianship begins.

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# GUARDIANS OF MORALITY:
# A CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF VIRTUE IN RELATIONSHIP TO WOMEN AND MORAL AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

by

**JOCELYN MARIE BORYCZKA**

VOLUME II

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# PROLOGUE TO PART II

## From Moral Guardianship to Traditional Womanhood: Virtue & Vice in the Discourse of the Sexual Revolution & Contemporary Political Theory

During the Sexual Revolution, feminists engaged in a cultural battle similar to that of the radical Lowell mill girls who protested against the Boston Associates for shorter hours and better working conditions in the 1830s, an aggressive political posture that challenged Victorian True Womanhood. Second wave feminists, in a similar vein, took their fight for equal rights and freedom to the streets, media, Supreme Court, and Congress. With the first wave and the Nineteenth Amendment behind them, feminists confronted other areas of gender inequality that included norms, mores, and, of course, morality, leading them to attack the updated Victorian symbol of Traditional Womanhood, the latest version of moral guardianship revived in the 1950s to encourage women to return to domesticity after World War II. Unlike the radical Lowell mill girls, the second wave feminists identified sexuality as a primary force in denying women freedom through moral constraint. Sexual liberation represented a central means for gaining control over women's lives and achieving full citizenship. To do so, feminists abandoned the feminine virtues of self-sacrifice, purity, chastity, and modesty, a move that aligned them with vice and presented a serious threat to the status quo. As a result, women's virtue and vice regained a place on the political agenda as the feminist challenge to moral guardianship generated a threat to the status quo and America's exceptional future. Tremors shocked

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the nation's conservative core, stimulating the rise of the Moral Majority, Christian Right, and Eagle Forum that reflected a growing cultural conservatism. This battle over morality translated into political theory where communitarians embraced virtue as the cure for the social disorder caused by the 1960s and feminists cultivated an alternative ethics based on relations and emotions that reflected women's experience with morality as care-givers.

Initiating this major shift in the political and cultural terrain of American political discourse, second wave feminists made sex a "hot button" political issue during the 1960s that galvanized women to organize across the country. They responded, in part, to the gauntlet thrown down by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that named women's "problem" as an identity crisis involving their sexuality. Morality contributes to the "problem" because, as Friedan explained, American society still adheres to a residual Victorian image of women as virtuous, sexually passive, biologically determined housewives bound to their social function by oppressive moral constraints, and various economic, social, and political pressures. Traditional Womanhood then became the iconic figure of women's oppression. To free women from this web of constraints, feminists envisioned their fight for liberation as "the struggle against the limitations of our reproductive function which minimizes our personal potential, against the concepts which make us solely responsible for raising children, against the rigid social mores which limit our contribution to the world."[1] Freedom and equality for women then required radically breaking with traditional sex roles that first wave feminists usually left unchallenged and

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[1] "What is Liberation? *Women: A Journal of Liberation*," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 68.

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often embraced. As part of this struggle, second wave feminists identified virtue as a concept that prevented their liberation from women's "reproductive function" and making a greater "contribution to the world."

To reach their liberatory goals, many feminists believed that nothing less than a sexual revolution would do. In claiming that "Our Revolution is Unique" (1968), Friedan frames "the real sexual revolution" as "the emergence of women from passivity, from thingness, to full self-determination, to full dignity."[2] Women, disgruntled with the legislators and political activists who ignored their issues, rallied around the slogan "the personal is political" to transform personal, intimate issues related to sex and family such as abortion, domestic violence, and rape into matters of heated political debate. As a result, the boundary between public and private life that traditionally made women's issues politically invisible shifted as feminists attacked the "problem" from various angles. Spearheading liberal feminism, some followed Betty Friedan's lead and organized the National Organization for Women (NOW) in order to fight for gender equality in the halls of Congress.[3] Others joined radical groups such as the Redstockings, The Feminists, or

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[2] In *Political Thought in America: An Introduction*, ed. Michael B. Levy (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1992), 469.

[3] Broadly representative of liberal feminist interests, NOW organized, in large part, as a response to the lack of enforcement by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that banned sex discrimination in the workplace. For an overview of NOW's early development, see Flora Davis' *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), Chapters 2 and 3. For a clear statement on this position and liberal differences with radical feminists, see Betty Friedan's speech to the 1968 National Organization for Women's (NOW) conference, "Our Revolution is Unique," in *Political Thought in America: An Anthology*, ed. Michael B. Levy (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1992), 466-472.

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New York Radical Feminists. These groups focused on dramatically transforming the private sphere, even calling for abolishing the family completely by replacing mothers with reproductive technologies such as test tubes. Many also challenged the objectification of women by protesting events such as the 1968 Miss America beauty pageant where, standing outside the convention hall, about two hundred women threw curlers, hairspray cans, bras, girdles, and other women's beauty supplies into the Freedom Trash Can. Some such as Mary Daly attacked the Church as a patriarchal institution and developed an alternative religious and moral perspective reflective of women's spirituality. Following the turmoil of the late 1960s and 70s, still other feminists began challenging the Sexual Revolution during the pornography debates of the 1980s that resurrected Traditional Womanhood as positively benefitting women by shielding them from male harassment and valuing their role as mothers and care-givers. Despite the roller-coaster ride that the movement took during these decades, it successfully, for better or worse, placed sex and women's virtue, previously seen as marginally related to public life, on the nation's political agenda.

While Tocqueville's pioneer woman of the 1830s symbolizes the construction of moral guardianship throughout the first half of American political history, the Sexual Revolution's burial of Traditional Womanhood captures the complicated relationship of women to morality within the second wave movement. As with the two camps of the Lowell mill girls, some feminists, similar to the radicals, wanted to break completely with virtue and moral guardianship while others, similar to the loyalists, valued women's motherhood and moral superiority, using this virtue tradition to leverage political power in

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relationship to men. Capturing the radical side of this moral perspective, radical feminists began their political movement with a demonstration against the Vietnam War at Arlington Cemetery called the "Burial of Weeping Womanhood." A pamphlet inviting women to attend read, in part, as follows:

> Don't Bring Flowers...
>
> Do be prepared to sacrifice your traditional female roles. You have refused to hanky-wave boys off to war with admonitions to save the American Mom and Apple Pie. You have resisted our roles of supportive girlfriends and tearful widows, receivers of 'regretful' telegrams and worthless medals of honor. And now your must resist approaching Congress playing these same roles that are synonymous with powerlessness. We must not come as passive suppliants begging for favors, for power cooperates only with power...Until we have united into a force to be reckoned with, we will be patronized and ridiculed into total political ineffectiveness. So if you are really sincere about ending this war, join us tonight and in the future.[4]

Initially these feminists geared their movement towards rejecting Traditional Womanhood, a role that called on their unquestioned support for husbands, sons, and boyfriends as they headed off to war. This position, however, represents a deeper political challenge to moral guardianship, indicated by their recognition of women's need to abandon their "traditional female roles...these same roles that are synonymous with powerlessness" and "total political ineffectiveness." Radical feminists broke with the passive and submissive political status consistent with "Weeping Womanhood." As such, these feminists, like the

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[4] Radical Women's Group. "Burial of Weeping Womanhood," in *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), 25.

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radical Lowell mill girls, act as "innovating ideologists" who, in this case, used sexual liberation to resolve the contradiction between their political goals and a constraining moral belief system.

Other feminists, however, similar to the loyal Lowell mill girls, held tight to women's traditional relationship with virtue and moral superiority. Religious feminist such as Mary Daly, despite her attempt to revise virtue as a means of generating a new feminist ethics, fails to do so by remaining trapped in the virtue-vice dualism. Anti-pornography feminists often resorted to moral guardianship by supporting Traditional Womanhood as a moral barrier against male aggression and assuming the political posture of protecting women against this source of moral decay. Feminists who rejected their position became aligned with vice as proponents of women's objectification and oppression. In both cases, religious and anti-pornography feminists work within the parameters of the virtue-vice dualism that prevents them from countering the larger moral framework designed to maintain moral guardianship for women. Remaining aligned with this belief system, however, commits women to supporting the very status quo that perpetuates women's oppression and denies them full citizenship.

Indicating the powerful threat posed by feminists who abandoned moral guardianship, conservatives and anti-feminists mounted a backlash against the Sexual Revolution and the advances made by women during the 1960s and 70s. Mobilized by the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the New Right continues to dominate the moral debate that currently manifests in the "family values" rhetoric. Within the broader scope of American political culture, the current backlash represents a

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redeployment of moral guardianship to commit women to the status quo as virtuous mothers as a response to the vice of women expressing discontent and demanding freedom, a strategy reflective of Puritan ministers and magistrates who crusaded against witches, women, like some second wave feminists, who threatened social decay. To engage with the theoretical dimension of this contemporary discourse, the communitarian and feminist approaches to virtue in political theory offer a means for assessing how the conceptual history of women's virtue informs the future of democratic and feminist ethics. Communitarians such as Alasdair MacIntyre, William Galston, and Amitai Etzioni rely on virtue to resurrect social order by binding the people to traditional moral understandings and social institutions, all of which imply a return to moral guardianship for women. Hoping to offer an alternative to communitarian morality, feminist care theorists, in particular, struggle with virtue as a concept within their endeavor to develop a feminist ethics based on care, emotions, and relationships. Overall, this analysis finds that feminists need to abandon virtue, a concept that this conceptual history illustrates constrains women from achieving full citizenship.

In contrast to Puritan, republican, and Victorian era women, contemporary feminists clearly identify the contradiction between the prevailing moral belief system based on virtue and vice and women's liberation. Although some remain wedded to the moral guardianship that preserves the status quo promoted by conservatives, communitarians, and loyalist feminists, others embrace the heritage of the radical Lowell mill girls to challenge this system as "innovating ideologists." According to moral guardianship's dualistic logic, these feminists become identified with vice, an under-

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explored moral standpoint that involves political danger but also serves as a source of political power for women. Vice enables women to escape the constraints of virtue which facilitates their ability to see its oppressive operations from a critical distance. Although assuming a standpoint of vice fails to dismantle the virtue-vice dualism, it locates women in a middle ground, a space conducive to exploring alternatives for formulating a liberatory morality consistent with feminist and democratic political goals.

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# CHAPTER SIX

## Religious Feminism & The Sexual Revolution: Finding the Moral Middle Ground Within the Virtue-Vice Dualism

### 6.1: Introduction

Continuing into the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s, religion plays a critical role in the conceptual history of women's virtue and vice. For the Puritans, women's virtue emanated from an infinite capacity for piety, or an unwavering dedication to God, while Eve's original sin rooted women in infinite vice that served to justify the witchcraft trials. The infinite dimension of virtue and vice evolves from its religious origins that infuse women's morality with an all-encompassing capacity to be morally responsible for America's exceptional future, a sentiment that John Winthrop articulated as "the City Upon the Hill." Republicans translated this religiously oriented infinite capacity into women's explicitly political responsibility for the nation's common good as its moral guardians whose virtue and vice dictated whether or not America would conquer or succumb to the threats of political decay. As Jacksonian democrats embraced the Victorian ideology of True Womanhood, Alexis de Tocqueville captured the other-worldly, spiritual nature of American women in the pioneer woman whose infinite capacity for sacrifice made her invaluable to the family and nation-building process. Moreover, Tocqueville explains that religion infuses women's morality in the private sphere of the increasingly secular democracy, granting women the politically significant role of shaping the mores that stabilize a chaotic political culture. As the nation debated the morality of working women such as the Lowell mill girls, religion served to bind female operatives to society's virtuous standards by justifying the "moral police" and mandating church attendance. At each of these historical junctures, religion acts as a defining feature of

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women's virtue and vice, particularly as a tool for developing their infinite moral capacity that holds them to the double burden of moral responsibility for the common good and the nation's exceptional future.

This chapter turns explicitly to religion in a manner similar to the economic focus of Chapter Five on the Lowell mill girl debates. Similar to the rebellious faction of the Lowell mill girls who challenged Victorian womanhood, second wave feminists such as those discussed in this and the next chapter rejected the Traditional Woman of the 1950s. Grappling with the fact that the 19th Amendment failed to ensure gender equality, second wave feminists shifted their attention from formal laws to mores that represented the arena of informal, though not less constraining, restraints emanating from social institutions, including family and religion. In this sense, the focus of second wave feminists resonates with Alexis de Tocqueville's position that granted women political significance as shapers of mores, which, of course, arose from their intimate connection to religion, the subject of particular interest here. During the Sexual Revolution, religion and the Church gained renewed public attention as many feminists targeted this patriarchal institution for staunchly supporting the woman's traditional role as the moral pillar of family and society and rejecting sexual liberation. While many feminists dismissed religion as an unwavering obstacle to their freedom, others viewed spirituality as essential to liberation and either fought to reform the Church or recover woman-centered spiritual practices. Within this complicated political climate, religious feminism evolved as a means to redefine women's spirituality and, with it, their morality. Although often pushed to the sidelines, second wave feminism's religious component holds particular importance to this conceptual history of women's virtue and vice since these feminists turned their attention to the Bible and morality, two central means for justifying women's subordination in American political history. Redefining spirituality, the Church, and biblical stories from a feminist perspective led some such as Mary Daly to negotiate the terrain of virtue and vice that,

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though this chapter will argue, fails at its attempt to revision these concepts, reveals a space between these two dualistic concepts worth further investigation - the middle ground.

Despite its historical oppression of women, religious feminists argue that religion directs attention to the spiritual dimension of women's liberation. Carol Christ, for instance, maintains that the Goddess offers an alternative focal point for women's spiritual empowerment[1] while Luisha Teish explores the positive aspects of Voodoo, a religion that values women's participation and leadership.[2] Feminist theologians such as Toni Craven provide alternative interpretations to those of the Church about women's role in the Bible.[3] Although approaching religious questions from various perspectives, these feminists share a belief that women's liberation requires spirituality. Representing the radical perspective of religious feminism, Mary Daly expresses the general critique of organized religion and the hope of spirituality:

> All of the major world religions function to legitimate patriarchy...The myths and symbols of Christianity are essentially sexist...The women's revolution is not only Antichurch. It is a postchristian spiritual revolution...The women's revolution is concerned with transvaluation of values, beyond the ethics dominated by The Most Unholy Trinity...The presence of women to ourselves which is *absence* to the oppressor is the essential dynamic opening up the women's revolution to human liberation.[4]

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[1] See "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," in *Women and Values: Readings in Recent Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Marilyn Pearsall (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1999), 264-272.

[2] See "Women's Spirituality: A Household Act," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New Burnswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 318-338.

[3] For a collection based on this perspective, see *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, ed. Ann Loades (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990).

[4] "The Qualitative Leap Beyond Patriarchal Religion," in *Women and Values: Readings in Recent Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Marilyn Pearsall (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1999), 252-3.

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As suggested by Daly's words - "transvaluation of values, beyond the ethics dominated by The Most Unholy Trinity" - morality intertwined with the religious perspective. The Church historically establishes moral codes through the Ten Commandments, the story of Adam and Eve, the Seven Deadly Sins, and the Cardinal Virtues, for instance, that continue to oppress women. As central concepts within religious morality, virtue and vice are critical to religious feminist discourse.

Linking women's spiritual transcendence to the practical politics of liberation, religious feminists hoped to transform the Church and even humanity. Despite their problems with the Church, many activists remained within the institution and hoped to alter its structures and positions internally.[5] Indicating how women could use spirituality to build political bonds, Janice Raymond states:

> For me, Gyn/affection raises questions of 'ultimate concern' or meaning for women. It is therefore, in part, a religious quest which goes beyond patriarchal religion's identification with God, gods or religious organizations...It is in this sense that I am calling a vision of female friendship religious or spiritual. I maintain that Gyn/affection has the power to help tie women's lives together, to make connections that have not been made, and to provide a unifying and directing influence in all other areas of female existence in this world. Female friendship creates a network of meaning that transcends women's past, our ordinary lives, and our present.[6]

Such a feminist perspective focuses on women escaping oppression, envisioning a future beyond the painful present, and forming the bonds necessary for political mobilization through "Gyn/affection." To achieve these goals, women need to look at "questions of 'ultimate concern,'" to find and free their spiritual core, true selves, or, in Mary Daly's terms, Be-ing. Building on the consciousness-raising of radical feminism, Daly sees Be-ing as a beginning for changing human life: "my task is to study the potential of the

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[5] For a discussion of this process from a social movement perspective, see Mary Fainsod Katzenstein's *Faithful and Fearless: Moving Feminist Protest Inside the Church and Military* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), Chapter 5 especially.

[6] *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 213.

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women's revolution to transform human consciousness and its externalizations that is, to generate human becoming."[7] While criticizing the patriarchal nature of organized religion, these feminists also view transcendence from oppressive moral constraints and spirituality as valuable political tools for women's liberation. Even though they draw attention to morality and the spirit, issues related to central feminist concerns about the internal, psychological dimensions of women's oppression, second wave feminists generally marginalized religious feminism. Some rejected the Church as inherently patriarchal. Radical feminist Valerie Solanas, for instance, claims that "religion not only provides the male with a goal (Heaven) and helps keep women tied to men, but offers rituals through which he can try to expiate the guilt and shame he feels at not defending himself enough against his sexual impulses; in essence, that guilt and shame he feels at being male."[8] Others saw religion as peripheral to feminist political theory. In *Feminist Politics and Human Nature,* Alison Jaggar states that "I have omitted religious and existentialist conceptions primarily because I find them implausible. They are outside the mainstream of contemporary theorizing, and they have little direct connection with socialist feminism, the version of feminist theory that I consider most plausible."[9] Yet, as this chapter illustrates, religion remains essential to understanding the conceptual nature of virtue and vice within contemporary feminist political theory and ethics.

In addition, religion plays a key role in contemporary moral and political discourse. During the last thirty years, the Christian Right's use of the Church and religious discourse to mount a serious backlash against the advances made by second wave feminists indicates

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[7] *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973), 6.

[8] *S.C.U.M. Manifesto,* in Barbara Crow's *Radical Feminism,* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000), 209.

[9] (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1983), 10.

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this institution's continued function in denying women freedom.[10] Following the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the National Conference of Catholic Bishops produced the Pastoral Plan for Pro-life Activities that organized Catholics into a political pressure group, eventually evolving into the National Right to Life Committee. Fundamentalist Christians also mobilized into a powerful political force under the leadership of televangelists such as Reverend Jerry Falwell who established the Moral Majority in January 1979. Indicating their new-found political power, Ronald Reagan won his bid for the presidency in 1980 due, in large part, to voter mobilization drives in churches throughout the South. With Reagan in the White House, the New Right, operating through the Heritage Foundation, proposed the Family Protection Act, a legislative initiative introduced into Congress in 1981 designed to dismantle the achievements of the women's movement. The Family Protection Act aimed to eliminate federal laws supporting equal education, to require that schools teach marriage and motherhood as proper careers for women, and to repeal all federal laws protecting battered wives and those providing legal aid for women seeking abortion counseling or divorce. Of course the New Right focused much of its efforts on opposing abortion rights for women. Members of Operation Rescue, led by Reverend Randall Terry, blocked entrances to clinics, attacked patients, and threatened doctors; anti-abortionists firebombed thirty women's health clinics between May 1982 and January 1985. While this snapshot of the Christian Right's political activity hardly communicates their significance in contemporary American politics, it suggests the profound impact of religion on

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[10] Useful discussions of the Christian Right from the perspective of the woman's movement appear in Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), Chapter 9; and Flora Davis' *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), Chapter 20. For a critical analysis of the Christian Right as a social movement, see Sara Diamond's *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989), and *Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1998).

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feminism. Reverends such as Jerry Falwell and Randall Terry tapped into the Judeo-Christian undercurrent of American political discourse that values women solely for their role as mothers and wives who sustain morality and the family. Using this biblical language, the Christian Right gained political ground on these issues, promoting family values, denouncing reproductive choice, and revitalizing religion in American public education. Today, the Christian Right still controls the agenda on morality and the family. In addition to its theoretical significance, this situation indicates important political reasons for examining how religion relates to women and morality from a feminist perspective.

To examine religious feminist approaches to virtue during the Sexual Revolution, Mary Daly's work takes center stage since she created a radical feminist metaethics that entails a revisioning of the virtue-vice dualism. Daly attempts to rename/reclaim this dualism as a means of granting women freedom from the moral constraints imposed on them particularly by religion. Given the serious criticisms of Daly, particularly on issues of essentialism[11] that often result in her dismissal by feminists, it seems necessary to justify the extensive analysis of her work here. Despite her critics, Daly influences many feminist thinkers such as Sarah Hoagland, Marilyn Frye, Janice Raymond, and Val Plumwood, and, speaking to her impact on feminism, a recent collection of feminist interpretations of Daly's work has been published.[12] Highlighting her contributions to feminist thought,

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[11] Critiques of Daly's essentialism are quite numerous in the literature. Perhaps the most well-known is Audre Lorde's criticism of Daly's failure to account for black women in *Gyn/Ecology* in "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," in *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 66-71. Uma Narayan similarly attacks Daly for her First World perspective on Third World women. Making a broader argument against the essentialism problem in feminist theory, Linda Alcoff uses Daly as one point of critique in "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 330-355.

[12] *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*, eds. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

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Hester Eisenstein states that "Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* was a landmark in woman-centered analysis, marking the boundary, the point where the pendulum of difference swung to its outer limits."[13] For the purposes here, Daly's attention to the virtue-vice dualism recommends her for analysis given the limited discussion of this concept in feminist political theory. In *Gyn/Ecology* and *Pure Lust*, Daly uses virtue and vice as the backbone of her ethical project that identifies the patriarchal nature of this dualism with the goal of reclaiming virtue as beneficial to a radical feminist ethics. In *Gyn/Ecology*, Daly illustrates that although the Eight Deadly Sins[14] deceive and oppress women, they must be reclaimed as feminist virtues. *Pure Lust* focuses on how renaming virtues releases the power essential to women's revolution: "raging, racing, we take on the task of Pyrognomic Naming of Virtues. Thus lighting, igniting the Fires of Impassioned Virtues, we sear, scorch, singe, char, burn away the demonic tidy ties that hold us down in the Domesticate State, releasing our own Diamons/Muses/Tidal Forces of Creation."[15] Re-naming and reclaiming words and concepts plays a central part in Daly's ethical project directed at women regaining power over language:

> women are now realizing that the universal imposing of names by men has been false because partial. That is, inadequate words have been taken as adequate...To exist humanly is to name the self, the world, and God. The 'method' of the evolving spiritual consciousness of women is nothing less than this beginning to speak humanly - a reclaiming of the right to name. The liberation of language is rooted in the liberation of ourselves.[16]

The recognition of language's significance to women's political liberation also suggests

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[13] *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1983), 107.

[14] Daly adds "Processions" that she defines as the collective deceptions of the Fathers, or patriarchy to the traditional Seven Deadly Sins.

[15] Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984), 226.

[16] *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1978), 8.

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Daly's compatibility with this conceptual analysis. Throughout her work, Daly engages with the etymology of terms and their context to show how the manipulation of language imposes limits on women. Together, Daly's attention to virtue and vice, use of discursive analysis, and impact on feminist ethics recommend her for this analysis.

Although Daly clearly recognizes how patriarchal religion used virtue and vice to create moral codes and symbols to oppress women, she maintains that virtue can and should be revisioned for a radical feminist ethics, making her project a strong case analysis for assessing this approach's viability. This analysis finds that uncritical reversals and transcendence, two aspects central to reclaiming virtue, create serious problems for revisioning virtue into a concept compatible with feminist ethics. Uncritical reversals refer to the process of inverting the patriarchal meaning of a gendered dualism such as virtue and vice to revalue its association with women. While Daly's renaming of virtue focuses on the right *ends* - liberating women from the constraints of virtue and vice, the *means* to achieving this ends - reversals - are flawed. Trapped within an uncritical reversal, the oppressive virtue-vice dualism remains essentially unchanged, preventing women's escape from its constraints and denying them freedom no matter how much renaming and reclaiming occurs. Such an attempt and failure to revision virtue, more importantly, indicates a potentially inherent flaw in revisioning the virtue-vice dualism for feminist ethics.

To escape this dualism's constraints, Daly suggests transcendence, a strategy consistent with the infinite dimension that, however, acts to oppress, not liberate, women and ultimately contradicts the contextual grounding of feminist ethics. Infinite virtue directs attention to transcendence, to superhuman moral ideals that people rarely achieve, making virtue a moral standard unattainable in everyday life. This infinite quality illustrates the link between virtue and the Kantian approach to morality that premises moral-decision-making on individualism, objectivity, and universal moral principles that

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many feminists argue contradict the contextual, subjective, and practice-oriented moral perspective of women. Transcendence also sustains virtue as a tool for elevating women above the corruption of public life, separating women from politics. This problem stems from Daly's overall view that feminists cannot change patriarchal structures and, instead, must focus on an inner journey to overcome social constraints to achieve liberation. Speaking to this issue, Eisenstein concludes that "Daly rejected the possibility of a transformation of patriarchal structures, urging women instead to embark upon an inner journey of discovery. Embracing female difference thus appeared to imply withdrawal from political struggle, and the development of an entirely separate and self-contained women's culture."[17] As such, Daly ultimately avoids deconstructing the virtue-vice dualism in order to focus on how women psychologically rose above its confines. A transcendent approach to women's freedom generally or as a strategy for breaking out of the virtue-vice dualism particularly poses two serious problems for feminist ethics. First, this approach is premised on a strategy that systematically oppresses women by locating them on a higher moral and political plane. Second, it highlights the dimension of virtue that contradicts the feminist focus on relationships, context, and practice as essential to a liberatory ethics for women.

The strategy of transcendence in overcoming the virtue-vice dualism also raises questions regarding the process for escaping the oppositional constraints erected by moral categories. If transcending the dualism, in other words, contradicts feminist attention to an ethics grounded in practice and context, what alternatives are available? Daly's attempt to revision virtue with the aim of transcending the dualism indicates the limits to both this means and ends. Revisioning virtue leaves the dualism in place while transcendence sustains a masculine approach to freedom and morality. These problems suggest that

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[17] *Contemporary Feminist Thought*, 115.

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other strategies may be more effective. Daly's transcendent strategy suggests another alternative. Instead of moving above and beyond this dualism, the more fruitful analytic strategy, this chapter argues, is to move through it, realizing the web of linking postulates and cultural cues. To develop this, the chapter turns to Katie Cannon's black womanist ethics that illustrates how black women carved out 'a living space' of moral dignity from multiple systems of oppression. Developing Cannon's point, this analysis explores the moral middle ground between the poles of virtue and vice as an alternative space in which women can identify oppressive moral structures as well as conceive of an ethics based on their lived experience. Through the conceptual history of virtue and vice, society locates women in this space as it shifts and changes their association with this dualism in response to changing political, economic, and social contexts, indicating a fluid, dynamic aspect to seemingly static moral concepts. From this negative experience as pawns within different political games, women can retrieve the positive space of the moral middle ground that resonates with their experience and offers a unique standpoint on the boundary between the dominant value of virtue and the subordinate status of vice from which they can conceive of an ethics designed for their liberation.

In order to develop this argument, the chapter moves through the following three stages. First, this analysis explores the religious symbols of the Virgin Mary and Eve that represent the moral categories of virtue and vice for women and lends further evidence to the case that contemporary cultural cues link to deeply embedded historical traditions such as Judeo-Christian religion. Two of Plumwood's dualistic characteristics - homogenization and instrumentalism - aid in assessing how Eve and the Virgin Mary establish extreme standards of virtue and vice for women that benefit men's interests. In addition, the real world counterparts of these religious symbols - nuns and witches - that some second wave feminists saw as potential models for women's liberation contextualize the strategies of and problems with renaming and transcendence. Second, this analysis

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focuses on Mary Daly's project of renaming and reclaiming virtue for a radical feminist metaethics in order to assess the viability of this approach for feminist ethics. In particular, this section focuses on how uncritical reversals and transcendence create insurmountable problems for a revisioning of virtue using Daly's strategy. Third, Katie Cannon's black womanist ethics that joins black women's lived and historical experience with Christian theology to formulate a morality for black women serves as a counterpoint to Daly's radical feminist metaethics. Though Cannon shares the problem of transcendence with Daly, she contributes the valuable idea of a 'living space' where women can cultivate an ethics based on their lived experience. Finally, analyzing the virtue-vice dualism from a religious feminist perspective reveals the need to seek alternative paths outside of the constraints and historically rooted ties of virtue and vice that consistently deny women moral and political freedom. The moral middle ground, this chapter contends, offers a starting place for exploring such alternatives to the virtue and vice dualism.

## 6.2: From Eve and the Virgin Mary to Nuns and Witches: The Problem of Transcendence in the Virtue-Vice Dualism

Religious feminists looked to the Bible as a means of identifying how the Church and religion oppressed women. Mary Daly and Janice Raymond turn particular attention to the iconic female symbols of Eve and the Virgin Mary as well as the medieval history of nuns and witches in Europe in order to illustrate, in the latter case, how the Church defined and redefined women's morality to suit broader political purposes, and, in the former, how symbols negate moral complexity and establish dualistic categories that facilitate making women pawns in these political games. Though relying on history and biblical symbols, Daly and Raymond use their analysis to criticize the contemporary gender oppression legitimized by this tradition and, thus, to argue for creating a liberatory religious and moral approach for women. Through religious discourse, Raymond and

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Daly show the deeply embedded nature of women's oppression by the Church and its link to political discourse that shapes society and acts as a reference point for contemporary women's political action. Raymond and Daly, however, overlook Puritanism, the biblical origin of American political discourse that, as Chapter Two illustrated, relied on the Virgin Mary, Eve, and witches to quell social disorder in the New England villages during the 1600s. This analysis links the symbols of the Virgin Mary and Eve and the real historical figures of witches and nuns, as discussed in Daly and Raymond particularly, to moral guardianship and the virtue-vice dualism to explore how the Puritan discourse translates into that of second wave feminism. This indicates the on-going power of religion in women's moral discourse and the serious limits that the religious framework of virtue and vice places on women's liberation. Reading Daly and Raymond's analysis against the conceptual pre-history of women's virtue during the Puritan era illustrates how infinite virtue and vice function to pull women towards a transcendent spiritual plane that contradicts their lived experience and undermines struggles for collective political change. Additionally, this section focuses on how virtue and vice act as political tools for restraining disorderly women and trapping them in a double bind that, however, reveals the potentially beneficial space of the middle ground between this dualism's opposite poles.

This section relies on two of Plumwood's five characteristics of dualisms in order to analyze how virtue and vice function in the religious discourse of Daly and Raymond. The first, *homogenization* occurs, Plumwood explains, when "differences among the inferiorised group are disregarded."[18] This element of dualisms illustrates how iconic symbols such as Eve and the Virgin Mary erase heterogeneity among oppressed groups, facilitating their location in either the virtuous or vice-ridden category. The second, *instrumentalism* defines the inferior group as a means to the superior group's ends while

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[18] Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 53.

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"the upperside is an end in itself, but the underside has no such intrinsic value, is not for-itself but merely useful, a resource."[19] This aspect of dualisms clarifies how biblical symbols translate into the lives of real women who serve as resources for men, particularly in terms of their sexuality. Together, both aspects illustrate how Daly and Raymond, similar to other religious feminists, identified the oppressive nature of these dualistic categories within religious discourse and history.

Eve serves as a symbol of primary concern for religious feminists given this myth's significance in justifying women's oppression as the cause of original sin, and, as the Puritan pre-history revealed, the bearers of blame for all of humanity's vice. As Raymond and Daly articulate, Eve symbolizes the homogenous moral category that holds women morally responsible for humanity's vice, a situation that serves the instrumental purpose of freeing men from blame for this aspect of the human condition. Eve links to virtue's etymology through "virago" as illustrated in the following *OED* citation: "name given by Adam to Eve - called 'virago' or taken from man. 1576, Gascaigne: 'Before Eva sinned, she was called Virago, and after she sinned she deserved to be called Eva.'" According to biblical tradition, first, Eve physically comes from Adam's rib, or "taken from man;" then, after the Fall, God punishes Eve by making her Adam's servant and subjecting her to pain and suffering in child birth, indicating woman's instrumental value based on her relationship to man that becomes even more apparent by examining the interconnected role of sexuality, sin, and moral responsibility in the story of Adam and Eve in *Genesis.* Actually, Eve's story begins with Lilith, Adam's first wife, discussed in the Talmudic period of the Jewish tradition.[20] Created from the earth just as Adam, Lilith asserted her sexual equality by refusing the subordinate role in the missionary position. After Adam

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[19] Ibid.

[20] In *Gyn/Ecology*, Daly offers a useful discussion of how the Lilith myth has been analyzed by a range of scholars (p. 85-6, ft.).

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refused to give up his dominant sexual role, Lilith fled to the Red Sea and lived promiscuously with demons, giving birth daily to evil spirits.[21] Refusing to be a resource for Adam, Lilith proved an unsatisfactory partner. So, God created Eve from Adam's rib, securing her dependence on him and presumably her unequal status. Despite their harmonious beginning, Eve, tempted by the serpent, eats from the tree of life and incurs God's wrath, resulting in a curse on all women as the cause of humanity's Fall. Eve's sin serves many instrumental purposes in subordinating women. As scholars such as Pamela Norris point out, this interpretation of the Fall did not become widely accepted until the medieval period[22] when the Church actively consolidated power, in part, by instigating witch hunts across Europe that put all women under suspicion of evil. The Puritans similarly used Eve to justify their witch hunts in America. Perhaps less apparent, Eve's sin represents women's capacity for infinite vice that transcends historical contexts and cleanses men of moral responsibility for humanity's "dark side."

Indicating the infinite, all-encompassing aspect of women's vice, Eve serves as the default category for women who fail to meet the standards of virtue symbolized by the Virgin Mary. As Daly states, "Eve...represents the category into which the Christian tradition has tended to place all women who have not managed to imitate the rather puzzling model of the virgin who is also a mother."[23] Such stark alternatives speak to the role of homogenization in moral dualisms that create only two options for women - the Virgin Mary or Eve, standards of infinite virtue or vice well beyond the capacity of any woman. Yet, the all-encompassing nature of women's morality functions to cleanse men of blame for humanity's sin by shifting it all to women. "It appears that what happens is

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[21] For an historical account of this story and of other temptresses in the biblical tradition, see Pamela Norris' *Eve: A Biography* (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1999), Chapter 10.

[22] *Eve: A Biography*, Chapter 2.

[23] *Beyond God the Father*, 60.

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that those under the yoke of Christian imagery often are driven to a kind of reversal of what this imagery [Eve] ostensibly means," Daly explains, "Unable to shoulder the blame for others, they can affirm themselves as 'good' by blaming others."[24] No matter what sins men commit, they cannot measure up to that of the daughters of Eve. Such a perspective indicates one way that religious moral discourse alleviates men of their moral responsibility for sin and vice, suggesting the deep roots of, what Joan Tronto calls, "privileged irresponsibility" that contributes to women's double burden of moral responsibility.

Focused on the relationship between religion and political action, Daly expresses how responsibility for sin and infinite vice damages women's psyche and undermines the possibility for women's collective political action. Characterizing women as Eves, Daly asserts, creates "*psychological paralysis*...from a feeling of hopelessness, guilt, and anxiety over social disapproval."[25] This paralysis arises from an internalization of the guilt and hatred that a male-dominated society communicates to women through such powerful myths as Eve and the Fall of humankind. "The myth has provided legitimation not only in the direction of the self-hatred of the male outward against women, but also for the direction of self-hatred on the part of the woman...As contradictory divided beings, the oppressed do not fully grasp the paralyzing fact that the oppressor, having invaded the victim's psyches, now exists within themselves."[26] The religious myth of Eve then translates into the lived experience of women by diminishing their sense of self-worth and defining them according to the terms of the dominant class, or oppressor. Capturing the Church's function in this process, Daly states, "Patriarchal religion adds to the problem by intensifying the process through which women internalize the consciousness of the

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[24] Ibid., 76.

[25] Ibid., 51.

[26] Ibid., 48.

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oppressor. The male's judgment having been metamorphosed into God's judgment, it becomes the religious duty of women to accept the burden of guilt, seeing the self with male chauvinist eyes."[27] The Church's oppressive construction of women translates into a subtext of contemporary political discourse: "The myth undergirds destructive patterns in the fabric of our culture. Literature and the mass media repeat the 'temptress Eve' motif in deadly earnest, as do the rationalizations for social customs and civil laws, such as abortion legislation, which incorporate punitive attitudes toward women's sexual function."[28] In the contemporary context, Eve transforms into the temptress who communicates the instrumental value of women as sexual resources for men. Since the Puritans, women's sexuality equates with vice and blames women for giving into sexual desire and temptation, establishing a double burden of moral responsibility that functions to blame women for sexual harassment and rape in the contemporary period.

Politically, Daly frames the guilt, sin, and general moral debasement of the Eve myth as contributing to women's self-hatred that creates obstacles to political organizing since women do not want to identify with others who reflect these traits and oppression back at them.[29] To overcome these ingrained psychological and sociological traits, Raymond reclaims the positive aspects of women's moral origins in the Eve myth as a step towards movement-building. "Man's 'original sin,' if you will, has been the defilement of the original woman and her origins with other women," Raymond explains, "Thus

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[27] Ibid., 49.

[28] Ibid., 45.

[29] Daly shared this line of argument with radical and lesbian feminists. Her perspective adds a religious explanation for this portrayal of women as mired in a self-hatred that prevents them from effectively organizing. The Radicalesbians articulate this position, stating that "women resist relations on all levels to other women who will reflect their own oppression, their own secondary status, their own self-hate. For to confront another woman is finally to confront one-self - the self we have gone to such lengths to avoid. And in the mirror we know we cannot really respect and love that which we have been made to be" ("The Woman-Identified Woman," in *The Second Wave Reader*, ed. Linda Nicholson, 156).

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Gyn/affection, which is an original act, has become the most taboo of all female actions. In turn, women's complicity - her 'original sin' - has been the denial of her origins and the denial of her original friendship for other women."[30] For Daly and Raymond, the Eve myth undermines women's ability to organize politically given a lack of self-worth that emanates from their moral responsibility for infinite vice, original sin, and humanity's downfall, a situation, they contend, that women must escape in order to achieve liberation. In particular, they aim to release women from their instrumental role as dependent, sexual resources for men. Liberated from these constraints, women, Janice Raymond argues, can find "the *original woman* - the woman who searches for and claims her relational origins with her vital Self and with other vital women. She is not the creation of men since she does not precede from their conceit."[31] From the perspective of moral guardianship, deconstructing the myth of Eve exposes the power of infinite vice in religious discourse at key points in American political history and its detrimental role in women's political status.

Alternatively, the Virgin Mary serves as Eve's antithesis - the virtuous woman who embodies moral purity and the infinite virtues of chastity and piety. As with the Puritans, the Virgin Mary symbolizes the infinite capacity for virtue through marriage to God and a life lived on the spiritual plane above human entanglements. The Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception captures how exceptional virtue and moral purity enable her to escape physical, especially sexual, relations with men. As the etymology of "virgin," also linked to "vir," further indicates, women's virtue requires the absence of sexual freedom. The *OED* defines "virgin" as "an unmarried or chaste maiden or woman, distinguished for piety or steadfastness of religion, and regarded as having a special place among the members of the Christian Church on account of these merits." The "unmarried or chaste maiden or woman," like the Virgin Mary, abstains from sexual relations. While Eve's vice

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[30] Ibid., 42.

[31] *A Passion for Friends*, 5.

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derives from a tempting sexuality, the Virgin Mary's virtue emanates from purity and chastity. Either position highlights the centrality of women's sexuality to religious moral discourse that establishes standards of virtue and vice to define women as sexual resources for men and to constrain their sexual freedom. Daly captures the double standard operating here, stating that "the inimitability of 'Mary conceived without sin' ensure that all women as women are in the caste with Eve. At the same time it reflects and reinforces duality of status. Women who are related to men have to be seen by 'their men' as exceptions in some way, just as Mary is good by reason of her relationship with Jesus."[32] Since women serve men as wives and mothers, the Christian religious tradition grants them virtue through the Virgin Mary who symbolically cleanses women enough to relate intimately with men. Speaking to this process from a cultural perspective, Sherry Ortner explains that

> One realm of culture through which these points are often articulated is that of concepts of purity and pollution...A well-known aspect of purity/pollution beliefs cross-culturally is that of the natural 'contagion' of pollution...Why is the purifying agent not itself polluted? The answer...is that purification is effected in a ritual, as a purposive activity that pits self-conscious (symbolic) action against natural energies, is more powerful than those energies.[33]

The Virgin Mary's birth of Jesus through the Immaculate Conception in which the Holy Father spiritually inseminates her serves as the purifying ritual that cleanses the sexual link between women and vice, distances women from the natural process of child birth to the greatest degree possible, and locates women on the transcendent plane of spiritual and cultural symbolism. Yet, virginity retains an association with a physical sexuality contained by the boundaries of living among other women. As Janice Raymond states, "virginity...is attractive to men because it presents the lure of untamed womanhood. More

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[32] Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 82.

[33] "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in *Woman, Culture, & Society* eds. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo & Louise Lamphere (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 72.

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than this, virginity also signals a woman who still resides in the world of women. She is thus fresh and ripe for the world as men have made it."[34] Such religious discourses tap into a functional theme within Western political thought that portrays women as empty vessels who carry children and give birth without an active role in the process.[35] To achieve infinite virtue, the Virgin Mary homogenizes women into vacuous receptacles above nature and devoid of human feeling or material reality.

While the Puritans used the Virgin Mary to bind some women to virtue amidst the political disorder of the late 1600s, Daly illustrates how the Church revived this symbol as a religious counterpart to the Traditional Womanhood of the 1950s. Speaking to the political power of the Virgin Mary, Daly describes how the Church used this symbol to draw peasants from paganism to Christianity by replacing the many goddesses with one strong Goddess. As Daly states, "during the early centuries of christendom, Mary as tamed Goddess had been an essential tool for the taming/training and conversion of the 'pagans.'"[36] In the 1950s, religious scholars integrated the Virgin Mary as Eternal Feminine with the Traditional Woman to create the Eternal Woman who is "Self-less, she achieves...merely generic fulfillment in motherhood, physical or spiritual...timeless and conservative by nature...shrouded in 'mystery,' because she is not recognized as a genuine human person."[37] To tame women who experienced a relatively high degree of independence during the 1940s, the Eternal Woman channeled them back into the

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[34] *A Passion for Friends*, 62.

[35] Aristotle's portrayal of women in *Generation of Animals* as empty vessels who merely receive the male sperm and passively give birth to the child represents a flash point for feminists in the sense that this functional view of women remains a theme within Western political thought. Susan Moller Okin offers an excellent presentation of functionalism in Aristotle's thought in *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), Chapter 4.

[36] *Pure Lust*, 92.

[37] Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1968), 149.

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homogenous category of domestic mother and wife. Such a perspective resonates with moral guardianship that functions to tie women to the status quo through their domestic roles that serve as their source of virtue and political value as pillars of stability at times of change.

This religious feminist discussion of the Virgin Mary and Eve resonates with the spiritual aspect of women's moral guardianship premised on infinite virtue and vice as well as the continued use of the elevation strategy discussed in Chapter Four. Daly and Raymond emphasize the on-going power of religion in shaping women's morality and political status to indicate how moral guardianship translates into the Sexual Revolution, binding women to the status quo and undermining their liberation. Both symbols remain essential to defining women's morality in sexual terms that constrain their freedom. The infinite virtue of the Virgin Mary and the infinite vice of Eve elevate women above the real world of human activity onto a transcendent spiritual plane of the sacred and profane, a space that enables society to hold women to the double burden of moral responsibility and releases men from ultimate responsibility for humanity's moral well-being. For women, this religious moral framework creates standards of virtue and vice, symbolized by women of biblical proportions, inherently beyond their reach, leaving them in a moral "never-never land" that offers little guidance in daily life. Politically, this position supports women's status as "suspect" citizens whose morality always remains in question.

In addition to the symbols of the Virgin Mary and Eve, religious feminists explore the Church's treatment of nuns and witches during the medieval period in Europe to illustrate its use of power to oppress women in the service of larger political goals. This historical context mirrors that of the Puritans who used vice to legitimize their witchcraft trials by identifying independent women as evil and dangerous to society. Religious feminists used these historical examples to show how moral categories labeled those who strayed from virtue as vice-ridden and deviant, opening them up to vulnerability and

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attack. Speaking to the implications of such moral categories for women, Janice Raymond states that "categorization promotes reductionism. Once a woman sees Gyn/affection categorized reductionistically, she sees herself as reduced. Categorization promotes dissociation and assimilation at the same time. It prompts women to dissociate themselves from the demeaned category while being assimilated into more acceptable hetero-relational categories."[38] For women, virtue requires their assimilation into the social roles of mother and wife that greatly reduces their range of life choices whereas women seeking independence challenge these categories, social roles, and, therefore, institutions critical to social stability. During the medieval period, nuns and witches represented independent women whom the Church labeled deviant and vice-ridden and subjected to violence and even execution in its quest to consolidate political power. For religious feminists, this history serves as something of a moral tale for women challenging the Church. Further, nuns and witches capture how symbols such as the Virgin Mary and Eve translate into the exercise of power in real women's lives. As such, this discussion returns to the role of vice in empowering women to challenge the status quo by breaking with virtue, a position encountered among the rebellious Lowell mill girls, educated republican women, and witches in Puritan villages.

During the medieval period, nuns initially assumed a religious association with the Virgin Mary through their vow of chastity and marriage to God. Janice Raymond analyzes nuns as a community of women that the Church persecuted because they became "deviant" within a changing political context aimed at channeling all women into a family life premised on heterosexual marriage. Raymond examines the Church's treatment of nuns to illustrate how the threat that women's friendship poses to patriarchal society and the extent to which the Church will go to prevent it. Women must embrace female

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[38] *A Passion for Friends*, 174.

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friendship or Gyn/affection to break free of hetero-reality. According to Raymond, "the world view that woman exists always in relation to man, has consistently perceived women together as women alone...The perception is that women without men are women without company or companionship...The perception is that women together are invisible - therefore, not perceived."[39] By embracing Gyn/affection, Raymond maintains that "women assert their power of absence to all forms of hetero-relations, we assert a power of presence to our Selves. This is indeed empowering."[40] While female friendship empowers women personally and politically, drawing on nuns for models of liberation from the constraints of hetero-reality raises problems given their continued dependence on the Church that defines nuns and links real women into a religious discourse designed to protect a patriarchal political and religious tradition. As such, Raymond's discussion highlights the power of vice and its threat to the status quo as well as the limitation of remaining within the virtue-vice dualism that taps into a powerful religious tradition opposed to women's liberation.

Before the Protestant Reformation, becoming a nun offered women an alternative to the back-breaking work of agricultural labor, years of dangerous and painful pregnancies, and often violent domestic situations. Raymond suggests that nuns enjoyed access to education, a range of public activities in their communities, and the friendship of other women. Despite their power and independence, the Church required them to take vows committing them to the virtues of charity and chastity, or abstinence from sex. Raymond shows that this vow intended to prevent intimate relations between women:

> the second spiritual claim brought against particular friendship was that it violated the vow of chastity. In taking the vow of chastity nuns promised to 'avoid undue familiarities, to guard modesty in all their actions, to mortify the sense'... 'Indeed the constraints of the chastity vow were felt most strongly within the community itself.' Behind all this is the fear of lesbianism, the fear that Gyn/affection would

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[39] Ibid., 3.

[40] Ibid., 29.

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> become carnal, unduly intimate, and surpass the boundaries of moderation. For this reason, also, particular friendships were actively discouraged.[41]

Chastity maintains its general role in circumscribing women's sexuality, in this case between women as well as men. Initially, nuns represented models for women to keep their spiritual commitments to God, their association with the Virgin Mary, and a pure moral virtue untainted by human sexuality outside of marriage or greed.

During the Reformation, the Church, however, labeled nuns "loose," politically dangerous women because they lived independently of husbands and traditional family life. Curtailing the disorderly activities of women served to establish solid social institutions and centralize religious authority. The Church institutionalized marriage rituals while political authorities set up marriage courts to regulate the process. Instead of allowing women to lead lives independent of men, "the Reformation sought to elevate marriage" as "the household became the Protestant cloister."[42] "The promotion of marriage thinly concealed the belief that women must be kept under control and that the wedded estate was the most effective means of achieving this goal."[43] As a result of this social and political movement, nuns shifted into the deviant category of vice to channel women into domestic life. Although the Church ultimately controlled the convents, most acted quite independently in generating income and determining their political and social role within their respective communities. Hilde (Hild) of Whitby in Britain, for instance, a prominent English abbesses, counseled kings and princes, wielded the power of a land owner, and even presided over an all-male monastery.[44] The cloistering of nuns accompanied a

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[41] Ibid., 93.

[42] Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "The Reformation of Women," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, 3rd edition, eds. Renate Bridenthal, Susan Mosher Stuard, and Merry E. Wiesner (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 183, 184.

[43] Ibid., 184.

[44] *A Passion for Friends*, 84-5.

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general push to "enclose" all women in the domestic sphere, a shift from the relative freedom of movement that women enjoyed in the marketplace, life of the court, and town. To tame "loose" nuns, Pope Boniface VIII ruled in 1289 that all nuns must be enclosed within convents and cut off from the world, ending their active role in many European communities. The Church took a particularly harsh stance on the small communities of laywomen called *beguines* who engaged in mystical worship and drew its membership largely from the lower classes.[45] By taking in laundry, nursing the sick, preparing the dead for burial, and making candles, the *beguines* remained economically and politically independent of the Church. In 1311, however, the Grand Council of Vienna condemned them and actively destroyed their communities. Forced to leave their homes, often through violent means carried out by local townspeople, many *beguines* resorted to prostitution for survival.[46] Nuns and dedicated religious women became symbols of vice and sin in order to serve the Reformation's pro-family movement designed to cloister women away in their husbands' homes, making them invisible to the public eye, in order to establish the family as society's cornerstone of stability.

The religious status of nuns or *beguines* traditionally associated with infinite virtue through piety and devotion to God quickly reversed according to the political goals of the Church. Women's virtue now derived from their instrumental role in serving men as wives and mothers. Protestants "no longer promoted Mary, and they removed most of her images," replacing her with other biblical mothers and wives such as Sarah, Rebecca, and Anna. Eve found renewed prominence in justifying women's loss of independence as the curse for their original sin. Chastity and virginity fell out of favor since both granted women independence from sexual service to men in the family. Previously valued for its

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[45] Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "The Reformation of Women," in *Becoming Visible*, 178.

[46] See Raymond's *A Passion for Friends*, p. 76-7 for a further discussion.

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moral purity and association with the Virgin Mary, virginity among nuns paradoxically made them vice-ridden as deviants outside the new standards of virtue for women as mothers and wives. As Raymond claims, "the Protestant Reformation grounded these attacks in the virginity of nuns, seeing this as an ultimate symbol of their looseness...In this view, all women who were unmarried were immoral...A loose woman who resides in a female world that is free from direct bonds with men becomes a loose woman who is put in constant bondage to men and male desires. Women who are unattached to men become immoral."[47] Without the remaining convents, authority over nuns transferred to priests and male religious authorities. To obtain further control over women, the Church imposed strict moral constraints on them to enforce a rectitude and godliness while narrowing the scope of women's religious activity greatly. Increased attention to virtue and morality equated with a decrease in women's power and their freedom, a pattern consistent with the religious element of moral guardianship.

In addition to nuns, accusations of witchcraft served to punish deviants who challenged the moral standards critical to centralizing religious authority. As mid-wives, healers, and occasionally spiritual leaders in peasant communities, these women represented the last vestiges of paganism that granted females a significant role, threatening the Church's power. Peasant communities also assigned great value to their medical skills, including their knowledge of medicines and ability to deliver babies safely. Suppressing these women helped to establish an elite medical profession, a goal of the wealthy that dovetailed with the Church's interest in suppressing witchcraft.[48] As Barbara

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[47] *A Passion for Friends,* 74.

[48] Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English historically trace the development of the medical profession and its roots within the suppression of witches and other subsequent groups of women who exercised a role in healing. Their analysis remains pertinent, particularly to explaining the continued inferiority assigned to nurses. See *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1989).

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Ehrenreich and Deidre English explain, "the witch-hunts left a lasting effect: An aspect of the female has ever since been associated with the witch, and an aura of contamination has remained - especially around the midwife and other women healers."[49] Throughout Europe from the 13th to the 17th century, the Church executed approximately 60,000 witches, though estimates rise into the millions, approximately eighty percent of them women.[50] Similar to the Puritan witches, these women served as scapegoats for the economic and political change of the period marked by wars, plagues, and "price revolutions" where inflation rose without wage increases, all of which led to broader social disorder.

As the daughters of Eve, women's infinite vice functioned to make them targets of authorities looking to establish power by controlling the most vulnerable. In particular, the Church focused on the irrepressible sexuality of witches who supposedly used satanic powers to seduce men. Drawing on Eve's infinite vice, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Witches Hammer*), the equivalent of a legal code book published in 1486 that outlined how to judge an alleged witch, classified carnal lust and sexual impurity as the most serious of crimes. Its authors, the Dominican priests, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger explain why women are more likely to be witches by linking them to Eve: "for through the devil tempted Eve to sin, yet Eve seduced Adam. And as the sin of Eve would not have brought death to our soul and body unless the sin had afterwards passed on to Adam, to which he was tempted by Eve, not by the devil, therefore she is more bitter than death."[51] As Kramer and Sprenger explain, women's sinful sexual nature drives

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[49] *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (New York, NY: The Feminist Press of The City University of New York, 1973), 6,7.

[50] Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "The Reformation of Women," in *Becoming Visible*, 178.

[51] Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger. *The Malleus Maleficarum* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971), 47.

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them to evil summarized in terms of "three general vices... namely infidelity, ambition, and lust. Therefore they are more than others inclined towards witchcraft, who more than others are given to these vices. Again, since of these three vices the last chiefly predominates, women being insatiable, etc., it follows that those among ambitious women are more deeply infected who are more hot to satisfy their filthy lusts."[52] To eradicate these evil women from society, the Church executed them, often burning them at the stake, to cleanse society of their moral contamination. Speaking to the cleansing away of such moral deviants, Daly asserts that "the witchcraze focused predominantly upon women who had rejected marriage (Spinsters) and women who had survived it (widows). The witch-hunters sought to purify their society (The Mystical Body) of these 'indigestible' elements - women whose physical, intellectual, economic, moral, and spiritual independence and activity profoundly threatened the male monopoly in every sphere."[53] At times of change, women as witches or nuns function as deviants whose infinite vice legitimizes their oppression since their freedom threatens society's stability and moral well-being.

For Daly and Raymond, the Church's treatment of nuns and witches drives home the real political power exercised by religious authorities through symbols such as the Virgin Mary and Eve who embody infinite virtue and vice. In particular, these real women embraced independence and endured the outcomes of deviance associated with vice. Such accounts correspond with the history of women's vice in American political discourse that illustrates a pattern of punishment for women who challenge the standards of virtue and act independently. Invoking religion as a pillar of support for the family legitimizes oppressing women who move outside the bounds of moral guardianship. Infinite virtue and vice link women's moral behavior with the fate of humanity in religious discourse that

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[52] Ibid.

[53] *Gyn/Ecology*, 184.

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holds women to the double burden of moral responsibility for mankind and cleanses men of any blame, a standard well beyond their power. This double bind that characterizes women's morality depends on this infinite component that elevates women to a transcendent plane above daily human experience and burdens them with an all-encompassing responsibility for the sacred and profane. The problem with transcendence emanates from the disconnection between women's moral responsibility for humanity and lack of political or religious power that makes them easy targets for those who hope to establish social order and preserve the status quo. While Daly and Raymond identify the power of vice for women, the problem of transcendence inherent to religious virtue undermines their hopes of revisioning this particular religious tradition as liberatory for women since it confines them to this double bind. Yet, as this chapter explores later, this discussion illustrates the fluidity of women's moral categories as they shift between virtue and vice, the Virgin Mary and Eve, nuns and witches depending on the political context. This suggests a middle ground between the poles of the virtue-vice dualism that women navigate frequently and may provide a space for considering a liberatory morality for women.

## 6.3: Mary Daly's Renaming/Reclaiming of the Virtue-Vice Dualism: The Limits of Uncritical Reversals and Transcendence

To create a radical feminist metaethics, Mary Daly uses vice to challenge the existing structures of women's oppression, particularly that of morality. Operating from a position of deviance enables Daly to identify the powerful constraints that the virtue-vice dualism imposed on women. Indicating how moral categories function, Daly states:

> I would say that radical feminist metaethics is of a deeper intuitive type than 'ethics'...The metaethics of radical feminism seeks to uncover the background of such logic, as women ourselves move into the Background of this background...This book has to do with the mysteries of good and evil...The phallocratic categorizations of 'good' and 'evil' no longer apply when women honor women, when we become honorable to ourselves...Gyn/Ecological metaethics, in contrast to all this, functions to affirm the deep dynamics of female

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be-ing. It is gynography.[54]

Daly seeks "to uncover the background of this logic" that keeps women passive and submissive, invisible to society and their true selves. To liberate women from such structural moral constraints, Daly focuses on language, stating that "Rhymes, alliterations, alternation of senses - all aid in the breaking of fatherland's fences. Thus liberating is the work of Wicked Grammar, which is a basic instrument, our Witches' Hammer."[55] Connecting language to the challenge of patriarchal morality as a subversive project, Daly calls her dictionary *Wickedary* presumably to emphasize the transformative power to change language granted to women associated with vice, or wickedness. Such a position resonates with that of Puritan witches and, more so, the rebellious Lowell mill girls. From her marginalized location, Daly recognizes virtue as a barrier to women's liberation. "I will examine some of the ways in which this deadly trio of patriarchal virtues [fallacious faith, false hope, and dead love] blocks women's potential for Living Faith, Hopping Hope, and Biophilic Bonding," Daly continues, "The triumvirate of vacuous virtues which sustain the illusion that Nothing is Something requires special attention."[56] As such, Daly potentially could become an "innovating ideologist" who offers a conceptual innovation in response to contradictions between prevailing and newly proposed beliefs, actions, and practices. Recognizing the contradiction between women's liberation and patriarchal virtue, Daly's innovation entails the renaming and reclaiming of this concept to suit a

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[54] *Gyn/Ecology*, 12-13.

[55] *Beyond God the Father*, xxv. Commenting on the deep ties of language to Daly's ontological project, Frances Gray sees that Daly "seeks to highlight the idea that language and ontology are so related that language is a condition, not just for the articulation of ontology, but for the very possibility of ontology. For her then, the key to directly affecting change in women's lives is through radically re-viewing discourse" ("Elemental Philosophy: Language and Ontology in Mary Daly's Texts," in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*, 230).

[56] "The Archaic Afterwards," in *The Church and the Second Sex*, xiii.

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radical feminist metaethics, instead of relegating it to the patriarchal dustbin. In contrast to the rebellious Lowell mill girls, however, Daly's reliance on renaming and reclaiming prevent ideological innovation by perpetuating problems inherent to this dualism's logic: uncritical reversals and transcendence. Failing to challenge dualism itself leaves Daly trapped in a logic premised on inequality and constraint. Moreover, this attempt to revision virtue from a feminist perspective exposes the potentially insurmountable obstacles to doing so given this dualism's logic.

More than many feminists, Daly articulates virtue's role in oppressing women. She highlights how virtue enforces a passive feminine ethic, consistent with moral guardianship, in the form of Traditional Womanhood. As Daly states,

> the passive ethic, then, whether stressing the so-called feminine qualities or the so-called masculine qualities does not challenge exploitativeness but supports it. This kind of morality lowers consciousness so that 'sin' is basically equated with an offense against those in power, and the structures of oppression are not recognized as evil...Striving for freedom involves an awakening process in which layer upon layer of society's deceptiveness is ripped away...It is radical feminism that can unveil the 'feminine' ethic, revealing it to be a phallic ethic.[57]

Speaking to the power of the status quo, Daly sees how challengers to "structures of oppression" equate with sin and vice instead of the oppressors, a process of deflecting attention away from the dominant class that repeatedly appears in moral guardianship discourse. Daly articulates how men value women for their passivity and frame any resistance to their oppression as "vice" or "evil." Unlike other radical feminists, however, Daly specifies virtue - not only different *virtues* - as oppressing women, trapping them in a patriarchal moral framework:

> the word *virtue* itself encased in coffins of patriarchal moral ideology, seems to have a putrid odor about it. That odor, to be specific, is an aroma of hypocrisy. Indeed, the word *virtue*, when Viragos first struggle to exhume it from the graveyards of phallic ethics, reeks of reversals. The traditional 'virtues,' as defined and used by the Masters of Morality, constitute a veritable arsenal of weapons

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[57] *Gyn/Ecology*, 102.

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commonly employed in the perpetual war against the Race of Racy Women.[58] From the outset, Daly recognizes that "traditional 'virtues' constitute a veritable arsenal of weapons" deployed to constrain women. Instead of leaving virtue "encased in coffins of patriarchal moral ideology," Daly opens the lid by articulating the concept's oppressive dimensions and goes further to reclaim virtue from this "putrid" past by renaming it as part of a vibrant, liberatory feminist ethics.

Naming then plays a central role in translating virtue and vice into Daly's radical feminist metaethics. From a religious feminist perspective, "naming" represents a powerful male right that God gave to Adam. As described in *Genesis* 2:19, after God creates "every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air," He "brought *them* unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof." Then God put Adam into a deep sleep and made Woman from his rib.[59] Man exercised the power of naming before woman even existed. Religious feminists such as Daly see this biblical story as indicative of patriarchal power over language and meaning that points toward the need for feminists to engage in the naming process to promote women's liberation. As Daly states,

> women are now realizing that the universal imposing of names by men has been false because partial. That is, inadequate words have been taken as adequate...To exist humanly is to name the self, the world, and God. The 'method' of the evolving spiritual consciousness of women is nothing less than this beginning to speak humanly - a reclaiming of the right to name. The liberation of language is rooted in the liberation of ourselves.[60]

To achieve self-definition and Be-ing, women must find the language to express their lived experience, a perspective consistent with the body of contemporary feminist thought that revisions concepts such as freedom, justice, power, and care and struggles with the

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[58] *Pure Lust*, 261.

[59] *Genesis* 2:21-23.

[60] *Beyond God the Father*, 8.

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limitations that language places on feminist theorizing. Daly's engagement with language amounts to nothing less than taking naming away from Adam's patriarchal heirs to include women in the process:

> The method of *liberation-castration-exorcism*, then, is a becoming process of 'the Other' - women - which we hear and speak our own words...Women may judge that in some cases the names imposed upon reality by male-dominated society and sanctified by religion are basically oppressive and must be rejected. In other instances, it may be that partial truth has been taken for the whole in the past, and that the symbols and conceptualizations that are biased have to be liberated from their partiality. Women will free traditions, thought, and customs only hearing each other and thus making it possible to speak our word.[61]

Daly's essentialism, or commitment to biologically determined sexual categories for men and women, already surfaces here as she indicates that women will speak their own language as opposed to men's. This *liberation-castration-exorcism* method presents two options for women engaged with naming: either they can reject names as too oppressive, or revision them based on their "partial truth." Daly employs both methods in the process of naming virtue and vice that creates serious problems since she accepts or rejects specific virtues and vices and revisions virtue and vice without interrogating the dualistic structure that defines how these terms function to deny women freedom and equality. As a result, Daly's naming of virtue and vice leaves the masculine and feminine categories in place. Trapped within an uncritical reversal based on essentialist categories prevents Daly from overcoming this dualism's patriarchal constraints.

Uncritical reversals characterize Daly's project, undermining her attempts to negotiate the virtue-vice dualism. Explaining how uncritical reversals operate in gendered dualisms, Val Plumwood states that:

> in gender reversal, a new feminine identity comes to be specified *in reaction to* the old. In the most extreme and conservative case this strategy accepts the old identity and reverses its value, excluding from the new 'authentic feminine' qualities such as rationality, thus conceding the male claim to these qualities, and

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[61] Ibid., 8.

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covertly affirming the qualities of subordination.[62]

Daly's reversal of virtue-vice is not "uncritical" in the sense that she unwittingly or superficially embraces masculine virtues for feminist purposes. To the contrary, Daly explains that "it is unimaginative and out of touch with what is happening in the women's movement to assume that the becoming of women will simply mean *uncritical acceptance* of structures, beliefs, symbols, norms, and patterns of behavior that have been given priority by society under male domination. Rather, this becoming will act as catalyst for radical change in our culture [emphasis mine]."[63] Indeed, Daly believes that the renaming of virtue and vice escapes such a reversal by transcending this dualistic moral framework established by patriarchy.

Yet, Daly begins this naming process by turning to Valerie Solanas' claim in the *S.C.U.M. Manifesto* that patriarchy actually appropriated female virtues for men:

> '...by claiming as his own all female characteristics - emotional strength and independence, forcefulness, dynamism, decisiveness, coolness, objectivity, assertiveness, courage, integrity, vitality, intensity, depth of character, grooviness, etc. - and projecting onto women all male traits - vanity, frivolity, triviality, weakness, etc.'[64]

For Daly, Solanas captures the original reversal in which men appropriated women's virtues of strength and independence and "projected onto women" their petty and weak traits. To reverse this original reversal, Daly reclaims for women the virtues stolen by men. Women's "new feminine identity" evolves "*in reaction to* the old" as defined by men's original reversal of virtue. Although Daly may contend that this process merely returns women's virtue to them, this reversal entails the inversion of female subordination and male domination which leaves gendered moral categories in place and perpetuates inequality as one class receives virtue at the expense of the other. A failure to interrogate

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[62] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 62.

[63] *Gyn/Ecology*, 14.

[64] *Pure Lust*, 262.

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the essentialist categories as inherently problematic traps Daly in this uncritical reversal of reclaiming male virtues for women. Additionally, Daly examines the etymological origins of virtue, recognizing that "the message of 'virility' appears to be embedded in the word itself, which is said to be derived from the Latin *vir*, meaning man,"[65] and reveals a "partial truth" about the concept. The full truth requires exploring the feminine etymology of virtue that stems from "virgin" which leads to a renaming of "virtue" from a feminist perspective:

> Virgins - that is, women are 'never captured: UNSUBDUED' - are proceeding to Name our own good (that is, life-affirming) qualities (operative habits). When we choose to call these 'virtues,' we hear this old word in a new way, and it thus becomes a New Word. It is used to describe qualities of Uncaptured/Unsubdued women, that is, Virgins. Knowing that *virgin* is thought to be derived from the Latin *virga*, meaning green branch, we claim the name *Virtue* also as a green branch, a New Name on the tree of words. *Virtue*, used by Virgins to Name our strengths, is a Virgin Word. Our virtues are Virgin Virtues.[66]

By bringing "Virgin" together with "Virtues," Daly reclaims the virility, strength, and independence of women before men appropriated their virtue. By doing so, Daly overlooks how these terms belong to a discourse with a logic determined by patriarchy. Assuming for a moment that men appropriated virtue from women, Daly conveys "strength" as a masculine attribute in the sense that "virgins" are "'never captured: UNSUBDUED,'" or separate from others and "Uncaptured" by or independent of men. This renaming of virtues as "Virgin Virtues" retains women's instrumental relationship to men whose moral identity remains defined in terms of the dominant class. Embedded in this uncritical reversal remains a reliance on masculine conceptions of freedom often characterized in terms of independence from relationships, autonomy from others, and the reason to create distance from emotional attachments, all traits that contradict the thrust of contemporary feminist ethics. Renaming virtues "Virgin Virtues" entails an uncritical

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Daly, *Pure Lust*, 262.

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reversal that perpetuates the masculine definition of women's morality instead of promoting a liberatory alternative.

The religious grounding of Daly's work perhaps prevents her pursuit of moral alternatives to virtue and vice that serve as key concepts in Christian morality. Daly's understanding of virtue emanates from St. Thomas Aquinas' medieval moral theory in the *Summa Theologica* based on Aristotle's four virtues of wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance that theologians and philosophers renamed the four Cardinal Virtues: *prudence*, justice, *fortitude*, and temperance. The Catholic Church subsequently specified the Three Divine Virtues as faith, hope, and charity while faith, hope, and *love* represent the Three Theological or Christian Virtues. Scholastics such as Aquinas viewed virtue and vice in relationship to a person's ability to control their emotions or passions and to act according to the moral principles of good established by God. Daly sustains this relationship between the passions and virtue, stating that "according to this philosophical tradition, moral virtues [justice, courage, and temperance] are deeply connected with the passions. Virtues are not identical with passions, however for virtues are habits, not movements. They are 'principles of movements.'"[67] Integrating Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean, the 'principles of movements' constituting virtue act like a moral guidance system to direct the individual towards the mean between two extremes. Courage, for instance, represents the mean between the two extreme passions of daring that can result in rashness and fear that can lead to cowardice. According to Daly, virtue entails the ability to balance such passions, a habit developed over time. While Daly adopts Aquinas' general framework, she criticizes how, together, passions and virtues are either "potted," containing women, or a "plastic," man-made means of paralyzing women. "Potted" and "plastic" virtues, according to Daly, constitute pseudovirtues:

In the sadoworld, in which reason is un-Realized and passions so plasticized, it is

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[67] Ibid., 217.

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> inevitable that the naming of virtues is vitiated, so that these are combined to form an ideology that legitimates the servitude of women. It is not only that the 'names' (nouns) to designate virtues are in themselves 'incorrect'; rather, the problem consists primarily in the use of these words for naming/describing the wrong actions.[68]

Female virtues, then, are "pseudo," fake, or unreal since they describe "wrong actions" and legitimate "the servitude of women." To claim women's real virtues demands unveiling their original form appropriated by men and uncritically reversing the original reversal.

Adapting Aquinas to rename "virtue," Daly defines it as an "operative habit." To escape phallocentric ethics, Daly explains that "the exorcism itself of the phallic presences of absence within women's psyches is accomplished largely by the acquiring of new operative habits, or virtues."[69] Even though Daly states that "it is problematic and even distasteful to many Furious women to call good operative habits 'virtues,'"[70] she insists on doing so. The renaming process entails breaking past patterns "since virtues, including the vicious pseudovirtues, are habits. Un-naming of foreground virtues necessitates breaking old habits, that is changing of behavior patterns formed through repeated acts."[71] These new Virgin Virtues emanate from independent 'UNSUBDUED' Virgins to reclaim active, positive virtues that women "name our own good (that is, life-affirming) qualities (operative habits). When we choose to call these 'virtues,' we hear this old word in a new way, and it thus becomes a new word."[72] Reclaiming virgin and virtue, according to Daly, redefines this concept in feminist terms, or does it?

Renaming virtue reveals two strengths from a feminist perspective. The first

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[68] Ibid., 218.

[69] Ibid., 261.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 225.

[72] Ibid., 262.

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emanates from Daly's association of virtue with the passions or emotions that corresponds to feminist arguments for the inclusion of emotion in ethical theory. Feminist philosopher Elizabeth Spelman, for instance, argues that feminists need to account for negative feelings such as guilt, shame, and embarrassment in their conceptions of virtue, concluding that the full range of feelings are essential to a feminist ethics grounded in women's lived experience.[73] Similarly, Daly conceptualizes virtue in emotional terms that link it to women's lived personal experience instead of focusing on principles of moral excellence. Second, Daly builds on this practical dimension of emotion by defining virtue as an "operative habit." An "operative" usually refers to a worker, or, more broadly, exerting force, power or influence which communicates action or an active force. "Habit" is an acquired behavior pattern regularly followed until it becomes almost involuntary, a customary practice. Together, "operative habit" communicates an active participation in acquiring new behavior patterns, an alternative to the passive and submissive virtue of Traditional Womanhood and moral guardianship. Moreover, "habit" links virtue to practice and the role of real lived experience in moral decision-making, a hallmark of feminist ethics.

Yet, the promise of Daly ends there. While investigating "operative habits" reveals a viable alternative to virtue, Daly returns to the virtue-vice dualism, creating serious flaws that prove insurmountable for a feminist revisioning of virtue. The critical flaw stems from reintegrating a practical moral perspective - operative habits - into a religious tradition based on principles, excellence, and transcendence. By trying to fit a square peg into a round hole, so to speak, Daly overlooks important barriers to her project's success. As a dualism, virtue links into a conceptual history premised on moral standards of excellence that cannot simply be dismissed and redefined as a habit. Dismissing this

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[73] See "The Virtue of Feeling and the Feeling of Virtue," *Feminist Ethics*, ed. Claudia Card (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 213-232.

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tradition coincides with diminishing the structural problems with virtue by defining it as an individual habit. Taking the same route to work every day or brushing your teeth before bed are habits, not virtues. Habits relate to patterns of individual behavior that emanate from a confluence of complicated forces that Daly overlooks in order to suggest that changing women's habits will make them free. Her position simplifies and trivializes the infinite or transcendent dimension of virtue that ties this concept into a deeply entrenched process of socialization carried out in families, schools, churches, offices, and political arenas over many generations. While virtue retains an individual component in which a person decides to act within or against its moral standards perimeters, social, political, economic, cultural, and religious structures also determine a course of action. Simply redefining virtue as a habit, even though operative, diverts attention from this structural context to the individual woman who somehow must marshal the power to break free of these constraints by independently changing her habits.

Trapped inside the uncritical reversal of virtue and vice prevents Daly from dealing with the bigger structural problem of transcendence introduced in the previous section. This conceptual history of virtue illustrates its infinite and finite components that operate in tandem though one usually receives more emphasis than the other depending on historical circumstances. Religious discourses, generally geared toward limiting women's freedom, focus on infinite virtue to employ God and spirituality in shaping moral behavior. For women, the infinite elevates them above human experience as "angels on pedestals" who become responsible for the political common good and the religious Fall of humanity. Indicating the infinite nature of religious virtue, the *OED*'s earliest references to it around 1250 relate to the embodiment of superhuman or divine power, evident in a miracle or mighty work: "an embodiment of such power; especially plural, one of the orders of celestial hierarchy. Entries at 1300: reference to Angels as exercises of Virtue in heavens. Related to power." Synonyms for virtue include religious terms such as saintliness,

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saintlikeness, angelicalness, and godliness.[74] These etymological clues highlight virtue's relationship to divine power, emphasizing its infinite religious dimension. Virtue belongs to a constellation of concepts that link human morality with the other-worldly capacity for excellence of gods, saints, and angels that transcends the complicated, sticky business of everyday moral decision-making. For feminists, the problem of transcendence contradicts efforts to create an ethics that emanates from personal lived experience and helps navigate emotions, human relationships, and social contexts, the "stuff" of human life.

Working within religious discourse, Daly fails to see transcendence as a problem for women and renames virtue, "Virgin Virtues" to communicate the liberation of this moral category from its male imprisonment by associating virtues with the "uncaptured," "unsubdued" Virgin. Associating virgin with virtue, however, suggests a purification process to cleanse away sin or vice, often the natural appetites and desires attributed to nature and women. "Virgin," in other words, enables virtue to transcend its masculine definition by cleansing the concept, a process that simply reverses the one that men assigned to "unclean" women and locates women in the masculine category of culture, reason, and virtue in order to free them from the negative feminine category of nature, emotion, and vice. By framing "operative habits" as "Virgin Virtues," Daly invokes a religious tradition consistent with infinite virtue to effectively wash away and purify its practical, finite aspect to transcend virtue's patriarchal definition. Instead of exploring the finite aspect of virtue as an "operative habit," Daly places ultimate value on the masculine, religious infinite position that requires women to transcend and diminish the worth of their lived experience to attain "Virgin Virtues." Daly then reappropriates transcendence, the very process men used to distance themselves from women, nature, and emotion, that, according to this dualism's logic, traps women inside the unequal, constraining trap of uncritical reversals.

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[74] *Roget's International Thesaurus*, 3rd ed., 978.1.

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Defined as "an immoral or evil habit or practice, vice also plays a critical role in this naming process. Sexual immorality, especially prostitution," vice, in the religious context, belongs to the constellation of concepts including the Seven Deadly Sins, central to Daly's analysis in *Gyn/Ecology* and *Pure Lust*:

> A standard listing of the Sins is the following: pride, avarice, anger, lust, gluttony, envy, and sloth. A feminist voyage discloses that these have been radically misnamed, that is, inadequately and perversely 'understood.' They are particularized expressions of the overall use of 'evil' to victimize women. Our journey involves confrontations with the demonic manifestations of evil....It is women ourselves who will have to expel the father from ourselves, becoming our own exorcists...Within a culture possessed by the myth of feminine evil, the naming, describing, and theorizing about good and evil has constituted a maze/haze of deception. The journey of women becoming is breaking through the maze - springing into free space, which is an amazing process.[75]

To break through "the maze" of good and evil, Daly renames the Seven Deadly Sins: Professions (pride), Possession (avarice), aggression (anger), obsession (male lust), assimilation (gluttony), elimination (envy), and fragmentation (sloth), and adds an eighth deadly sin that integrates the others: Processions (deception).[76] Speaking to the need for this eighth deadly sin, Daly explains that "I choose to use the term Processions to name the deception of the fathers...Processions both display and disguise the Deadly Sins of the Fathers. The deception they engender glues the Sins into conglomerates, reversing them, re-presenting them as Virtues."[77] Processions represents the original reversal when patriarchy appropriated women's virtues for men and attributed vice to women through Eve and the Fall. To reverse this original reversal, Daly reclaims vice by renaming the "Eight Deadly Sins" the "Volcanic Virgin Virtues" that belong to women. As Daly states, "thus understood *Vice* is a New Word. It calls to mind the fact that the Virtues/Vices (the Virtuous Vices) of Virgins are like spiral staircases, making possible movement out of the

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[75] *Gyn/Ecology*, 2.

[76] Ibid., 30-1.

[77] Ibid., 30.

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Foreground/Flatland into Other dimensions. Our spiraling movement, overcoming the dronish dichotomies of virile/viral virtues and vices..."[78] Embracing the "Virtuous Vices" empowers women to transcend and overcome the "dronish dichotomies" or, more accurately, the dualism of virtue and vice. Daly defines "vice" as a "good operative habit of Wicked women; Virgin Virtue; WICKEDNESS."[79] This entails redefining vice as virtue to dissociate it from its evil, patriarchal past as a tool of women's oppression. Without a moral category equivalent to vice, Daly essentially creates a vacuous ethics without the capacity to tell good from bad, a dangerous situation for women who often suffer abuse, sexual harassment, and rape, practices that need to be identified as "bad" and to incur legal punishment. Transcendence blinds Daly to such practical moral problems, leaving women in a moral "never-never land" without the tools to navigate the serious dangers in their lives.

To highlight the problem with renaming virtue and vice, this analysis turns to how Daly revisions one vice, Lust and the four Cardinal Virtues of Courage, Prudence, Temperance, and Justice. Lust reveals how sustaining virtue/vice as the moral framework triggers uncritical reversals based on embedded masculine and feminine categories. Essentially, Daly reclaims Lust, one of the Seven Deadly Sins, as a Virgin Virtue, calling lust the Cardinal Virtue: "there are many bright virtues in Archaic Time/Space, but the greatest of these is Lust, Ontological Lust...the Cardinal Virtue...All other virtues of Wild women hinge on Ontological Lust, which is the hinge of the door to freedom, to the possibility of Breaking out. Without the Cardinal Virtue of Ontological Lust, women become unhinged, attempting to hinge ourSelves to whatever appears stable."[80] *Pure Lust*

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[78] *Pure Lust*, 263.

[79] *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987), 99.

[80] "The Archaic Afterwords," *The Church and the Second Sex*, xxvii.

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focuses on retrieving this sin and freeing it from "phallic lust," defined by Daly as "a fusion of obsession and aggression. As obsession it specializes in genital fixation and fetishism, causing broken consciousness, broken heartedness, broken connections among women and between women and the elements. As aggression it rapes, dismembers, and kills women and all living things within its reach."[81] Labeling "lust" as "pure" transforms this Deadly Sin into a Virgin Virtue that cleanses lust of its male association with "genital fixation and fetishism" and aggression against women. Given its sexual content, "pure lust" implies a renewed sexual purity or the traditional feminine virtue of chastity constrains women's sexual freedom. Instead of valuing lust for its raw sexual power and unbridled desire that can grant a form of sexual freedom denied to women, Daly contains its political power by purifying lust in order to categorize it as a Virgin Virtue and separate this vice from its phallic construction.

Daly's treatment of lust speaks to a broader political issue illustrated by this conceptual history in which vice often helps women to leverage power by breaking with, not adhering to, virtue. Vice puts women on the other side of oppressive structures that virtue enlists them to support. Reflecting this idea, Judith Shklar states in *Ordinary Vices* that "it is only if we step outside the divinely ruled moral universe that we can really put our minds to the common ills we inflict upon one another every day."[82] "Pure lust" forces women back into "the divinely ruled moral universe" in which vice must be cleansed of its degraded nature to transcend to the elevated status of virtue. Assuming the masculine association with virtue possesses the greatest moral value, Daly ignores the power of vice in women's lives. This position leads her to constrain its potential by reintegrating vice into the confines of virtue, undermining its capacity to challenge the status quo and, possibly, the dualistic logic defining women's morality.

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[81] *Pure Lust*, 1.

[82] (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984), 1.

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Whereas lust starts as a sin, the renaming process for the Cardinal Virtues of Prudence and Courage entails first defining them as Sins in order to dislocate their masculine definition, and then cleansing these sins enough to transform them into feminist virtues, a circular process premised on uncritical reversals that revalue masculine virtues as Virgin Virtues. As with pure lust, renaming the Cardinal Virtues as sins and then Virgin Virtues fails to identify the power of vice, retains the masculine assumptions of virtue, and leaves the dualistic logic of virtue and vice in place. To rename prudence and courage, two virtues that strike a balance between extreme courses of action, Daly redefines them as extreme, or outside the perimeters of traditional virtue that transforms them into vices and prepares them to become Virgin Virtues. Courage, for Daly, "is a Sin-full Virtue. Derived from the Latin *cor*, meaning heart, *Courage* signifies a heartfelt, passionate strength... 'exceeding the limits of what is normal or tolerable'...EXTRAVAGANT, FANTASTIC.'"[83] Courage entails "reuniting...passion and intellect" to empower women to battle their oppression. Also extreme, prudence "does not mean that a Prude will not seek 'right reason' about matters of moral virtue. It does mean that her standards for judging/measuring the mean between extremes, such as cowardice and rashness, are different from the standards of phallic morality. Her standards are Pyrometric. For Pyrospophical Wisdom is Passionate, Extreme."[84] While Daly recognizes the power of extremes, and vice and sin in "challenging...the Lecherous State," she dilutes the strength of this position by renaming courage and prudence virtues in order to give them the moral value that a male-dominated religious and political tradition attributes to this concept. As such, Daly retains a masculine aspect of virtue that awards great honor to extreme acts of courage by the few which diminish the daily acts of valor performed by the many. Daly perpetuates the gendered morality of the virtue-vice

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[83] *Pure Lust*, 280.

[84] Ibid., 264.

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dualism by reinforcing its infinite aspect that deflects attention from lived experience to a transcendent plane beyond humanity's grasp. While the infinite aspect of virtue can motivate people to take great risks and achieve amazing accomplishments, for women, it sustains a level of moral responsibility for humanity beyond their power that damages self-worth, diminishes the value of daily experience, and makes them "suspect" citizens.

As the one virtue accessible to women, Daly does not transform temperance into a vice. Instead, Daly focuses on women's role in the American temperance movement to show how these women, like their contemporaries fighting against pornography, functioned "to temper/toughen female powers."[85] By defending this feminine virtue that gave women some power based on their moral guardianship, Daly overlooks how temperance enlisted women in the fight against male vice, symbolized by drinking, that registered as a threat to the social order. Following in their footsteps, Daly portrays anti-pornography feminists as daring innovators whereas temperance puts them on the side of defending the status quo by imposing moral constraints on women's sexual freedom. Perhaps sensing this, Daly leans toward valuing "distemperance" that means "out of order, not functioning normally."[86] By simply embracing the opposite for its deviance and nonconformity, Daly fails to rename or revision since such virtues and vices remain defined by masculine standards instead of generating ethical concepts meaningful to women, not in reaction to men.

Despite its value to women's fight for freedom, Daly rejects justice as a masculine virtue that traps women into playing by patriarchal rules. "For the Droningly Dictated Dichotomy of justice-injustice is chiefly concerned with the making and breaking of Boys' Club rules," Daly argues, "The pair justice-injustice, is too pallid to Name the Righteous Virtue of Raging women...Women swing to the left and to the right when captured within

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[85] Ibid., 286.

[86] Ibid., 288.

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the confines of the patriarchally controlled imagination - expressed in the words 'justice' and 'injustice.'"[87] As such, women must reject justice and embrace the virtue of Nemesis which will enable them to fight against patriarchy on their terms. Daly further explains that "the Otherness of this context is not 'complementary' to the prevailing order of sadosociety, for it *is* Other. Women participating in the powers of Nemesis, Spinning gynocentric ways of be-ing, are not caught in reactive rage, but are Actively Raging, Racing."[88] Rejecting justice and embracing temperance indicates the inherent problem that Daly faces by working within the virtue-vice dualism. Temperance retains value simply due to its association with women when it served masculine purposes to keep social order whereas justice, a concept central to patriarchal laws and institutions, loses any moral worth despite its powerful role in women's struggle for liberation. By focusing on the gendered nature of these virtues, Daly fails to see the structural problem of the virtue-vice dualism. The problem that justice poses for women, in this context, emanates from its location as a virtue, not the concept itself.[89] As a result, Daly focuses on playing pieces such as justice and injustice, temperance and distemperance without seeing the rule dictated by the logic of the virtue-vice dualism that ultimately determines how women play this moral game.

At each turn, this renaming/reclaiming of the vice of Lust and the virtues of Courage, Prudence, Temperance, and Justice engages Daly in a cycle of uncritical reversals that prevent a revisioning of feminist virtue. As such Daly perpetuates the contradiction between women's liberation and feminine virtue by reappropriating

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[87] Ibid., 275, 276.

[88] Ibid., 278.

[89] This is not say that justice has not created problems for feminists. Susan Moller Okin's *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: BasicBooks, Inc., 1989); and Iris Marion Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990) represent two key feminist approaches to the Rawlsian concept of distributive justice.

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masculine virtue for women and reversing the gender associated with these moral values. As a result, Daly spins in circles between virtue, vice, and virtue in order to reverse original reversals, cleanse women of vice, and create Virgin Virtues. Instead of transcending the virtue-vice dualism, Daly traps women within it and denies them the vice that historically helped them to see women's virtue as oppressive and challenge it. Inverting the relationship between masculine virtue and feminine vice contradicts feminist goals for liberation since the inequality of power remains in place alongside the constraints of the virtue-vice dualism.

## 6.4: Katie Cannon's *Black Womanist Ethics*: Carving Out a 'Living Space'

Instead of renaming/reclaiming virtue and vice from an original reversal, Katie Cannon retrieves virtue from the historical experience of black women, represented by the life and art of Zora Neale Hurston, joining it with the Christian theology of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. to outline an ethics for black women in *Black Womanist Ethics*.[90] By doing so, Cannon deconstructs a dominant myth of blacks as immoral or amoral by illustrating the virtues that arise from a lived reality premised on survival and the absence of moral agency given black women's lack of equal rights and freedoms. "Racism, gender discrimination and economic exploitation as inherited, age-long complexes," Cannon explains, "require the Black community to create and cultivate values and virtues in their own terms so that they can prevail against the odds with moral

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[90] Mary Daly's essentialist view of men and women led black feminists to criticize her for ignoring racial differences between women. Audre Lorde, for instance, wrote an open letter to Daly in which she states, "the oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those differences. Nor do the reservoirs of our ancient power know these boundaries. To deal with one without even alluding to the other is to distort our commonality as well as our difference" ("An Open Letter to Mary Daly," in *Sister Outsider*, 70).

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integrity."[91] Invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage represent the three finite virtues found within black women's history of servitude and oppression. Whereas Daly hopes to rescue women's virtues from patriarchy, Cannon moves outside this moral framework defined by whites and men by looking to the black community and its history to establish her ethical theory on black women's experience. Despite this innovative approach, Cannon, however, shares with Daly the problem of transcendence that emanates from her reliance on Christian theology to meet the "infinite" criteria of virtue in order to complete her ethical theory, suggesting how this necessary component of virtue contradicts a feminist ethics based on practice, context, and experience. Reading Cannon against Daly illustrates how virtue requires the infinite aspect that generates the problem of transcendence in two very different approaches to feminist ethics, indicating a limit to the religious framework in defining a morality consistent with women's liberation. Although race creates critical differences for women, the dualistic logic of virtue and vice similarly limits black and white women to a moral guardianship discourse that sustains their subordination to men. Despite the weakness of transcendence, Cannon's strength of starting with lived experience leads her to investigate how black women negotiate the complicated boundaries between race, gender, and class by carving out a 'living space,' a concept consistent with the moral middle ground that offers a meaningful alternative to transcendence as a strategy for further developing a feminist ethics independent of the problems generated by the virtue-vice dualism.

Working from the lived experience of black women, Cannon illustrates the triple oppression of race, class, and gender operating in black women's lives that negates their virtue or moral worth in the white and, in a different manner, black community. Consistent with other black feminists such as Angela Davis and bell hooks, Cannon locates

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[91] *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 2.

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the origins of black women's oppression in slavery that, in terms of morality, defined the slave woman as absolutely vice-ridden. In this context, black women functioned as the moral antithesis of the Victorian era's True Woman which granted white women the political virtue of moral guardianship that encompassed the religious purity of the Virgin Mary. Alternatively, black women represented vice, though not as the daughters of Eve that continued to affiliate certain white women with vice, but as Jezebels, a label derived from *I Kings* 16:31 that refers to the wife of Ahab, the King of Israel and means a wicked, shameless woman. As Deborah White explains, "one of the most prevalent images of black women in antebellum America was of a person governed almost entirely by her libido, a Jezebel character. In every way Jezebel was the counterimage of the mid-twentieth century ideal of the Victorian lady. She did not lead men and children to God; piety was foreign to her. She saw no advantage to prudery, indeed domesticity paled in importance before matters of the flesh."[92] Slavery functions as the black woman's moral legacy in which she serves as white society's receptacle of vice. Starting from the position of property, black women's lack of moral agency followed them from Reconstruction to the migration from the South to the North into the 1960s and 70s.

Yet, Cannon shows how black women cultivated a morality suited to these circumstances by developing a method that "starts with experience instead of with theories of values or norms. However, I believe that basic experiential themes and ethical implications can lead to norms lived out in the realities of day-to-day experience."[93] Unlike white women, black women must navigate race, class, and gender oppression that locates them on different boundary lines and requires them to alter assumptions within the dominant white and black male communities in order to live with honor, dignity, and

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[92] *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 28-29.

[93] *Black Womanist Ethics*, 5.

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respect. As Cannon states, "Black women writers authenticate, in an economy of expressions, how black people creatively strain against the external limits in their lives, how they affirm their humanity by inverting assumptions, and how they balance the continual struggle and interplay of paradoxes. Blacks win by losing, retain their blessings by giving them away."[94] Black women invert the assumption of vice that, although Cannon does not explicitly address it, provides a critical standpoint from which black women can challenge the status quo and how it defines them. Speaking to the virtues of vice, Cannon states, "Living under a system of cheating, lying and stealing, enslaved Blacks learned to consider these vices as virtues in their dealings with whites. The bittersweet irony of Afro-American experience forces Black people to examine critically the conventional, often pretentious, morality of middle-class American ideals."[95] Being defined as immoral by white society places black women in the position of vice that denigrates their tools for survival. From their perspective, cheating, lying, and stealing function as exercises of power and the virtues necessary for oppressed people to exist despite their oppressors. Similar to the rebellious Lowell mill girls, however, the dualistic logic of virtue and vice traps black women in an uncritical reversal of defining the vices assigned to them by a white and male society as virtues. For an oppressed class, however, the standpoint of vice enables them to see how morality constrains them and perpetuates their subordination.

Recognizing this prevents Cannon from falling into the trap of uncritical reversals in a fashion similar to Mary Daly. Instead, Cannon moves outside the moral framework of white patriarchal society to derive the three finite virtues of invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage from black women's lives. The black author, Zora Neale Hurston embodied invisible dignity as an unwavering supporter of black culture. As Cannon

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[94] Ibid., 77.

[95] Ibid., 76.

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explains, "her life was committed to redressing ignorance about Black culture. Her work was an affirmation of the Black race as one of the great human races, inferior to none in its accomplishments and in its ability."[96] Quiet grace represents how black women "face life squarely, front and center, without reverence or protection by dominant powers in society" that afford white women the feminine virtues of passivity and subordination.[97] "'Unshouted courage' is the quality of steadfastness, akin to fortitude, in the face of formidable oppression...it involves the ability to 'hold onto life' against major oppositions."[98] Defined by the oppressed conditions of black women, these finite virtues retain the impetus for change in contrast to an adherence to the status quo characteristic of moral guardianship. While "invisible," "quiet," and "unshouted" suggest the passive aspects of these virtues, Cannon stresses how each resists oppression in a way that allows black women to survive. Since black women's standpoint denies them the protections necessary to express unbridled rage and anger, "quiet grace," for instance, enables them to retain dignity and live in a world where "the Black woman's very life depends upon her being able to decipher the various sounds of the larger world," and to serve "as the motivation for channeling the power for change along definite lines and toward definite ends."[99] This virtue then empowers black women to navigate the boundaries of their oppression and to generate change. Similarly, "unshouted courage" involves the incentive to facilitate change, to chip away the oppressive structures, bit by bit, to celebrate and rename their experiences in empowering ways."[100] Whereas white women's finite virtues enlist their support for the status quo of the dominant class, those of black women value

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[96] Ibid., 111.

[97] Ibid., 125.

[98] Ibid., 144.

[99] Ibid., 125, 126.

[100] Ibid., 144.

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resistance and oppression. "Invisible," "quiet," and "unshouted," however, retain a passivity and reticence similar to female virtues indicating a way in which black women play a less active role in the fight against oppression than their male counterparts. These qualifiers suggest how even black women define their virtue according to feminine traits of passivity as a means of adapting the virtue-vice dualism to their context which speaks to how feminine virtue dilutes the exercise of women's political power.

Similar to Daly, Cannon turns to Christian theology to complete her ethical theory that, she correctly identifies, remains unfinished without collective moral standards which in the virtue tradition requires the infinite dimension. This move introduces the problem of transcendence into Cannon's otherwise grounded womanist ethics. While Daly relied on the medieval views of St. Thomas Aquinas, Cannon remained within the black religious tradition by applying the Christian ethics of theologians Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. to the context of black women's lives. For Cannon, the limits of finite virtues that guide individual behavior become apparent when trying to explain how Zora Neale Hurston transformed from a black advocate to a conservative writer for white magazines after the black community decimated her character by falsely accusing her of molesting a ten year old boy. Cannon uses Hurston as a lesson for black women who need faith as their moral support. When the human community turns its back, the spiritual community of God remains as an infinite source of strength. "As a Black feminist of faith," Cannon proclaims, "I maintain that the cultural and historical support available to Hurston was the balm of the Black religious heritage. By applying the faith claims of Christianity to the nuances and ambiguities of Black life, two of Hurston's contemporaries, Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr., provide conceptual elements for enhancing the moral agency of Black women."[101] Thurman and King offer

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[101] Ibid., 160.

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three ethical themes useful to black women - *imago dei*,[102] love as grounded in justice, and the irreplaceable nature of community. King's version of *imago dei*, for instance, illustrates how Cannon applies these ethical principles to black women. Applying natural law, "theological ethics for King is based on a sense of social responsibility that deals with the inherent value of each human being. The *imago dei* motif gives Black women the divine right 'to be treated as ends and never as mere means.'"[103] Instead of building on women's lived experience, virtue requires an infinite component readily available in Christian ethics that, however, creates the problem of transcendence and makes this aspect of virtue ethics incompatible with feminist ethics.

As such, this infinite dimension of black women's virtue triggers certain elements of moral guardianship discourse, particularly the elevation strategy and the double burden of moral responsibility. First, turning to the spiritual diverts attention away from the harsh reality and opportunities found in lived experience. Describing this ethical perspective, Cannon states that "implicit, not yet explicit, in Hurston's literary vision...is the theological vision: Human beings are united in a bond of divine love which enables them to live justly; and the overarching mandate calls for all people to live cooperatively as faithful disciples in an inclusive human community."[104] Among other things, this ethics presumes that its members believe in God, creating exclusion and inequality evident when applied to the real world of the human community. Believers acquire infinite virtue that seemingly elevates black women and grants them a moral worth unavailable to them in their lived experience. In a sense, attributing a complete virtue to black women forces Cannon to look outside women's lived experience to meet the standards of morality created by a patriarchal

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[102] This term refers to the ultimate significance of the individual's personality as a child of God.

[103] Ibid., 163.

[104] Ibid., 174.

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Christian tradition, denying the full strength of the black woman's ethical perspective. Cannon's initial method of using lived experience suggests the alternative of exploring how black women generate collective moral standards in their families, neighborhoods, associations, religious groups, and political clubs. This approach, however, requires breaking with the tenets of virtue, particularly those of Christian ethics, that demand people to transcend such contexts and constraints.

Second, infinite virtue creates in women the capacity to hold the double burden of moral responsibility for families and the political community's common good that also operates in relation to black women. When describing the black slave woman as the moral antithesis of the white True Woman, Cannon, for instance, states that "the white female was charged with the responsibility of being 'the repository of white civilization'...The Black woman became the correlate to the white lady. Her function was to perform the unavoidable and tedious tasks which were thought to be demeaning to civilized ladies."[105] Whereas white women served as 'the repository of white civilization,' black women functioned as 'the repository' for white women. If so, black women assume a double burden of moral responsibility, well beyond their power, for the white community. In the black community, women serve as moral guardians whose "unshouted courage" requires them to sacrifice their interests for others and the community. As Cannon explains, "as the historical custodian in her community and in the society at large, the Black woman is held accountable for many happenings beyond her control."[106] As "historical custodian" for the black and white community, black women's double burden of moral responsibility extends beyond their lived community to one in which they have little, if any, power, leaving black women vulnerable as targets of blame for political decay such as that associated with the "welfare queen" discourse prominent in the 1960s. Speaking to the

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[105] Ibid., 38, 39.

[106] Ibid., 144-5.

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double burden of moral responsibility, Cannon explains that "the Black woman's added burden was that she was held accountable for mollifying the effects of these adverse conditions," in this case pertaining to black migration from the South to the North.[107] Race adds another layer of oppression onto black women who act as moral guardians within the black and white communities, intensifying their double burden of moral responsibility. Within the black community, the black woman's double burden of moral responsibility also helps to explain the outrage of black men against black feminists who fought their patriarchal oppression, only to be charged as traitors to their community and the Civil Rights movement. As moral guardians, black women possess an infinite capacity that entails their moral responsibility for their community's success or failure in fighting for social justice against the dominant white community. Infinite virtue perpetuates the double burden of moral responsibility for white and black women by holding them responsible for things well beyond their control, a position that makes them morally suspect and potential traitors to their community. Given black women's particular vulnerability, infinite virtue and moral guardianship undermine their liberation from such a double burden of moral responsibility.

By turning to Christian ethics, Cannon translates black women's lived experience into a tradition that triggers a moral guardianship discourse and leaves black women disadvantaged in relationship to the black and white communities while contradicting the grounded, experiential premise of feminist ethics. Infinite virtue derives its strength from a capacity to elevate women above the immoral world of public life, diverting attention away from the value and political problems of lived reality. To achieve this position, Cannon, like Daly, omits vice from her faith-based womanist ethics. Perhaps to distance black women from a legacy as immoral and amoral individuals with a tragic history of miscegenation, death, and oppression, Cannon turns to virtue. While black women's vice

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[107] Ibid., 62.

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illustrates their oppressed status as the deviant and subordinate in society, it constitutes a critical aspect of their moral character within the context of American political discourse and acts as a central tool for justifying the punishment of black men and women. Although Cannon hopes to retrieve a moral and virtuous tradition for black women, two facts remain. First, vice serves as a source of political power for black women since it sustains their outsider status which enables them to see the structures of oppression clearly and to act as a moral voice against it. Second, ignoring vice denies a tool used against black women and men to justify their oppression and, as such, it should not be omitted, no matter how charged an issue. Without addressing vice, Cannon lands in a position similar to that of Daly. Both sides of the moral coin - virtue and vice, good and evil - must be addressed in an ethical theory that hopes to address the political realities that confront oppressed groups often charged with vice to justify their subordination and exclusion from political power. The transcendence problem with infinite virtue deflects attention away from the benefits and detriments of vice. In the case of black women, attempts to fit them into the moral guardianship role consistent with white women's virtue and vice contradicts their particular historical and lived experience, leaving them in the vulnerable position of being saddled with the double burden of moral responsibility for the black and white community.

Despite the problem of integrating black women into a moral tradition designed to perpetuate women's oppression, Cannon's primary reliance on black women's lived experience that explores how these women carved out a 'living space' offers an alternative to transcendence by focusing on how black and white women negotiate their lived realities. As Cannon states, "locked out of the real dynamics of human freedom in America, they implicitly pass on and receive from one generation to the next moral formulas for survival that allow them to stand over and against the perversions of ethics and morality imposed on them by whites and males who support racial imperialism in a

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patriarchal social order. The Black woman's literary tradition documents the 'living space' carved out of the intricate web of racism, sexism, and poverty."[108] The virtue-vice dualism represents an "ethics and morality imposed" on black women "by whites and males." To develop a black womanist ethics, Cannon adopts infinite and finite virtues consistent with Christian ethics and a white moral tradition to elevate black women's moral status. Moving away from this 'living space' denies the full power of the black woman's lived experience to generate an ethical theory consistent with freedom and equality. Alternatively, a 'living space' parallels, what this analysis calls, the middle ground between virtue and vice that for black women becomes most evident when they strive for moral worth in a society that defines them as amoral or immoral. Speaking to the moral and political power of this space, Cannon explains,

> Throughout the various periods of their history in the United States, Black women have used their creativity to carve out 'living space' within the intricate web of multilayered oppression. From the beginning, they had to contend with the ethical ambiguity of racism, sexism and other sources of fragmentation in this acclaimed land of freedom, justice and equality. The Black woman's literary tradition delineates the many ways that ordinary Black women have fashioned value patterns and ethical procedures in their own terms, as well as mastering, transcending, radicalizing and sometimes destroying pervasive, negative orientations imposed by the mores of the larger society.[109]

This "living space" carved out of "the intricate web of multilayered oppression" empowers black women to negotiate the negative mores imposed by the larger society and to fashion "value patterns and ethical procedures in their own terms." Instead of drawing attention to a transcendent, spiritual plane, this strategy confronts the contradictions between a society premised on "freedom, justice, and equality" and the reality of "racism, sexism, and other sources of fragmentation." At this moment, Cannon acts as an "innovating ideologist" who turns to black women's experience, not Christian ethics or the virtue-vice

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[108] Ibid., 7.

[109] Ibid., 76.

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dualism, to explore a 'living space' as a solution to this contradiction. In contrast to Daly's uncritical reversal of virtue and vice, Cannon's 'living space' moves outside this dualism's logic to value women's experience as the starting point for a feminist ethics. This perspective redefines the role of religion as one piece of women's lives that may inform their ethics instead of as the solution to the puzzle that integrates women into the virtue-vice dualism. Informed by Cannon's 'living space,' this analysis proposes the moral middle ground as an alternative to transcendence and uncritical reversals that values women's lived and historical experience as critical to finding a way out of the virtue-vice dualism that perpetuates a moral tradition antithetical to women's liberation.

## 6.5: Conclusion: Finding the Middle Ground in the Virtue-Vice Dualism

Among religious feminists, Cannon and Daly represent more radical approaches to feminist ethics that, in the end, encounter serious problems due to their reliance on the infinite virtue of Christian theology. Despite her challenges to the Church, its biblical teachings, and morality, Daly fails as an "innovating ideologist" by relying on a moral perspective consistent with the religious discourses of moral guardianship. Dismissing the political value of vice leaves Daly trapped within a series of uncritical reversals that invert women's relationship to virtue and vice without challenging the dualistic logic that sustains inequality and constraints. Perhaps the oppressive history of Eve as the origin of humanity's sin and vice prevents religious feminists from recognizing the "virtues of vice" in women's lived experience when working against moral standards to effect change. Without vice, Daly relies on the infinite aspect of virtue that emanates from the transcendence of spirituality as a means of overcoming this dualism, a position that perpetuates the elevation strategy which raises women above human life to achieve a higher moral plane. In the context of virtue's operation within American political discourse, Daly's ultimate defense of infinite virtue locates her on the side of preserving

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the status quo instead of political change. Infinite virtue serves a similar function in Cannon's ethics to eliminate the political power of vice and to divert attention from black women's lived experience. As such, women, according to both of these ethical theories, remain within the moral guardianship discourse instead of achieving liberation from these moral constraints.

Unlike Puritan, republican, and democratic women from earlier eras, second wave feminists recognized the powerful constraints of dualisms inherited from the Enlightenment. Radical feminists such as Daly and, to a lesser extent, Raymond hoped to liberate women from these constraints by inverting masculine and feminine categories that trap women in uncritical reversals and perpetuate the logic of dualisms. Others such as Cannon challenged white society's assumptions about black women's immorality or amorality. Working within the religious tradition in which the Virgin Mary and Eve, heaven and hell, good and evil, virtue and vice constitute the moral universe undoubtedly contributes to a refusal to value vice and challenge this dualistic structure. As a result, Daly and Cannon turn to the infinite and use transcendence as the primary means of overcoming the patriarchal and racist past of the virtue-vice dualism. Instead of challenging the dualistic structure, renaming and reclaiming virtue for women illustrates two critical problems for revisioning feminist virtue - transcendence and polarization. These problems deflect attention away from the moral middle ground that could prove useful in further developing moral standards viable for a feminist ethics grounded in contexts, practices, and the moral complexities of human life.

Transcendence contradicts feminist approaches to ethics and indicates two key problems for revisioning virtue from a feminist perspective. Contemporary feminist ethics directly responds to the Enlightenment's moral theory best represented by Kantian ethics that argues for freedom from the constraints of emotions and relations to achieve an objective reality premised on reason and virtue, or universal moral principles. Speaking to

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the alternative feminist perspective, Alison Jaggar states that "these considerations point not only toward a naturalistic as opposed to a rationalistic moral epistemology - that is, toward an ethics as plural and local rather than singular and universal, grounded not in transcendent reason but rather in historically specific moral practices and traditions."[110] Transcendence in Cannon and Daly's ethics reveals an aspect of this moral dualism antithetical to feminist ethics. First, in the religious discourse of virtue and vice, transcendence indicates a process of purification for women due to their association with the profane, vice, and sin as the daughters of Eve, or as Jezebels. Such a position assumes the negative value of women's association with emotions, nature, and human relationships, the very aspects valued by feminist ethics. Moreover, transcendence ignores the value of vice in women's efforts to effect political change, integrates women back into the moral guardianship discourse of defending the status quo, and diminishes the value of their lived experience. Second, transcendence reflects the infinite component of virtue that is necessary to how this concept establishes moral standards of excellence. Eliminating the infinite aspect of virtue to revision this concept as grounded, finite, and more consistent with feminist ethics essentially deconstructs virtue to that point that it no longer functions or resembles virtue. Without its infinite component, moral standards of behavior applicable to a broader political community disappear since finite virtues serve to guide individual actions. Transcendence reflects this problem in reverse by cleansing women of vices such as lust and eradicating the category of virtue that left Daly and Cannon's ethics without a measure for the "bad" practices of human life. To revision virtue to fit into feminist ethics would entail eliminating its infinite component that causes the problem of transcendence, a move that prevents virtue from functioning to create moral standards for a community.

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[110] "Feminist Ethics: Projects, Problems, Prospects," *Feminist Ethics*, 93.

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The polarization involved in transcendence that implies an "above" or elevated status (virtue) versus a "below" or denigrated status (vice) indicates another problem with revisioning virtue, particularly evident in Daly's work. Daly's uncritical reversal of masculine and feminine virtue and vice sustains gendered separatism and inequality by maintaining these extreme moral positions. Despite this, Daly struggles to maintain the virtue-vice dualism that entails more fluidity when applied to women. Sherry Ortner argues that women act as conduits between the polar categories of nature and culture, another dualism central to women, stating that "woman's being [is] seen as intermediate between nature and culture."[111] To overcome the polarized categories of reason and emotion, and virtue and vice, Daly resurrects and redefines the Virgin Mary as a symbol that links women's historical oppression by the Church to their vitality represented by this powerful religious icon. As Daly states, "the image of Mary is an *operational image*. This means that the function of the Arch-Image as *conduit* [emphasis mine] of Archimagical powers was to inspire in women *acts* of knowing and passion, causing women to participate in its powers."[112] Linking Mary to the Black Madonna, Daly further associates this cultural Arch-Image with "the black earth" and "other elements" of nature[113] that speaks to Ortner's point that women never fully belong to either nature or culture. Daly's reconstruction of the Virgin Mary indicates her awareness of the fluidity between polar categories such as nature and culture, reason and emotion to the extent that she aims to synthesize these categories within the Virgin Mary symbol. Yet, Daly's reliance on the virtue-vice dualism reinstates polar moral categories that elevate virtue as the dominant moral position, indicated by Daly's choice of the Virgin Mary, not the Black Madonna, Joan of Arc, Eve, or Lilith, as her Arch-Image. Unlike these images, the Virgin

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[111] "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" 87.

[112] *Pure Lust*, 95.

[113] Ibid., 117.

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Mary carries the moral weight of virtue and purity for women, enabling them to transcend their patriarchal condition. The dualistic logic of virtue and vice, however, negates Daly's attempt to synthesize nature and culture, reason and passion within the Virgin Mary, the symbol of female virtue and transcendence above humanity's degraded condition. This failed attempt illustrates how the polarity inherent in dualisms contradicts the moral ambiguity of daily life and classifies women according to either/or categories that negate human complexity and the shifting identities central to feminist ethics.

Between the poles of virtue and vice, however, women's experience with this dualism points to a middle ground that offers an alternative space for exploring feminist ethics. While Ortner identifies women as conduits between nature and culture, the attribution of virtue and vice to women similarly entails a greater fluidity than usually observed. The shifting moral value assigned to the Virgin Mary and Eve, nuns and witches in response to changing political and economic circumstances illustrates how women act as conduits between these polar extremes of morality. As a result, women inhabit a moral middle ground that, while making them pawns in patriarchal political games, provides a unique space for exploring ethical alternatives to the virtue-vice dualism. As Daly's position reveals, synthesizing virtue and vice into the Virgin Virtues simply locks women into the logic of the virtue-vice dualism. Transcendence contradicts a grounded feminist ethics and invokes the oppressions associated with moral guardianship. Alternatively, the middle ground emanates from women's experiences with morality and keeps ethical reflection grounded in practical contexts. Instead of focusing on the extremes of virtue and vice, this location immerses women in the moral ambiguities, emotions, and practices constitutive of human life and actual ethical decision making.

Moving away from the polar opposites of the virtue-vice dualism toward this moral middle ground avoids the problem of transcendence and uncritical reversals by working within the context in order to move through it. This position embraces the

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perspective of Katie Cannon who used black women's lived experience to illustrate how they carved out a 'living space' where they could cultivate their moral worth in a patriarchal, racist society. The middle ground operates to create a standpoint similar to Patricia Hill Collins' outsider-within stance that reflects a position on the boundaries of domination and subordination and reveals a means to liberation despite oppressive structures.[114] In this sense, vice plays a critical role in establishing the moral middle ground due to its outsider or deviant position that enables women to break with their insider role as the virtuous moral guardians of the status quo. Once in the middle ground, women must consider how to move forward without engaging in the unrealistic project of severing ties with the past. To do so, Janice Raymond provides the perspective of dual vision:

> Dual vision include, on the one hand, a keen recognition of the conditions of female existence in the man-made world. This means an acute near-sightedness that sees keenly with the ordinary faculty of sight. Realism of the world as men have fabricated it is necessary to maintain more than ordinary sight - or a feminist far sightedness - that does not become far-flung or escapist. On the other hand, realism about the conditions of female oppression and the man-made manipulations of female existence in this world may carry us beyond heterorelational structures, but at the same time there must be far-sighted thinking and action that suggest where we are going.[115]

Such vision remains contextually oriented and aware of the dynamic power relations operating within moral discourse while looking beyond them to make better decisions for the future. This middle ground between virtue and vice enables feminists to see this dualism's logic that locks women into a moral structure based on inequality, constraint, and the absence of moral ambiguity. Digging into the middle ground, long populated by women, presents exciting possibilities for conceiving of a feminist ethics that goes beyond

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[114] As Collins states, "as outsiders within, Black women have a distinct view of the contradictions between the dominant group's actions and ideologies," captured in the role of the black domestic worker in a white household (*Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* [New York, NY: Routledge, 1991], 11).

[115] *A Passion for Friends*, 207.

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the constraints of the virtue-vice dualism. Although the middle ground does not resolve the problem of dualisms, it creates a space from which women can achieve a more lasting freedom through an ethics premised on a dual vision that encompasses the moral ambiguity and complexity of lived experience, the very moral middle ground where women navigate their daily realities.

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# CHAPTER SEVEN

## A Battleground of Virtue and Vice: The Sexual Revolution

### 7.1: Introduction

While religious feminists targeted the Church and its morality as the path to spiritual liberation for women, most feminists, ranging from liberals to radicals, focused on sex and power as primary barriers to women's freedom, equality, and inclusion. Politically oriented feminists such as Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone looked to first wave feminism's Victorian morality and single issue orientation to explain how and why women still lacked equality and freedom almost fifty years after the Nineteenth Amendment's passage. These second wave feminists experienced a contradiction between their formal political rights and informal repression that denied them full citizenship despite women's right to vote. Similar to the rebellious Lowell mill girls who challenged the Victorian era's True Woman, many feminists, particularly the radicals, of the second wave attacked Traditional Womanhood, a remnant of Victorian ideology that took on iconic status for women in the 1950s. Despite their different historical contexts, the Lowell mill girls and radical feminists recognized the binding limitations that morality placed on women's full inclusion within the political community. As such, these second wave feminists qualify as "innovating ideologists," a term used by James Farr to describe how groups resolve contradictions between inconsistent beliefs within a system. Unlike the rebellious Lowell mill girls who never directly challenged Victorian True Womanhood, radical second wave feminists explicitly tackled Traditional Womanhood as representative of an oppressive belief system inconsistent with women's liberation. Alternatively, anti-pornography feminists of the era, similar to the loyalist Lowell mill girls, held firmly to Traditional

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Womanhood and virtue as essential to protecting women from a society hostile and violent towards them. These contrasting positions among second wave feminists reflect the continued power of moral guardianship discourse as it translated into the contemporary era when challenges to virtue and Traditional Womanhood evoked intense responses from feminists and anti-feminists alike. Despite an awareness of morality and even virtue and vice, these feminists focus on finite virtue that, while developing a stronger analysis of morality as an exercise of power, overlooks its infinite dimension that links to moral guardianship and helps to explain how a challenge to women's virtue equates with a threat to American exceptionalism. By locating second wave feminist discourse within the broader conceptual history of virtue, this chapter illustrates why the sexual revolution triggered such a powerful backlash because these feminists threatened women's moral guardianship directly and, thus, the nation's future.

Initiating this challenge to Traditional Womanhood, on January 15, 1968, about five thousand women converged on Capitol Hill to petition Congress to end the Vietnam War, an event known as the Jeanette Rankin Brigade Protest.[1] Later that evening, a group of women called the New York Radical Feminists organized a counter-protest to demonstrate the significance of issues pertaining to sex and gender. After marching behind a huge female dummy with a blank face and blonde curls draped with S&H Green Stamps, curlers, garters, and hair spray cans, five hundred women arrived at Arlington

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[1] On an historical note, this event marked an important break between politicos, women who wanted to remain attached to the "larger movement" of the New Left including student and anti-war protests, and feminists who wanted to organize separately on gender issues that they viewed as central to any revolutionary change. For an extensive discussion of the politico-feminist split, see Alice Echols' *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), Chapter 2 especially.

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Cemetery where they held a funeral for Traditional Womanhood.[2] Kathie Sarachild delivered the "Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood" that explained why women must fight against their oppression by organizing around their issues instead of playing a subordinate role in the male-dominated peace and student movements.[3] In this speech, Sarachild rejects women's traditional strategy of leveraging political power through Traditional Womanhood:

> And we were even attempting to organize ourselves on the basis of power...that little bit of power we are told we have here in America...the so-called power of wives and mother. That this power is only a substitute for power, that it really amounts to nothing politically, is the reason why all of us attending this funeral must bury traditional womanhood tonight. We must bury her in Arlington Cemetery, however crowded it is by now. For in Arlington Cemetery, our national monument to war, alongside Traditional Manhood, is her natural resting place.[4]

Sarachild clearly identifies how moral guardianship - here expressed as "the so-called power of wives and mothers" - actually undermines women's capacity to acquire power since "it really amounts to nothing politically." Speaking to how "this power is only a

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[2] Shulamith Firestone provides a first-hand account of this event in "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?" in *Notes from the First Year - Documents from the Women's Liberation Movement*, Special Collections Library, Duke University on-line collection, http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/, June 19, 2001.

[3] Although women actively participated in the early Civil Rights movement, Sara Evans documents how, by the mid-1960s, most white students, male and female, left that movement and focused attention on New Left issues such as the Vietnam War, Northern poverty programs, and university politics. Largely, this separation occurred as Civil Rights leaders deemed it important for blacks to focus on their issues independently, a lesson that women soon learned. See Evans' *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), especially Chapter 4, "Black Power - Catalyst for Feminism." Two key documents mark the historical juncture: the "SNCC Position Paper: Women in the Movement" describes women's oppression in the Civil Rights movement; and Casey Hayden and Mary King's "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo" expresses a similar sentiment in the student movement; both documents can be found in *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade*, eds. Judith Clavir Albert and Stewart Edward Albert (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1984)114-116, 133-136.

[4] *Notes from the First Year - Documents from the Women's Liberation Movement*, On-line Archival Collection, Special Collections Library, Duke University, http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/.

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substitute for power" expresses a position consistent with moral guardianship that, for these feminists, manifests in Traditional Womanhood, a symbol of the belief system that locks women into the submissive sex roles of mothers and wives, and denies them access to public life where they could affect political change. Moreover, freed from Traditional Manhood and Womanhood, men and women could explore their "human qualities [that] will make us attractive, then, not servile qualities...And both our daughters and sons will be free to develop themselves in just the directions they want to go as human beings."[5] Freedom from such constraining social roles represented a central goal for early second wave feminists. In retrospect, this mock burial of Traditional Womanhood marked a turning point in the women's movement as radical feminists identified how this cultural icon erected high barriers against women's full and active citizenship.

The death of Traditional Womanhood implies the death of virtue. A remnant of Victorian morality, virtue animates Traditional Womanhood by setting the moral standard for "appropriate" female behavior based on a strong dose of restraint, denial, and sacrifice, particularly in sexual terms. To gain freedom, this generation of feminists called for a sexual revolution to liberate women from the web of moral constraints centered on their sexuality, codified by virtue, and symbolized by Traditional Womanhood. Unlike first wave feminists, those of the second benefitted from the psychological and sociological work of thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Talcott Parsons[6] in order to develop theories about how women internalize external oppressions through the ego. Awareness of such processes drew feminists' attention to the moral dimension of women's oppression. In

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Although feminists roundly rejected Freud and Parsons' views on women, they benefitted from their insights into the internalization of external processes and the role of mores in creating unseen oppressions for women. On this topic, see, for instance, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*.

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particular, they identified a multitude of finite virtues, including modesty, chastity, self-sacrifice, and vulnerability, established by men and internalized by women, that limited women's sexual freedom. Virtue's part in maintaining moral constraints, particularly on women's sexuality, made this moral concept more prominent in the theory-building of second wave feminism when they considered the political value of Traditional Womanhood, how to achieve sexual freedom, and the causes of their oppression in and exclusion from the political community.

This analysis of virtue and vice in feminist discourse during the Sexual Revolution begins in 1963 when Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* that brought the problems arising from women's forced exodus back to domestic life in the 1950s to popular consciousness. Although determining the Sexual Revolution's conclusion is difficult, this analysis marks its end in 1989 when the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* to allow states broad regulatory discretion over abortion, a case many feminists feared would overturn *Roe v. Wade* and cause the death of feminism since reproductive rights, most saliently represented in abortion, constituted the thrust of this stage of the movement. It could, however, be argued that the Sexual Revolution ends in 1975 when radical feminist groups, for all practical purposes, disband and the Christian Right and other anti-feminist forces gather strength in the wake of *Roe v. Wade*. During this period, for instance, Phyllis Schlafly established the Eagle Forum in 1972 to fight the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion rights, and basically all feminist initiatives; Jerry Falwell co-founded the Moral Majority in 1979 to battle the moral denigration perpetuated by sexual liberation and feminism; and Beverly LaHaye, wife of Tim LaHaye, the co-founder of the Moral Majority with Falwell,

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formed Concerned Women for America.[7] In the face of this mounting backlash, the press began declaring the death of feminism in the early 1980s, a dirge that continued throughout the decade. Despite such declarations, ending this analysis in 1975 or 1979 would exclude feminism's continued struggle around such issues as abortion, sexual harassment, rape, AIDS, and the pornography debates of the 1980s. *Webster* serves to represent more than a pinnacle defeat for feminists of the Sexual Revolution that marked the political tide's turn distinctively in favor of the backlash against the struggle for women's reproductive freedom. 1989 also indicates a shift from the movement's more radical rejection of Traditional Womanhood and virtue towards a position more consistent with cultural feminism that focused on the values of motherhood, virtue, care, and the family in shaping women's identity and political participation. In Chapter Eight, the analysis turns to feminist discourse amidst increasing cultural conservatism.

As feminists engaged in theory-building between 1963 and 1989, dualisms became an increasingly evident problem in terms of epistemological barriers to women's liberation. While feminists such as Joan Tronto[8] and Virginia Held[9] recognize the gendered aspect of moral categories, an investigation into a virtue-vice dualism remains absent from feminist

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[7] Many events coalesced to turn the tide against the Sexual Revolution. On June 30, 1982, the deadline for ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment passed three states short of the required thirty-eight [For a complete account of this historical development, see Jane Mansbridge's *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986)]. This event, coupled with the general anti-feminist tone set by Ronald Reagan's White House and the defunding of women's projects by the federal government, resulted in the media proclaiming the death of feminism by the mid-1980s. Even feminist leaders such as Betty Friedan retreated from the broader agenda of sexual freedoms. Friedan, for instance, took aim at radical feminists in *The Second Stage* (1981) where she attacked their anti-family rhetoric and called for a pro-family feminist agenda.

[8] See *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Chapters 1-3 particularly.

[9] See *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), Chapter 3 especially.

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ethics. Even feminists such as Val Plumwood who examine dualisms and morality overlook virtue and vice. Plumwood, for instance, provides an admittedly inconclusive, though still quite comprehensive, series of dualisms prominent in Western thought, ranging from culture/nature, male/female, mind/body, universal/particular to freedom/necessity, master/slave, production/reproduction.[10] Yet, a dualism reflecting morality such as good/bad, right/wrong, moral/immoral, or virtue/vice fails to appear. This omission gains significance because this moral dimension helps to explain the political outcome of dualisms that categorize people into either/or categories as a means of morally justifying the inclusion of some into and the exclusion of others from the political community. Plumwood recognizes the connection between morality and politics when she states that:

> the attempt to simply enlarge the privileged class by extending it to, and including, certain women not only ignores a crucial *moral* dimension of the problem; it ignores the way in which different kinds of domination act as models, support and reinforcement for one another and the way in which the same conceptual structure of domination reappears in very different inferiorised groups.[11]

Morality, then, helps to structure women's oppression. Specifically, focusing on this "*moral* dimension" illustrates how the political significance of dualisms evolves from a valuing process that deems the male/reason/culture/public category to be morally "good" or virtuous, and the female/emotion/nature/private category as morally "bad," vice-ridden, or even evil. Based on this moral hierarchy, the "good" citizens, men, gain entrance into and "bad" women remain excluded from the political community. Complicating matters,

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[10] Val Plumwood offers the following list of dualisms: culture/nature; reason/nature; male/female; mind/body (nature); master/slave; reason/matter (physicality); rationality/animality (nature); reason/emotion (nature); mind, spirit/nature; freedom/necessity; universal/particular; human/nature (non-human); civilised/primitive (nature); production/reproduction (nature); public/private; subject/object; self/other. See *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 43.

[11] Ibid., 29.

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Plumwood recognizes that "extending" and "including" women in the "privileged class" diverts attention away from how morality justifies political hierarchies by making it appear as though women achieve inclusion. Given the political implications of these gendered moral hierarchies, the absence of virtue-vice from feminist analysis of dualisms presents a more pressing concern when trying to understand women's continued exclusion from full participation in political life.

As such, this chapter focuses on how the discourse of second wave feminism illustrates that virtue and vice operate as a powerful dualism in establishing the moral hierarchies that translate into women's political oppression. In order to identify a dualism, Plumwood outlines five criteria briefly introduced here.[12] First, *backgrounding* involves the master or dominant group's denial of their dependency on subordinate groups such as women, people of color, and the poor, a process that keeps the master group in society's foreground. Second, *radical exclusion* or *hyperseparation* creates an expansive distance between the two groups that polarizes them into two distinct, vastly separate, spheres. Third, *incorporation* specifies how the subordinate group's identity is defined solely in terms of their dependence on the master group, denying their individuality or separate existence. Fourth, *instrumentalism* narrowly defines the subordinate group in terms of its objective function in serving the purposes or needs of the dominant or master group. Finally, *homogenization* or *stereotyping* integrates these four characteristics by eliminating any unique identity and framing the subordinate as a universal group that lacks particular members or characteristics and collectively exists only in service to the dominant group. This chapter demonstrates that virtue meets these five criteria, making it a dualism that operates in conjunction with vice. As a dualism, virtue and vice links into a series of, what Plumwood calls, postulates that constitute the entire constellation of dualisms used

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[12] For a complete discussion, see *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 47-55.

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to deny women equality and freedom such as culture-nature, reason-emotion, and public-private. These cultural assumptions about women's morality transfer from one historical period to the next, revealing the powerful role of moral guardianship within American political discourse.

In particular, feminists such as Plumwood and Sherry Ortner articulate how the culture-nature dualism oppresses women by using their reproductive capacity to locate them closer to nature and, therefore, less capable of fully integrating into the sphere of culture. This position highlights the importance of sexuality in the conceptual history of virtue, a view articulated more systematically by radical, socialist, and black feminists who illustrated how women's sexuality linked them to nature and vice, justifying their continued subordination. Women's reproductive capacity keeps them "*closer* to nature than men" and requires them to be ritually cleansed to achieve the purity demanded of culture and virtue.[13] As a result, "women's consciousness - her membership, as it were, in culture - is evidenced in part by the very fact that she accepts her own devaluation and takes culture's point of view."[14] This perspective parallels the necessity of women to accept the culture's virtues that devalue their independence and participation in political life and position women as defenders of the status quo that oppresses them. Second wave feminists specify how women's sexuality links them to nature, adding another dimension to the role of virtue and vice in oppressing women and making them second class and, even, suspect citizens.

Although this conceptual history presented virtue and vice as a dualism before the Sexual Revolution, second wave feminists identified and critiqued the limits of dualisms

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[13] Sherry Ortner. "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in *Women, Culture, & Society*, eds. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 72-3.

[14] Ibid., 76.

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without applying their analysis to virtue and vice, a task performed in this chapter. Despite extensive attention to sexuality, power, and morality, these feminists overlook the broader structural problems with virtue and vice as a dualism. Instead, finite virtues such as modesty, chastity, and self-sacrifice and, to a lesser degree, finite vices such as promiscuity take center stage in the discourse on morality among radical, lesbian, black, and socialist feminists. Given their attention to material reality, these feminists often identified how virtues and vices created unequal power relations between men and women. None, however, interrogate the infinite dimension or *virtue* itself, focusing only on the specific *virtues* traditionally associated with women. While feminists during the Sexual Revolution often recognized the relationship between women's morality and sexual oppression through specific virtues such as chastity, modesty, and self-sacrifice, and even specified the anti-democratic aspects of virtue and vice, their focus on the finite virtues and vices prevented them from seeing the infinite element of virtue and vice necessary to identifying how and why this dualism functions to oppress women in different historical contexts ranging from the Puritan era to contemporary family values rhetoric. Whereas religious feminists focused on the infinite at the expense of the finite, these politically oriented feminists attended to the finite without seeing the infinite when both are necessary to identifying how virtue and vice function to oppress women. As a result, these feminists accurately diagnosed the symptoms - the moral characteristics assigned to women by men, instead of the disease - the logic of virtue-vice dualism that frames these specific traits within the broader discourse of women's moral guardianship. Making these connections highlights the contradictions between feminist beliefs in freedom, equality, and inclusion, and the inequality, constraint, and exclusion of the virtue-vice dualism. This chapter then illustrates how virtue and vice operate as a dualism, the very logic of which functions to establish values antithetical to feminist theory, politics, and ethics.

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Taking infinite and finite virtue and vice into account returns this analysis to the significance of women's moral guardianship. From this perspective, it becomes evident that the challenges of second wave feminism to sexuality, morality, and women's social roles in the family directly attacked moral guardianship, a central tenet of American exceptionalism. As such, their efforts triggered a powerful cultural backlash premised on retaining traditional morality, promoting women's sexual constraint, and revaluing women's social roles in the home through a family values rhetoric. Such a perspective indicates the necessity of attending to the moral dimension of women's liberation that serves as a ready-made argument against feminist advances in a political culture that frames such advances as threatening to the nation's very well-being and an indicator of its decay.

To develop this argument, this chapter moves through the following stages. First, this analysis begins with Kate Millett's rejection of Traditional Womanhood and morality as viable tools of liberation given their centrality in saddling women with, what she calls, "serviceable virtues" that deny them sexual freedom, the key to political change for Millett. To counter the monolithic status of white Traditional Womanhood, bell hooks introduces its antithesis, the black Jezebel which expresses the racial component of these moral hierarchies. Together, hooks and Millett undermine the position that virtue elevates women above men and highlight the level of women's instrumental service to them. Second, the pornography debates among feminists during the 1980s illustrates how the virtue-vice dualism structures such sexual discourses, narrowing the range of choices and debatable positions to two either/or categories that limit freedom. Trapped in another uncritical reversal, feminists engaged in this debate failed to interrogate the moral logic defining women's sexuality and limiting its expression, leaving women in the position of instrumental sexual resources for men, the very oppression against which they fought.

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Third, the analysis turns to lesbian feminist discourse that operates from the position of vice, the moral category reserved for those who deviate from the path of virtue. Part of the legacy of Puritan witches and rebellious Lowell mill girls, these feminists recognize the oppressive moral system of virtue and vice due to their standpoint as the vice-ridden. As such, they articulate how finite female virtues define women's morality according to their sexual functions as wives and mothers, highlighting how sexuality characterizes the conceptual history of virtue and denies women full citizenship. Finally, the chapter closes by expressing how the virtue-vice dualism contradicts the belief system of feminism and traps women in a moral guardianship discourse that functions to trigger backlashes if challenged. Recognizing the oppressive function of women's morality, however, leads a few feminists to explore alternatives such as a middle ground and pluralist ethics.

Comparing the rebellious Lowell mill girls with some second wave feminists indicates that both qualify as innovating ideologists who explored alternatives to the contradictions between their beliefs and lived realities. While the rebellious Lowell mill girls ultimately turned to a rights-based discourse in response to their failure to invert the virtue-vice dualism of the Victorian era, radical feminists specified sex and power as essential to defining women's morality and turned to these more material forms of oppression instead of fully articulating an alternative morality. Though both recognize the contradiction between their liberatory goals for women and the limitations of virtue and vice in realizing them, neither offers an alternative moral system or its deconstruction which leaves it readily available for their opponents to use, a particularly powerful tool given its association with moral guardianship and American exceptionalism. Despite their location on the side of vice that helps them to recognize the oppressive uses of morality in society, neither offer a way out, an indicator that contemporary feminists need to formulate an alternative moral system to end the cycles of anti-feminist backlashes.

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## 7.2: The Problem with Traditional Womanhood: Virtue as a Barrier to Sexual Liberation

In *Sexual Politics* (1969), Kate Millett identifies the structural oppression related to women's virtue by accounting for the failure of first wave feminists to overcome the limits placed on women by Victorian morality. To achieve lasting liberation, Millett argues, contemporary women must see how sex oppresses them through social, economic, and political structures that they must challenge. "Sex is deep at the heart of our troubles," claims Millett, "and unless we eliminate the most pernicious of our systems of oppression, unless we go to the very center of the sexual politic and its sick delirium of power and violence, all our efforts at liberation will land us again in the same primordial stew."[15] When describing the edifice of sexual oppression, Millett sees virtue and sin (vice) as one of its pillars:

> And the old myth of sin and virtue, the myth of guilt and innocence, the myth of heroism and cowardice on which the Great Figures repose, the old pillars of an old and decadent structure, are also built on the sexual fallacy...By attempting to replace this corrupt and tottering edifice while preserving its foundations, the revolution's own bid for social transformation inevitably fails and turns into counterrevolution...[16]

"Built on the sexual fallacy," virtue and sin serve as the fallacious myth upon which feminists continuously erect new structures that inevitably crumble. As a result, for instance, the first sexual revolution of 1830-1930 succumbs to a backlash following the Nineteenth Amendment's passage. To succeed, a sexual revolution must destroy this foundation built on the myths of "sin and virtue," "guilt and innocence," "heroism and cowardice." For women, this means overthrowing the myth of Traditional Womanhood that bases their identity on virtues related to sexual purity and self-sacrifice. As such, Millet poses a challenge to women's moral guardianship, a discourse premised on "the old

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[15] *Sexual Politics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 22.

[16] Ibid.

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pillars of an old and decadent structure."

To explain the perpetuation of these myths, Millett focuses on women's socialization that trains them to accept virtue, Traditional Womanhood, and the patriarchal ideology that constitute sexual politics. Her theory of sexual politics emanates from three overlapping principles of socialization: temperament, role, and status.[17] This socialization process aims, in part, to instill in women an homogenous set of virtues that direct their behavior. Temperament, in particular, relates to virtue since the moral standards of Traditional Womanhood socialize women to act passively and docilely, traits that sustain their subordination to men:

> The first item, temperament, involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category ('masculine' and 'feminine'), based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates: aggression, intelligence, force, efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, 'virtue,' and ineffectuality in the female.[18]

This list of masculine and feminine characteristics creates direct parallels between male "aggression" and female "passivity," male "intelligence" and female "ignorance," etc. "'Virtue,'" however, appears to be the exception, suggesting that Millett sees men as lacking a moral equivalent to feminine virtue such as vice or sin. Yet, virtue resurfaces in her critique of functionalism to expose some important complexities about masculine morality that show why male sin or vice fails as suitable alternatives to feminine virtue.

In her challenge to functionalism, Millett categorizes masculine "governing virtues" and feminine "serviceable virtues" and vices that illustrate the gendered power dynamic within the virtue-vice dualism. Like other second wave feminists such as Betty

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[17] Ibid., 26. To clarify their relationship, Millett explains these principles in the following terms; "the three categories one might designate status as the political component, role as the sociological, and temperament as the psychological - yet their interdependence is unquestionable and they form a chain" (*Sexual Politics*, 26).

[18] Millett, Ibid.

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Friedan[19] and Susan Moller Okin,[20] Millett confronts functionalism, a predominant school of thought in the 1950s and 1960s associated with Talcott Parsons, Margaret Mead, and Eric Erickson who argued that society functions best when women play the sex role of mother and wife, and men act as the family breadwinners. Millett rejects this sexual division of labor based on stereotypes that legitimized Traditional Womanhood's resurrection during the 1950s. When attacking Talcott Parsons, Millett specifies how society attributes different types of virtue to men and women in order to establish the hierarchy of patriarchal power:

> The *governing virtues* of a sovereign caste are clearly outlined, with the usual admission that the ruling group is often not sufficiently sure and certain of its dominance. The *vices* of the oppressed and all their *serviceable virtues* are acknowledged, with the usual implication that the under class could be much more ingratiating in its place and is expected to bear its ignoble status with a better fortitude and a more accommodating mien than it does...While the scheme is of no use in determining either human or sexual nature, it is a frank albeit unwitting statement of the actual status of male and female in patriarchy [emphasis mine].[21]

Patriarchal society then attributes "governing virtues" such as reason, courage, and justice to men to sustain their dominance. Despite their earlier omission, men clearly possess virtue since denying them this moral status would undermine their moral authority and, thus, political power. Alternatively, society assigns women, as members of the "under class" in patriarchy, "serviceable virtues" such as chastity and self-sacrifice that emanate from their sexuality as objects fulfilling men's desires, reproducing children, and maintaining the private sphere. Equally as important, women's "serviceable virtues"

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[19] While *The Feminine Mystique* reveals that various areas of American society contribute to women's role as housewife and mother, Friedan focuses on the problems functionalism in Chapter 6, "The Functional Freeze, the Feminine Protest, and Margaret Mead."

[20] While the entire book provides an excellent critique and analysis of functionalism from a feminist perspective, see especially Chapter 10, "Women and Functionalism, Past and Present," in *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[21] *Sexual Politics*, 232.

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coexist alongside "the vices of the oppressed" that justify their subordination. "While to the male is assigned every virtue of human rationality, the preponderance of traits valued by the very society in which he predominates," Millett explains, "under the beguiling rubric of 'expressive' is ascribed to the female nearly every conceivable vice of character. One recalls not only the misogynous tradition but the seven deadly sins."[22] Together, women's vice and "serviceable virtues" function to sustain their dependence on men by granting moral value for service to them and labeling women with vice for any deviance from this acceptable standard of behavior.

Millett's "serviceable virtues" and vices tap into the set of cultural assumptions perpetuated by moral guardianship discourse. Passivity, ignorance, docility, and ineffectuality represent finite virtues that characterize women's overall submissiveness as constitutive of their moral worth within patriarchy. As Millett suggests, categorizing these feminine traits as virtues implies some access to social and moral status for women who embrace the status quo and "bear this ignoble status with...fortitude and a more accommodating mien." Women's finite virtues then secure their instrumental service to patriarchy instead of granting them the political power traditionally affiliated with virtue, a position consistent with moral guardianship. Alternatively, women's "vices," similar to earlier Puritan, republican, and democratic discourses on female morality, lack specificity since society ascribes "to the female nearly every conceivable vice of character." As such, any behavior that deviates from patriarchal standards of virtue potentially constitutes vice, the default moral category for women. When located within the broader conceptual history of virtue, Millett's position fits into the moral guardianship discourse.

Complicating women's associations with "serviceable virtues" and vice, bell hooks in *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) discusses how the relationship

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[22] Ibid., 229.

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of race to virtue, vice, and Traditional Womanhood helped to polarize black and white women. An Aunt Jemima or mammy represents the black version of the Traditional Woman whose "greatest virtue was of course her love for white folk whom she willingly and passively served. The mammy image was portrayed with affection by whites because it epitomized the ultimate sexist-racist vision of ideal black womanhood."[23] The Aunt Jemima stereotype gives moral status to black women who exhibit the virtues that make them serviceable to white men and women. White society, however, categorized most black women as Jezebels whose exotic, almost animalistic, appearance tempted white men into lustful acts. The Jezebel dehumanizes black women and justifies treating them as available sexual resources. As hooks explains, "from such thinking emerged the stereotypes of black women as sexual savages, and in sexist terms a sexual savage, a non-human, an animal cannot be raped."[24] Despite many historical changes, contemporary black women still function as Jezebels. "Even if an individual black female became a lawyer, doctor, or teacher, she was likely to be labeled a whore or prostitute by whites," hooks continues, "All black women, irrespective of their circumstances, were lumped into the category of available sex objects."[25] As either the virtuous Aunt Jemima or the sinful Jezebel, moral categories define black women in terms of their service as domestic labor or sexual resources for white society, adding race to this virtue-vice equation.

Looking at virtue from a black feminist perspective illustrates how black women as Jezebels played an essential role in the elevation strategy, a key element of moral guardianship discourse. While white women's virtue elevates them above the morally corrupt public sphere, the black Jezebel serves as the Traditional Woman's foil, distancing

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[23] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: black women and feminism* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981), 84.

[24] Ibid., 52.

[25] Ibid., 58.

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her from the sins of Eve and, in a sense, purifying her of the animalistic sexuality of Eve or the Whore, the white equivalent to the Jezebel. As ideas of the sentimental family spread during the 19th century, bell hooks shows how white society simultaneously transformed black women into the antithesis of white Traditional Womanhood. As white women became "mythologized as pure and virtuous, a symbolic Virgin Mary, white men could see her as exempt from negative sexist stereotypes of the female," and hooks continues that the "shift away from the image of white woman as sinful and sexual to that of white woman as virtuous lady occurred at the same time as mass sexual exploitation of enslaved women."[26] Black women, then, acted as the moral receptacles of vice premised on their association with loose sexuality and slavery. This perspective clarifies why, when liberal and radical feminists urged women to leave the private sphere and Traditional Womanhood behind during the Sexual Revolution, some black women wanted the privileges attached to white women's elevated status such as a chance to stay at home, have their husbands earn a living, and raise their children full-time. Elevating white women built on existing racial differences between white and black women, polarizing and homogenizing them by establishing two categories: virtuous white Traditional Women and vice-ridden, black Jezebels. In this context, vice becomes black women's most "serviceable virtue" since the virtue-vice dualism morally justified elevating white Traditional Womanhood by denigrating black women as Jezebels or valuing them for their servitude as Aunt Jemimas.

Despite the perception generated by Traditional Womanhood, white women, as Millett stated, remain tied to vice. As with moral guardianship discourse throughout American political discourse, Millett, similar to the Puritans and republican era thinkers, returns to the Fall of Eve in the Garden of Eden to express the continued relationship

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[26] Ibid., 31-32.

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between women and vice:

> The myth of the Fall is a highly finished version of the same themes. As the central myth of the Judeo-Christian imagination and therefore of our immediate cultural heritage, it is well that we appraise and acknowledge the enormous power it still holds over us even in a rationalist era which has long tact. This mythic version of the female as the cause of human suffering, knowledge, and sin is still the foundation of sexual attitudes, for it represents the most crucial argument of the patriarchal tradition in the West.[27]

During the Victorian era, white and black women, though to different degrees, share the status of vice, a central means for justifying their oppression. The close proximity to vice probably heightened women's fears of falling from the pedestal and losing their tenuous status. Race enhances such fears since being "inappropriate" is one thing, being a Jezebel quite another. Such a charged moral context undoubtedly intensified the polarization of white and black women. Reading hooks and Millett together deconstructs the iconic status of Traditional Womanhood by identifying racial difference and the role of vice. Traditional Womanhood never applied to black women who remained immersed in vice, and white women lived on the edge of a moral precipice where one "inappropriate" action could push them into the depths of vice represented by Eve or the Jezebel. Despite this complexity, this case illustrates the homogenization aspect of the virtue-vice dualism that functions to locate all women in either the white/dominant/virtue or black/subordinate/vice category. In the end, such oppositional moral categories gloss over white women's continued proximity and link to vice, enabling the elevation strategy to operate. The elevation model also obscures from view men's "governing virtues" that solidly secured their moral authority and political power. This perspective challenges the justification for denying women access to the corrupt political world since male virtue still reigned there, suggesting that there might be room for women's morality too. Despite the appearance of an elevation for white women, the closer look at the relationship of virtue and vice to

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[27] *Sexual Politics*, 52.

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Traditional Womanhood, here initiated by Millett and hooks, contradicts the simplistic elevation strategy of lifting women above moral corruption by unmasking how this process sustains the continued denigration and dependency of women, making arguments for women's moral superiority antithetical to white or black women's liberation.

This discourse begins to reveal the dualistic aspect of virtue, specifically the homogenization of woman's moral character, symbolized by Traditional Womanhood and its antithesis, vice, symbolized by the Jezebel. This moral framework capitalizes on broader racial divisions that manifest themselves among women, reveal how the virtue-vice dualism creates hierarchies between women and men and other women, and disguise how either virtue or vice, Traditional Woman or Jezebel, secure women as sexual resources for men. Plumwood expresses the ability of dualisms to generate such hierarchies in the following terms:

> Dualism is a relation of separation and domination inscribed and naturalised in culture and characterised by radical exclusion, distancing and opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher or lower, as inferior and superior, as ruler and ruled, which treats the division as part of the natures of beings construed not merely as different but as belonging to radically differing orders or kinds, and hence as not open to change.[28]

Two levels of inequality emanate from the role of the virtue-vice dualism in this discourse on Traditional Womanhood. First, men's attribution of virtue to women creates the illusion of making them "higher" than men who populate the lower or inferior world of politics. Second, race functions to elevate white Traditional Women of virtue above sinful black Jezebels. Hidden beneath racial difference and white women's elevation, black and white women's link to virtue and vice remains the same - a connection to nature through sexuality. Traditional Womanhood functions as wives and mothers perform reproductive labor in the private; the Aunt Jemima passively serves white families; and Jezebels provide sexual services as readily available objects of desire. Neither virtue nor vice sever the tie

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[28] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 48.

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between women and nature, and indeed capitalize on this tie by treating "the division as part of the natures of beings construed...and hence as not open to change." Nature serves as a defining aspect of the virtue-vice dualism that constructs women's morality in terms of their biologically determined reproductive function as sexual resources for men. The virtue-vice dualism operates to homogenize all women into the Traditional Womanhood category, overlooking racial differences by essentially erasing the Jezebel or Whore from the picture, and narrowing women's worth to their reproductive functions. Pulling back the veil of Traditional Womanhood reveals its racist aspect and exposes how the virtue-vice dualism operates within this monolithic symbol to sustain women's connection to nature, justifying their continued exclusion from public life, despite the appearance of elevating them through moral superiority. Millett and hooks' deconstruction of Traditional Womanhood from a race and gender perspective illustrates the role of sexuality within moral guardianship discourse in which women's virtue and vice depends on their instrumental function as sexual resources for men, a position often masked by portrayals of women as morally pure "angels on pedestals." As such, this iconic symbol loses its appeal as a useful tool in the struggle for women's liberation that requires breaking with Traditional Womanhood, its racist undertones, and the moral constraints of virtue and vice based on women's sexuality.

## 7.3: The Feminist Pornography Debates: How Uncritical Reversals Contradict Freedom in Virtue-Vice Discourse

Deconstructing Traditional Womanhood played a central role in the early feminist discourse of the Sexual Revolution that focused on how Victorian morality continued to oppress women sexually and politically. As the second wave moved forward, feminists still believed that breaking the link between women's virtue and sexuality would open the door to freedom and equality with men and applied this premise to specific issues such as

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abortion and pornography. While feminists generally united in their fight for abortion rights,[29] they split over the censorship of pornography that some saw as constraining women's freedom while others portrayed pornography as one choice of sexual freedom among many. As such, this debate turns a critical eye onto how virtue and vice relate to women's freedom, a concept traditionally defined as an absence of constraints or "'not obstructed, controlled or mastered'"[30] Nancy Hirschmann revisions Isaiah Berlin's negative and positive liberty dualism to express a feminist freedom that accounts for the dynamic interplay of internal psychological and external material constraints to explain the socially constructed reality shaping women and men's choices, agency, and empowerment.[31] Working from this view of freedom, virtue and vice establish internal constraints on women's behavior that they learn from their external context and translate into acceptable or unacceptable actions. Virtue narrows the range of choices available to women and erects an obstacle to their freedom due to its essential link to sexuality that instrumentally locates women in the homogenous categories of either Traditional Woman or Whore. To explain this process, first, Plumwood's dualistic characteristic of instrumentalism indicates how women's virtues identify them as a means to men's ends which raises issues of moral responsibility. Second, the problem of uncritical reversals illustrates how the virtue-vice dualism traps women in the Traditional Womanhood-Whore framework that serves a masculine, instrumental purpose.

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[29] Black feminists voiced an alternative perspective that black women want the right to have children given their experiences with federally funded sterilization programs.

[30] *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought* eds. David Miller, et. al. (Blackwell Publishers Ltd.: Cambridge, MA, 1996), 166.

[31] See, for instance, Hirschmann's "Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom," *Political Theory* 24 (February 1996): 46-67; and "Revisioning Freedom: Relationship, Context, and the Politics of Empowerment," *Revisioning the Political: Feminist Reconstructions of Traditional Concepts in Western Political Theory*. eds. Nancy J. Hirschmann and Christine Di Stefano (Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 51-74; *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

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The pornography debate among feminists during the 1980s illustrates the problem of uncritical reversals and how the virtue-vice dualism undermines women's freedom in contemporary feminist discourse. This debate breaks down into two central camps. First, anti- pornography feminists wanted to protect women from its dangers such as rape and sexual harassment. To do so, many resurrected Traditional Womanhood and ultimately used a moral guardianship argument that, even for feminists such as Catharine MacKinnon who asserts that pornography is not a moral problem, aligns them with a protection of the status quo similar to the loyalist Lowell mill girls who upheld Victorian morality and the corporation's benign protection over its female workers. Second, other feminists viewed pornography as an expression of sexual choice and freedoms denied women and especially rejected their opponent's reliance on Traditional Womanhood to justify their position. Although this simplifies their position, this analysis refers to these feminists, who usually identified as radical and socialist, as pro-pornography to express their opposition to its censorship as a constraint on women's sexual freedom. In moral terms, those opposed to pornography align with moral guardianship and protecting the status quo through their virtuous position and support for Traditional Womanhood whereas their opponents became immediately classified as vice-ridden supporters of masculine sexuality and even associated with the Whore category. Examining this political debate reveals how the virtue-vice dualism operated beneath the surface of this discourse to trigger an uncritical reversal. Anti-pornography feminists charged their opponents with pursuing a masculine sexual freedom consistent with the Whore while pro-pornography feminists accused them of taking a reactionary turn towards 19th century Traditional Womanhood and Victorian feminine virtues. As a result, neither challenged the virtue-vice dualism nor the Traditional Womanhood-Whore framework that narrowly defines women's moral and political choices and instrumentally secures women as sexual resources for men. In short, failure to see the broader moral structures perpetuated the moral guardianship discourse and

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ultimately denied women the sexual liberation both groups hoped to achieve.

Instrumentalism, Plumwood's fourth characteristic of dualisms, further illustrates the limitations that virtue imposes on women's freedom in this particular context. As Plumwood explains, the master or superior group defines the inferior group as a means to their ends while "the upperside is an end in itself, but the underside has no such intrinsic value, is not for-itself but merely useful, a resource."[32] In the case of women, their value emanates from their sexual service to men secured through this moral dualism. Plumwood states that "the identity of the underside is constructed instrumentally, and the canons of virtue for a good wife, a good colonised, or a good worker are written in terms of usefulness to the centre."[33] Sarah Hoagland puts this instrumental relationship between women and men into stark relief when framing it in terms of master-slave virtues, stating that "under modern phallocratic ethics, virtue is obedience and subservience, and the virtuous are those who remain subordinate (accessible). The function of phallocentric ethics - the master/slave virtues - has been to insulate those on top and facilitate their access to the resources of those under them."[34] Virtue plays a central role in defining women's instrumental relationship to men by limiting their moral identity to a range of characteristics that deny women self-definition and agency, both of which demand independence from instrumental service to men. The virtue-vice dualism cements in place a moral framework that prevents women from achieving freedom from an instrumental definition based on their sexual service to men, a position clarified in the feminist pornography debates.

Falling into this uncritical reversal prevents these feminists from addressing the

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[32] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 53.

[33] Ibid.

[34] *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Values* (Palo Alto, CA: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988), 82.

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bigger problems of the virtue-vice dualism that leaves unresolved women's instrumental role as sexual resources for men. Virtue's instrumental role in limiting the number of choices available to women becomes evident as feminists considered the implications of sexual freedom. Defined as sexual resources for men, feminists became trapped in an uncritical reversal that forced them to conceive of women's sexuality according to the terms set by Traditional Womanhood and the Whore. According to Plumwood, dualisms naturally lead feminists into the trap of uncritical reversals when they create a new feminine identity in reaction to the old one established by patriarchy. In this situation, women confront two choices: either reject the feminine identity shaped by men or embrace it by claiming its "newness" even though it sustains the same instrumental relationship between men and women. As the debate over pornography unfolds below, anti-pornography feminists, on the one hand, embrace virtue and a "new" Traditional Womanhood to take the moral high ground against pornography and to protect women from male vice and dangers such as rape and sexual harassment. On the other hand, pro-pornography feminists rejected their position as resurrecting an oppressive feminine identity designed to deny women pleasure, and limit their freedom. At times, the debate devolved into anti-pornography feminists claiming Traditional Womanhood and accusing their opponents of representing Whores. Despite their differences, neither attacked the core issue: women being defined, whether as Traditional Women or Whores, as instrumental sexual resources to serve male ends, a relationship dependent on the moral dualism of virtue and vice.

Feminists began fighting against pornography as the anti-feminist backlash gathered steam in the late 1970s. They challenged the Sexual Revolution's dismantling of Traditional Womanhood as the way to expand women's sexual freedoms by exposing the dangers of sex and denial of protections granted to women through the feminine virtues represented by this cultural icon. Capitalizing on Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will*

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(1975) and Kathleen Barry's *Female Sexual Slavery* (1979) which historically documented the brutal uses of sex as a tool to oppress women, anti-pornography feminists used such evidence to show how pornography endangered women by contributing to a culture of violence that endorsed rape. To communicate this message, these feminists organized an anti-pornography movement spearheaded by Women Against Pornography (WAP), founded in 1979.[35] They argued, despite a paucity of factual evidence, that pornography caused men to rape women. Heightening the sense of danger, feminists such as Robin Morgan and Adrienne Rich compared lynching black men to raping women. Modifying Civil Rights rhetoric, Rich states, "pornography is about slavery. To oppose pornography requires that we connect culturally glorified violence against women with more traditionally recognized forms of political enslavement; that we ask: What is the meaning and function of the slave?"[36] Pornography, according to this argument, creates a cultural context in which sexual violence against women becomes permissible, endangering all women and instilling fear in a way similar to the random acts of lynching that helped secure oppression in the black community. Because this comparison focused on male sexual power over women, many of these feminists, including Robin Morgan and Catharine MacKinnon, extended the definition of rape to include every act of sex not initiated by the woman. Anti-pornography feminists equated the Sexual Revolution's freedoms with danger and violence against women who needed protection.

Opposing pornography put these feminists on the same side of the issue as the

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[35] The anti-pornography campaign kicked off in November 1978 when feminists organized a "Feminist Perspectives on Pornography" conference in San Francisco, attended by 1,000 women, and held a Take Back the Night march. WAP represented the movement's East coast branch that included feminists in New York City who organized tours of the, then, red-light district of Times Square so that women could see the impacts of pornography first hand.

[36] "Afterword," in *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*, ed. Laura Lederer (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1989), 318-319.

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Christian Right and other anti-feminists such as Phyllis Schlafly. To differentiate themselves from the conservatives, these feminists performed a delicate balancing act by advocating for freedom from the dangers of pornography and the value of womanhood without resorting to traditional moral and religious claims. Speaking to the difficulty of forming such an argument as feminists in the Sexual Revolution's aftermath, Helen Longino states that "the detachment of sexual chastity from moral virtue implies that we cannot condemn forms of sexual behavior merely because they strike us as distasteful or subversive of the Protestant work ethic, or because they depart from standards of behavior we have individually adopted."[37] Instead, anti-pornography feminists often argued that pornography is morally wrong because it harms women. Invoking the harm principle, however, led these feminists to define all sex as dangerous unless initiated by women and not necessarily in all such cases. Women who advocated the pleasures of sex, they asserted, embraced masculine sexual characteristics, abandoned their female identity, and basically suffered from false consciousness. Echoing these sentiments, Diana E.H. Russell exclaims, "but all this assumes that there can be a Sexual Revolution without a sex-role revolution too, and that change means women changing to be more like men. No thank you!"[38] Moreover, feminists such as Robin Morgan argue that pro-pornography feminists expose women to sexual danger since the Sexual Revolution caused "the erosion of the virgin/whore stereotypes to a new 'all women are really whores' attitude, thus erasing the last vestige of (even corrupted) respect for women."[39] Adding a racial component to this dualism, Adrienne Rich claims that

> the Black woman (and the Asian, the Hispanic, the Native American, the woman

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[37] "Pornography, Oppression, and Freedom," in *Taking Back the Night*, 42.

[38] "Pornography and the Women's Liberation Movement," in *Taking Back the Night*, 302.

[39] "Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape," in *Taking Back the Night*, 138.

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> of color in general) still represented - and often treated - as the presumed or potential harlot, though in the blatancy of recent pornographic media, the white woman - and the female child - have been visibly dumped from the pedestal of purity to become part of this highly salable imagery.[40]

The Sexual Revolution, then, harmed women by removing them from "the pedestal of purity," a stereotype that elicited certain protections from sexual danger for, presumably white, women.

Invoking the virgin/whore dichotomy implies the operation of the virtue-vice dualism that sustains women's instrumental role and triggers a cycle of uncritical reversals. By charging the Sexual Revolution with harming women by extending their sexual freedoms and abandoning the protections of Traditional Womanhood, cultural feminists such as Adrienne Rich and Robin Morgan, according to the dichotomy's logic, locate all women who fail to oppose pornography in the Whore category, not as freer, more independent women with a wider range of choices. Or, like Diana E.H. Russell, they presume that sexual freedom means that women adopt male sex roles instead of the opposite inversion or an exploration of new sexual choices. Locating women who opposed their views as Whores allowed anti-pornography feminists to leverage political power through Traditional Womanhood by claiming moral superiority as the protectors of women against the dangers of pornography and sexual violence. Rejecting the Sexual Revolution on the grounds of its vice-ridden goals of denigrating women, pro-pornography feminists embraced Traditional Womanhood and its moral virtues. As a result, these feminists failed to mount an attack on patriarchy, specifically the men who committed rape, purchased pornography, and profited from employing women in the industry. Instead, they challenged other feminists and blamed *them* for making women into Whores. Resorting to the Traditional Womanhood/Whore dichotomy taps into the virtue-vice dualism that defines women's worth in terms of their "serviceable virtues" and

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[40] "Afterword," in *Taking Back the Night*, 317.

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sustains their instrumental role as sexual resources for men. This oppressive relationship remains in place and women continue to accept the double burden of moral responsibility for male and female sexual behavior. Being trapped in this framework that benefits male-domination limits the opportunity for women's sexual freedom since they must choose between the Virgin or Whore, both of which sustain their sexual service and deny them sexual pleasure.

Stating that "a critique of pornography is to feminism what its defense is to male supremacy,"[41] Catharine MacKinnon, the loudest voice among anti-pornography feminists, captures the either/or nature of this debate in which these feminists charged the others with supporting male power if they did not oppose pornography. Although MacKinnon often found herself on the same side of the pornography issue as the Christian Right and many anti-feminist women, she sharply rejected the moral content of their arguments and framed the matter in terms of power. For MacKinnon, pornography constitutes a male sexuality premised on women's forceful subordination that translates into women's material or real oppression in society. As she states, "pornography is a means through which sexuality is socially constructed, a site of construction, a domain of exercise. It constructs women as things for sexual use and constructs consumers to desperately want women, to desperately want possession and cruelty and dehumanization...Through pornography, among other practices, gender inequality becomes both sexual and socially real."[42] Pornography then defines women as instrumental resources for men's sexual satisfaction and perpetuates the use of implied or explicit force to maintain women's subordination in society. Accordingly, pro-pornography feminists uphold male supremacy

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[41] "Not a Moral Issue," in *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 146.

[42] "Sexuality," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 167.

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and exhibit false consciousness when they assert that pornography represents one of many choices of sexual expression available to men and women. As long as patriarchy exists, MacKinnon asserts, women cannot know their own forms of sexual pleasure because men define it according to their needs. "Sexual freedom," MacKinnon explains, "means women are allowed to behave as freely as men to express this sexuality, to have it allowed, that is (hopefully) shamelessly and without social constraints to initiate genital drive satisfaction through heterosexual intercourse. Hence, the liberated woman. Hence, the sexual revolution."[43] Hence, arguing for women's sexual freedom amounts to supporting their adoption of an aggressive male sexuality premised on women's subordination and objectification that denies them equality and liberation from the patriarchal power perpetuated by pornography. MacKinnon essentially charges pro-pornography feminists with engaging in an uncritical reversal by embracing male sexuality as a means to achieve liberation that, however, disempowers women within a power structure based on their oppression. Without a sufficient analysis of power, feminists remain trapped within their false consciousness, believing that women can express sexuality or desire within patriarchy and even achieve sexual liberation. Framing sexuality in these terms clearly articulates sex as a tool of power. Yet, MacKinnon presents sexuality as a static and negative force in women's lives that never changes or involves positive aspects, a position that defines women's sexual expression as negative and even vice-ridden since it assumes a masculine nature, and remains consistent with women's moral guardianship and virtues that promoted the denial of women's sexual freedom.

Initially, MacKinnon appears to be an "innovating ideologist" who defines pornography as an exercise of power designed to oppress women, a clear contradiction to their freedom and equality as well as a position independent of morality. MacKinnon, for

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[43] "Sexuality," 163.

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instance, explicitly rejects pornography as a moral issue. As she states, "obscenity law is concerned with morality, specifically morals from the male point of view, meaning the standpoint of male dominance. The feminist critique of pornography is a politics, specifically politics from women's point of view, meaning the standpoint of the subordination of women to men. Morality here means good and evil; politics means power and powerlessness. Obscenity is a moral idea; pornography is a political practice. Obscenity is abstract; pornography is concrete."[44] This dualistic approach that pervades her work, however, forces MacKinnon to embrace positions consistent with patriarchal power and moral guardianship that undermine the innovating impulse as her argument falls into the trap of uncritical reversals. In this case, establishing this barrier between morality and politics redraws a boundary often used in American political discourse to exclude women from public life based on their moral superiority. MacKinnon, despite her claim that pro-pornography feminists embrace a masculine sexuality based on power, relies on a masculine notion of power predicated on a separation of morality and politics, another means of oppressing women. This conceptual history of virtue illustrates how women's morality serves as a defining feature of their relationship to politics, a point only visible when explored from a woman's perspective. Yet, MacKinnon identifies how male morality relates to their power, stating that "it becomes clear that male morality sees as good that which maintains its power and sees as evil that which undermines or qualifies it or questions its absoluteness. Differences in the law over time - such as the liberalization of obscenity doctrine - reflect either changes in the group of men in power or shifts their perceptions of the best strategy for maintaining male supremacy - probably some of both."[45] Given her narrow focus on masculine power exercised through morality to

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[44] "Not a Moral Issue," in *Feminism Unmodified*, 147.

[45] "Not a Moral Issue," 152.

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legitimize pornography, MacKinnon ignores how virtue and vice shape women's political posture that extends well beyond the specific issue of pornography. By assuming that morality and politics can or should be separated, MacKinnon embraces a view of power consistent with patriarchy's justification for women's exclusion from politics. Instead of offering an alternative to the contradiction between women's liberation and patriarchy, MacKinnon perpetuates patriarchal power by re-establishing a boundary and dualism critical to diverting attention away from how women's morality denied them access to real political power.

In conjunction, the overall structure of MacKinnon's argument against pornography, as well as that of other anti-pornography feminists, places them on the side of defending the patriarchal status quo once seen from the vantage point of moral guardianship. Their position promotes the absence of freedom and the feminine virtues consistent with moral guardianship. Although these feminists proclaimed that ending pornography would liberate women from patriarchy, the alternative illustrates how state intervention and censorship denied women free choice and agency in shaping their sexual identities. Instead, like the loyalist Lowell mill girls before them, women should rely on paternal protection from a male-dominated state to regulate information and to ensure women's safety from harm. This position locates anti-pornography feminists on the side of moral guardianship as protectors of the status quo represented by the patriarchal state. As such, these feminists become the means by which society deals with the vice of pornography, relegated to deviant behavior that threatens the nation with decay. Similarly, women fought for temperance and against prostitution in the 1800s. In all these circumstances, women assume the double burden of moral responsibility for themselves, men, and even the nation, a posture that deflects attention away from men's actions and towards other women as the source of social problems. Anti-pornography feminists take up the banner of moral guardianship, implicitly defending the finite feminine virtues of

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modesty, chastity, and purity that limit women's sexual freedom and retain their reliance on patriarchal power to protect them from harm. Instead of challenging the status quo, a reliance on traditional dualisms and moral beliefs located anti-feminists on the side of moral guardianship.

Pro-pornography feminists recognized the dangers posed by anti-feminists' separation of morality and politics that results in identifying any feminist who examines the moral side of an argument as a social conservative, closing off a critical sphere of women's oppression from examination. On this issue, Carol Smart responds to MacKinnon's argument that porn is not a moral issue by articulating how pornography is a moral and political issue. By doing so, Smart identifies the dangers of framing the pornography debate in MacKinnon's terms, implying that feminists have moved beyond issues of sexual morality for the political realm. Such a position leaves morality as a powerful weapon for conservatives to use against feminists and fails to recognize how morality frames feminist debate in terms of charging their opponents with vice. Morality plays a powerful part in women's lives. Ignoring it, Smart contends, undermines feminists ability to deconstruct this rhetoric since "it is to this largely unreconstructed or undeveloped element in feminist thought which much of the anti-pornography, pro-censorship rhetoric appeals, *whilst publicly disavowing questions of morality*. Thus, whilst the content of the speech denies the traditional moral dimension, the form speaks directly to this traditional, unreconstructed moral paradigm."[46] In particular Smart examines how anti-pornography feminists construct their arguments based on the personal testimony of female victims who experience sexual oppression by men who recently viewed pornography. Such testimony puts anyone who opposes censoring pornography on

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[46] "Unquestionably a Moral Issue," in *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, eds. Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 187.

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the side of evil as supporters of these women's oppressors. This tactic of anti-pornography feminists cuts off meaningful exploration into the possible positive uses of pornography as a source of sexual pleasure, for instance, since all such inquiries qualify as vice-ridden. As Smart states, "it is in this strategy that I see pro-censorship feminism embracing a very traditional form (if not content) of morality. Sharp dichotomies of good and evil are established: there is no nuance at all."[47] These arguments take shape in terms of the virtue-vice dualism. As such, feminist discourse on pornography becomes limited to two choices: "anti-censorship becomes transposed as pro-porn. The way in which the argument has been structured allows of only two positions: anti-porn/pro-censorship and pro-porn/anti-censorship. This binary dichotomy locates the moral high ground with the pro-censorship lobby. In this formulation good can easily be distinguished from evil."[48] Fighting against the censorship of women's sexual expression locates pro-pornography feminists on the side of vice and evil that, in this context, challenges the status quo of women's sexual oppression. Anti-pornography feminists sustain the tenets of moral guardianship and female virtue by denying women the freedom to make choices about their sexuality. Linking MacKinnon to a broader moral discourse, Smart states that "this is an argument which depends on a heavily encoded set of moral messages so embedded in a Western Judaeo-Christian culture that we often fail to see its workings."[49] As a pro-pornography feminist, Smart's position of vice enables her to see beyond cultural assumptions and identify the "set of moral messages" consistent with the virtue-vice dualism and moral guardianship discourse that fits women and feminist argument into either/or categories established by a tradition oppressive to women. By challenging the

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[47] "Unquestionably a Moral Issue," 189.

[48] Ibid., 196.

[49] Ibid., 190.

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status quo of women's sexual oppression, pro-pornography feminists land on the side of vice since their opponents portray them as morally degraded proponents of male pornography instead of feminists exploring a range of choices available to forming women's sexuality, a position that breaks with feminine virtues and the self-sacrifice and constraint of moral guardianship.

Developing the pro-pornography side of this debate, these feminists reassert pleasure's importance in achieving sexual freedom and departing from women's double burden of moral responsibility. In *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (1984) and *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (1983), feminists explore how pleasure intersects with danger as an important step towards a feminist theory of sexuality. As Ann Snitow explains,

> sexual experience with men or women can be abusive, objectifying, and degrading, but it can also be ecstatic, inspiring, illuminating. It can also be - and here the inadequacy of a polarized discourse becomes clear - a peculiar mixture of all these things: Objectifying and pleasurable, degrading and inspiriting. We must bring together the complexities and contradictions: we must integrate what we know with what we do not know.[50]

Instead of reasserting moral dualisms, Snitow calls for "complexities and contradictions" that open up possibilities and unforeseen choices for women whose virtue and vice so narrowly confined their sexual expression. Accepting women as sexually desirous breaks with the virtue of self-restraint and the assumptions of moral responsibility that limit women's sexual freedoms. In an attack on anti-pornography feminists, Ellen Willis states that "the goody-goody concept of eroticism is not feminist but feminine. It is precisely sex as an aggressive, unladylike activity, and expression of violent and unpretty emotion, an exercise of erotic power, and a specifically genital experience that has been taboo for

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[50] "Introduction," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow et al. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 42.

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women."[51] In contrast to the restrained behavior of Traditional Womanhood, women's sexual freedom demands a range of behaviors traditionally considered "taboo for women" such as pornography, S&M, and masturbation. Despite anti-pornography feminists' claims to the contrary, advocating for sexual choices coincided with spaces safe from sexual danger in which women could explore such pleasures. Their definition of female pleasure reflects distinctively masculine terms. Willis, for instance, states "but feminists supposedly begin with different assumptions - that men's confusion of sexual desire with predatory aggression reflects a sexist system, not male biology; that there are no good (chaste) or bad (lustful) women, just women who are, like men, sexual beings."[52] Without patriarchy, Willis suggests that women could engage in sexual pleasure in a manner "like men," discounting the possibility that women may express sexuality differently. In a sense, however, Willis compares with MacKinnon in that she dismisses morality - "no good (chaste) or bad (lustful) women, just women" - as central to women gaining sexual freedom. Consistent with pro-pornography feminists, Snitow and Willis identify the limits that dualistic moral categories place on women's sexuality.

Asserting women's right to sexual pleasure, including looking at pornography or working in the industry, challenged women's moral responsibility for sexuality and the finite female virtue of self-restraint that requires the denial of female pleasures and women's exclusion from public life's moral corruption to secure their place as virtuous protectors of men's sexual behavior. Ironically, self-restraint framed as a finite female virtue assumes that *women*, not men, who cannot control their libidos must be morally constrained by society. Indicating the double standard working here, Carol Vance states that

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[51] "Feminism, Moralism, and Pornography," in *Powers of Desire*, 464.

[52] Ibid., 463-4.

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> through a culturally dictated chain of reasoning, women become the moral custodians of male behavior, which they are perceived as instigating and eliciting. Women inherit a substantial task: the management of their own sexual desire and its public expression. Self-control and watchfulness become major and necessary female virtues.[53]

As "moral custodians of male behavior," women assume the double burden of moral responsibility for their own and male sexual activity that demands women's acceptance of the finite virtues, self-control, and watchfulness. Pursuing pleasure and exploring sexual choices requires a rejection of these female virtues and the sexual moral standards of Traditional Womanhood. Vance points out the threat that this poses to patriarchy "to the extent that women's experience of desire signals the giving up of vigilance and control - responsibility of a proper woman - it causes profound unease about violating the bounds of traditional femininity."[54] Such a move relinquishes the protections and political power afforded to women by Traditional Womanhood that, anti-pornography feminists argued, puts women in danger. To the contrary, Marilyn Frye contends that women's moral responsibility for sexuality sustains their instrumental subordination and denies them real power anyway:

> the function is in service of men and men's interests as men define them, which includes the bearing and rearing of children...Women's service work also is characterized everywhere by the fatal combination of responsibility and powerlessness: we are held responsible and we hold ourselves responsible for good outcomes for men and children in almost every respect though we have in almost no case power adequate to that project.[55]

Here Frye speaks to the double burden of moral responsibility in which society and women hold themselves responsible for men and children despite their lack of power to meet it. Together Vance and Frye identify the continued power of moral guardianship that sustains

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[53] "Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carol S. Vance (Boston, MA: Routledge, 1984), 4.

[54] Ibid., 5

[55] *The Politics of Reality* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983), 9.

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finite female virtues such as self-restraint and the double burden of moral responsibility. Instead of accepting this condition, pro-pornography feminists challenged this moral belief system and, according to the logic of the virtue-vice dualism within moral guardianship discourse, aligned with vice.

From this moral standpoint that affords a clear view of structures oppressive to women, pro-pornography feminists such as Ellen DuBois, Linda Gordon, Judith Walkowitz, and Alice Echols drew similarities between anti-pornography and 19th century social purity feminism in order to pinpoint how virtue and Traditional Womanhood erect barriers to women's freedom. Resurrecting this moral system based on Victorian ideals, DuBois, Gordon, and Walkowitz similarly assert, may earn feminists short-term gains at the long-term expense of restricting women's sexual freedom and trapping them within the private sphere. Judith Walkowitz, for instance, illustrates the dilemma confronted by social purity feminists:

> In their defense of prostitutes and concern to protect women from male sexual aggression, feminists were limited by their own class bias and by their continued adherence to a separate-sphere ideology that stressed women's purity, moral supremacy, and domestic virtues. Moreover they lacked the cultural and political power to reshape the world according to their own image. Although they tried to set the standards of sexual conduct, they did not control the instruments of state that ultimately enforced these norms.[56]

Virtue in this context acts as a double-edged sword: on one side, it gives women the political power to demand state protections while, on the other, it traps them in the domestic sphere where they maintain the virtuous standing necessary to securing these protections without any "control of the instruments of the state that ultimately enforced these norms." Similarly, Ellen DuBois and Linda Gordon articulate how espousing the "domestic virtues" of motherhood sustains women's oppressive status; "but at the same time motherhood was the last straw in enforcing women's subordination to men, the

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[56] Judith Walkowitz. "Male Vice and Female Virtue: Feminism and the Politics of Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain," in *Powers of Desire,* 434.

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factor that finally prevented many from seeking independence. What was conceived as women's greatest virtue, their passionate and self-sacrificing commitment to their children, their capacity for life itself, was a leading factor in their victimization."[57] Anti-pornography feminists, they fear, take the Sexual Revolution down this same road by using motherhood and its virtues to impose Victorian-style moral standards on contemporary women. Voicing this concern, Alice Echols states that

> to curb the promiscuity and rapacity spawned by the Sexual Revolution, cultural feminists propose that we impose upon the culture a female sexual standard - a standard which seems to correspond to their understanding of their mothers' sexual values...Cultural feminist sexual politics really offers us nothing more than women's traditional sexual values disguised as radical feminist sexual values.[58]

In the logic of moral guardianship pertaining to "women's traditional sexual values," Sexual Revolution equates with "promiscuity and rapacity" that amount to vices since women's sexual freedom contradicts the virtuous standards of women's behavior. Echols further criticizes anti-pornography feminism for reverting from the social construction of gender to biological determinism by reviving a "female principle" premised on motherhood, caring, and nurturing:

> women's traditional orientation away from what one feminist terms the 'purely sexual' is interpreted as a virtue or an advantage rather than an emblem of oppression. This preoccupation with defying the female sensibility not only leads these feminists to indulge in dangerously erroneous generalizations about women, but to imply that this identity is innate rather than socially constructed.[59]

Arguing for an "innate" female identity or principle based on motherhood clearly revives a Victorian ideology that contradicts the importance of gender, a key means for women's liberation among second wave feminists. Driving this point home, Echols claims that

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[57] "Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth-Century Feminist Sexual Thought," in *Pleasure and Danger*, 35.

[58] "The Taming of the Id: Feminist Sexual Politics, 1968-1983," in *Pleasure and Danger*, 63-4.

[59] Ibid.

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"unfortunately as recent feminism has become synonymous with the reclamation and establishment of a so-called female principle, it has come to reflect and reproduce dominant cultural assumptions about women."[60] Although these feminists do not frame it as such, they accurately describe how anti-pornography feminists rely on moral guardianship discourse and female virtues to revive an ideology based on women's oppression and political exclusion. As such, they promoted the views of the status quo and women's support for "cultural assumptions" that perpetuate their subordination.

Given the dualistic nature of this debate, both sides became trapped in an uncritical reversal that took them back to female virtue and Traditional Womanhood, the very obstacles to women's freedom that the Sexual Revolution aimed to dismantle. The moral dimension of this debate locks these feminists into an uncritical reversal generated by the virtue-vice dualism and symbolized by the Traditional Womanhood-Whore dichotomy. As such, neither the anti nor pro-pornography feminists successfully broke the pattern of identifying women as Traditional or Whores. Pro-pornography feminists, on the one hand, offered a masculine sexuality oriented towards aggression and action that, given the social paradigm for women and sex, translated into an association with the Whore and vice. Anti-pornography feminists, on the other, embraced Traditional Womanhood and female virtue as they tried to reverse their negative association with women's oppression by attributing positive value to mothering, care, and responsibility. In the end, the overarching Traditional Womanhood-Whore dichotomy and the virtue/vice dualism remained in place, securing women's instrumental role as sexual resources for men. Ilene Philipson saw how the Virgin-Whore dichotomy trapped pro and anti-pornography feminists in a debate that diverted attention from attacking central tenets of patriarchy.[61]

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[60] "The New Feminism of Yin and Yang," in *Powers of Desire*, 440.

[61] See "Beyond the Virgin and the Whore," in *Women, Class, and the Feminist Imagination: A Socialist-Feminist Reader*, eds. Karen V. Hansen and Ilene J. Philipson

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Despite calls for moral complexity by pro-pornography feminists such as Carol Vance, the virtue-vice dualism structures this argument, resulting in a discourse narrowed down to an either/or choice from women that contradicts their hopes for greater freedom. As Philipson explains, "this is a binary discourse: it permits only two perspectives - polar opposites. Thus pornography is either discussed as though it is always violent *or* valorized as an emblem of sexual liberation for women and men...This discussion lacks both an analysis that permits ambiguity, nuance, overdetermination - that is, the elements of lived reality - and any recourse to that reality."[62] Locked into the cultural discourse of moral guardianship instead of the lived reality of women, both parties fall into an uncritical reversal established by the virtue-vice dualism. Implying something of a virtuous position, pro-pornography feminists charge their opponents of assuming a vice-ridden standpoint that promotes restricting women's sexual freedom and oppressing different sexual groups such as prostitutes, S&M practitioners, and gays and lesbians who practice what society deems to be "deviant" behaviors. Alternatively, anti-pornography feminists more explicitly embrace virtue in an effort to claim the moral high ground as protectors of women against the dangers of sexuality and loss of Traditional Womanhood. This uncritical reversal results from the logic of moral guardianship structuring discourse on women's morality and sexuality that revolves around questions pertaining to virtue and vice, and diverts attention away from the complexities of women's lived experience. Escaping this trap requires seeing how these categories limit women to two choices about their sexuality, a central component of their moral character and then finding alternatives to the virtue-vice dualism that narrowly defines women's sexual identities as instrumental, limits their choices, and triggers uncritical reversals that leave in tact the oppressive moral belief

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(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 451.

[62] Ibid., 453.

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system of moral guardianship.

In this vein, pro-pornography feminists began investigating two alternatives to this moral framework that resonate with the challenges the rebellious Lowell mill girls posed to Victorian True Womanhood in the mid-1800s. As such, these modern day feminists act as "innovating ideologists" who, instead of accepting Traditional Womanhood and female virtue, recognized the oppression perpetuated by this belief system and explored other options for securing women's liberation. First, and more generally, pro-pornography feminists advocated for sexual freedom from restrictions on women's consensual and safe explorations of desire. Instead of hoping for benevolent state protections, pro-pornography feminists took the risk of empowering women to make choices about their forms of sexual expression. Sexual freedom, in this context, stems from recognizing how moral guardianship and virtue oppressed women and the need for an alterative approach to breaking with the powerful norms and morals sustaining women's subordination. Similar to the rebellious Lowell mill girls, these feminists identified the contradictions between their goals of women's liberation and this new Victorianism. As such, they turned to a more democratic discourse to push for freedom and to escape the cultural assumptions of sexual and moral restraint perpetuated by moral guardianship.

In addition, Gayle Rubin explores some elements of a conceptual and descriptive framework designed to establish a liberatory approach to sexuality. Instead of working from the premise that sex is a natural, unchanging force or, for women, a "female principle," Rubin asserts that sex constitutes an ever-changing dynamic that reflects shifting power relations within societies, a position that differs from MacKinnon who identified sex as an operation of power, but presented it as a static system inherently designed to exercise negative control of women's lives. To create a more complex idea of sexuality, Rubin challenges the virtue-vice dualism that establishes the either/or categories of good or bad sex by exploring a space similar to the middle ground introduced in

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Chapter Six. To do so, Rubin begins by illustrating how any form of sexual expression that deviates from accepted moral standards justifies severe punishment of those vice-ridden individuals. Even though Western cultures, based in Christianity, start from the premise that "sex is inherently sinful,"[63] they differentiate good from bad sex with the former related to heterosexual, married, monogamous sex for procreative purposes and the latter refers to anything else, including homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, commercial expression. These moral valuations translate into a hierarchy in which the good forms of sex dominate and the political battle involves where to draw the line between good and bad sex. The dominant group creates a hierarchy among the "bad" forms of sex that grant a level of permissibility for, say, unmarried heterosexual couples while placing transsexualism and fetishism as absolutely vice-ridden and deviant at the bottom of the sexual hierarchy. Sex acts defined as "good," Rubin further explains, retain a level of complexity whereas all "bad" sex acts lack such moral nuances, an homogenizing effect that justifies repressing and even persecuting those engaged in these behaviors. Rubin articulates how this polarized perspective on sexuality contradicts an ethical system consistent with democratic principles:

> This kind of sexual morality has more in common with ideologies of racism than with true ethics. It grants virtue to the dominant groups, and relegates vice to the underprivileged. A democratic morality should judge sexual acts by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quantity and quality of the pleasures they provide. Whether sex acts are gay or straight, coupled or in groups, naked or in underwear, commercial or free, with or without video, should not be ethical concerns. It is difficult to develop a pluralistic sexual ethics without a concept of benign sexual variation.[64]

Here Rubin acts as an innovating ideologist by recognizing the severe limits of a virtue-vice dualism premised on constraint and inequality between dominant groups and the

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[63] Gayle Rubin. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger*, 278.

[64] "Thinking Sex," 283.

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underprivileged. This narrow understanding of sexuality upholds this moral system the denies women freedom, a right necessary to achieving the independence and full citizenship in a democratic polity based upon expression of self-interest and the opportunity to pursue a range of choices. Rubin hints at a "democratic morality" that would shift attention to looking at how contexts determine the ethical nature of sexual acts between individuals, allowing for consideration of how consent determines whether or not these behaviors constitute harm or benefit for those involved. This call for complexity indicates the need for a moral middle ground that accounts for lived experience as a feature of making ethical determinations about sexual behavior instead of imposing traditional standards inherited from the Victorian era. Although Rubin does not completely dismantle the moral structure, she makes an innovative move towards shifting from moral guardianship and the virtue-vice dualism towards an ethical system more consistent with feminist values such as freedom, equality, and contextual reality. Powerful cultural assumptions perpetuated by the moral system of virtue and vice that operate to constrain women's sexuality and range of moral choices. Despite this, some pro-pornography feminists saw this oppressive structure due to their proximity to vice and explored alternatives to the contradiction between women's liberation and moral guardianship. This perspective qualifyies them as "innovating ideologists" in a vein similar to the rebellious Lowell mill girls before them.

## 7.4: The Power of Vice: Theorizing from the Standpoint of Deviance

Throughout the conceptual history of virtue, women who challenged the dominant moral belief system, ranging from the Puritan witches to rebellious Lowell mill girls and pro-pornography feminists, found themselves located on the side of vice, a dangerous standpoint that opened up the possibility for abuse, punishment, and even execution. From the feminist perspective of moral guardianship, however, vice presents a powerful moral

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position from which to analyze and challenge the dominant virtue-vice paradigm of women's morality. During the Sexual Revolution, some feminists embraced this legacy of women's vice and even reappropriated the term "witch" as a political organizing tool, naming their covens WITCH (the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell). Carrying broomsticks and wearing black hats and dresses, WITCH protested by performing guerilla street theater such as the public hoaxing of the Bell Telephone company for their discriminatory employment policies against women. One WITCH document captures the political power that these feminists derived from this standpoint:

> WITCH is an all-women Everything. It's theater, revolution, magic, terror, joy, garlic flowers, spells. It's an awareness that witches and gypsies were the original guerrillas and resistance fighters against oppression - particularly the oppression of women - down through the ages. Witches have always been women who dared to be: groovy courageous, aggressive, intelligent, non-conformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary.[65]

As "the original guerillas and resistance fighters against oppression," WITCH reversed the terror used against women centuries ago in order to exercise it against patriarchy and corporate institutions. Similar to many radical feminists of the era, Witches embraced courage, aggression, independence, and sexual liberation as positive traits for women that broke with the paradigm of feminine virtue and moral guardianship. Though WITCH effectively employed this political strategy, their movement remained on the fringes of second wave feminism. More radical feminists identified as "dykes" and "bitches," two other labels reappropriated to indicate a rejection of hetero-relational standards of female dependence on men and a refusal to behave according to the finite female virtues assigned to them by patriarchy. In *The Bitch Manifesto*, for instance, Joreen Freeman explains that a bitch is "never a true woman" since "they rudely violate conceptions of proper sex role

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[65] *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writing from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan, (New York, NY: Random House, 1970), 605.

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behavior,"[66] indicating the break with the Victorian era's "true woman." Similar to its historical predecessor - the witch - the "bitch" values independence, especially from men, and refuses to accept the sexual double standard by denying men access to their sexual and emotional resources. As a result, men and women often accuse bitches of "being uptight" and "needing to get laid." The Radicalesbians similarly recognize how "dyke" or "lesbian" applies to independent women or "bitches" who love other women:

> Lesbian is a label invested by the Man to throw at any woman who dares to be his equal, who dares to challenge his prerogatives...who dares to assert the primacy of her own needs...For in a sexist society, for a woman to be independent means she *can't* be a woman - she *must* be a *dyke*...For a lesbian is not considered a 'real woman.'[67]

Because dykes and bitches exert their independence and exercise choices outside the virtue-vice, hetero-relational framework, society categorizes them as vice-ridden in order to minimize the threat that they pose to male power. Feminists who identified with vice such as "dykes" and "bitches" move to the forefront of this analysis because their particular standpoint offers a position critical for seeing the oppressive operations of the virtue-vice dualism.

Specifically, this section turns to the theory-building among lesbian feminists such as Sarah Hoagland and Marilyn Frye who clearly recognized how female virtues created the appearance that women's passivity and dependence emanates from their nature. Standing outside heterosexual relationships, these feminists identified how virtue and vice constrained women and enforced their dependence on men by regulating their sexuality. To explore this issue, this analysis examines three of the remaining five dualistic traits: incorporation, hyperseparation, and backgrounding. Within female virtue a tension exists between the *incorporation* of women into the dominant political discourse by portraying

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[66] In *Radical Feminism*, 227.

[67] Ibid., 234.

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them as naturally dependent on men and *hyperseparation* which distances women from men and other women. Both of these processes, in turn, contribute to pushing women into the political community's background as passive supporters of the status quo determined by patriarchy. Together, these three dualistic traits reveal how virtue and vice erect a conceptual barrier between public/culture and private/nature by defining women's moral value in terms of nature or "the natural." Nature here refers to a woman's biologically determined reproductive function as child-bearer and nurturer that locates her closer to the animals and nature as a person unable to control natural forces such as menstruation and primitive instincts. Natural implies the given or unchangeable character of such relationships because they remain beyond man's power to control. Politically, associating women with nature dehumanizes and distances them from culture and reason enough to justify their continued inequality, constraint, and exclusion. Capturing the role of nature and virtue in the process of hyperseparation, Plumwood states that

> the model of ideal human character and of human virtue, which points out that the western human ideal is one which maximizes difference and distance from the animal, the primitive, and the natural...the masters (male and female)...leave to slaves and women the business of providing for the necessities of life...regard this sphere of necessity as lower and...conceive virtue in terms of distance from it.[68]

Virtue then distances the male public sphere of culture from the female private sphere of nature. Although attributing virtue to women should include them in culture and public life, lesbian feminists particularly illustrate how female virtues actually maintain women's biologically determined role as sexual resources, reproductive laborers, and emotional nurturers that supposedly constitute a "woman's nature." Denied virtue and culture because they loved other women, not men, lesbian feminists contradicted assumptions about women's nature, especially as sexual resources for men. As such, the more fluid barrier between culture and nature discussed by Sherry Ortner loses its permeability from a

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[68] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 25.

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lesbian perspective that clarifies how virtue oppresses women by only creating the appearance of permitting them an affiliation with culture. Framing this discussion in terms of incorporation, hyperseparation, and backgrounding illustrates how finite female virtues associate women with nature to sustain their oppression as opposed to granting them any real political power.

From the vantage point of vice, lesbian feminists identify how virtue backgrounds women by devaluing their reproductive functions that associate them with nature through sexuality. To explain how backgrounding effects women, Frye skillfully uses the analogy of a theater production to compare men to actors on center stage or the foreground, and women with stage hands who work behind the scenes and, though invisible to the audience, ensure the production's success. This analogy captures a "phallocratic reality" where "the space and figures and motion...constitute the foreground, and the constant repetitive uneventful activities of women...constitute and maintain the background against which this foreground plays."[69] Virtue plays an important part in this backgrounding process by granting women moral value and the appearance of political status for their contributions as the nation's moral guardians. In particular, lesbian feminists articulate how sexuality operates within virtue discourse to perpetuate women's dependence on men as their sexual and emotional resources. Yet, female virtue functions in a complicated fashion clarified by how backgrounding relates to hyperseparation and incorporation. As Plumwood explains, "backgrounding is a complex feature which results from the irresoluble conflicts the relationship of domination creates for the master, for he attempts both to make use of the other, organising, relying on and benefitting from the other's services [through incorporation], and to deny the dependency which this creates [through

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[69] *The Politics of Reality*, 167.

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hyperseparation]."[70] By valuing women's passivity and submissiveness, particularly as mothers and wives, virtue connects or incorporates women with men whereas the different types of virtues such as Kate Millett's male governing versus female service virtues establish a hyperseperation between male dominance and female subordination that justifies women's exclusion from public life on functional grounds. Virtue creates the impression of elevating women above nature when, in reality, their moral worth derives from their reproductive function, central to a woman's nature, that determines their instrumental value to men and society. By accepting their position as moral guardians who contribute to the nation from the background, or "behind the scenes," women become invested in preserving the status quo that perpetuates their oppression.

In particular, Sarah Hoagland develops a critique of the finite female virtue of self-sacrifice that, as this conceptual history reveals, serves as central to defining women's morality and backgrounding them within the political community. Alexis de Tocqueville discussed the significance of this virtue when describing the American pioneer woman who quietly gave her life to her husband and children for their greater good and that of the nation. Contemporary feminists such as Hoagland identify this virtue as central to women's oppression. Self-sacrifice drastically limits women's freedom, rendering it almost impossible, since it requires adopting the other's interests as one's own and relinquishing the self, the source of agency and autonomy. Hoagland focuses on the relationship between self-sacrifice and mothering since society expects mothers to sacrifice their pursuits, interests, and essentially the self to adopt those of their husbands and children. According to a dualistic moral code, Hoagland sees two options as available to American men and women: one either sacrifices themselves or acts out of self-interest. Yet, Hoagland suggests that mothers actually act on their self-interest by adopting their

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[70] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 48.

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family's in order to secure the limited power and control available to them in a male-dominated society, serving as a survival tactic for women. As Hoagland states, "mothering as unconditional love is self-sacrifice. And in general I want to suggest that when we equate self-sacrifice with virtue - something we must exhibit to be considered ethical - and we act accordingly, control begins to enter our interactions as a logical and acceptable consequence."[71] Here Hoagland articulates how framing a moral trait as a virtue introduces patriarchal power into women's relationships and moral identity. Within this oppressive context, women exercise control and power through deceit and manipulation of those closest to them since women lack the freedom to act independently. Additionally this virtue secures women's oppression by valuing them for willingly relinquishing the self in service to others, a mechanism that reduces, immobilizes, and molds women by denying them independence and autonomy. This constraint translates into repressing women's sexuality by narrowing it to waiting passively for male advances, ignoring their own pleasure, and limiting behavior to heterosexual, monogamous sex that excludes pornography, S&M, or other "deviant" acts. As Hoagland shows, self-sacrifice introduces control and limits freedom, characteristics consistent with the instrumental aspect of the virtue-vice dualism that pushes women's needs, wants, desires, and interests into the background.

Building on this analysis of how self-sacrifice exercises power in women's lives, Barbara Burris identifies its global importance in *The Fourth World Manifesto*. According to Burris, self-sacrifice perpetuates a system of global oppression in which men control all women who become the equivalent of the Fourth World:

> through the imposition of a servant status on women, the female culture has elaborated a whole servile ethic of 'self-sacrifice.' As the major ethic of the female culture, self-sacrifice has been one of the most effective psychological blocks to women's open rebellion and demand for self-determination. It has also been a

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[71] *Lesbian Ethics*, 99.

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> major tool of male manipulation of females.[72]

The "whole servile ethic of 'self-sacrifice'" manipulates women into believing in their moral responsibility for their oppressors. This dynamic shaped women's participation in the male-dominated peace movement of the 1960s. As Burris explains,

> they [women] opted to reinforce the split between male and female and to use their 'feminine myths' to act as adjuncts to the male peace movement and claim that women's voice was needed (in the same old role, of course) to save men from themselves - their own self-imposed slaughter. The oppressed are going to 'save' with their oppressed 'virtues' (defined by males and unsifted and unquestioned) their own oppressors.[73]

This description speaks directly to the double burden of moral responsibility that frames women, the oppressed, as responsible for saving men, the oppressors, from themselves through women's self-sacrificing, passive support for peace. Such a position resonates with moral guardianship as this scenario enables the male peace movement to hold women responsible for its failures and the broader national decay associated with the Vietnam War. Oppressed 'virtues' such as self-sacrifice deny women the power to "save" anyone even though society puts them in a lose-lose situation of accepting moral responsibility for everyone. Giving women social recognition for their sacrifices by framing them as virtues appears to grant them political power while deepening an investment in their own oppression.

Incorporation, the second dualistic trait, illustrates how self-sacrifice oppresses women by defining the Other (women) as a negation of the Subject (men). This encompasses two seemingly contradictory pressures: grafting the substance of the Other onto the Subject to ensure an instrumental relationship that serves the dominant group's ends while distancing the Subject from the Other to justify the Other's oppression. Barbara Burris echoes this process of incorporation when stating that "all of the female

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[72] "The Fourth World Manifesto," in *Radical Feminism*, 251.

[73] Ibid., 241.

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culture traits are defined as negatives by the dominant world culture. We do not believe them to be so (except all those that keep us subservient such as passivity, self-sacrifice, etc.)."[74] Within this dualistic logic, the Other's virtues serve as the foil to the Subject's superior morality. For the Other, incorporation entails a loss of self in relation to the Subject. As Plumwood explains,

> because the other is defined and perceived in relation to the master, he or she is not encountered fully as an independent other, and the qualities attributed or perceived are those which reflect the master's desires, needs and lacks...qualities or activities which do not fit into the scheme are ignored or denied...The master consciousness cannot tolerate unassimilated otherness.[75]

The Subject recognizes the Other as an appendage that lacks an independent identity or an autonomous self who earns moral worth by behaving according to the standards of virtue ensuring their service to the Subject. In the case of women, men demand complete access to women's physical, emotional, and sexual resources to the extent that the female self grafts onto the male and lacks any independent identity. Self-sacrifice then captures the extent of women's incorporation required under the feminine virtues that creates a particularly pernicious system of oppression.

As part of self-sacrifice, the finite female virtues of altruism, vulnerability, and sensitivity emphasize how women gain moral worth for channeling their emotional resources to men. Altruism acts as the key to traditional ethics in that a person is expected to serve the interests of others in order to live in a political community. The sexual division of moral labor, however, assigns altruism to women in the private sphere in order to enable egoism and self-interest to drive men in public life and the capitalist market, a point illustrated by Tocqueville. Women who assert self-interest lose their virtuous status, a reinforcement to their subordination. As a corollary, Hoagland identifies

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[74] Ibid., 262.

[75] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 52.

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vulnerability as a feminine virtue that serves male interests by denying women independence and agency. As she explains, "while vulnerability is not usually called a virtue, still a virtuous woman must make herself vulnerable by being nonreciprocally open, loyal, and dependent."[76] As Marilyn Frye adds, the finite female virtue of sensitivity emotionally traps women into caring for others:

> For women, such accusation [of being insensitive] is particularly intimidating, since sensitivity is one of the few virtues that has been assigned to us. If we are found insensitive, we may fear we have no redeeming traits at all and perhaps are not real women. Thus are we silenced before we begin: the name of our situation is drained of meaning and our guilt mechanisms are tripped.[77]

These three virtues illustrate that any failure to assert self-interest constitutes a breach with an ethical system premised on women's self-sacrifice and subordination. Speaking to this, Frye uses the arrogant versus loving eye to describe how men incorporate women into their patriarchal paradigm. The male's "arrogant eye" looks out at the world to determine how others can best serve him by "integrating an integrated human organism and grafting its substance to oneself."[78] If the arrogant eye sees a behavior or trait that does not serve it, then it marks that characteristic as Other or deviant because the "norms of virtue and health are set according to the degree of congruence of the object of perception with the seer's interests. This is exactly wrong."[79] The female's "loving eye," in contrast, sees the world in terms of how it can best serve and care for others. Virtue reinforces this focus of the woman's gaze by rewarding emotional commitment with moral worth. Moreover, women's emotional orientation towards others seems natural since mothers devote themselves to their children and virtue simply assigns social value to this

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[76] *Lesbian Ethics*, 83.

[77] *The Politics of Reality*, 1.

[78] Ibid., 66.

[79] Ibid., 69.

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traditional function. Hoagland captures the totality of this oppression when stating that "altruism, self-sacrifice, and vulnerability - as virtues of subordination - function to channel women's energy and attention away from their selves and their own projects."[80]

To explore this further, Sarah Hoagland shows how the other-orientation of finite female virtues, specifically altruism, self-sacrifice, and vulnerability, backfire when directed at other women because they secure their instrumental relationship with men. Finite female virtues deny women direct avenues to power, making deceit and manipulation - which channel power through others - represent the survival strategies available to women. When these virtues operate among women, devastating effects result. "When lesbians use the virtues among each other, we wind up using our survival skills against each other; thus our survival skills go awry," Hoagland continues, "I want to suggest that the feminine virtues are a means of exercising control in relationships - whether as lovers, friends, or collective members - and that as a result they function to interrupt rather than promote lesbian connection."[81] Feminine virtues cultivate a debilitating exercise of power that breeds dissent and distrust among women and separates them from each other. Building on this point, Hoagland offers a structural critique that comes close to challenging virtue as a concept beneficial to women: "the *structure* of the feminine virtues will thwart even our best efforts because these virtues don't function to promote a female agency which stems from self-understanding and which both related and separate. And far from facilitating our ethical interaction, the feminine virtues actually interrupt attempts among lesbians to connect and interact ethically by promoting control and distance and by erecting barriers."[82] Because finite "feminine virtues" secure women's dependence on men

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[80] *Lesbian Ethics*, 83.

[81] Ibid., 70.

[82] Ibid., 100.

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and channel their physical and emotional energy towards them, it works against women's relationships that form the basis of collective feminist and lesbian political action. Although Hoagland limits her critique to how feminine virtues undermine lesbian ethics, leaving unanswered broader questions such as can there be *feminist* virtues and is virtue essentially antithetical to feminism, she illustrates a link between moral and political power through feminine virtues that erects barriers between women due to their loss of self in a context that only values them for channeling physical and emotional resources to men and children.

Incorporation works in conjunction with the third dualistic trait, hyperseparation to specify even further how female virtues secure women's dependence on men. Hyperseparation defines the Other as the subject's negative in order to establish the greatest distance possible between the dominant and subordinate group. According to Plumwood, this process achieves "a major aim of dualistic construction...polarisation, to maximise distance or separation between the dualised spheres and to prevent their being seen as continuous or contiguous. Separation may be established by denying or minimising overlap qualities and activities, and by the erection of rigid barriers to prevent contact."[83] To counteract men's dependency on women through incorporation, hyperseparation entails erecting barriers and boundaries to separate men and women into distinct categories that secure masculine superiority.[84] An inverse relationship then exists between incorporation and hyperseparation since the less distance between or the more incorporated the groups, the greater the separation needed between them. Given the close

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[83] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 49.

[84] Plumwood elaborates this point, stating that "the more doubtful or insecure the establishment of such an identity is, the more strongly and vociferously the other's inferiority must be stressed. Such an identity requires constant reassurance of superiority and hence constant reassertion of hierarchy. This is a major factor in establishing certain types of masculinity" (*Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 51).

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proximity and similarities between men and women who often live, sleep, and have sex together, virtue plays a critical role in establishing hyperseparation between them by linking women's moral character with nature that justifies their confinement in private life, and male virtues to reason and culture that legitimates their political power and inclusion in public life. Compare some prominent male governing and female serviceable virtues that appear in the moral discourse of second wave feminists:

| Male Governing Virtues | Female Serviceable Virtues |
|---|---|
| reason | emotion |
| courage | docile |
| aggressive | passive |
| independent | dependent |
| strong | vulnerable |
| self-serving | self-sacrificing |
| individual | contextual |

These finite male and female virtues "establish separate 'natures' which explain and justify widely differing privileges and fates."[85] Virtue maximizes the differences between men and women by differentiating their moral characters on the basis of two distinct natures - one suited for culture and the other nature itself, two categories with at least two political outcomes. First, these virtues define who achieves "full personhood" with its rights, duties, freedom, and respect. Based on the service orientation of feminine virtues, men deny women "full personhood," described by Marilyn Frye as "unqualified participation in the radical 'superiority' of the species, without justification by individual virtue or achievement - unqualified membership of that group of beings that may approach all other

[85] Ibid., 49.

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creatures with humanistic arrogance."[86] As a consequence, women's nature is "a little less human," or not "civilized" enough to permit their full inclusion in political life. Second, women's exclusion means that men hold the power to define what constitutes male governing virtues and female serviceable virtues that enable men to control the moral terrain. As Hoagland states, "the exclusion of women from the conceptual community simultaneously excludes them from the political community. So the manipulation here is designed not just to dodge particular applications of moral principles but to narrow the moral community itself, and is therefore particularly insidious."[87] Without any power to define morality, women become trapped in a familiar Catch-22 where their moral virtue denies them "full personhood" according to the patriarchal political community that determines their moral worth.

In addition to creating hyperseparation between men and women, this dualistic trait serves to erect barriers between women as well. Lesbian feminists pinpointed how virtue excluded them from the women's movement based on patriarchal definitions of "true women" that categorized lesbians as "deviant." Although always actors within the women's movement, lesbians began demanding recognition of their sexuality in the late 1960s after Rita Mae Brown came out at a New York NOW chapter's rap session in 1969.[88] As the issue of lesbianism percolated in NOW during 1969, its president Betty Friedan declared the issue, the "lavender herring" and lesbians the "lavender menace" that threatened to derail the women's movement by opening the dangerous Pandora's box of sexual identity and completely marginalizing feminism in mainstream political discourse.

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[86] *The Politics of Reality*, 48.

[87] *Lesbian Ethics*, 51.

[88] For historical accounts of these events, see Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love's *Sappho Was A Right-On Woman: A Liberated View of Lesbianism*, (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), Chapter 7.

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In response, a group of lesbians called the Lavender Menace presented their position at the Congress to Unite Women in New York City in May 1970. Their paper, "The Woman-Identified Woman" expresses how, in the absence of a female self, women see themselves and other women through the eyes of men and experience self-hate: "women hate both themselves and other women. They try to escape by identifying with the oppressor, living through him, gaining status and identity from his ego, his power, his accomplishments. And by not identifying with other 'empty vessels' like themselves."[89] By incorporating into men's vision of them, women lose their identity and separate from other women whom they see with hatred as others who mirror their low status. The finite female virtues promote this separation by granting women moral worth for sacrificing their identities in service to men. Connected to a series of cultural assumptions, female virtues appear natural due to their grounding in the reproductive functions related to mothering to the point that women who reject this function and its virtues become unnatural and, according to this dualistic logic, vice-ridden in the eyes of other women as well. The split between lesbian and liberal feminists illustrates the result of this process. In addition, such perceptions also apply to racial barriers between black and white feminists. As bell hooks explains, "it is a woman's acceptance of divisiveness as a natural order that has caused black and white women to cling religiously to the belief that bonding across racial boundaries is impossible to passively accept the notion that the distances that separate women are immutable."[90] Virtue sustains the racial separation between the white Traditional Woman and the black Jezebel that normalizes such differences to the point that cultural constructions appear to be natural, or a given, insurmountable reality. The virtue-vice dualism also erects moral barriers that generate separatism within the feminist

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[89] Radicalesbians, in *Radical Feminism*, 236.

[90] *Ain't I a Woman*, 156.

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movement as well.

Together, backgrounding, incorporation, and hyperseparation indicate how lesbian feminists identify the use of finite female virtues in securing women's oppression. Marilyn Frye defines oppression as "a system of interrelated barriers and forces which reduce, immobilize and mold people who belong to a certain group, and effect their subordination to another group (individually to individuals of the other group, and as a group, to that group)."[91] This definition highlights two key elements of virtue: inequality between the dominant (male) and subordinate (female) groups, and the barriers that separate them. Virtue facilitates the process of making women's oppression appear to be natural. As Hoagland explains, "'femininity' is a concept which makes female submission to male domination seem natural and normal...The 'feminine virtues' function to preserve the relationship of dominance and subordination, facilitating the access of those with greater institutional power to the resources of those with lesser institutional power."[92] Frye echoes the point that efficient subordination requires "that the structure not appear to be a cultural artifact kept in place by human decision or custom, but that it appear natural - that it appear to be a quite direct consequence of facts about the beast which are beyond the scope of human manipulation or revision."[93] Feminine virtue attributes moral value to women's reproductive functions that historically preserve women's subordinate position in the private sphere and work to differentiate men from women's social function. Denied access to the finite feminine virtues, lesbian feminists identify their heterosexist function that requires women to sacrifice their very beings to men in order to receive some moral worth that actually undermines their political power. From their standpoint of vice,

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[91] *The Politics of Reality*, 33.

[92] *Lesbian Ethics*, 69, 70.

[93] *The Politics of Reality*, 34.

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however, these feminists begin to mount a serious challenge to the oppressive use of female morality by illustrating how finite feminine virtues such as self-sacrifice deny women freedom and equality. As such, lesbian feminists make an important contribution to understanding how sexuality explicitly links with female virtues to make women's oppression appear natural although clearly they serve a political function to exclude women from public life.

## 7.5: Dualisms & Nature: The Trouble with Sex and Oppositional Categories

This analysis of second wave discourse illustrates that, despite discussions about finite female virtues and dualisms, infinite female virtues, vice, and the virtue-vice dualism remain outside the considerations of how women's morality perpetuates their political oppression. While second wave feminists identify how finite female virtues such as self-sacrifice deny women freedom and agency, they fail to question the viability of virtue in feminist ethics. Turning attention to how the virtue-vice dualism functioned in the discourse of feminists during the Sexual Revolution specifies how the logic of dualism and the definition of women's morality in terms of their sexual nature reveals two problems of essentialism and oppositional categories that contradict the thrust of contemporary feminist ethics and political theory, raising important issues for the viability of revisioning virtue.

In part, failing to address the virtue-vice dualism may stem from the uncritical reversal in which feminists sustain the value of virtue despite its masculine definition and usage due to its association with "good" and "excellence" that makes the concept appear to be innocent, or lacking a masculine power dynamic and, as such, easily transfers into feminist ethics. Plumwood's analysis of dualisms illustrates how even she falls into the trap of uncritical reversals surrounding the virtue-vice dualism. Essentially, Plumwood who catalogues an extensive list of dualisms oppressive to women excludes virtue and vice

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even though she recognizes morality as important to understanding how and why dualisms work to create subordinate groups. Ignoring the virtue and vice dualism enables Plumwood to push morality and virtue into the background, leaving unquestioned a central mechanism of women's oppression. As such, she argues for a virtue ethics as central to her vision of the "good" life.[94] Without critically analyzing virtue, Plumwood reinserts virtue, a concept valued in the dominant masculine discourse, into her ecofeminist moral theory, ushering a powerful moral dualism into the heart of her project.

Although Plumwood and the second wave feminists in this analysis fail to recognize it as such, virtue meets the five criteria for dualisms. Initially, virtue appears when feminists challenge Traditional Womanhood, a cultural icon representative of the sexual oppression and moral constraints of the Victorian era that resurfaced in the 1950s. Kate Millett's governing versus serviceable virtues and bell hooks' historical account of the white Madonna and black Jezebel indicate the *homogenizing* aspect of the virtue-vice dualism that creates universal moral categories for men and women and erases individual identities and specific traits. Homogenization limits women's moral choices to the virtuous Traditional Woman or the vice-ridden Jezebel or Whore. Next, the virtue-vice dualism structured the pornography debates among feminists during the 1980s. As a result, anti-pornography feminists such as Robin Morgan and Catharine MacKinnon claimed the high ground of virtue as the moral guardians of women's sexuality and portrayed pro-pornography feminists as vice-ridden supporters of deviant sexual behaviors that endangered women's lives. Without an alternative moral framework, pro-pornography feminists promoted the virtue of pornography, a sexual behavior largely associated with men, and denigrated any limits on sexual expression as vice. As such, this debate devolves into a cycle of uncritical reversals based on a *hyperseparation* between

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[94] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 183.

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these two groups of feminists that results in neither attacking a core issue - how such moral belief systems perpetuate women's *instrumental* value to men as emotional and sexual resources. Finally, lesbian feminist discourse illustrated how finite female virtues sustain women's primary sexual function that incorporates them into and hyperseparates them from dominant male categories of reason and culture in order to background women in the political community. Examining when and how feminists used virtue during the Sexual Revolution reveals that this concept meets Plumwood's five criteria and operates as a dualism in conjunction with vice.

Recognizing virtue as part of a dualism carries with it three important implications pertinent to contemporary feminist ethics. First, seeing virtue as a dualism draws attention to its opposite - vice, a concept usually marginalized in feminist discourse. Ignoring vice plays into the elevation strategy employed in the mid-19th century to lift women above the morally corrupt public sphere that created the illusion of severing women's biblical ties to original sin. Further, analyses related to vice reveal the powerful uses of this moral category to establish white Traditional Womanhood on the backs of black Jezebels. Without fully operationalizing vice, second wave feminists fail to see how they deploy this concept to marginalize other women who buck the status quo as pro-pornography feminists did in the 1980s. Moreover, vice functions as a politically strategic standpoint for feminists that, though dangerous, empowers women to see the oppressive function of the virtue-vice dualism, a first step towards challenging it.

Second, as a dualism, virtue and vice belong to a series of linking postulates that help to illustrate how this dualism transfers oppressive cultural assumptions about women from one historical period to the next. "Linking postulates," according to Plumwood, "are assumptions normally made or implicit in the cultural background which create

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equivalencies or mapping between the pairs."[95] Specifically, the virtue-vice dualism represents one piece that locks into a puzzle consisting of other dualisms such as male/female, public/private, culture/nature, reason/emotion, and production/reproduction. According to the series of concepts associated with virtue as the dominant moral concept, associating women with virtue, as moral guardianship does, should link them to production/public/culture/reason/male. Instead, women's link to virtue creates an illusion of such connections when in reality it solidified their affiliation with reproduction/private/nature/emotion/ female, and vice. In part, this results from the "serviceable" character of the virtues attributed to women such as self-sacrifice, chastity, and altruism that emanate from their sexual function as mother and wives and coincide with cultural assumptions about women's nature. As such, female virtues appear to elevate women above nature by granting moral value to the very cultural assumptions that associate them with nature and justify their subordination. Virtue and vice sustain women's oppression since, as Plumwood claims, "virtually the whole set of dualisms can be mobilsed for this purpose of inferiorising the sphere of nature and those human beings who may be counted as part of nature, providing a powerful and all-pervasive model of rational meritocracy which is confirmed and mirrored at every turn."[96] While standing alone virtue creates the illusion of elevating women through an association them with culture and reason, as a dualism, it belongs to a series of linking postulates that reveal the reality that virtue continues to define women's moral worth in terms of their reproductive nature which, in patriarchal society, justifies denying them full citizenship.

Tied to a series of linking postulates, a dualism, Plumwood explains, represents a conceptual weapon that can trigger cultural assumptions used to oppress groups despite

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[95] Ibid., 45.

[96] Ibid., 47.

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varied historical contexts. As Plumwood states, "culture thus accumulates a store of such conceptual weapons, which can be mined, refined and redeployed for new uses."[97] The virtue-vice dualism stores old oppressions such as nature used to deny women full participation in the political community through cultural assumptions associated with moral guardianship. Despite radically different contexts, this dualism consistently serves as a conceptual weapon that political forces "mined, refined, and redeployed for new uses." Second wave feminists sense this use of virtue and vice in their powerful critiques of Traditional Womanhood, the cultural and moral residue that society redeployed to persuade women to return to the private sphere after the social chaos caused by World War II. In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett recognizes how the Traditional Womanhood of the 1950s represents yet another backlash against women similar to that which followed the Nineteenth Amendment's passage. bell hooks illustrates the on-going use of vice, symbolized by the Jezebel, in denigrating black women in American society and the feminist movement. Lesbian feminists analyze self-sacrifice, a finite female virtue that traces back to the Puritan era when magistrates and ministers premised women's morality on a complete sacrifice of the self and worldly life for a higher spiritual plane. In turn, religious feminists of the Sexual Revolution translate infinite female virtues into ethical arguments for women's liberation through spiritual transcendence. Throughout the conceptual history of women's virtue, this dualism serves to tie women's morality into linking postulates that collectively shape moral guardianship, one of the most powerful conceptual weapons for denying women full citizenship.

Third, as a dualism, virtue and vice contradict the relational impetus of feminist ethics and political theory. "Relational impetus" refers to feminist objections to the Enlightenment's focus on individuals, principles, transcendence, and universals at the

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[97] Ibid., 43.

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expense of relationships, practices, contexts, and particulars. A world view inclusive of women, many feminists contend, should account for relationships and contexts. Accordingly, feminists revision certain concepts such as "relational autonomy"[98] and "relational equality."[99] Articulating a relational approach to morality, Virginia Held advocates a "focus on relations between persons rather than construing moral problems simply as issues for us as isolated individuals making decisions among a range of options."[100] In a similar vein, some feminists explicitly see dualisms as an Enlightenment tool for creating a boundary between public and private life, making the latter feminine sphere invisible. With the purpose of establishing either/or categories, many feminists recognize dualisms as antithetical to relational approaches that challenge this oppositional epistemology, yet fail to apply this critique to virtue as one category within a powerful moral dualism.

As this analysis illustrates, dualisms pull concepts into an either/or category obscuring similarities and resemblances between them and making it appear as though each pair stands alone, disconnected from linking postulates. Yet, seeing dualisms as linking postulates illustrates how these concepts overlap and intertwine despite their oppositional framework, revealing their part in this logic. Seeing dualisms from this angle reveals how political power operates in terms of language since dualism requires invasively pulling apart conceptual relationships to create either/or categories. This process reflects

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[98] For a strong review of feminist positions on autonomy, see Christine Di Stefano's "Autonomy in the Light of Difference," *Revisioning the Political*, 95-116. On relational autonomy, see, for instance, Rhonda Copelon's "From Privacy to Autonomy: The Conditions for Sexual and Reproductive Freedom," in *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming a Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 27-43.

[99] Christine M. Koggel. *Perspectives on Equality: Constructing a Relational Theory* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998).

[100] *Feminist Morality,* 78.

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political consequences since dualisms establish division and separation first among concepts and, then, groups of people who fit either one side of the dualism or the other that coincide with a dominant or subordinate political status. The virtue-vice dualism, for instance, justifies the hyperseparation of men and women into public and private life, not only by retaining women's association with vice but also to nature by granting women virtues premised on their reproductive functions that justify their domestic role. As Plumwood states in her critique of Enlightenment dualisms,

> the master model...is taken for granted as simply the *human* model, while the feminine is seen as a division from it...it does not yield, as it might seem to do as first a gender-neutral position...This is a model of domination and transcendence of nature, in which freedom and virtue are construed in terms of control over, and distance from, the sphere of nature, necessity and the feminine.[101]

Associated with "the master model," virtue controls the feminine sphere and distances it from the masculine. As such, the virtue-vice dualism establishes gender hierarchies that perpetuate inequality and constraint for women, bolstered by an entire web of linking postulates designed to exclude women from full citizenship. As a dualism then, virtue and vice contradict the relational impetus of feminist ethics and political theory by creating either/or categories based on hierarchies of moral worth that translate into gender inequality and political exclusion.

Although sexuality and nature serve as a component of virtue's conceptual history, second wave feminists explicitly articulate their role in sustaining women's oppression. Specifically, the finite female virtues identified in this analysis of second wave feminist discourse come from women's reproductive capacity that defines their sexual function in the social order. Recognizing how virtue, sex, and nature clarifies how women's virtue failed to give them political power since it remained grounded in women's nature that morally justified their place in the private sphere. Exposing the link between virtue and

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[101] *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* 23.

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nature indicates a deeply gendered aspect of virtue that raises the problem of essentialism and further complicates revisioning virtue to suit feminist ethics.

Second wave feminists identified various moral traits as virtues. The following represents characteristics classified as finite feminine virtue within the discourse analyzed here:

| | |
|---|---|
| self-sacrifice | love |
| altruism | attention |
| vulnerability | cheerfulness |
| self-control | humility |
| watchfulness | kindness |
| passivity | gentleness |
| pleasing personality | sensitivity |

Vulnerability, humility, watchfulness, and passivity relate to women's power, actually valuing weakness and framing women's defensive posture as a moral excellence. Altruism, self-control, and self-sacrifice require women to relinquish the self, the core of political identity, in the service of others, primarily husbands and children. The remaining virtues - love, kindness, cheerfulness, gentleness, attention, and sensitivity - represent the morally valued emotions that constitute a woman's pleasing personality. Together these virtues outline women's moral character as other-oriented, weak, and self-sacrificing, resulting in an absence of self, the core of identity and independence that translates in a subordinate political status. According to these finite virtues, women encounter a narrow range of options limited to relinquishing power, denying the self, and channeling physical and emotional resources to others. This other-orientation of women's virtues highlights how their moral worth emanates from relationships to men and children based on women's "nature" that determines their biological function as reproductive mothers, sexual resources, and care-givers. Tying these socially generated traits to nature indicates one

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way in which women's moral character seems immutable and, indeed, remains consistent despite changing historical contexts.

Premising women's virtue on their nature links to a series of postulates such as body, matter, animality, primitive, and reproductive that dehumanize women and justify their exclusion from political life. These postulates facilitate the dehumanization process that begins by narrowing the range of moral choices to channel physical and emotional energy to others and to deny women the space to cultivate an independent, autonomous identity, the key to "full personhood." These moral choices build on cultural assumptions about women that define them in terms of sex - first as a sexual resource for men and second for their reproductive capacity. Sex acts as *the* animalistic trait that drives humans and defines women. By characterizing women in terms of sex, men distance themselves from this animalistic trait and keep the freedom to engage in a range of sexual behaviors while saddling women with the double burden of moral responsibility for controlling male and female sexual behavior. Despite their association with virtue, women's sexual function denied them political power, a position clarified by how second wave feminists labeled groups of virtues attributed to women that generally fall into two categories:

| Sex/Gender | Power/Political |
|---|---|
| heterosexual virtues | governing-serviceable virtues |
| feminine virtues | domestic virtues |
| female virtues | master-slave virtues |
| | virtues of subordinates |

The first category broadly relates to sex in terms of sexuality as indicated by heterosexual virtues and sex/gender, or feminine and female virtues while the second expresses the political dimension of the sexual categories. Governing-serviceable and master-slave virtues indicate the oppressed status of women as service-providers, even slaves, and always subordinates to men. Domestic virtues encompass the reproductive labor performed in the private sphere, the

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antithesis of civic virtues associated with citizenship. Together these categories indicate the intersection of sex and power where women's virtue actually strengthens their link to nature and their subordinate power position. Virtue, in other words, fails to sever the tie between women and nature or to endow women with the moral character of full citizens. Instead, a male-dominated society grants moral value to women based on their sexual nature that binds them even closer to virtues by creating the illusion of permitting them some political power through this moral concept.

Basing women's moral character on cultural assumptions about their sexual nature contributes to the perception of virtues as being immutable. This manifests in accusing women who reject the virtues of self-sacrifice and passivity, for instance, fail to meet the standards of "true" women, implying a biological deviation based on an assessment of moral character. This path of inquiry ends on essentialist terrain where "what is a woman" questions abound. According to the moral guardianship tradition, a woman's virtue mirrors her essential nature as a reproducer of children, bolsters the social imperative to adhere to the finite female virtues, and narrowly defines moral value according to sexual function. Virtue's essentialist component may explain why feminists overlook this concept's significance since its association with nature pushes female virtues into the background, beyond question or concern, appearing to be an essential aspect of women's nature. More importantly, although it could be argued that deconstructing this essentialist aspect of female virtues creates the space for solving the essentialism problem, this concept links into a powerful set of dualisms that effectively redeploy a rangeg of cultural assumptions to ensure the moral valuing of women based on their nature.

## 7.6: Conclusion: "We Need a Moral Revolution"

During the Sexual Revolution, feminists identified how society constrained women through their sexuality and morality, locking them into Victorian images of Traditional Womanhood that denied them full political inclusion and citizenship. Clearly feminist

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hopes for women's liberation contradicted the dominant moral belief system based on women's constraint and instrumental value to society. By rejecting this status, second wave feminists collectively mounted one of the most serious challenges to moral guardianship in American political discourse. Yet, a critical dimension of female virtue remains unaccounted for in their analysis that indicates how the cultural backlash against feminism gained such momentum in the 1980s. Despite their attention to the finite feminine virtues such as self-sacrifice, altruism, and vulnerability, feminists overlooked the infinite dimension of virtue which helps to explain the vehement conservative attack on second wave feminism's revolutionary advancements. As this conceptual history reveals, women's virtue consists of the infinite and finite components with the former pertaining to the spiritual or transcendent moral plane often emanating from religion, and the latter referring to the material, lived experience of moral behavior. Infinite female virtue is essential to identifying how women's morality translates into politics because this component links individual behavior to a broader moral plane characterized by spirituality and a political commitment to the common good. Without an account of infinite virtue, second wave feminists could not predict the political response to their attacks on Traditional Womanhood and feminine virtue. Although they made the connection to Victorian morality, the virtue-vice dualism links into a series of postulates that constitute moral guardianship, a moral belief system that grants moral worth to women for their defense of the status quo and blames them for any deviation from the nation's exceptional future. Working in tandem with finite virtue, the infinite links women's individual moral behavior to the common good that creates a double burden of moral responsibility for their families, communities, and ultimately America's exceptional future. Throughout the second wave discourse, feminists reference moral custodians and women's moral responsibility without making the connection to this broader political terrain accessible through infinite female virtue that, though more secondary in contemporary discourse, still

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functions to justify women's second-class citizenship. Looking at the Sexual Revolution from this perspective helps to explain the powerful backlash mounted against this feminist movement.

Because second wave feminists challenged moral guardianship, conservative anti-feminist forces successfully presented feminism as destructive to American families, society, and ultimately its exceptional future. Anti-feminists such as Phyllis Schlafly tapped into moral guardianship discourse to argue that the feminist movement aimed to tear down the American family and destroy the entire society through equal divorce laws, women's active military service, the Equal Rights Amendment, pornography, homosexuality, abortion rights, and paid employment outside the home. Often participants in the backlash framed their opposition in terms of "woman's nature." For example, Connaught Marshner, a key player at the Heritage Foundation in the 1980s states, "'a woman's nature is, simply other-oriented...Women are ordained by their nature to spend themselves in meeting the needs of others," a position supportive of women's self-sacrifice and serviceable virtues.[102] Framing the same sentiment in religious terms, Beverly LaHaye, founder of Concerned Women for America, explains that "'the woman who is truly Spirit-filled will want to be totally submissive to her husband...This is a truly liberated woman. Submission is God's design for women.'"[103] Such a position resonates with that of Puritan ministers who used infinite virtues such as piety, sacrifice, humility, and modesty to justify women's submission to God that, in the finite world, translates into their role as "help-meets" to men. LaHaye echoes religious leaders on the Christian Right such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson who revived the Puritan discourse in which religion justifies women's role in the family as God's chosen path for them. Politically,

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[102] In Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York, NY: Doubleday, Inc, 1991), 241.

[103] Ibid., 247.

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challenging this role represented a breach of faith for women and the nation whose exceptional future depended on their moral guardianship. Taking this position enabled the New Right to capture the moral high ground of virtue, indicated by their use of terms such as "pro-chastity," "pro-motherhood," and "pro-family" that coalesced into the family values rhetoric. As such, feminists who advocated for sexual freedom, equal employment opportunities for women, and a range of choices in public life landed on the side of vice as challengers to the American way of life. Without a full appreciation of moral guardianship's power in American political discourse, feminists remain on the losing end of this battle that taps into deep religious and political roots connected to American exceptionalism.

Despite the powerful hold of the virtue-vice dualism and moral guardianship on women's morality in American society, feminists continue to push for change and fight to hold their political ground against this backlash that indicates the depth of their challenge to the status quo. Speaking to the intense relationship between morality and women's political liberation, Sarah Hoagland exclaims, "we need a moral revolution....a set of values among ourselves which further develop female agency away from the dominant/subordinate relationship of heteropatriarchy."[104] To do so, Hoagland illustrates the oppressive nature of feminine virtues that takes her to the brink of challenging virtue as an obstacle to women's freedom. Yet, she shifts attention away from virtue to argue that "amazoning," a reconception of motherhood as creation and inclusive of a range of choices not limitations and sacrifices, should replace "mothering," a practice that embodies the feminine virtues. In the process, however, Hoagland avoids an important question: what happens to virtue? Without interrogating virtue itself, the potential for moral revolution dissipates since the virtue-vice dualism and moral guardianship discourse

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[104] *Lesbian Ethics*, 81, 82.

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remain the overriding framework for women's morality.

Even though second wave feminists failed to interrogate the virtue-vice dualism itself as they focused on finite female virtues, they began generating alternatives to this moral belief system that qualify them as "innovating ideologists" in the spirit of the rebellious Lowell mill girls. Although Hoagland leaves virtue in place, "amazoning" represents an alternative to the "mothering" paradigm premised on serviceable virtues that define women in terms of their children and sacrifice of the self. Some feminists more directly formulated ways to overcome the broader limitations of dualistic thinking. In an attempt to break with the oppositional categories that narrow women's sexual existence to a monogamous, sterile heterosexuality, Adrienne Rich put forth the lesbian continuum designed to express the more fluid and dynamic range of sexual expressions available to a woman. As Rich explains, "I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range - through each woman's life and throughout history - of woman-identified experience: not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman."[105] As such, Rich challenges the construction of adult sexuality as premised on procreation and nurturing children, a position antithetical to moral guardianship and the female virtues. Moreover, the continuum represents an epistemological break with dualisms that moves toward a more fluid and dynamic understanding of sexual identity. In a similar vein, Sherry Ortner directly addresses the problem of the culture-nature dualism that locates women in an position of "intermediacy" between these polar categories. For Ortner, "intermediacy" explains how women translate nature to culture and vice versa, a function that makes them pawns in larger political games and sustains their secondary status. Speaking to this ambiguity, Ortner states that "from this point of view, that which is intermediate between culture and nature is located

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[105] "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Powers of Desire*, 192.

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on the continuous periphery of culture's clearing; and though it may thus appear to stand both above and below (and beside) culture, it is simply outside and around it. We can begin to understand then how a single system of cultural thought can often assign women completely polarized and apparently contradictory meanings, since extremes, as we say, meet."[106] Applying this model to the virtue-vice dualism explains how women retain responsibility for both moral categories that sustain their double burden of moral responsibility and status as "suspect" citizens. More importantly, however, "intermediacy," looked at from another angle, implies a moral continuum consistent with a fluid morality instead of static oppositional categories. Although Ortner's concept of "intermediacy" communicates how the culture-nature dualism subordinates women, this position resonates with the moral middle ground discussed in this conceptual analysis of virtue that views an intermediate standpoint as beneficial to theorizing an alternative to the virtue-vice dualism. By emphasizing the dynamic nature of women's moral tradition, the continuum and intermediacy direct attention towards moving beyond the static framework of moral dualisms.

A more dynamic approach to morality correlates with the nascent efforts of some second wave feminists to consider a pluralist ethics more consistent with democratic politics. As discussed earlier, Gayle Rubin argued for a "pluralist sexual ethics" premised on the complex, lived experience of sexuality that traverses the boundaries between "good" and "bad" sex. To do so, Rubin insists that progressives "recognize the political dimensions of erotic life."[107] This position addresses how the democratic values of freedom, inclusion, and equality contradict a moral belief system premised on women's constraint, exclusion, and inequality. Similar to Rubin, other socialist feminists such as

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[106] "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" 85.

[107] "Thinking Sex," 310.

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Lorna Weir and Leo Casey apply the "personal is political" thesis to morality by deconstructing its premise on women's sexual nature. As Weir and Casey specify, "by postulating a natural order of sexuality that serves the general good, sexual naturalism sets an absolute ethical standard by which all sexual activity will be judged," with the result that "the morality of sexual naturalism inevitably turns to a moral authoritarianism."[108] Instead, they suggest "moral pluralism, rooted in open and democratic decision-making" that "removes sexual morality from the category of the naturally given, thus opening ethical judgment to the possibility of meaningful community consensus."[109] Although Weir and Casey end their analysis there, a pluralist ethics begins to resolve the contradiction between democratic politics and women's morality by offering a different procedure for making ethical decisions based on collective discussion and engagement with moral issues instead of relying on traditional moral standards that sustain the oppression of women and other "deviant" groups. A pluralist ethics also focuses on thinking about moral decisions in terms of the real, lived experience that includes relationships, practices, and contexts, values central to feminist ethics and political theory.

Developing a moral middle ground and a pluralist ethics represent important innovations in response to the ideological dominance of moral guardianship and the virtue-vice paradigm that feminists of the Sexual Revolution began to identify. Yet, the on-going backlash against women liberation speaks to the political imperative for contemporary feminists to articulate the means by which virtue and vice deny women full inclusion within the democratic political community. Although creating alternatives to this moral paradigm remain critical to the vitality of feminist ethics and political theory, virtue and vice as the pillars of moral guardianship require dismantling in order to end the endless uncritical

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[108] "Subverting Power in Sexuality," in *Women, Class, and the Feminist Imagination*, 472.

[109] Ibid., 473.

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reversals that perpetuate cultural backlashes and deny women full citizenship. In the end then, we do need a moral revolution.

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# CHAPTER EIGHT

## Virtue & Vice in Contemporary Discourse: Communitarian and Feminist Approaches to Morality and Ethics

### 8.1: Introduction

As the tide of conservatism began to rise in the late 1970s, virtue regained currency in American political discourse. The Moral Majority met the Sexual Revolution's challenges to marriage, the family, sex, sexuality, and reproductive labor by putting virtue, religion, and "family values" back on the nation's political radar screen. Opposing abortion, homosexuality, feminism, and pornography, the Christian Right generated and capitalized on a growing cultural backlash against the second wave's advances following *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Cultural conservatism achieved new-found political power after registering two million voters for the 1980 presidential election that, in the wake of Ronald Reagan's successful bid for the White House, catapulted its leaders into the political spotlight.[1] Such shifts in political fortunes led the media to declare the "death of feminism" repeatedly throughout the late 1980s.

Despite such declarations, feminism survived, though its radical edge dulled as many feminists turned attention to the family and women's role in it, a move that allowed some feminist voices to be heard amidst the conservative din. In *The Second Stage*, for

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[1] For a complete discussion of the demise of the Moral Majority and rise of the Christian Right that paralleled Ronald Reagan's political success, see Sara Diamond's *Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1998), Chapter 4.

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instance, Betty Friedan reasserted the family's critical importance in women's lives, much to the chagrin of radical feminists. Igniting the ethic of care literature, Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1981) emphasized how women's socialization as nurturers and care-givers led them to take a relational, responsibility-oriented approach to moral dilemmas in contrast to the individualistic, rights-based character of men's moral development. Working within the "acceptable" discursive boundary of family, gender difference, and morality, such feminist approaches remain consistent with the language of moral guardianship and virtue that, once again, found new life in American politics among feminists, communitarians, and cultural conservatives. Their resurgence in this political context fits the pattern within American political culture in which backlashes always follow on the heels of women's advances. Speaking to this cyclical nature, Susan Faludi explains that "a backlash against women's rights is nothing new in American history. Indeed it's a recurring phenomenon: it returns every time women begin to make some headway toward equality, a seemingly inevitable early frost to the culture's brief flowerings of feminism."[2] Virtue, this chapter argues, acts as a conceptual weapon deployed to activate such backlashes by anchoring women to their status as moral guardians - protectors of the nation's traditions and the status quo - and accusing challengers to the moral order of vice and suspect citizenship.

To make this argument, this analysis focuses on the communitarian and feminist care debates that developed within the broader political backlash of the 1980s. In these

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[2] *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1991), 46.

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debates, the theoretical underpinnings for this cultural backlash act as a window into the political undercurrents of virtue and tradition that work against women's political advances. In a sense, the "return to virtue" among some political theorists[3] arose out of Alasdair MacIntyre's response to John Rawls' position in *A Theory of Justice* (1971) that "justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought."[4] Reviving an Aristotelian ethic that allows for multiple virtues, including justice, MacIntyre initiates a communitarian response to liberalism that put virtue and morality back on the map for political theorists. Speaking to the liberal-communitarian debate's influence, Mary Dietz explains, "Over the past ten years the liberalism:communitarianism binary has come to reign supreme in the polemics of Anglo-American academic theory as the party identification 'Democrat:Republican' and its 'bipartisan' attendant 'liberal:conservative' do in American politics."[5] Although liberalism remains a critical counterpoint for many feminists, its premise of moral neutrality and attention to justice - not its characterization as a virtue, make this position less pressing for the current analysis. Communitarians, in contrast, use virtue and virtues to build the moral foundation necessary for reconnecting the people to their political community that, in turn, will generate more participation, or,

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[3] Similarly, intellectual historians such as J.G.A. Pocock, Gordon S. Wood, and Bernard Bailyn renewed virtue within the civic humanist approach to American political thought that also revived considerations of the common good and morality within American politics. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of this development.

[4] (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 3.

[5] *Turning Operations: Feminism, Arendt, and Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 67.

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in Ben Barber's terms, "strong democracy."[6] Similar to this community-orientation, most feminists reject the universal, individualistic, rational premises of Kantian morality dominant in liberal thought since it contradicts and excludes the particular, relational, and emotional aspects of women's moral development and experience.[7] Although virtue and virtues play various roles in the feminist ethic of care literature, virtue always looms in the background and acts as an unquestioned assumption that must be investigated. Given their relative attention to virtues, virtue, and morality, the communitarian and feminist care literature tracks the problems of gender neutrality and "assumed goodness" or idealism in both positions that arise from both an implicit and explicit reliance on virtue, landing both camps in traps into which they accuse liberals of falling.

Primarily, this analysis reveals how women's virtue tradition contradicts the background assumption of virtue as a positive ethical concept and raises serious questions about its viability in a feminist ethic consistent with a more democratic, liberatory politics. As an assumed "good" or beneficial political concept, virtue occupies the moral background for debates about women's proper role in public and private life characteristic of backlash politics. Approaching virtue in this manner parallels feminist interrogations

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[6] See Benjamin Barber's *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

[7] For two opposing views on Kantian ethics that stem from responses to care ethics, see Sally Sedgwick's "Can Kant's Ethics Survive the Feminist Critique?" where she argues against Kant's ethics while Herta Nagl-Docekal's "Feminist Ethics: How It Could Benefit from Kant's Moral Philosophy" holds that Kantian universalism pertains to feminist claims that care is universal to human life, and, thus, more consistent with a Kantian perspective than most feminists care to recognize. Both essays are in *Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant*, ed. Robin May Schott (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), Chapters 3 and 4.

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into areas of ethics that presume a "false gender neutrality," perpetuating women's domination by masking operations of power. Speaking to the need for feminist ethics, Alison Jaggar explains this point:

> failing to recognize distinctions of gender at a time when gender operates as a set of socially instituted expectations that regulate every aspect of our lives, mostly to the advantage of men, is equivalent to refusing to acknowledge a pervasive system of domination. Pretending that social distinctions and privileges do not exist usually is equivalent to perpetuating them, as has become clear in legal contexts in the United States, where gender-blind and thus supposedly nondiscriminatory applications of law have often resulted in worsening women's situation.[8]

In terms of virtue, feminists usually limit their analysis to its masculine etymological roots in the Latin *vir*, meaning "man." As such, virtue remains an unacknowledged pillar within "a pervasive system of domination" where it operates, at different times, as either an implicit or explicit standard of moral excellence for the political community. Identifying virtue's relationship to women makes these moral assumptions particularly hard to discern given the assumed "goodness" of virtue and women's traditional role as invisible members of society secluded away in the private sphere. Christine Koggel indicates the difficulties of tracking how power functions in such societal standards, rules, and norms, stating that, "while relations of power and authority are implicated in the activity of establishing and maintaining standards and rules in general, they are particularly evident when the standards and rules apply to people...When language learning is successful, norms and purposes become so much a part of the background that they are taken for granted and hidden."[9]

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[8] "Feminist Ethics: Projects, Problems, Prospects," in *Feminist Ethics*, ed. Claudia Card (Lawrence, KN: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 96.

[9] *Perspectives on Equality: Constructing a Relational Theory* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 37.

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Virtue acts as part of the "norms and purposes" that constitute a generally accepted and unquestioned moral backdrop for politics. Examining women's relationship to virtue, however, exposes the exercise of power through this concept that creates high barriers to women's political equality, freedom, and inclusion. By contesting the assumed "goodness" of virtue premised on women's political status as moral guardians, this analysis illustrates how this moral framework fuels backlashes against women in order to suggest why feminists should explore alternative ethical concepts and approaches more consistent with liberatory politics.

Communitarians and feminists, this chapter shows, essentially ignore the possibility that virtue functions differently when assigned to women, suggesting an over-riding gender neutrality and an uncontested acceptance of the concept. For communitarians who call for a return to moral order and the traditional institutions of marriage, family, and religion, their failure to address how morality, particularly virtue, oppresses women and marginalizes their political voice comes as no real surprise, though this position ultimately contradicts the premise of their political project. Among feminists, however, the absence of contestation over this "essentially contestable" concept serves as a surprise given their awareness of virtue's etymological roots and the oppressive use of feminine virtues such as self-sacrifice. This situation indicates how women's virtue operates in the background of norms, rules, and standards that become so deeply embedded in our cultural consciousness as to be difficult to discern and identify as detrimental. In addition, challenging virtue historically puts women in a politically precarious position that leaves them susceptible to accusations of vice and causing the nation's political decay. Without

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an analysis of women's virtue, however, neither communitarians nor feminists offer a full picture of a "thicker," in contrast to liberalism's "thin," moral subject, defined by gender. Further strengthening this argument that the absence of a gendered critique of virtue results in a "thin" moral self, neither communitarians nor feminists identify the role of vice. Of course, this moral concept functions to identify those who deviate from moral standards of virtue and to establish the moral grounds for legal punishment, making vice critical to the exercise of political power. If communitarians and feminists hope to achieve the goal of constructing a "thicker" moral subject than liberalism, women's virtue and vice must be retrieved from the background of assumed cultural morals, mores, norms, and rules, and exposed as important tools in women's oppression.

The absence of the virtue-vice dualism perpetuates the invisibility of women's double burden of moral responsibility that excludes them from full citizenship, raising broader issues for feminism and its affiliation with democratic principles such as freedom, equality, and inclusion. The virtue-vice dualism creates hierarchical categories to "resolve" the moral dilemmas of politics by classifying people according to their moral behavior. This process justifies political exclusion and simplifies the problem of politics by narrowing moral questions into either/or answers. If this is the case, then the virtue-vice dualism, lingering in the background of feminist ethics, dilutes the politically transformative power of concepts such as care that many feminists see as a path by which women can change how we envision democracy. As Joan Tronto claims, "care as a practice can inform the practices of democratic citizenship. If through the practices of giving and receiving care we were to become adept at caring, I suggest that not only

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would we have become more caring and more moral people, but we would also have become better citizens in democracy."[10] Understanding care as a virtue - either implicitly by leaving this moral tradition unquestioned and uncontested or explicitly, this analysis contends, contradicts this democratic aim by importing a political concept that ensures women's inequality, exclusion, and constraint into feminist ethics and political theory. To make this case, this chapter builds a negative response to the question, *should* care be a virtue?

To do so, this chapter moves through the following stages. First, this analysis summarizes the tradition of women's virtue and vice in American political culture as generated by the conceptual history developed in this project. This process lays the groundwork for interrogating the use of "tradition" and institutions such as marriage and family to develop a "thicker" moral subject and enables a reading of the communitarians and feminists against women's virtue tradition in order to highlight the significance of this political concept. Second, Alasdair MacIntyre presents a teleological argument that makes a "strong case" for virtue as necessary and sufficient for reviving a moral tradition and community orientation to save society from liberalism's moral relativism and individualism. Examining MacIntyre's position reveals the weaknesses of a teleological argument and the possible strengths of "practice" for feminist ethics. Third, an analysis of the communitarian literature focuses on Amitai Etzioni and William Galston's work, to reveal how their case for multiple virtues and liberal pluralism, though "weaker" or more

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[10] *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 167.

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flexible than MacIntyre, invokes a moral and political tradition based on women's exclusion and inequality. Fourth, an exploration into virtue's role in the ethic of care literature centers around two camps: the maternalists such as Nel Noddings and Sara Ruddick who focus on care within dyadic relationships modeled by mothering, and the politicos such as Joan Tronto, Selma Sevenhuijsen, Julie Ann White, Christine Koggel, and Mona Harrington who view care as a practice capable of generating political transformation. Finally, vice enters this analysis despite its extremely marginal role in communitarian and feminist considerations of the moral subject. Women's virtue tradition reveals the centrality of vice to their political identity, oppression, and, importantly, moments of political radicalism. Taking a cue from Judith Shklar's *Ordinary Vices*, vice, this analysis contends, serves a necessary function in liberal democracy and in developing a more complete understanding of the moral subject as well as women's full citizenship.

## 8.2: The Problem with "Tradition:" An Overview of the Conceptual History of Women's Virtue

The conceptual history of women's virtue constitutes a "tradition." Framing it as such highlights the deeply conservative nature of women's virtue and draws this concept out from the background in order to reveal its problematic function in a feminist, liberatory, democratic politics. This section sets the stage for reading the communitarians and feminist care theorists against this tradition of women's virtue that translates into these contemporary discourses and ultimately works against women's full citizenship.

*Webster's Dictionary* defines "tradition" as "the handing down of statements,

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beliefs, legends, customs, information, etc. from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice; long-established or inherited way of thinking or action; a continuing pattern of culture beliefs or practices." These "culture beliefs or practices" retain moral, religious, political, and even educational value within a society and they often function as stabilizing forces particularly in response to intense cultural changes such as those generated by the Sexual Revolution. Women usually act as the bearers of culture and tradition by maintaining moral and religious practices in the private sphere that remain stable despite the march of political change in public life. Across cultural contexts, women's virtue makes them the guardians of a nation's traditions. Feminists such as Uma Narayan identify how Third World women function as cultural symbols of a pre-colonial past that undermines contemporary struggles for women's rights. As Narayan explains, "Thus, in the Indian context, many nationalist women as well as men subscribed to a posited 'dichotomy between the 'material West' and the 'spiritual East,' within the terms of which nationalist women often embraced their roles as 'repositories of a national spiritual essence' who must remain untainted by 'Westernization' and its implied pollution."[11] Immigrating from the Third to First World, Narayan further explains, only intensifies women's role as markers of cultural practices and moral and religious beliefs while men freely explore their new cultural contexts. Specifically, immigrant women prepare the food that acts as a daily means for connecting the family to cultural traditions

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[11] *dislocating culture: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 19.

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through special ethnic dishes prepared in the home.[12] For American women, their virtue similarly serves as a primary mechanism for maintaining tradition. Yet, living in a political culture defined by immigrants that corresponds with extensive racial, ethnic, religious, and class diversity, the moral beliefs for which women remain responsible operate as a particularly powerful binding agent. In a political community with Italian, Pakistani, Indian, and Russian citizens, for instance, shared beliefs in the Protestant work ethic, the American Dream, and "family values" create some common ground among diverse people. This cultural context intensifies the political significance of women's virtue that sustains shared moral understandings in an otherwise often disparate political culture. The American woman's virtue, in short, defines her political identity as the keeper of tradition.

Moral guardianship captures the construction of women's political identity as keepers of virtue, tradition, and the status quo, central elements in the conceptual history of women's virtue from America's colonial period to the present. Beginning with the Puritans, ministers such as Cotton Mather attributed infinite and finite virtue to women who devoted themselves to God and family as a means of protecting their communities against the threatens of Indian attacks, a rising mercantalist class, and witches. Despite their association with vice as the daughters of Eve, virtuous Puritan women gained the political distinction of preserving God's community, marking the initial phase of their relationship with American exceptionalism. During the republican period following the

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[12] Uma Narayan offers a wonderful and insightful discussion of food politics among Third World women, particularly in multicultural contexts of the First World in "Eating Cultures: Incorporation, Identity, and Indian Food," of *dislocating cultures*, Chapter 5.

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nation's founding in 1789, women fully emerged as the nation's moral guardians whose virtue granted them the power to maintain religion and morality in the private sphere as public life became more secular and to educate their children to be good citizens. Early republicans such as Benjamin Rush and Judith Sargent Murray asserted that the nation's exceptional destiny depended on its moral guardians who protected the status quo and stabilized moral traditions. This political duty locked women in a double bind as they became morally responsible for preventing moral decay and the nation's demise while lacking the political power necessary to fulfill this responsibility. By the era of Jacksonian democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville captures an even more fully formed version of the American woman as moral guardian in the pioneer woman who sacrifices her freedom and physical self for her children, husband, and the greater good of nation-building in the West. Moreover, Tocqueville articulates that the American woman's responsibility for keeping the nation's mores grants them great political significance since mores often outweigh formal laws. Moral guardianship reaches its pinnacle during the Victorian era of the mid-1800s as universal manhood suffrage solidifies the separate spheres ideology and women transform into "angels on pedestals" whose happiness comes from raising children in the morally pure atmosphere of the sentimental family.

Although shifting more into the background during the contemporary period, moral guardianship still acts as an important point of departure for women's political identity and a powerful force against their struggle for political change. Even as women entered the paid labor force of the growing textile industry in the 1830s, some mill girls attempted to retain their virtuous standing as moral guardians although merely stepping

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foot on to the factory floor challenged Victorian ideology. During this period, for instance, radical Lowell mill girls fought against the oppressive corporate policies of the Boston Associates by trying first to claim the moral high ground above the textile tycoons who forced them to work twelve to fourteen hours a day in poorly ventilated factories and paid decreasing wages. Yet, the Victorian image of women held more cultural sway and ultimately moved opinion against the unionized mill girls by portraying them as too independent and vice-ridden since they broke with feminine passivity and submissiveness. Similar situations play out in the Sexual Revolution. Feminists such as Mary Daly and anti-pornography advocates remained tied to a moral guardianship discourse by valorizing women's virtue as the source of their moral superiority to men and protection against sexual danger, a position that sustains a tradition of passivity and submissiveness. In contrast, radical feminists rejected the Traditional Woman, a reincarnation of the moral guardian, and virtue, yet failed to offer an alternative moral framework that left them wide open to the ensuing backlash led by the Moral Majority. Currently, this moral tradition frames the "family values" discourse that implies, and in some quarters explicitly calls for, women's return to the family, the deterioration of which threatens democracy. Despite historical change and advances in women's political, economic, and social equality, the virtue tradition of moral guardianship still defines women's political identity as the passive support for the status quo that keeps America on the exceptional path of virtue and retains a sense of the common good amidst dynamic change.

Though often marginalized, vice works in tandem with virtue, functioning as a constant reminder of the punishments available for those who abandon the virtuous path.

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Puritan women, for instance, experienced the political power exercised through vice when ministers and magistrates accused hundreds of women of witchcraft and then sentenced them to death, banishment, jail, and harsh fines that often left them destitute. Political leaders from the republican to Jacksonian eras such as Reverend James Fordyce and Dr. Elisha Barrett warned women against vice by declaring that they deserved poverty, poor health, prostitution, and the lack of male or societal protections for abandoning virtue and moral guardianship. Yet, women from the radical Lowell mill girls to the Sexual Revolution's radical feminists turned, wittingly or unwittingly, to vice as a means of pressing for social change, a political posture that required abandoning the passive citizenship of the virtuous moral guardian. Overall, the conceptual history of women's virtue reveals that vice operates to push women towards progressive change while virtue pulls them back into supporting the tradition and status quo embodied in the passive citizenship consistent with moral guardianship.

Framing this conceptual history in terms of tradition functions to spotlight the detrimental effect of grounding women's citizenship in the moral terms of virtue and to show how its backgrounding effect makes this problem so hard to identify. In part, then, this speaks to the larger problem of backgrounding identified by feminists. Articulating this process, Marilyn Frye expresses how a male-dominated society must make women invisible since "it is essential to the maintenance of the foreground reality that nothing within it refer in anyway to anything in the background, and yet it depends absolutely upon

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the existence of the background."[13] Women's virtue sustains their role in the background where their "constant repetitive uneventful activities" passively maintain moral traditions and stability as the nation's keepers of the common good who, however, lack the power to define the common good, their virtues, or tradition. This political identity grants women moral status for their passivity and punishes them for transgressions with vice, labeling them deviants who defy the political order and, thereby, jeopardize America exceptionalism. Speaking to how such social assumptions can perpetuate inequality, Christine Koggel explains that "the relational features of language and of people illuminate the significance of norms in our social practices and political contexts, norms that are often hidden in the background, function to perpetuate beliefs about the inferiority of differences, and continue to make those differences significant to the way people are treated. Feminist theory has been instrumental in uncovering these norms and revealing their effects on people."[14] In a similar vein, this feminist project uncovers how virtue and vice create moral differences between women and men that perpetuate beliefs about women's inferiority as citizens defined by their passivity and political inactivity. Most importantly, virtue establishes women as the keepers of a tradition premised on their oppression, making them participants in their own domination and recipients of serious social consequences if they refuse. Women's virtue tradition creates the background for communitarian and feminist engagements with morality that both hope will revitalize

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[13] *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983), 167-8.

[14] *Perspectives on Equality*, 3.

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democratic practices. Yet, omitting women's virtue tradition from their positions speaks to the power of backgrounding triggered by women's virtue and the need for feminists to uncover the detrimental effects of this moral tradition in order to root out a critical source of oppression still preventing women from achieving full democratic citizenship.

## 8.3: Alasdair MacIntyre's Teleological Argument: The Strong Case for Virtue

In *After Virtue* (1981), Alasdair MacIntyre declares that "morality today is in a state of grave disorder"[15] so serious that it compares with the Dark Ages of morality preceding the Roman empire's fall. The cause of America's moral decay is emotivism: "the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character."[16] Based on ever-changing preferences, attitudes, and feelings, MacIntyre believes, this moral doctrine leaves modern man without a *telos*, or a binding conception of man's nature as an end in itself that anchors moral judgments to a shared standard. To repair this "state of grave disorder," MacIntyre calls for a return to Aristotelian virtue premised on a *telos* that grants man the "good life" through participation in the *polis*. Turning to Aristotle, MacIntyre offers an alternative to, what he deems to be, the "thin" moral premise of Kantian ethics embraced by contemporary liberals such as John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Instead of targeting whether or not Rawls correctly identifies justice as the first virtue, MacIntyre argues that without a

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[15] *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 256.

[16] Ibid., 12.

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teleological foundation neither justice nor any other virtue offers a sufficient organizing principle for liberal democratic society. Unlike other scholars who joined the charge against Rawls under the banner of "communitarians," MacIntyre's teleological argument presents, what this analysis refers to as, a strong case for virtue because he rejects the moral framework of liberalism's emotivism or moral relativism that results in a fragmented bureaucratic individualism. While MacIntyre shares communitarian concerns about moral disorder and excessive individualism, he offers a more dramatic case for virtue by grounding it in Aristotelian tradition instead of communities, focusing on a teleological argument for virtue not a range of virtues, and rejecting liberal individualism instead of working within its ideological framework.

MacIntyre's *After Virtue* plays a critical role in this project for a number of reasons. First, MacIntyre offers a central response to Rawls that shapes current debates in political theory, particularly contemporary democratic and feminist theory. Second, and more importantly, MacIntyre's critique of the Kantian ethics that informs Rawls' theory of justice rests upon virtue - not a multiplicity of virtues - a view parallel to the thrust of this analysis. In doing so, MacIntyre specifies the teleological nature of virtue within the Aristotelian tradition central to Western political theory and influential in contemporary feminist ethics.[17] As such, MacIntyre's teleological argument exposes important problems

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[17] Although some feminist political theorists rely on a Kantian morality, feminist care theorists often turn to an Aristotelian ethical perspective. This remains in line with feminism's problems with liberal virtue based on reason, transcendence, and abstract principles associated with Kant and Rawls, although many feminists still support justice as a critical concept. Pertaining to virtue and ethics specifically, however, most feminists seriously question the value of the Kantian approach.

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for virtue from a feminist perspective due to its tendency towards moral perfectionism and the "end" as the "good life" that presumes a unified self and community contradictory to the diversity and difference embraced by feminists and contemporary democratic theorists. Finally, MacIntyre's use of Aristotelian virtue reveals two other pressing problems for feminists related to tradition and practice. In terms of tradition, MacIntyre presents a gender-neutral Aristotelian tradition that actually justifies women's secondary, oppressed status. Causing further problems, women's relationship to virtue indicates how this concept links women to tradition and contradicts their efforts for change. Practice plays a critical part in MacIntyre's account of virtue that emphasizes the contextual, relational, action-oriented aspects of Aristotle's ethics that correspond with feminist emphasis on social context and relationships in moral decision-making and political activity. Despite such moments of compatibility with feminist ethics, locating practice within the context of Aristotelian virtue, premised on tradition and *telos*, reveals the need for feminists to sever the ties between practice and this virtue tradition in order to release this concept from its oppressive moorings in Western political theory that undermine its liberatory potential in feminist ethics.

MacIntyre's position emanates from a teleological argument that conceives of human nature as having an end that defines this nature and cannot be determined or understood without it. For Aristotle, man's *telos* is the "good life" or *eudaimonia*[18]

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[18] *"Eudaimonia"* is a notoriously difficult term to define. Usually the term translates as "happiness," yet a fuller conception is that *eudaimonia* has the character of the end itself. It acts as a self-sufficient end to which nothing can be added to make it more desirable. For further discussion, see "Introduction," R.F. Stalley in *The Politics,* trans. Ernest Barker (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), xii.

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achieved in the *polis* where the internal goods of practices and the pursuit of the good life, not external goods or rewards, motivate man's virtue or moral excellence. Enlightenment thinkers, according to MacIntyre, replaced an Aristotelian *telos* with natural rights, a move that MacIntyre completely rejects, going so far as to state that "the truth is plain: there are no such rights, and belief in them is one with belief in witches and in unicorns."[19] As a result, modern morality amounts to a "theatre of illusions"[20] where it appears that modern man has a *telos* when, according to MacIntyre, he really does not. Political and moral life boils down to an individual's pursuit of self-interest without the interference of others, the community, or tradition. Without a *telos*, modern man lacks a moral compass and standards of virtue that enable him to make clear moral judgments and resolve political conflicts within the context of a shared understanding of the end of man, the "good life." Although MacIntyre accounts for historical change, negotiation, and conflict within his moral vision, the thrust of his teleological argument entails recovering Aristotelian virtue as the means for establishing a unified self and, subsequently, a unified moral order to retrieve modern morality from its fragmented individualistic premise.

Applying Aristotelian virtue to contemporary feminist ethics reveals a problem of moral perfectionism based on MacIntyre's assumption that humanity shares a conception of the "good life." Reading MacIntyre against women's virtue tradition returns to the problems with infinite virtue that pull moral decision-making towards a higher plane, in this case towards the end of a "good life." The emphasis on the *end* of a good life

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[19] *After Virtue*, 69.

[20] Ibid., 77.

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disinvests citizens of the *means* - the everyday, messy business of negotiating a complicated ethical reality. By doing so, this teleological argument for virtue rests on the premise of moral perfectionism or the transcendent, infinite aspect of virtue that ultimately undermines its more finite, grounded element represented by practice, an issue to which we turn shortly. A tendency towards moral perfectionism in MacIntyre's teleological argument for virtue raises further problems for feminists, clarified by his views on the unified self and community as essential to moral order.

The *telos*, for MacIntyre, unifies the fragmented, individualistic moral self and, thus, a fragmented moral order. Modern morality's downfall accompanied the Enlightenment's creation of the autonomous self defined in terms of their freedom from the relations, constraints, and traditions of life that allowed it to be "liberated from those outmoded forms of social organization which had imprisoned it simultaneously within a belief in a theistic and teleological world order and within those hierarchical structures which attempted to legitimate themselves as part of such a world order."[21] Without the predetermined identity granted by a "theistic and teleological world order," modern man's reason and self-determination disconnected him from tradition and a *telos* that made him a creature of social context, defined by preferences and self-interest. As MacIntyre explains:

> this democratized self which has no necessary social content and no necessary social identity can then be anything, can assume any role or take any point of view, because it *is* in and for itself nothing...The self is now thought of as lacking any necessary social identity, because the kind of social identity that it once enjoyed is no longer available; the self is now thought of as criterionless, because the kind of

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[21] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 60.

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> *telos* in terms of which it once judged and acted is no longer thought to be credible.[22]

Without a *telos*, "this democratized self" possesses no essential identity or defined nature and, therefore, no means to create meaningful standards of moral judgment for the individual much less the community. To repair this fragmented, rootless self, MacIntyre offers a self grounded in a teleological tradition premised on virtue that consists of three necessary elements: practice, narrative, and tradition. Virtue, for MacIntyre, operates as the organizing principle that integrates practice, narrative, and tradition to unify the subject and social order as an anchor for moral judgment and standards that emanate from practices deriving authority from a tradition that binds a community together. While this analysis turns to practice and tradition momentarily, here narrative plays a particularly critical role in unifying the self since, as MacIntyre asserts, a narrative provides people with a storyline that helps them to coherently understand the trajectory of their lives and connects their narrative with that of their community's. Tying this to a unified self, MacIntyre explains that "thus personal identity is just that identity presupposed by the unity of the character which the unity of a narrative requires. Without such unity there would not be subjects of whom stories could be told."[23] Subjectivity then requires unity.

While feminists share MacIntyre's concerns about the lack of relation to others in liberalism's autonomous subject, his unified self contradicts how most feminists understand the complex, dynamic moral subject. While some feminists such as Kate

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[22] Ibid., 32, 33.

[23] Ibid., 218.

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Millett and Marilyn Frye argue that women need to uncover a universal, original self, most feminists today, greatly influenced by postmodernism, focus on a much more relational, dynamic, and contextually-defined moral subject. Similar to MacIntyre, feminists generally reject liberalism's self as too independent, static, universal, and autonomous, but, unlike MacIntyre, move towards a relational or even postmodern, dynamic self. Jean Grimshaw, for instance, dismisses a humanist view and promotes a relational autonomy premised on a complex self that includes rationality and integrates experiences of desire, fantasy, and irrationality.[24] In contrast to MacIntyre, relations to others and the world, not a *telos* predetermined by tradition, shape a relational self that changes and grows over the expanse of a life time, a position greatly influenced by Nancy Chodorow's object relations theory. As Christine Di Stefano explains, "the object relations account problematizes the very notion of the self as an independent touchstone for autonomy. For the self is complexly constituted, relationally embedded, and not necessarily a whole or unity except in provisional, fictitious, or exaggerated poses of separation, independence, and identity."[25] This self encompasses diversity, difference, and dynamic social contexts as essential to identity formation, not a cause of grave moral disorder.

MacIntyre's unified self raises problems for feminists similar to those of the Enlightenment. While Kantian liberals assume a universal, transcendent self, MacIntyre

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[24] "Autonomy and Identity in Feminist Thinking," *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy*, eds. Morweena Griffiths and Margaret Whitford (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 90-108.

[25] "Autonomy in the Light of Difference," in *Revisioning the Political: Feminist Reconstructions of traditional Concepts in Western Political Theory*, eds. Nancy J. Hirschmann and Christine Di Stefano (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 105.

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presumes that the practices, narrative, and tradition preceding the self benefit it and allow for the virtue necessary to live the good life. Both overlook how these assumptions exclude women's experience in the world and the inequality and oppression meted out by traditions in which women play no part in defining. Feminists such as Grimshaw realize that a relational self opens the space for women to define themselves based on their experiences of the world instead of being defined by it. Additionally, a "unified self" hardens one to the dynamic changes made available by experiences with others, possibly strengthening prejudices and moral justifications for unequal treatment. Virtue functions in such a capacity to predetermine moral standards based on a community's tradition that often entails labeling those who express difference as deviant to justify their oppression. MacIntyre's "unified self" then illustrates how virtue, the objective of this self, operates to undermine the dynamic, diverse character of the relational self more conducive to difference and change.

By unifying the self, MacIntyre hopes to unify the political community by binding it to the teleological foundation of virtue that establishes moral order. Without a *telos*, MacIntyre finds modern liberalism devoid of the capacity to link citizen to community in a substantive, meaningful way since moral character amounts to living within the rules of a law-abiding society that creates the security necessary for individuals to pursue their self-interest and external goods. Man's "good life" no longer equates with that of the *polis*. According to MacIntyre, liberals such as Rawls wrongly envision government as serving a procedural, distributive function that relies on a "thin" moral subject bound to their political community only through its laws. MacIntyre's problem, then, is not Rawls' claim

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for justice as a society's first virtue, but the absence of a teleological foundation without which no true virtue - justice or otherwise - can exist. As a result, for instance, Rawls cannot satisfactorily answer questions about "desert," pertaining to who deserves more goods than others and why since such answers require an understanding of man's moral character and a vision of the "good life." Rawls' use of justice as a virtue sustains the illusion of a *telos* while actually fragmenting the moral order by deploying pieces of an Aristotelian argument without its teleological foundation. Stating the problem, MacIntyre declares that "what we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have - very largely, if not entirely - lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality."[26] By reviving Aristotle's complete teleological argument for virtue, MacIntyre hopes to unify man with the *polis* as integral to the good life instead of merely as a rule-imposing set of institutions.

MacIntyre's teleological position requires a unified political community bound by virtue and a shared vision of the good life that tightly connects man to the *polis*, leaving little room for privacy or the private sphere much less difference, deviance, or dissent. As a result, MacIntyre assumes that consensus or the resolution of political argument, and the people's unity in a shared tradition and community represent the goal of political life, or "the good life" of its citizens. Critiquing this tendency towards resolving political argument in liberal and communitarian positions, Mary Dietz states that "the conviction

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[26] *After Virtue*, 2.

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and the conceptual binary so thoroughly pervade these texts that they constantly threaten to resolve the manifold problems of democratic citizenship into a shared formula that bears a single solution."[27] MacIntyre's "single solution" involves returning modern man to the teleological foundation of virtue in order to resolve the complexity of modern life and reinstate moral order, thus ending the unresolvable conflicts that arise from moral relativism. Politics then distills into an homogenous pursuit of the good life as virtue operates to squelch dissent and the moral forces behind progressive change. Virtue's tendency towards moral perfectionism lays the foundation for an ideal state of politics geared towards an harmonious "end" in the "good life" instead of a realistic politics where citizens engage in the often flawed, conflictual business of navigating the messy terrain of ethical difference that entails on-going negotiation and compromise. Based on a unified self and community, MacIntyre's teleological argument for virtue contradicts the vibrant, dynamic process of the democratic politics more consistent with feminist visions for the future.

To regenerate moral order, MacIntyre makes a strong case for returning to an Aristotelian tradition that offers a pre-existing, predetermined context from which modern man derives the practices necessary for achieving virtue, the good life, and a teleological view of human nature. Differentiating his vision from a conservative or Burkean view of tradition, MacIntyre states that "a living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute

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[27] *Turning Operations*, 65.

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that tradition."[28] Making moral judgments then entails engaging with a pre-existing moral tradition based on virtue and "the good life." As MacIntyre states,

> the virtues find their point and purpose not only in sustaining those relationships necessary if the variety of goods internal to practices are to be achieved and not only in sustaining the form of an individual life in which that individual may seek out his or her good as the good of his or her whole life, but also in sustaining those traditions which provide both practices and individual lives with their necessary historical context.[29]

Virtues then explicitly lock each person into traditions that define their political reality representing a force against which change must occur. Avoiding the limits of Kantian ethics, MacIntyre emphasizes "historical context" and a "socially embodied argument" that sustain the role of context, practice, and political reality in his overall position, even allowing for some negotiation of traditions in relationship to the given Aristotelian tradition. Yet, MacIntyre ignores the inherent problem of using tradition as a starting point for political negotiation, particularly in regards to morality. In this case, MacIntyre draws on Aristotelian tradition, one of the most powerful in Western political theory, only intensifying the problem. MacIntyre's reliance on tradition avoids the role that power plays in a scenario where a dominant group - in this case property-owning, male, Athenian citizens - established a tradition by which all other groups, including women, must measure up to their standards of virtue. By definition, oppressed groups excluded from shaping this tradition always operate at a disadvantage, unable to meet moral standards that they had no part in creating. Turning to feminist critiques of Aristotelian and

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[28] *After Virtue*, 222.

[29] Ibid., 223.

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women's virtue traditions clarifies this problem further.

Instead of rehearsing criticisms of MacIntyre's position on tradition itself, this analysis focuses on the relationship of tradition to women's virtue specifically. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), MacIntyre delves deeply into the questions about tradition left unanswered in *After Virtue* by more fully developing tradition into an alternative to individual reason as the means for determining justice. MacIntyre explores the Homeric, Aristotelian, and Thomist traditions as those preferable to liberalism, ultimately advocating the Thomist that brings the Aristotelian and Christian traditions together. In *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (1989), Susan Moller Okin offers a powerful critique of MacIntyre's tradition-based thinking about social justice to expose its "pervasive sexism" and "to uncover a more general and basic problem of this way of thinking - its incapacity to deal critically with the fact and the effects of domination" made explicit by a feminist analysis of this approach.[30] Okin's convincing critique of MacIntyre's tradition-based approach extends to women's virtue tradition specifically in order to reveal its particular "effects of domination."

First, this analysis focuses on the role of women's virtue in the Aristotelian and Thomist traditions advocated by MacIntyre. Instead of offering a full interpretation of either Aristotle or Aquinas on women's virtue, this discussion illustrates how MacIntyre's marginal consideration of women's virtue contradicts his strong case for virtue, and how this concept strengthens tradition by excluding classes of people, particularly women, and creates a false pretense of unity. Aristotle states that "it is thus clear while moral

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[30] 44.

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goodness is a quality of all those mentioned, the fact still remains that temperance - and similarly courage, and justice - are not, as Socrates held, the same as in a woman as they are in a man. One kind of courage is concerned with ruling, the other with serving; and the same is true of other forms of goodness."[31] Women's virtue amounts to the temperance to control desires and to function as those who serve and never rule. Susan Moller Okin argues that Aristotle measured all other groups - women, children, slaves, and manual laborers - against the functions of free, leisured, property-owning male citizens, not against their own functions, naturally finding these other groups inferior. Overall, Okin finds Aristotelian functionalism oppressive to women, stating that "this was a society, however, in which she was thoroughly disadvantaged and oppressed - a society dominated by men, in which her role and all the qualities valued in her were dictated by men. Aristotle is not interested in the qualities of women apart from this context."[32] Offering a more generous feminist reading of Aristotle, Arlene Saxonhouse, argues that "the city of Aristotle's dreams exalts the feminine virtue of restraint" achieved through a woman's function in the family where "he finds it in her capacity within the structure of the family - a realm in which she not only give birth but gives stability, preserves and educates the young of the city. It is a realm in which she can demonstrate her unique virtue."[33] Through the feminine virtue of self-restraint, Aristotle implicitly grants women a

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[31] *The Politics*, 36. 1260a4.

[32] *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 93.

[33] "Aristotle: Defective Males, Hierarchy and the Limits of Politics," in *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State

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part in the *polis* and, thus, the *telos* as sources of moderation in the private sphere. Although Okin and Saxonhouse present opposing views, both identify the "separate spheres" ideology in Aristotle's view of women as serving men and controlling their desires in the *oikos*. As the "rulers" of women, men define the *telos*, virtue, and tradition that judged women as inferior when measured against standards antithetical to their social function. Additionally, MacIntyre's reliance on Aquinas' use of Augustine in his Christian ethics, as Okin notes, sustains this view of women as inferior and degrades them even further by adding their responsibility for original sin.[34] In both traditions, virtue acts as a tool of power to establish a separate and inferior function for women who lacked any voice in determining the standards by which society judges them, a key aspect of women's tradition in Western political theory that MacIntyre hopes to regenerate. Although MacIntyre thinks that contemporary women should gain citizenship, his failure to see the gendered operations of power within virtue itself would import a tradition based on women's inequality and exclusion into the heart of modern political life.

MacIntyre's failure to see the gendered nature of virtue results in an inaccurate portrayal of America's grave moral disorder. Women's virtue tradition actually maintains social order through the "separate spheres" ideology that excludes women from public life and denies them the power to define their vision of the "good life." While disorder, individualism, and self-interest characterized the public life of American men, as Alexis de

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University Press, 1991), 50, 51.

[34] See *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1989), 56-57.

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Tocqueville articulately expresses, order, relationships, and self-sacrifice define private life where women's virtue allowed democracy to thrive. MacIntyre's position implies that women's advances during the second wave jeopardized the nation's moral order. At the very least, his failure to recognize women's virtue tradition in Aristotle, Aquinas, or America contradicts his assumption of a self and community unified in a *telos* granted by virtue. Male and female virtue represent gender difference, not unity. MacIntyre might argue that one's *telos* is to fulfill their social function that, in this case, requires women's service and inferiority to men, a position justified by women's virtue tradition. Even so, a teleological argument for virtue premised on an Aristotelian tradition presumes a unified conception of the "good life" defined by women's inequality, constraint, and exclusion from determining their good life. Women's virtue makes them the embodiment of tradition, not those who establish it. By overlooking this relationship, MacIntyre entirely misses the key questions of whose good life? And, who has the power to define the good life? By failing to see virtue's gender dynamic, MacIntyre relies on a universal ideal of virtue, *telos*, and tradition that ignores historical context, gender difference, and the operations of political power within this moral concept. As such, MacIntyre falls into the Kantian trap of universalisms that he claims to reject by ignoring the oppressive gender differences inherent to virtue and its tradition in his quest for unity and moral order.

Practice represents the foundation for MacIntyre's teleological argument as the first and necessary step to narrative and then tradition, the other two elements of virtue. MacIntyre defines practice as:

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity

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> through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[35]

Based on Aristotle, this aspect of MacIntyre's virtue ethics represents a powerful alternative to Kantian perspectives due to its action-orientation and grounding in "cooperative human activity." MacIntyre specifies his vision of practices through these examples: bricklaying is not a practice but architecture is; and playing tic-tac-toe is not a practice, but chess playing is. This vision presumes that humans achieve a higher standard of excellence when an activity such as bricklaying is located within the practice of designing and building large structures that connect with a narrative and tradition of architecture. Of course, this assumes that bricklaying itself lacks these elements and implies an elitism whereby bricklayers and tic-tac-toe players lose their chance at true virtue. Again, exclusivity and inequality arise when engaging with MacIntyre's virtue tradition that claims to be grounded in "human activity," context, and history, yet fails to recognize the implications of virtue for real people's lives. In a feminist critique of MacIntyre on practice, Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey emphasize this point, stating:

> We return to our first thought: that philosophy and theory must be sociologically adequate. The concept of practice is a great advance on the decontextualized concepts of free will and agency that have been invoked in liberalism, and on the determinism or abstraction of empiricism. But we need to study the political conditions under which practices emerge, the workings of power in structuring agency, participation, membership and access to institutions. Without this study MacIntyre's work does not make up the deficiencies he identifies in classical

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[35] *After Virtue*, 187.

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liberalism.[36]

Avoiding the problem of power in human relationships and ethics, MacIntyre fails to offer a "thicker" moral subject embedded in the reality of social contexts. Yet, as Frazer and Lacey aptly state, "the concept of practice is a great advance on the decontextualized concepts of free will and agency...determinism...or abstraction," a key aspect of MacIntyre's position that resonates with feminists.

In feminist ethics, practice operates as a critical grounding for the ethic of care literature in which theorists such as Joan Tronto frame care as a practice. Although, as we shall see shortly, care theorists vacillate on the issue of whether or not care is a virtue, they generally agree that it is a practice in the sense that it grounds the ethic in context, relations, and emotions more consistent with the Aristotelian tradition. MacIntyre makes explicit the relation between practice and virtue in his argument, specifically in his definition of virtue: "*a virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.*"[37] As such, he draws attention to some problems that may arise from a feminist reliance on practice that overlooks this concept's location in a virtue tradition oppressive to women.

While practice successfully establishes an action-oriented, relational grounding for

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[36] Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey. "MacIntyre, Feminism and the Concept of Practice," in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, eds. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 279-280.

[37] *After Virtue*, 191.

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feminist ethics, the concept in the virtue tradition highlights the problem of insularity. For MacIntyre, practices pertain to the internal goods derived from engaging in a practice, already established by those participating in the practice. As such, the practice sets its own terms that can only be identified and recognized by participating in the practice itself. Since those outside the practice cannot participate in the process of negotiating the terms, the practice becomes insulated from external forces. While this may seem reasonable in a practice such as architecture which requires immense technical skill, the outcome - a building or bridge - contributes to the public space and, thus, suggests the need for input beyond practitioners in this field. MacIntyre intensifies the problem by insisting that a pre-existing tradition acts as the standard of virtue by which practices are to be judged. As he explains, "A practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods. To enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them...In the realm of practices the authority of both goods and standards operates in such a way as to rule out all subjectivist and emotivist analyses of judgement."[38] Relying on pre-existing tradition creates immense resistance to new approaches to practices, possibly perpetuating "bad" or outmoded practices, and making it difficult for new groups such as women to engage in those closed to them by tradition. In particular, virtue frames women as keepers of a tradition that they had no voice in creating and expects their passivity and submissiveness even in practices such as mothering. Suggesting that mothering qualifies as practice, MacIntyre states that "thus the range of practices is wide: arts, sciences, games, politics, in

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[38] Ibid., 190.

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the Aristotelian sense, the making and sustaining of family life, all fall under this concept."[39] Linking the practice of mothering to the virtue tradition clarifies why any changes to this practice meet with great social resistance and even cultural backlash because such changes involve women trying to gain a voice in a practice and to change their exclusion from tradition and the creation of the cultural script. Such efforts represent women trying to define the "good life" based on their experience, a true exercise of moral and political power.

While practice remains insular within MacIntyre's virtue tradition, its operation reveals a bigger dilemma for feminists. Some such as Christine Koggel and Julie Ann White frame ethical decision-making in democratic terms where practitioners or even a broader public could deliberate about standards for "good" and "bad" practices. While certainly a step in the right direction, this reading of MacIntyre indicates how practice can limit this democratic approach at a point where a political community searches for ethical standards to bind together those of practitioners or smaller deliberative communities because, as MacIntyre contends, practices must be bound to a narrative and broader tradition that provide pre-existing measures of practices. MacIntyre's version of practice as embedded within a teleological virtue tradition contradicts feminist applications of this concept. Overall, this strong case for virtue excludes women, strengthens the power of a tradition oppressive to them, and maintains standards designed to judge them to be inferior. Further, the American woman's virtue tradition illustrates how this concept denies women full citizenship and voice in "tradition." The inherent link between *telos*

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[39] Ibid., 187-8.

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and virtue that creates a unified self and community contradicts feminist emphasis on a dynamic self living in an ever-changing, diverse political world. For these reasons, MacIntyre reveals why feminists need to sever the tie between practice and this virtue tradition premised on unity and adherence to a past oppressive to women as a measure for the present. By doing so, feminists can more freely explore alternatives to an oppressive virtue tradition that includes processes such as public deliberation about ethical standards that, although not sufficient to fill the void of collective standards offered by virtue, starts to overcome the problem of insularity in developing a democratic approach to the issue.

## 8.4: The Communitarian Case for Multiple Virtues: Retrieving Moral Guardianship

Similar to MacIntyre, communitarians hope to regenerate America's moral order through a revival of virtue and tradition.[40] Yet, the communitarians' point of departure

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[40] "Communitarianism" refers to a rather ambiguous body of literature that should be differentiated from the more recent resurgence of republicanism among some political theorists. A range of scholars often fall into the communitarian camp although they may not agree with many of its positions. Michael Sandel presents one theorist who distances himself from this school of thought and more recently moved towards a republican identification. In *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Sandel explains that "insofar as 'communitarianism' is another name for majoritarianism, or the idea that rights should rest on the values that predominate in any given community at any given time, it is not a view that I would defend" ([New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992], x). In *Democracy and Its Discontents*, Sandel explores republicanism as a public philosophy focused on recovering America's civic voice. He explains, "if the public philosophy of contemporary liberalism fails to answer democracy's discontent, it remains to ask how a renewed attention to republican themes might better equip us to content with our condition" (*Democracy and Its Discontents: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* [Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996], 324). Moving towards republicanism instead of communitarianism, Sandel joins other theorists such as Richard Dagger whose *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997) explores republican themes; and Philip

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and goals differ enough on these issues to warrant a separate analytic category in order to understand virtue's role, particularly in relation to women, in this contemporary discourse. Admittedly, "communitarian" applies to a wide array of scholarship, yet, as Amitai Etzioni explains, "all share the quest for the moral, legal, and intellectual criteria that allow one to characterize a society that carefully balances concerns for the common good and for autonomy, differentiating these societies from those that are leaning toward social anarchy or conformism."[41] An eroding social order and morality that renders America without a common good due to the excessive freedom, individualism, and self-interest constitute primary concerns for communitarians. In *Habits of the Heart* (1985), Robert Bellah *et. al.* return to Alexis de Tocqueville's worry that individualism would pull Americans into their small circle of family and friends and the solitude of their hearts, leaving the tyranny of majority to reign and democratic despotism to set in as equality increased. Setting the wheels of communitarianism in motion, Bellah *et. al.* uncovered a profound commitment to individualism in the 1980s that, however, still held out hope for reconnecting the people to community. Some such as Benjamin Barber focused on "strong democracy," aimed at revitalizing and expanding participatory politics at the local, state, and federal levels.[42] Although communitarians generally agree with the need for more participation, most focus

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Pettit whose *A Theory of Freedom: From the Psychology to the Politics of Agency* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001) works from a republican perspective to reconceptualize a freedom.

[41] "Introduction: A Matter of Balance, Rights, and Responsibilities," in *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, ed. Amitai Etzioni (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), xi.

[42] See *Strong Democracy*.

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on voluntary associations, cultural beliefs, practices, and social institutions to regenerate America's common good. Like MacIntyre, many believe that virtue and morality offer the primary means to this end. Instead of concentrating on politics, community which Etzioni defines as "webs of social relations that encompass shared meanings and above all shared values"[43] anchors their position. Tradition, however, runs a close second. Instead of turning to an Aristotelian or Thomist virtue tradition, communitarians take Tocqueville as their point of theoretical departure and often delve into the liberal tradition to retrieve its virtues that offer a substantive alternative to the anemic liberal proceduralism and moral neutrality offered by a Rawlsian perspective. Revitalizing virtues entails reconnecting the people with the social institutions of family, marriage, religion, and education, traditional sources of morality in American society. This approach aims to reestablish social order without state intervention by motivating citizens to embrace morals that will restrain their freedom to better serve the common good, and to achieve balance between freedom and order.

To narrow the scope of analysis, the positions of Amitai Etzioni and William Galston anchor this discussion of communitarianism given the prominence of their arguments in shaping this school of thought, the centrality of virtue, and their implicit reliance on the moral guardianship discourse. Leading the communitarian movement, Etzioni attends to the role of culture and society in rebuilding the institutions, traditions, and shared values on a moral foundation to bind diverse political communities into a broader common good. To do so, Etzioni creates a "sociology of virtue" that blends "the

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[43] "Introduction: A Matter of Balance, Rights, and Responsibilities," xiii.

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virtues of tradition with the liberation of modernity" to achieve a "virtuous equilibrium" or new golden rule: "respect and uphold society's moral order as you would have society respect and uphold your autonomy."[44] Through "social virtue" that pertains to personal moral character enforced and shaped by the individual in relation to the community, Etzioni believes that Americans can balance freedom and order through voluntary morality and community-based virtues, not state intervention and the biblical virtues promoted by social conservatives. While William Galston shares many of Etzioni's views, he turns more explicitly to liberalism to provide a substantive alternative to the moral neutrality of Rawls' procedural paradigm. In a vein similar to others (Macedo, 1990; Sandel, 1982,1996; Berkowitz, 1999; Kloppenberg,1998; and Krause, 2002), Galston contends that virtues emanate from the liberal tradition and shape a common good based on pluralism and diversity. For Galston and Etzioni, virtues offer the means for unity amidst plural and diverse communities by committing the people to certain standards of moral excellence derived from communities and a shared liberal tradition. In keeping with this tradition of virtue, we shall see how the communitarian discourse actually revitalizes moral guardianship for women and, thus, feeds into the backlash against their freedom, equality, and inclusion.

Aspects of communitarianism, at least initially, commend this approach to feminists. In particular, the communitarian rejection of liberal neutrality, focus on community, attention to social contexts and institutions, and embrace of a "thicker" moral

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[44] *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1996), xvii, xviii, xix.

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subject correspond with feminist emphasis on particularism, context, and relations in their ethical perspective. Moreover, communitarians promote multiple virtues emanating from diverse and pluralistic communities instead of a teleological argument for Aristotelian virtue. In their feminist critique of the liberal-communitarian debate, Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey specify these shared concerns with "*social constructionism*" or "the claim that social reality is contingent rather than given" and "*value communitarianism*" committed to collective values, culture, and aspects of human life.[45] Despite such overlapping concerns and commitments, Frazer and Lacey argue that "in several respects communitarian theories should be regarded as deeply unsatisfactory by any feminist, including those of us who endorse the feminist critique of liberalism. Indeed, we shall suggest that one should sometimes be forgiven for forgetting that communitarianism is really engaged in *political* theory at all."[46] In particular, communitarians fail to address power relations, inclusion, and issues of race, class, and gender that result in a vacuous portrayal of communities removed from social realities and the diversity of real people. Ultimately, their neutrality on such issues fails to offer a "thicker" moral subject and resorts to embedding people in "thick" moral structures inherited from the liberal tradition and premised on the exclusion and domination of women, blacks, and the poor in the name of unity and social order.

Without an analysis of power, inclusion, and diversity, communitarians rely on a

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[45] *The Politics of Community: A Feminist Critique of the Liberal-Communitarian Debate* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 3.

[46] Ibid., 130.

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virtue tradition consistent with moral guardianship that excludes women, promotes their passive citizenship, undermines diversity, contradicts democratic politics, and lays blame for social disorder at women's doorstep. Regardless of their claims to use virtue to end the culture wars, communitarians perpetuate the anti-feminist backlash discourse. The background moral assumptions of communitarian virtue expose how their false gender neutrality and oppressive power relations amount to reviving moral guardianship, and the explicitly anti-democratic impulse of virtue and its perpetuation of women's oppression in contemporary discourse. As the conceptual history of women's virtue reveals, those who claim social disorder - from the Puritans and Boston Associates of Lowell to anti-pornography feminists of the 1980s - draw upon the moral guardianship theme in America's cultural script to blame women for instability and to raise questions about virtue and social institutions to divert attention from real political and economic issues that, for instance, effect two-parent working families. The communitarian discourse redeploys the virtue tradition of moral guardianship, illustrating this political concept's crucial role in perpetuating anti-feminist, anti-democratic views in contemporary discourse.

This argument begins with the historical context to which communitarians respond and their reliance on Alexis de Tocqueville to draw parallels between their discourse and anti-feminist backlashes in American political history that rely on women's virtue and moral guardianship to plea for social order. The focus then turns to the social institutions of family, marriage, education, and religion as the means for regenerating virtue, key indicators of moral guardianship and backlash politics. Coupled with their functionalist argument, communitarianism promotes a veiled "separate spheres" ideology. Next,

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Galston and Etzioni generally focus on finite virtues consistent with masculine conceptions of political power that retain their traditional gendered characteristics, valuing women for their passivity and adherence to the status quo and sustaining their double burden of moral responsibility for America's exceptional future. Finally, a consideration of this moralistic position's anti-democratic nature reiterates the limits of virtue for feminist theory and practice.

For many communitarians, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s marks the beginning of moral decay in American society as "excessive" freedom and individualism and a general disregard for moral tradition caused massive social upheaval. As William Galston laments, "today, this cultural consensus is gone, replaced by pitched battles on numerous fronts. Although many forces contributed to the breakdown of consensus, the critical event was, I believe, the civil rights movement."[47] Amitai Etzioni concurs, stating that "the year 1960 is used as a baseline here because the society of the 1950s is often cited as the model of the orderly society we lost, one in which virtues were well in place."[48] For both, the loss of virtues particularly indicates the disappearance of "cultural consensus" and an "orderly society" to which they hope to return. Etzioni admires how Americans of the 1950s adhered to strong beliefs such as anti-Communism, Christianity, family unity, sexual codes, and respect for authority that bound society together without state intervention and greatly limited anti-social behavior such as violent crime, drug

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[47] *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 268.

[48] *The New Golden Rule,* 60.

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abuse, and consumption of pornography. This position implies that when different groups - women, blacks, gays and lesbians, students, and others - fight for equal rights, freedoms, and inclusion in political life, they jeopardize the moral consensus and engage in a self-interested, individualistic politics that pulls the nation apart into separate identity groups. As a threat to the common good, Etzioni thinks that limiting identity politics will restore "cultural consensus" by stressing a person's membership in multiple, overlapping communities instead of one affinity group. Of course, Etzioni raises a valid point that black feminists, in particular, highlight in terms of the intersections of race, class, and gender that cut across single identity boundaries.[49] Yet, such views about the problems with identity politics value difference and diversity whereas Etzioni's use of the 1950s as an historical benchmark reveals his adherence to conformity and homogeneity that portray diversity as a weakness that must be overcome through dedication to the shared moral virtues of America's political tradition. Blacks, women, gays and lesbians, and others who employed identity politics to leverage enough power to win some civil rights in the 1960s and 70s remain marginalized if not excluded from the "moral voice" and core values of American society. Abandoning or limiting identity politics in favor of community consensus simply perpetuates the oppression and inequality of minorities and women by the dominant group that retains moral authority in Etzioni's communitarian society.

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[49] For a classic statement of this view see Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?," in *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, ed. Miriam Schneir (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 93-95. For a contemporary black feminist perspective on intersectionality, see Kimberle Crenshaw's "Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew," in *Women Transforming the Political: An Alternative Reader*, eds. Cathy J. Cohen, Kathleen B. Jones, and Joan C. Tronto (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1997), 549-568.

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Although Etzioni claims to embrace America's diversity and pluralism, he invokes a commitment to virtues that belong to a moral tradition exclusive of different groups and designed to squelch social disorder, exactly the means by which women, the poor, and minorities historically gain some political power.

Targeting women especially, Etzioni uses their fight for sexual freedom in the 1960s to illustrate how women's autonomy created social anarchy, a position consistent with moral guardianship arguments against women's freedom throughout American political history. Harkening back to the 1950s, Etzioni respects the era's social order built, in part, upon a "separate spheres" ideology in which "the roles of men and women were relatively clearly delineated" and enforced by a society that "chastised" those who challenged these norms, stigmatized unmarried women as spinsters and married women without children.[50] "Powerful stereotypes, traditions, and interpersonal networks" kept women out of the workplace and politics and "sexual partners were expected to be heterosexual, married, and even then limit their conduct to culturally defined behaviors."[51] Society readily labeled promiscuous women who broke these codes and traditions as "sluts." Second wave feminists ranging from Betty Friedan to Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millett attacked the Traditional Womanhood of the 1950s as repressive and based on a Victorian code of moral conduct contrary to democratic values such as freedom and equality. Their fight against separate spheres and for sexual freedom, in Etzioni's eyes, amounts to social anarchy. As he states, "the sexual 'liberation' of the 1960s provides

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[50] *The New Golden Rule*, 61-2.

[51] Ibid., 64.

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another example of the issue involved when autonomy and anarchy are not separated" since the movement started as a rebellion against tight sexual mores and for autonomy but "led quite a few Americans to a state of normless anarchy" resulting in increased rates of divorce, single motherhood, and date rape on college campuses.[52] Women's increased sexual freedom correlated with the fact that "traditional virtues lost much of their power, and no strong new shared values arose."[53] This position parallels the basic premises of the moral guardianship argument in which women's departure from traditional virtues - especially those pertaining to sexual conduct such as modesty and chastity - amounts to social anarchy. Communitarians such as Etzioni redeploy this argument to associate women's challenges to the status quo with the decay of America's social order and faltering exceptionalism, a heavy moral responsibility for such a politically vulnerable class of citizens.

Further indicating a reliance on moral guardianship, communitarians generally accept Alexis de Tocqueville as a theoretical point of departure given his concern that individualism and equality would result in tyranny of the majority and democratic despotism. Communitarians share Tocqueville's belief that mores and social institutions can protect the people from intrusive government intervention and extensive centralization. In particular, Tocqueville plays an active role in communitarian arguments for regenerating moral order and reconnecting individuals to community by resurrecting traditional two-parent families, religious beliefs, and strong social mores. Women's

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[52] Ibid., 67-8, 71-2.

[53] Ibid., 69.

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glaring absence from this discussion speaks to a set of moral assumptions pushed into the background of communitarian discourse with important implications for women. Though willing to lay blame on women for the social anarchy supposedly caused by second wave feminism, communitarians such as Galston ignore women's political significance as shapers of mores whose maintenance of religious belief in the family anchored democracy in Tocqueville's account. Of course, moral guardianship required Tocqueville to limit women's political significance through the "separate but equal" argument and elevation strategy that located women close to though above the vice-ridden world of politics.[54] Masculine and feminine virtues also operated in Tocqueville's thought where women's courage, fidelity, chastity, and self-sacrifice required severe constraints on their freedom to secure the social order of democracy. Ultimately, communitarians sidestep Tocqueville's attention to women's virtue which contributes to veiling a set of assumptions in their position that rely on "separate spheres," moral guardianship, and a gendered virtue tradition consistent with women's oppression. Making explicit the implicit assumption about women's relationship to virtue and regenerating moral order undermines the communitarian claim to provide a "functional alternative to traditional virtue"[55] based on either Etzioni's new golden rule or Galston's liberal virtues. Seen from a feminist perspective, both thinkers belong to the forces of backlash politics that blame women for moral disorder and aim to constrain their freedom to save America from perceived decay.

Similar to Tocqueville who reacted to the upheaval that democracy posed for

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[54] For further discussion of these points, see Chapter 3.

[55] *The New Golden Rule*, 73.

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European aristocracy and that white male suffrage generated in Jacksonian America, Galston and Etzioni also hope to stem the tide of democratic freedom, this time caused by identity politics movements of the 1960s through a revival of virtue. The traditional social institutions of the family, education, and religion represent the moral pillars of a communitarian society. As the conceptual history of women's virtue illustrates, these three institutions fall under women's purview as the nation's moral guardians who maintain stability and transmit virtue to future citizens. Despite the communitarian rejection of liberal neutrality and supposed embrace of diversity, these moral pillars appear to be gender neutral and lacking any recognizable power relations. As such, Galston and Etzioni import a series of moral assumptions into their position that perpetuates women's moral guardianship and a virtue tradition premised on their lack of freedom and the double burden of moral responsibility.

Citing rising divorce, single motherhood, and illegitimate birth rates, the family's decline, according to Galston and Etzioni, represents the root of society's evils such as increases in violent crime and drug abuse and decreases in respect for authority and voter turnout. Galston contends that contemporary sociological data confirms "Tocqueville's observations [that] led him to conclude that America's families helped mute self-centered egoism and link individuals to their political institutions."[56] Without a two-parent family in place, Galston asserts that young people lack the civic character and ability to discharge their citizenship responsibilities. "It follows," Galston maintains, "that if families become

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[56] "Liberal Virtues and the Formation of Civic Character," in *Seedbeds of Virtue*, eds. Mary Ann Glendon and D. Blankenhorn (New York, NY: Madison Books, 1995), 57.

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less capable of performing that role, the well-being of the entire community is jeopardized."[57] To strengthen the two-parent family, Etzioni promotes peer marriage in which both parents willingly accept rights and responsibilities in the family. Although Etzioni recognizes the need for economic restructuring and some state support for such changes, he completely ignores the extensive sociological research that shows the persistence of women's double burden of labor and "the second shift" which speaks to the tenacity of moral assumptions about "women's work" in the family and the need to address them instead of backgrounding such issues. Dedicated to the traditional two-parent family structure, Galston and Etzioni reject strengthening day care programs and non-traditional family structures. Both also find current divorce laws too lenient and support "braking mechanisms" and cooling-off periods, failing to identify how such policies impact women who suffer the greatest financial setbacks in divorce since they usually retain custody of the children and make considerably less money than their spouses. Although Galston and Etzioni assert that people must retain a "right of exit" in terms of affiliation with communities and subcommunities, neither apply this to marriage, the cornerstone of their communitarian vision. Alternatively, feminists such as Susan Moller Okin assert the need to achieve equality in divorce to grant men and women the freedom to exercise the exit option.[58] Without a gendered analysis of power relations in the family, communitarians retain assumptions that deny women freedom, sustain their moral responsibility for this institution, and perpetuate the same neutrality of which they

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[57] Ibid., 56.

[58] See *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Chapter 7.

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accuse Rawlsian liberals. Gender neutrality reveals the absence of diversity and pluralism in this communitarian vision of the family that embeds conformity and homogeneity in values established by tradition not current communities and promotes the need for state intervention to sustain a family form that should not respond to changing historic and economic contexts. In short, their vision of the family contradicts their proposed vision of community and locates contradictory assumptions in the center of their political position.

Developing this point further, Galston defends functional traditionalism in his discussion of the family and religion which he sees as a means of curtailing the sweeping changes to these institutions during the 1960s. Functional traditionalism then "rests its case on asserted links between certain moral principles and public virtues or institutions needed for the successful functioning of a liberal community."[59] The traditional two-parent, heterosexual family fulfills the requirement of functional traditionalism since it cultivates and transmits the "moral principles and public virtues" necessary for Galston's liberal community to function. Similar to Tocqueville, who Galston notes frequently in his discussion of the family, Galston uses the traditional family to stem the tide of democratic equality and freedom in the midst of great social change. In the 1830s, Tocqueville identified how the forces of democracy radically transformed the family and equalized relationships particularly between father and son. During this period, American families underwent the first stage of radical changes as fathers began to leave the home to earn a wage in a nascent industrial sector. Currently, American families adjust to the two-parent working family, a result of changing economic structures and gender assumptions about

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[59] *Liberal Purposes*, 280.

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the traditional breadwinner-homemaker family model.[60] Speaking to this issue, Iris Marion Young articulates how Galston assumes that a heterosexual, two-parent family resolves societal problems despite data to the contrary and promotes the virtue of independence consistent with the male-breadwinner model premised on women's dependence as wives and mothers who keep the home, an outdated notion that ignores the mountain of data on the two-parent family structure today.[61] Galston and Etzioni's portrayal of the family rests upon a series of assumptions that sustain women's virtue tradition of moral guardianship given their failure to address the radically changing family structure in contemporary America and the ways in which communities respond to these needs. Additionally, neither examine how moral assumptions about men's familial responsibilities would have to change in order to meet the new demands of the family or "peer marriage," a key issue, due to the strong stereotypes enforcing the male breadwinner role. Although elsewhere Galston and Etzioni claim that American society should cultivate a social virtue that emanates from communities and their practices, apparently this view does not apply to the family, a point at which they revert to a traditionalism oppressive to women and premised on their sacrifice of freedoms and equality. Similar to an inconsistency in Tocqueville's views on women and the family, this communitarian vision of women's role in the family

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[60] See, for instance, Jody Heymann's "Can Working Families Ever Win?" *Boston Review* 27 (February/March 2002) 1: 4-13; Alice Kessler-Harris' *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003); Joan Williams' *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[61] "Mothers, Citizenship, and Independence: A Critique of Pure Family Values," *Ethics* 105 (April 1995): 535-556.

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contradicts Tocqueville's premise that increases in equality, such as those experienced by women since the 1960s, require increased freedom, a position conducive to freeing women from the constraints of oppressive moral codes that dictate sexuality and family life.

Serving functions similar to the family, Galston and Etzioni promote education and religion as two social institutions necessary for cultivating strong beliefs and the civic character that bind individuals to the community. As women's virtue tradition reveals, mothers and wives possess primary responsibility for education and religion, a point ignored by Galston and Etzioni that further bolsters their implicit reliance on moral guardianship. Despite commitments to pluralism, diversity, and responsiveness to historical contexts, Etzioni and Galston's views on religion and education rest upon traditional assumptions detrimental to women and contradictory to the proclaimed commitments of both thinkers. Religion holds great power over Americans and, Galston insists, "provides both the *reasons* for believing liberal principles to be correct and the *incentives* for honoring them in practice."[62] Religion emanates from the family where children should learn a strong belief system against which all other beliefs and moral principles must be judged. Although Galston employs Tocqueville to support his argument for religion's importance to American democracy, he fails to see that Tocqueville identified women as the keepers of religion and mores, thus making them politically significant in an increasingly secularized polity.

In tandem with religion, education should support, instead of challenge, strong

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[62] *Liberal Purposes*, 265.

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beliefs, including those fostering a civic dedication to the government. To strengthen children's commitment to the nation, the state should require a standard curriculum and, according to Galston, "may properly teach those beliefs and habits needed to bolster the institutions that secure liberal rights, and citizens of liberal polities who resist this civic education would irrationally contradicting their own self-interest, rightly understood."[63] Galston contrasts his views with Amy Gutmann who envisions schools as cultivating the democratic virtue of critical engagement with politics and beliefs in addition to mention substantive content. Alternatively, Galston argues that "the greatest threat to children in modern liberal societies is not that they will believe in something too deeply, but that they will believe in nothing very deeply at all...if the deliberator has strong convictions against which competing claims can be weighed. The role of parents in fostering such convictions should be welcomed, not feared."[64] To bolster "strong convictions," religion and education should reinforce the strong beliefs established by parents, promoted by religion, and unquestioned in schools, a position that contradicts the communitarian commitment to value pluralism since children learn political and social values at the expense of acquiring the analytic and deliberative skills necessary to integrating others' views and questioning prejudices. Despite the benign picture of families assumed here, they often teach racism, sexism, homophobia, and religious hatreds that a critical and expansive educational curriculum can challenge in order to promote democratic values such as tolerance, freedom, and equality. As a result, Galston's future citizens develop an insular world view

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[63] Ibid., 250.

[64] Ibid., 255.

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premised on the specific beliefs of their families and religious leaders that fragment a broader common good as these citizens lack the skills critical for understanding and critically engaging with other belief systems that emanate from an education geared towards navigating conflict and appreciating difference. Although Galston relies on Tocqueville, he completely ignores the role of women in religion and education as the keepers of faith and teachers of mores who stabilize the family by grounding it in traditional beliefs. This omission on Galston's part speaks to the gender neutrality that pervades his analysis and contributes to portraying the family as an idyllic solution to repairing the nation's social fabric by developing strong beliefs in children. Without interrogating the set of gender assumptions functioning in his position, Galston perpetuates the moral guardianship of women in these situations for which the political culture holds them responsible.

Based on their view that family, education, and religion constitute the three pillars of the moral infrastructure necessary for regenerating America's common good, communitarians rely on a functionalist argument to redeploy a "separate but equal" ideology in contemporary discourse. As the previous discussion indicates, Galston promotes a functional traditionalism, and Etzioni uses a functionalist method in the sociological tradition of Talcott Parsons. Feminists, including Betty Friedan and Susan Moller Okin, generally reject functionalism as a primary justification for "separate spheres" and the sexual division of labor that makes women invisible and excludes them from

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political life.[65] This method serves this same function in communitarian discourse which focuses on the social institutions of family, religion, and education traditionally associated with women. Yet, communitarians ignore women's role despite Tocqueville's recognition of their political significance and thirty years of feminist scholarship on the subject. Continuing in this direction, Galston's recent work in *Liberal Pluralism* (2002) aims to strengthen the boundary between the public and private spheres to keep the state out of the private so that morals and social institutions can freely flourish and regenerate strong communal bonds. Such a move aims to depoliticize the private while enhancing the emphasis on virtue, morality, and traditional social institutions by resurrecting a boundary designed to deny and justify women's exclusion from public life. Without any analysis of gender relations or the separate spheres ideology, Galston resurrects moral guardianship, a tradition antithetical to feminism and its advances made under the banner, "the personal is political."

Virtues play a critical role in the communitarian vision by serving the essential function of reestablishing social order amidst the chaos generated by the civil rights movement and identity politics, a position consistent with this concept's role in American political discourse as a mechanism for aligning groups, particularly women, with the status quo. Although communitarians claim to offer virtues consistent with contemporary society, they rely on a virtue tradition consistent with moral guardianship and antithetical to democratic values such as freedom, equality, and inclusion. Regenerating morality,

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[65] See Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, NY: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1983), Chapter 6; and Okin's *Women in Western Political Thought*.

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Galston and Etzioni agree, requires achieving a balance between individualism and community, and autonomy and order. Etzioni explains this in terms of "inverting symbiosis" in which the primary virtues of autonomy and order operate in tandem to achieve a balance within the tension between "*centrifugal forces* that exacerbate the need to maintain the order (if the given societal pattern is to be sustained) and to *centripetal forces* that increase the need to protect autonomy."[66] Through "inverting symbiosis," Etzioni invents a new golden rule to anchor society. He explains that although the people do "not require a return to the specific arrangements or values of an earlier era, American society requires a functional alternative to traditional virtue: a blend of voluntary order with well-protected yet bounded autonomy."[67] For Galston and Etzioni, virtue establishes order and counterbalances freedom by committing individuals to shared moral understandings that restrain their actions to accommodate the needs of the common good. Focusing on the moral substance of liberalism, Galston articulates the inverse relationship between freedom and virtue, stating that "liberalism is committed to equality, but it needs excellence. It is committed to freedom, but it needs virtue. I argue that these sets of terms are not antinomies: an undogmatic inspection of liberal beliefs and practices reveals recognizably liberal excellences and liberal virtues."[68] This position contradicts

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[66] *The New Golden Rule*, 46.

[67] Ibid., 73.

[68] *Liberal Purposes*, 11.

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Tocqueville who equated virtue with freedom, or the "*free* choice of what is good."[69] Apparently, Galston and Etzioni understand virtue quite differently although their view does remain consistent with moral guardianship in which female virtues create order, limit dissent, and commit citizens to a moral belief system premised on a tradition designed to exclude women from political life.

Consistent with their gender neutrality and avoidance of power relations, Galston and Etzioni promote a range of virtues that, with a few exceptions, draw from the masculine virtues that Kate Millett aptly classified as governing virtues. Their positions assume female virtues given their reliance on social institutions traditionally under women's guardianship and their functional arguments that leave the separate spheres unchallenged. For Etzioni and Galston, virtues constitute the community's moral voice that orders society in the place of laws or other state interventions. Such a position resonates with Tocqueville's view that mores often governed to a greater degree than formal laws in American democracy, although communitarians ignore women's significance as keepers of mores and, thus guardians against state encroachment into private life and personal freedom. Etzioni identifies the foundational virtues of autonomy and order, life and health as core values that generate more social virtues. Developing a more thorough catalogue, Galston draws on the liberal tradition to specify five categories of virtues: the *general virtues* of courage, law-abidingness, and loyalty; the *liberal virtues* of independence, self-restraint, self-transcendence; and tolerance; the *liberal economy*

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[69] See *Voyages en Angleterre,* in *Oeuvres, papiers et correspondances d'Alexis de Tocqueville*, ed. J.P. Mayer (Paris: 1951 - ), 5:2, 91, quoted from Cheryl Welch's *De Tocqueville*, 51. For further discussion see Chapter 3.

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*virtues* of work ethic, delayed gratification, and adaptability; those of *liberal politics* that involve citizenship and leadership such as patience, sense of purpose, and resistance to popularity, and *general political virtues* to engage in public discourse and to narrow the gaps between practice and principle. Collectively, these virtues such as work ethic, courage, loyalty, and independence reflect masculine moral traits valued for their necessity in public and economic life. In the liberal tradition, this conceptual history illustrates, such finite masculine virtues operate in tandem with finite female virtues such as passivity, dependence, self-sacrifice, modesty, chastity, and fidelity that secure social stability in the private sphere to create a sexual division of moral labor consistent with communitarianism's functional arguments. Failing to identify the gendering of virtue that Tocqueville recognized leaves moral guardianship in tact and imports a separate spheres ideology into contemporary discourse.

Galston's catalogue, however, includes some virtues that reflect female character traits. Self-restraint, for instance, represents a variation on the finite female virtue of self-sacrifice. Speaking to virtue's importance, Galston states,

> moral virtue is more than individual self-restraint. It is also the display of due concern for the legitimate claims of others. Conversely, moral virtue is more than a system of rational demands we make on one another. It requires, as well, taking responsibility for oneself and cultivating one's humanity while tempering one's passions and desires...To strike a principled balance between them is to begin the task of reconstituting public morality in a liberal polity.[70]

Moral virtue entails restraining or "tempering one's passions and desires" in light of "due concern for legitimate claims for others." In the liberal tradition upon which Galston

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[70] *Liberal Purposes*, 289.

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relies, this virtue of self-restraint transforms into self-sacrifice when applied to women whose moral guardianship holds them morally responsible for "reconstituting public morality" that traditionally entails the sacrifice of their freedom for the common good, a position consistent with Galston's functionalism. Self-transcendence, another of Galston's liberal virtues, coincides with the infinite component of female virtue that, since the Puritans, commands women to overcome their material needs, desires, and wants for the common good. In a sense then, Galston ushers female virtues into his moral theory that, without a recognition of gendered power relationships, perpetuate moral guardianship and women's oppression while seemingly extending these virtues to the broader society to transfer inequality and constraint into the entire citizenry. From this perspective, Galston's liberal virtues transform all citizens into moral guardians, a political status designed to protect the status quo and to restrain freedom through oppressive moral codes derived from tradition. If so, this moral system undermines the freedom to question and challenge the status quo which promotes conformity by squelching autonomy and independence, values necessary for democracy.

While communitarianism poses serious problems for democracy in general, this ideology amounts to a veiled backlash against women, or what Etzioni more benevolently calls, a "curl back" to the increased social order developing in the 1990s. To foster this "curl back," communitarians resurrect a virtue tradition based on moral guardianship that blames women for social decay and holds them responsible for repairing it, a position made evident by digging into the moral assumptions behind virtue that expose a false gender neutrality and avoidance of power dynamics which perpetuate a sexual division of

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moral labor and separate spheres ideology. Such insights speak to communitarianism's anti-democratic impulse that contrasts with claims to revitalize citizen participation and community involvement. In particular, Galston questions the value of democracy. To assert value pluralism, Galston argues that democratic values represent only one set of values among many others. More importantly, he believes that Americans must abandon the primacy of politics for that of community. As Galston explains, "it is not my intention to mount an assault on democracy. But I do want to suggest that when democracy overreaches, other important values can be imperiled...Democracy is an ordering of the political domain...If, as seems more plausible, politics is not the totality of human life, and if pluralism is correct, political goods - including democracy - cannot be overriding."[71] As such, virtue and morality act as alternative ordering principles that restrain democratic freedom when it "overreaches" and imperils "other important values." For women, resurrecting virtue and diminishing the value of politics presumably to elevate the importance of private life parallels moral guardianship arguments deployed at different points in American political history to deny women full citizenship under the pretenses of restoring social order. Coupled with their functional traditionalism that supports a separate spheres ideology, communitarianism amounts to a renewed attack on women consistent with the culture wars that Galston and Etzioni claim they want to end. Communitarianism crystallizes how virtue promotes order at the expense of freedom and counterbalances democratic values and politics, illustrating how moral guardianship

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[71] *Liberal Pluralism: The Implications of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 81, 82.

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continues to operate in contemporary political discourse in order to perpetuate women's oppression and to undermine democracy.

## 8.5: The Feminist Ethic of Care: Assuming Virtue & Omitting Vice

Whether making a strong case for virtue as man's *telos* or a weaker case for value pluralism, communitarians agree on virtue's importance in regenerating the moral foundation necessary for saving America from decay. Feminist ethicists tend to agree with communitarians insofar as they view liberalism's moral subject, portrayed in individualistic, universal, self-interested terms, as too "thin" and contrary to the relational, particular, and responsibility-oriented moral subject more consistent with women's experience. While feminists and communitarians similarly formulate a "thicker" moral subject, they start from opposite points that lead to very different ends. Communitarians begin and end with morals grounded in tradition and community as the means for binding citizens together in a stable, shared set of understandings, rituals, beliefs, and narratives. In comparison, feminists generally view the communitarian moral subject as "*too* thick," or too embedded in a static tradition that diminishes the range of moral choices, conceives of community relationships as static, oppresses women and others, and fails to account for the reality of lived experience. Speaking to this point, Christine Koggel states,

> But the tradition and history of MacIntyre invokes are nostalgic pictures of past traditions and communities in which discrimination was overt and explicitly justified in the rules and practices...Communitarian claims that self-knowledge and agency consist in discovering and living an identity set by a community ignore the facts of actual communities structured by oppressive power relations and

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dominated by particular groups.[72]

From a feminist perspective, using community and tradition as moral anchors perpetuates women's oppression and inequality. Unlike communitarians, many feminists ground their ethics in relations, emotions, and contexts that allow for a thicker moral subject who lives in a dynamic, ever-changing context, not the static world of tradition. Instead of fragmenting American democracy's social order, this moral subject reflects the plurality of values, diverse experiences, and different people that mirror a vibrant, inclusive democratic polity. In contrast to supporting the complex moral subjects and complicated political communities that feminists see as indicative of democracy, Mary Dietz points out that communitarians seek to "solve" the problem of democratic politics instead of accepting its conflictual, dynamic nature.[73] Virtue helps to solve the problem of politics by narrowing moral complexity into the virtue-vice dualism that minimizes options for political discourse and excludes those who fail to meet traditional standards established and maintained by the dominant group. Despite virtue's prominence in communitarianism and its implications for democratic ethics, feminists generally leave virtue uncontested in their ethical considerations. Yet, some care theorists such as Nel Noddings, Sara Ruddick, and Selma Sevenhuijsen describe care as a virtue while others such as Joan Tronto, Julie Ann White, and Christine Koggel sidestep the issue of virtue which allows it to continue operating in the background of their theories. In either case, virtue, given its oppressive tradition in relation to women and its anti-democratic impetus, undermines the

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[72] *Perspectives on Equality: Constructing a Relational Theory*, 138.

[73] *Turning Operations*, 65.

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ethic of care's feminist and democratic potential. As such, this analysis argues that feminist care theorists should jettison virtue as an explicit or implicit aspect from their political projects.

The feminist ethic of care literature plays a central role in this analysis for three reasons. First, the ethic of care offers a critical alternative to liberal and communitarian approaches to the moral subject and their procedural and community-based visions of politics. Second, virtue holds an important place within the feminist discourse on care in which virtue belongs to the constellation of concepts that constitute the moral universe of women's care whether or not it is explicitly framed as such. Moral guardianship, in particular, entails the nurturing, mothering, and educating done by women who, through their care, model and transmit the virtue necessary to preserve America's exceptional future. As such, female virtue implies a relationship to care. Third, this relationship ultimately stymies care's politically transformative potential. Because care links women's morality to actual political and policy concerns directly related to women's full citizenship, framing care as a virtue or leaving this concept uncontested seriously limits care. As part of care's moral and political background, virtue anchors care to the moral justification for women's passive citizenship as the nation's moral guardians, sustains inequality, undermines diversity, narrows choices, and perpetuates a link to an oppressive moral tradition, all of which contradict tenets of feminism and the goal of women's full citizenship. This analysis contends that either framing care as a virtue or ignoring their relationship places an important obstacle in the way of care's politically transformative potential.

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To investigate virtue's role within the care literature, this analysis focuses on its central thinkers who break into two major camps: the maternal and political approaches. Comparing and contrasting these positions on care identifies the serious limits that virtue poses for care's radically transformative potential as a political concept. Both approaches depart from Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) that provides critical insight into the gendered nature of moral development. Clearly distinguishing a male ethic of rights and a female ethic of care, Gilligan explains:

> These different perspectives are reflected in two different moral ideologies, since separation is justified by an ethic of rights while attachment is supported by an ethic of care. The morality of rights is predicated on equality and centered on the understanding of fairness, while the ethic of responsibility relies on the concept of equity, the recognition of differences in need. While the ethic of rights is a manifestation of equal respect, balancing the claims of other and self, the ethic of responsibility rests on an understanding that gives rise to compassion and care.[74]

Accordingly, due to the emphasis on independence and individualism in the young boy's socialization process, men approach moral dilemmas by focusing more on universal principles such as justice while young girls, socialized as more dependent and oriented towards others, tackle moral problems through the lens of the particular contexts, people, and responsibilities. Countering the claims of Lawrence Kohlberg, Gilligan illustrates how women's moral development was not *inferior to* but *different from* men's. Based on this thesis, feminist political theorists began generating an ethic of care as an alternative to the "justice only" approach and differentiating their ontological perspective from the communitarian reliance on tradition, conformity, and pre-determined moral standards.

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[74] *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory of Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 165.

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Unlike the communitarians, moreover, care theorists accounted for the gendered nature of morality that overcame problems of gender neutrality and a "thin" moral subject and looked to women's experience in terms of emotions, practices, and relationships to specify power relations and to ground feminist ethics in the context of women's lived reality.

Virtue plays a role of varying degrees of importance within both approaches to care. Maternalists such as Nel Noddings and Sara Ruddick use the dyadic mother-child relationship as the model for care-giving that, given its grounding in the traditional role of mothering, relied on virtue as a cornerstone of this ethic to attribute moral value to this central experience of womanhood. Turning away from the mother-child as the paradigm for care ethics, Joan Tronto's *Moral Boundaries* (1993) frames care as a political concept capable of radically altering how citizens understand democracy and the practices of politics. This shift moves virtue into the background due to the diminished role of women's traditional social functions although some such as Selma Sevenhuijsen frame care as a virtue. While the maternalists and "politicos,"[75] those who approach care as a political concept, rely on virtue to different degrees, none interrogate virtue, though some

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[75] The term "politicos" is used deliberately here to address a shift away from the cultural feminism often identified with care theorists. In particular, Alice Echols uses the term "politicos" in reference to the women who wanted to remain part of the "larger" peace and student movements instead of organizing around women's issues. Additionally, Echols classifies cultural feminism as starting when they broke with the radicals by reverting to biological determinism in order to revalue motherhood and woman's reproductive capacity. "Politicos," in this context, attempts to merge the more political orientation of the earlier women in the student movement and the aspect of care theory related to caring as a practice performed by women in the home. Unlike cultural feminists, "politicos" transform the practice of care into a political concept that applies to the entire community and holds radical potential for change. For more on cultural feminists and the "politicos" of the student movement, see Alice Echols' *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

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avoid it, integrating negative and politically oppressive cultural assumptions into care ethics. Despite important contributions to accounting for gender which created a "thicker" moral subject, care theorists, like the communitarians, fail to identify vice as critical to subjectivity and feminist ethics, an oversight that still portrays a "thin" moral subject and closes off access to a vital resource for understanding how women's morality relates to political power.

***The Maternalist Approach***

Virtue plays a larger role in the maternalist approach given its focus on the nurturing and caring practices of mothering. An offshoot of cultural feminism, maternalists value women's differences with men, identifying giving birth and mothering as the definitive characteristics of women's socialization process that cultivate a moral imperative to care. As such, maternalists premise the ethic of care on the dyadic mother-child relationship as a model for caring practices. Indicating their contribution to political theory, Mary Dietz states that "maternal feminism is expressly designed to counter what it thinks are the arid and unimaginative qualities of the prevailing liberal view and, more emphatically, to present an alternative sense of civic virtue citizenship."[76] Unlike liberals and communitarians, maternalists grounded their ethic in practices and women's lived experience that differed from universal and traditional approaches to morality. Yet, maternalists accept virtue as an uncontested concept that places value on a woman's mothering capacity and implicitly elevates women's political status as citizens. As such, maternalists rely on the logic of moral guardianship that locates their discourse within the

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[76] *Turning Operations*, 31.

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same category as that of Judith Sargent Murray, Catherine Beecher, the loyalist Lowell mill girls, and anti-pornography feminists. By defining women's identity in terms of motherhood, maternalists trap women in the man-woman and virtue-vice dualisms that undermine the progressive potential of this approach to care ethics. With this said, however, "maternalists," Mary Dietz clarifies, "are almost alone among other feminisms in their concern with the moral attributes of citizenship (hence their affinity with some contemporary communitarians) and the content of feminist political consciousness."[77] By turning attention to women's morality and its part in their conceptions of citizenship, maternalists began developing ideas central to feminist ethics such as "practices" that emanate from the moral actions related to mothering a child. Because maternalist ethics relies on virtue, "practice" remains tied to this tradition that limits its potential. Virtue's logic pulls "practice" towards an infinite, transcendent plane that undermines its contextual orientation or anchors practice in finite material actions that prevent a means by which practice can act as a building block for collective moral standards emanating from experience rather than tradition. To explore the strengths and weaknesses of the maternalist approach in terms of virtue, this analysis turns to the work of Nel Noddings, Sara Ruddick, and Eva Kittay. Despite their important contributions to the ethic of care, the fact that virtue serves as the moral concept upon which they rely seriously limits their democratic and even feminist potential to the point of making maternalism an approach with insurmountable problems for care ethics.

Nel Noddings' *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*

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[77] *Turning Operations*, 33.

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represents the point of departure for the ethic of care that translates Gilligan's work on moral development into philosophy. Calling her's a "feminine," not a feminist, approach to care indicates Noddings' reliance on the traditional, dyadic mother-child relationship as the model for care-giving and an ethic of care premised on women's experiences in the private sphere that Noddings values and accepts as a positive basis for a feminine alternative to the liberal justice paradigm for morality. Without a broader political goal for this ethic of care, Noddings narrowly frames care as involving "two parties: the one-caring and the cared-for. It is complete when it is fulfilled in both. We are tempted to say that the caring attitude is characteristic of caring, that when one cares, she characteristically exhibits an attitude. But, then, it could be missed by the cared-for."[78] Despite the narrowness of Noddings' approach, she articulates an alternative to the "Father's" language or the universalistic ethic dominant in liberal democracy. An ethic of care, in contrast, gives voice to the Mother whose language captures the particular - contexts, emotions, relationships, and practices related to caring. As such, relationships constitute the primary element of Noddings' ethic which she describes in terms of "taking *relation* as ontologically basic simply means that we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence. As we examine what it means to care and to be cared for, we shall see that both parties contribute to the relations; my caring must be somehow completed in the other if the relation is to be described as caring."[79] At this

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[78] *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 68.

[79] Ibid., 4.

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juncture, Noddings presents a relational ethic as an alternative to liberalism's universal principles and abstract ideals in order to frame caring as the premise for a feminine ethic.

Virtue's role in Noddings' ethic, however, reveals a contradiction between her relational objective and the universal or infinite component of virtue that draws caring towards an abstract ideal. To fight this impulse, Noddings relies on David Hume's "active virtue" to express the sentiments of natural caring and responses to that caring as a means of grounding this ethic in finite material practices. Although virtue serves as an ethical ideal for Noddings, she believes that the relational aspect of care as an "active virtue" prevents it from devolving into universal principles. As Noddings explains,

> When we discuss the ethical ideal, we shall be talking about 'virtue,' but we shall not let 'virtue' dissipate into 'the virtues' described in abstract categories...It is limited by what we have already done and by what we are capable of, and it does not idealize the impossible so that we may escape into ideal abstraction...The virtue described by the ethical ideal of one-caring is built upon in relation. It reaches out to the other and grows in response to the other."[80]

Although an "ethical ideal," Noddings understands virtue as a result of the finite relationship of "one-caring" who "reaches out to the other and grows in response to the other." Instead of imposing abstract moral standards on this relationship, it remains "limited by what we have already done and by what we are capable of." In terms of virtue, caring acts as a finite or material ethical practice. Yet, Noddings realizes that virtue requires an infinite component in order to qualify as a moral standard of excellence. To avoid merely adding care to a list of feminine virtues, she frames it as an ethical ideal that fulfills the infinite requirement for virtue. Indicating the tension between the finite and

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[80] Ibid., 80.

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infinite, Noddings explains that "caring is not in itself a virtue. The genuine ethical commitment to maintain oneself as caring gives rise to the development and exercise of virtues, but these must be assessed in the context of caring situations...The fulfillment of virtue is both in me and the other...For many women, motherhood is the single greatest source of strength for the maintenance of the ethical ideal."[81] Here, virtue transcends the practice of caring that "is not in itself a virtue" because as an ethical ideal, virtue operates above, though related to, finite practices. Further illustrating the infinite aspect operating in Noddings' ethic, she presents joy as the reward for engaging in the ethical ideal of caring, explained in the following terms: "we are not without exalted descriptions of emotion. Joy, in particular, is often described as a state not only desirable but superior to neutral states."[82] Referring to this emotion as "exalted" taps into the infinite or spiritual element of virtue that continues pulling care towards the abstract, beyond lived human experience, enabling people to reach a higher ideal. Virtue forces Noddings to abstract this practice from the moral reality of daily life and invokes a degree of moral perfectionism that demands individuals to aim for the ideals of joy and virtue beyond their grasp. Although Noddings begins from the point of relationships, instead of abstract principles, she ends up fitting care into an ethical ideal by framing it as a virtue, an Enlightenment principle that functions to create universal moral principles. Though caring meets the finite criteria of virtue, this concept inherently entails an infinite dimension that works against the practical, contextual focus of feminist ethics.

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[81] Ibid., 97, 130.

[82] Ibid., 143.

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In addition, Noddings revalues care, a practice associated with women and mothering, that fails to possess true ethical value in the Father's language of the Enlightenment that downgrades the moral worth of such relational activities. To revalue care and give voice to the Mother's language, Noddings, as the previous discussion illustrates, frames care as an ethical ideal to meet the standards of virtue established by the Father's language. Failing to question virtue itself leads Noddings into the trap of uncritical reversals in which she revalues care, a practice devalued by the Father's language. Indicating how this process operates in Noddings' ethic of care, she explains that "an ethic of caring has its source in natural human caring, and it seeks the maintenance and enhancement of that caring. Its conservation of traditional values is a sign that it is the wellspring of moral values and that moral deliberation may safely be referred to it. But it is not a life-denying ethic."[83] Noddings correctly identifies the "conservation of traditional values" in an ethic of caring. While Noddings rightfully recognizes the benefits and strengths of women's caring as a practice degraded by patriarchy and even many second wave feminists, she avoids the serious downside of how care as a virtue belongs to a moral tradition premised on oppressing women by granting them moral worth based on caring and mothering. Though Noddings limits care to private, "apolitical," one-on-one relationships, her position entails important political implications made evident by her reliance on care as a virtue that taps into the tradition of moral guardianship. Without challenging this tradition, Noddings fails to see that "the wellspring of moral values" from caring perpetuates women's oppression by framing this

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[83] Ibid., 108.

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practice as a virtue that elevates women's moral and political status based on their support of the status quo most immediately depicted by a dedication to the caring practices of mothering. By ignoring the broader framework of these "traditional values," Noddings continues to play by the rules of a masculine game. Speaking to this point, Sarah Hoagland states that "I am sympathetic with Nel Noddings's impetus away from masculine ethics. It's just that in a patriarchal world we need something far more radical than an appeal to the feminine - itself a product of the masculine world."[84] Revaluing feminine care as a virtue attempts to elevate this practice according to a masculine moral logic that used this very process to establish women as moral guardians. This tradition upon which Noddings relies perpetuates women's political oppression, traps care in an uncritical reversal, and fails to break free of the Father's language that employs women's virtue to serve just these ends.

In contrast to Noddings, Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* focuses on finite *virtues* as the core of her ethical argument that emphasizes practices without turning the ideals or abstract principles consistent with Noddings' ultimate reliance on the infinite. Consistent with Ruddick's emphasis on finite ethics, she dramatically breaks with Noddings by applying maternal thinking to politics in order to argue that women's mothering serves as a model for a politics of peace, a move that makes Ruddick more attentive to the role of power and oppression. Similar to Noddings, however, Ruddick maintains the primacy of mothering and the dyadic mother-child relationship as the core of

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[84] "Some Thoughts about 'Caring," in *Feminist Ethics*, ed. Claudia Card (Lawrence, KN: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 256.

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women's experience and source for thinking about politics from an alternative perspective. As Ruddick expresses, "all mothering, whether done by men or women, depends on some particular woman's labor; to be 'pregnant' with new life is still and only to be a woman whose body and embodied willfulness is the ground and condition of each new and original being who lives."[85] Maternal thinking revalues mothering and child birth as the point of departure for establishing an ethic of care based on "practices" that anchor her position in a contextual reality reinforced by finite virtues. By doing so, Ruddick encounters a serious problem by framing her ethics in terms of virtues. Instead of ultimately relying on an ideal or infinite virtue as Noddings does, Ruddick's use of finite virtues and related practices prevents her ethics from establishing collective standards of moral behavior beyond those participating in a given practice which resurrects the problem of insularity. From a broader perspective, relying on finite virtues in conjunction with mothering locates Ruddick in moral guardianship discourse that dilutes the transformative potential of her admirable politics of peace. An ethic based on finite female virtues and a moral tradition that promotes passivity and submissiveness cannot achieve this political goal without abandoning these assumptions.

In contrast to Noddings, Ruddick grounds her ethic in finite virtues that parallel her commitment to escaping abstract principles and ideals by more fully theorizing "practice" as essential to a relational ethics. Maternal thinking then represents an effort to free virtue from its universalist tradition by emphasizing its finite dimension and

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[85] *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989), xiii.

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relationship to practice. Ruddick then defines maternal practice as a beginning "in response to the reality of a biological child in a particular social world. To be a 'mother' is to take upon oneself the responsibility of child care, making its work a regular and substantive part of one's working life" to meet the three demands for preservation, growth, and social acceptability.[86] To meet these demands, maternal practice requires finite virtues, particularly humility, cheerfulness, proper trust, and love. Unlike Noddings more ideal presentation of motherhood, Ruddick explores the tensions and conflicts involved with a mother's struggle to preserve the positive side of these virtues from the continuous pulls of its more degenerative form. For instance, Ruddick explains that "developing habits of conversational reflection depends on on-going mutual trust. When training is a work of conscience, proper trust is a virtue of which unquestioning obedience or blind trust are degenerative forms...Clearly, to identify proper trust as a virtue is not to identify an achievement but an ongoing and difficult struggle."[87] Such attention to the "ongoing and difficult struggle" between the positive and negative poles of a finite virtue such as proper trust ground Ruddick's ethic in a contextual reality of ethical judgments that avoids the pitfall of moral perfectionism created by framing care as an ethical ideal. Although Ruddick escapes Noddings' pitfall, a continued reliance on virtues revives the opposite problem with insularity that arises by exploring the link between practice and virtues in her ethic and how both tie Ruddick to a tradition of moral guardianship that undermines her goal of using maternal thinking as a basis for generating a politics of

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[86] Ibid., 77.

[87] Ibid., 118, 119.

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peace.

Turning first to the relationship between virtues and practices revisits the problem of insularity encountered in the earlier discussion of MacIntyre who uses narrative, tradition, and ultimately virtue to create a set of moral standards that bind all citizens, regardless of their practices, to a shared set of beliefs. As feminists such as Ruddick attempt to pry virtues and practices loose from abstract principles and teleological arguments, they lose the mechanism for overcoming the insularity problem that only allows practitioners to establish standards for a given practice. Focusing on finite virtues solves one problem with abstract principles while creating the equally pernicious one of insularity. Ruddick speaks to this problem by stating that "if thinking arises in and is tested by practice, who is qualified to judge the intellectual strength and moral character of a practice as a whole? It is sometimes said that only those who participate in a practice can criticize its thinking."[88] In the context of maternal thinking then, mothers become the only ones qualified to make judgements about the practices involved in meeting their demands as parents. Although this approach may allow for the children's input in terms of responding to their care, it closes off avenues of outside input from other family members, teachers, friends, and even social workers that, given its relative objectivity, can strengthen the practices of women immersed in the day-to-day minutia and subjective experience of mothering. Insularity such as this raises even broader political problems unresolvable through practice. Mothering, for instance, represents a practice important to the entire political community. Instead of limiting this practice to the dyadic mother-child

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[88] Ibid., 25.

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relationship in the home, the entire society should view it as critical to the community, a perspective that directs attention to developing support and resources for mothers and children such as day care, health care, and stronger schools. The broader view remains more consistent with the contextual emphasis of feminist ethics, though one thwarted by practices as framed in the virtue tradition. Ruddick remains within this tradition by using finite virtues as the means of establishing the ethical dimension of maternal practices. To avoid Noddings' problem with universalisms created by framing care as an infinite virtue, Ruddick commits to the finite virtues that cause insularity. Reading these maternalists against each other reveals a double bind inherent to virtue that either traps the ethic in the finite that prevents a broader moral compass for the political community, or in the infinite that transcends the material reality of caring practices.

Relying on finite virtues as the ethical aspect of maternal practices ties Ruddick into a moral guardianship discourse that ultimately diminishes the political potential of peace in her project. Humility, cheerfulness, and love represent the three core finite virtues of maternal thinking in which humility and cheerfulness enable the preservative love necessary for this ethic to function. "Humility," Ruddick explains, "is 'a selfless respect for reality and one of the most difficult and central of virtues,' and a way of persevering and controlling in an exhausting, uncontrollable world."[89] This form of humility requires mothers to realize their limited capacity to control events that pertain to their children. During the Puritan era, humility served as an infinite virtue that commanded complete humbleness and acquiescence before God, and translated into a

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[89] Ibid., 73.

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finite virtue in republican discourse to portray women as humble and generally submissive mothers and wives whose presence left the status quo undisturbed. Ruddick retains the passive quality of humility that supports giving into uncontrollable events. In conjunction, "mothers identify cheerfulness as a virtue," Ruddick explains, "Cheerfulness is a matter-of-fact willingness to accept having given birth, to start and start over again, to welcome a future despite conditions of one's self, one's children, one's society, and nature that may be reasons for despair...In circumstances of personal or social disaster that warrant despair, maternal cheerfulness is an extraordinary feat."[90] Both Puritans and republicans advocated cheerfulness as a finite female virtue that made women more pleasing to men and lifted the family's spirits in times of despair. This virtue perpetuates the belief that women should endure their fate and oppression with smiles on their faces. Love also plays a vital part in maternal thinking. As Ruddick explains:

> The concept 'attentive love,' which knits together maternal thinking, designates a cognitive capacity - attention - and a virtue - love. Attentive love is prey to the self-loss that can afflict maternal thinking: indifference, passivity, and self-denial are among its degenerative forms. Attentive love is also a corrective to many defects of maternal thinking, including an anxious or inquisitorial scrutiny, domination, intrusiveness, caprice, and self-protective cheerfulness.[91]

Although earlier discourses failed to include love as a finite virtue, they assumed this virtue which belongs to the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity. This love, when linked within women and their virtue tradition, affiliates with the religious or Christian virtues of faith, hope, charity, and love, the latter expected of women in relationship to

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[90] Ibid., 74.

[91] Ibid., 120.

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God and their families. Independence, humility, cheerfulness, and love represent powerful and necessary practices and moral predispositions that allow a society to operate as different people negotiate their interests and cooperate in a community. By framing them as virtues, however, Ruddick plugs them into a virtue tradition historically associated with motherhood that constructs women as passive, subordinate moral guardians. Although Ruddick specifically redefines each of these finite virtues to match a more active practice of mothering, none depart from a general acceptance and submission to the world in which mothers and children function. The double burden of moral responsibility for children and family remains unquestioned. By attempting to redefine specific virtues then, Ruddick overlooks the structural problems of virtue theory and its part in moral guardianship discourse. As result, Ruddick resurrects these powerful tools used to oppress women by aligning them with submissiveness and the status quo that dilutes her attempt to politicize motherhood.

Combining finite virtues with maternal practices locks Ruddick into a series of linking postulates that result in a moral guardianship discourse translating into Ruddick's advocacy for a politics of peace. This limitation on the transformative potential of maternal thinking arises from Ruddick's failure to see the structural problems with virtue that transcend specific finite virtues. Speaking to this point, Ruddick explains that "mothers, like gardeners or historians, identify virtues appropriate to their work."[92] To the contrary, the conceptual history of women's virtue illustrates how the dominant class in society, whether Puritan ministers or the Boston Associates of Lowell, determined and

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[92] Ibid., 25.

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imposed virtues on women to suit their political and economic needs. Granting mothers the right to "identify virtues appropriate to their work" would permit them too much moral and, therefore, political authority. Indeed, Ruddick relies on female virtues consistently used throughout American political discourse which speaks to the assumed positive character of these moral traits. Seeing the broader structure of women's virtue reveals how the maternal approach triggers the moral guardianship discourse to which it belongs, locking maternal thinking into an oppressive tradition.

This problem becomes more evident in Ruddick's use of maternal thinking to promote a peace politics that ultimately translates into a discourse of moral guardianship. Reflecting back on her work, Ruddick states, "I ended *Maternal Thinking* on a confident note, envisioning a maternal politics, designating mothers as 'custodians of the promise of birth.'"[93] This characterization of mothers "as 'custodians of the promise of birth'" provides the grounds for motivating women to work for peace in order to protect their children from a violent world. This argument maintains women's double burden of moral responsibility by holding mothers responsible for securing peace when they lack the political power to do so. Further, moral guardianship informs Ruddick's view of maternal thinking as an alternative to the masculine militaristic world view. Through maternalism, Ruddick seems to hold women responsible for a peace politics by stating, for example, that "in many Western cultures women are portrayed as strong and brave victims of circumstances over which they have little control. Their sufferings and sacrifices are

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[93] Ibid., xx.

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expected; they persevere in a violent world - but they bear no responsibility for it."[94] As custodians of birth, however, mothers must take control instead of acting as "strong and brave victims of circumstances." By taking this position, Ruddick redeploys the double burden of moral responsibility that actually does hold women responsible for "a violent world" that, according to moral guardianship, evolves from their failure to prevent moral and social decay. In addition, moral guardianship demands that mothers socialize their children to accept this world and adhere to its values. Moreover, although Ruddick sees maternal thinking as motivating the politics of resistance among women to generate peace, the overriding discourse of moral guardianship diminishes this resistance by sustaining women's submissive and passive moral traits. The finite virtues of cheerfulness, humility, trust, and love, for instance, require passivity and collectively exclude the possibility of the aggressive actions that accompany resisting a violent world. Denied the tools for direct political action, women remain within the confines of moral guardianship that locates them on the side of the status quo, in a sense, a place of peace for women who received protection and avoided punishment by adhering to the virtuous path. Indicating the power of moral guardianship discourse, Ruddick ignores the role of vice that historically led to political change for women but entails a break with maternalism, the source of women's virtue. As such, Ruddick resorts to revamping traditional feminine virtues such as cheerfulness and humility that undermine action or participation against moral guardianship which represents the status quo for women. Embracing maternalism and its finite virtues perpetuates moral guardianship and commits women to a passive political

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[94] Ibid., 156.

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posture that raises no significant threat to the status quo.

By maintaining mothering as central to a woman's identity and virtue as the basis for a feminist ethic, the maternalist approach redeploys moral guardianship to sustain the passivity, subordination, and acceptance of the status quo that denies women full citizenship. Turning to Eva Kittay's position in *Love's Labor*, in some respects, builds on Ruddick, clarifies this argument further by illustrating the role of dependency and socializing children for acceptance in society as important to maternalism. Both Ruddick and Kittay explore the challenges faced by mothers who must train and socialize their children to fit into a society with whose values and institutions they often disagree. For Ruddick, training represents one of a mother's primary responsibilities that often requires them to teach their children not to deviate from the norms, accept the "language of the Father" and oppressive institutions, and valorize authority. Mothers must negotiate the conflict between preparing their children to fit into society and preventing them from inculcating that society's values and virtues of oppression. Developing this point, Kittay states that raising children

> means preparing them for a world larger than the family. Mothers who are wary of the social institutions and practices of the society in which they live, and who understand the oppressive nature of these institutions, are reluctant to socialize their children to be acceptable in situations that they themselves view as unacceptable. Yet the most rebellious mother understands that each human is a social being and the some degree of social acceptance is crucial to their own child's well-being.[95]

Kittay illustrates this dilemma by discussing the need to fit her seriously disabled daughter

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[95] *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 165.

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Sasha into society, a process that automatically challenged society's assumption about "normality." This perspective on mothering resonates with moral guardianship in that mothers assume responsibility for socializing their children to accept, instead of question or even resist, the institutions that perpetuate oppression. Focusing on such alternatives breaks with moral guardianship that holds women morally responsible for socializing children into the status quo, a burden maternalists lay upon mothers instead of exploring the network of relationships involved in this process. According to the logic of moral guardianship, fathers fail to assume these responsibilities that perpetuate this double burden of moral responsibility and labor. In addition, Kittay classifies her brand of maternalism as dependency work instead of caring or maternal thinking to emphasize its relational aspect and "to emphasize that care of dependents *is work*."[96] Although Kittay tries to avoid this situation, "dependency" corresponds with political posture of the moral guardian who depends on an oppressive system for survival and remains morally responsible for sustaining it through their caring and dependency work.

Although maternalists contribute to developing the relational aspect and practice-orientation of the ethic of care, their reliance on the dyadic mother-child relationship, mothering practices, and virtue tradition lock them into the binary logic of male-female and virtue-vice dualisms that perpetuate women's oppressive moral and political status as moral guardians. As a result, the dynamic possibilities of practice, relational ethics, and the political implications of care narrow into either/or categories that create a unidimensional view of morality as virtue and parenting as mothering, a position consistent

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[96] Ibid., 30.

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with moral guardianship. Maternalism ultimately operates as a contemporary variation on the theme of moral guardianship that perpetuates women's submission and political support for the status quo. Speaking to the anti-democratic, anti-feminist logic of maternalism, Mary Dietz states, "it also emphasizes the theoretical and practical costs of abandoning a more labyrinthine understanding of politics than this formulation affords in favor of an ethics that reinforces rather than resists the binary configuration 'male:female' and the conventional gender relations this hierarchical dualism underwrites."[97] Further, the virtue-vice dualism "reinforces" the limitations of maternalism for a democratic and feminist ethics. Such dualisms sustain hierarchies between mother and child, the virtuous and vice-ridden, and men and women that perpetuate inequality and deny a full understanding of intersecting relationships of a complex nature and fluid power dynamics. By relying on the virtue-vice dualism and mothering, maternalists divest politics of its complexity by invoking an approach consistent with moral guardianship that limits women's moral choices to specific virtues and binds them to the status quo. Despite a turn to politics, power, and practice as this approach evolved, its dualistic logic narrows morality and politics into the moral categories of virtue and vice, and the political identity of moral guardianship, solving the "problem" of politics by reverting to a traditional framework designed to stifle women's potential.

***The Political Approach***

The political approach to care breaks with maternalism by shifting away from the dyadic relationship of mother and child as its paradigm in order to explore care as a critical

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[97] *Turning Operations*, 14.

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dimension of political life. Reflecting this shift, Joan Tronto and Bernice Fisher define care in the following terms: "on the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a *species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible*. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web."[98] Freed from many of the limitations imposed on it by maternalists, care transforms from a practice limited to the private sphere and women's function as mothers to a concept with political, social, and economic implications for democracy and capitalism. Because this practice characterizes all human life, Tronto articulates, care connects issues such as health and child care to people's immediate experience and makes politics real. As a result, care also exposes the power relationships between dominant and subordinate groups in society. As Tronto explains, "those with power rarely surrender it willingly; what I have suggested, though, is that care as a political value can help transform our public discussion in such a way that it exposes the ways in which the powerful have access to too many resources. At the same time care provides the powerful with a vision of what they stand to gain in a well-ordered and well-cared for society."[99] In contrast to maternalism, the political approach to care, in many ways grounded in Tronto's theory, abandons the narrow mother-child model in order to locate this concept

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[98] *Moral Boundaries*, 103. See also, Bernice Fisher and Joan Tronto's "Toward a Feminist Theory of Care," in *Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives*, eds. Emily Abel and Margaret Nelson (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1991), 40.

[99] Ibid., 177.

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within the power dynamics of politics by crossing the moral boundary between public and private life. To investigate the role of virtue in the political approach, this analysis focuses on the work of Joan Tronto, Selma Sevenhuijsen, Julie Ann White, and Christine Koggel which provides insights into practice as an element critical to grounding feminist ethics in a contextual reality as well as care's relationship to equality and justice. Virtue's presence and absence within this discourse reveals a movement towards a more cohesive feminist ethic and a number of unanswered questions left by failing to struggle with virtue which ultimately stymies this approach's transformative potential.

Due to the shift away from maternalism, virtue appears much less frequently in the politico discourse. Functioning in the background, virtue implicitly arises through this approach's reliance on practice and care which, although defined in political terms, remains culturally embedded within women's virtue tradition and realm of moral responsibility that correlates with moral guardianship. Compared with the maternalists' direct use of virtue and finite female virtues, politicos usually avoid relying on virtue or integrate the concept without analyzing it, both of which create a slippage problem that involves interchanging virtue with other moral concepts such as values or perceptions. Taking a closer look at the slippage problem exposes a gap between practice and virtue, the organizing concept within this ethical approach that traditionally establishes moral standards for a political community. Whereas practice integrates easily into the particularistic focus of feminist ethics, virtue introduces abstract moral principles antithetical to democratic and feminist ethics that, however, as a moral compass for society, overcomes the problem of insularity. Although virtue contradicts the feminist and

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democratic aims of the politicos, investigating their approach isolates the problem of constructing an alternative means to establishing moral standards that correspond to the particular, relational basis of feminist ethics without falling into the trap of moral relativism. To do so, this section begins with the care-justice debate that begs the larger question, should care, or justice for that matter, be considered a virtue? This debate reveals how either an implicit or explicit reliance on virtue forces care into a masculinist, universalist framework in order to compare care with the Rawlsian "justice first" position. Next, the role of practice in the political approach and its origins in virtue ethics illustrates the limits of practice for developing a more complete feminist ethics, a discussion that also uncovers the critical problem of "evil practices." To assess how well politicos solve the problems with practice and to identify the significance of the slippage problem within care ethics, this analysis turns to Selma Sevenhuijsen's concept "judging with care." Finally, exploring the relationship between equality and care shows that framing care as a virtue sustains inequality in feminist ethics. Overall, the political approach to care reveals that leaving virtue uncontested and in the background maintains a dualistic logic and oppressive moral tradition antithetical to a democratic and feminist ethics.

The care-justice debate plays a critical role in the political approach to care that offers an opportunity for identifying how the dualistic framework of virtue and vice informs the use of care whether or not theorists avoid, ignore, or integrate virtue into their ethical position. The differing positions of Tronto and Sevenhuijsen indicate the politicos' ambivalent position on care as a virtue. Tronto remains unconvinced that care should be considered a virtue, stating that "those who have written eloquently about care as a virtue,

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whether a social virtue as in Gilman or a private virtue as in Noddings, have been unable to show a convincing way of turning these virtues into a realistic approach to the kinds of problems that caring will confront in the real world."[100] As such, Tronto generally avoids using virtue. Sevenhuijsen, however, remains less convinced:

> it might be worthwhile to consider care as a virtue, in spite of the feminist criticism which may be leveled at male traditions of virtue ethics. This of course assumes that the formulation of virtues and moral feelings is not taken at face value (well-meaning care can, for instance, conceal shame, guilt or aggression), and that we continue to think about which aspects of care can be considered virtuous and which not and in which contexts that is important, for whom, and why.[101]

Despite its oppressive tradition, Sevenhuijsen holds out hope that carefully applying virtue to care can help differentiate good from bad care as a moral concept capable of creating standards applicable to the broader community, enabling it to judge caring practices. By approaching virtue from this perspective, Sevenhuijsen then raises a matter central to this analysis by stating that, "this also means that the political importance of care emerges: the issue of how far we can see the ethics of care as a political virtue, and whether this enables us to perceive and judge political problems in an innovative way."[102] Such ambivalence about care as a virtue among politicos such as Tronto and Sevenhuijsen suggests an underlying awareness that framing care as a virtue raises a series of problems for democratic and feminist ethics. Such unease, in part, seems to emanate from virtue's implicit role in the care-justice debate.

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[100] Ibid., 161.

[101] *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations of Justice, Morality, and Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), 25.

[102] Ibid., 32.

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The logic shaping the care-justice debate reveals problems with assuming that care and justice are or should be virtues, or *the* virtue for a democratic society. Failing to interrogate virtue as part of the ethical basis for this debate leaves virtue as its assumed moral premise. The care-justice debate departs from Rawls' claim that "justice is the first virtue of social institutions." Justice as a virtue then acts as the standard against which care must measure. Susan Moller Okin, for instance, compares the two concepts to argue that " the best theorizing about justice...has integral to it notions of care and empathy, of thinking of the interests and well-being of others who may be very different from ourselves."[103] To sustain the primacy of justice, however, Okin concludes that "it is, therefore, misleading to draw a dichotomy as though they were two contrasting ethics."[104] According to a dualistic logic, Okin's synthesis amounts to demoting care to a secondary role in order to elevate the primacy of justice. In contrast, Tronto differentiates care from the Rawlsian "justice first" position by explaining that "the argument I have made in this chapter for an ethic of care is not an announcement of a first principle of social virtue. I do not mean to pronounce care as a first principle and to deduce all other forms of virtue and of life from that principle. Rather, care will be congruent with other aspects of social life that also require our serious attention."[105] Although Tronto avoids inverting Okin's position on justice, she implicitly elevates care to the level of social virtue though not as a first principle. Retaining care's relationship to virtue indicates how this dualistic

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[103] *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, 15.

[104] Ibid.

[105] *Moral Boundaries*, 154.

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framework shapes feminist ethics that continues to measure its concepts against standards antithetical to its purpose. Whether a moral assumption, one of many social virtues, or an explicit means for judging care, the virtue ethic and its dualistic logic shapes and partially defines the care-justice debate. As such, care theorists explicitly or implicitly equate care with justice in various ways. Although Tronto locates care within a number of social virtues including justice, this move assumes virtue acts as a viable concept in feminist ethics despite its oppressive tradition. Other politicos such as Julie Anne White assert a more primary role for care than justice while Sevenhuijsen and Koggel move towards synthesizing these two concepts in order to overcome the limitations of both. Regardless of their different positions, the debate adheres to a dualistic logic sustained by a reliance on virtue and vice that goes uncontested as the moral dimension of care and justice.

As a result of locking care and justice into this dualistic logic, the field of moral choices, and ways of seeing the political world drastically narrow by fitting them into a framework of either/or categories that simplify the complexity of daily moral and political reality, a process reflective of the anti-democratic impetus of dualisms generally and virtue and vice particularly. Similar to Tronto and Sevenhuijsen, White addresses the issue of the complementary relationship between care and justice. As White states, "I raise some questions here about the workability of frameworks that bring justice and care together, arguing that they are often not attentive enough to problems of compatibility that follow from defining the frameworks in opposition to one another...Of course care is not just - it is exactly the opposite. In some sense, both care and injustice have been formulated in

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opposition to justice."[106] Given the classification of justice as a virtue, care often acts as its antithesis, categorizing it as a vice or injustice, or a lesser virtue consistent with the lesser moral value associated with women's behavior and practices. To elevate care from its diminished status as part of women's moral tradition, politicos feel compelled to elevate care to the level of virtue granted to concepts such as justice. Trapped in this narrow moral field defined by virtue seriously diminishes the opportunity for exploring alternative possibilities for a dynamic framework conducive to diversity, conflict, and freed from the hierarchies that undermine the equality of a democratic, feminist ethics. This dualistic logic excludes a range of other ethical concepts and practices by focusing on the two concepts of care and justice. Concentrating on elevating care to a virtue also pushes vice off the radar screen that leaves important issues about "bad care" and "evil practices" on the periphery of this analysis. If feminists hope to provide a "thicker" conception of the moral subject that accounts fully for the emotions and experiences of life in its often painful reality, vice needs recognition as a means for creating a more complete understanding of moral personhood. With this said, accounting for vice does little to challenge the dualistic framework that imposes a set of traditional means for judging people's morality, placing them in either/or categories, and morally justifying a range of inequalities that define political life.

To distinguish care from justice, politicos frame this concept as a practice that locates this care ethic in the particularistic, relational realm as opposed to the

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[106] *Democracy, Justice and the Welfare State: Reconstructing Public Care* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 75.

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universalistic, individualistic arena of liberal justice. Although politicos implicitly distance their use of practice from MacIntyre's teleological argument and Ruddick's maternal thinking, this concept remains within the virtue ethics tradition, a connection left in place by these thinkers who trace practice back to Aristotle's ethics, premised on virtue. Despite an emphasis on context and relations to offer an alternative to MacIntyre's practice, framing care as a practice sustains its ties to the virtue tradition. Yet, politicos effectively use practice to expand conceptions of care to include all citizens and political communities by emphasizing how care serves a necessary function in public and private life. As Tronto explains, "caring is not simply a cerebral concern, or a character trait, but the concern of living, active humans engaged in the processes of everyday living. Care is both a practice and a disposition."[107] To articulate the practical orientation of care, Tronto specifies four phases of care - caring about, taking care of, care-giving, and care-receiving - that coincide with the dispositions of caring - attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. This ethical framework enables Tronto to clarify how care as a practice "is an alternative to conceiving of care as a principle or as an emotion."[108] Similarly, Sevenhuijsen conceives of care as a social practice and specifically addresses the teleological pull of practice that MacIntyre emphasizes in his use of the concept. According to Sevenhuijsen, Sara Ruddick, like MacIntyre, places too much emphasis on virtues and a higher plane of moral excellence. Alternatively, Sevenhuijsen grounds practice within social constructions, stating that "practices and discourses exist

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[107] *Moral Boundaries*, 104.

[108] Ibid., 108.

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independently of particular social subjects, yet they are also constituted by constellations of human action and behavior...Practices, thus conceived, are directed by formal and informal rules and habits, by interpretative conventions and by implicit or explicit normative frameworks."[109] Instead of a telos or higher plane, these practices function within a web of rules, habits, and conventions that belong to and operate independently from "constellations of human action and behavior." Sevenhuijsen, however, explicitly links this normative framework to virtue ethics by defining care as a virtue and relying on practice, a key concept in this ethical tradition. As a result, Sevenhuijsen retains a stronger tie to the teleological position of MacIntyre than she might hope that speaks to the need for politicos to address the virtue tradition directly. The tension between practice and virtue arises from the relational nature of feminist ethics consistent with practice and the need for broader moral standards that extend beyond those engaged in specific practices, a function performed by virtue. Seen from the perspective of finite and infinite virtue, both elements of practice (finite virtues) and virtue (the infinite aspect) function in tandem to constitute this political concept. One simply does not function without the other. As such, practice is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for virtue. Focusing on practice without severing its ties to virtue perpetuates the constant pull towards abstract principles that contradict feminist ethics. Yet, doing so also creates the problems of insularity and parochialism that trap ethics in a double bind as long as virtue defines its framework.

Some politicos promote deliberative democracy as a means for expanding practice

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[109] *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care*, 21.

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into a fuller ethical premise for care that enables participants to determine good and bad practices within a given context instead of relying on universal principles derived from tradition, independent of concrete reality and moral subjects. Introducing the discursive aspect of care ethics, Sevenhuijsen discusses ethics as a textual practice, "social practices of moral deliberation can be interpreted as forms of 'story-telling,' in which signification, evaluation, and judgment are intertwined."[110] Building on this position, White operationalizes this "textual" as a "discursive" practice consistent with deliberative democracy, a process that permits the on-going negotiation of difference and conflicts. Basing morality on communication and discourse undermines the traditional assumptions of living up to predetermined sets of moral standards embodied in virtue. White dramatically concludes that "if democratic empowerment means anything, it must mean a citizenry empowered to deliberate. Public care appropriate to a democratic state requires the same commitment to deliberation - deliberation in which everyone engaged in the process of care has a voice that is heard."[111] Similarly emphasizing the importance of partiality, difference, and dialogue, Christine Koggel articulates a communicative ethic that makes the "other" within Rawls' original position a concrete subject embedded in relationships that require negotiating difference, a central means for dislocating the power relationships in society. Textual and discursive practice and a communicative ethic develop practice as a means of establishing an ethical alternative to the Enlightenment tradition by engaging real people in deliberations about their practices and allowing for a

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[110] Ibid., 28.

[111] *Democracy, Justice, and the Welfare State*, 173.

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fluid conception of moral standards that reflect changing contexts.

Moving moral discussions into the arena of deliberative democracy where people negotiate and discuss "good" and "bad" practices fully solves the problem of parochialism that arises from the unresolved relationship between care and virtue. In the care ethic, parochialism entails drawing people into a small sphere of those who share the same practices and network of caring relationships that closes off a broader vision of caring practices in society. As Tronto asks, "How are we to guarantee that people, who are enmeshed in their daily rounds of care-giving and care-receiving, will be able to disengage themselves from their own local concerns and to address broader needs and concerns for care?"[112] Virtue usually acts as the moral mechanism for addressing these broader issues by providing a shared conception of moral excellence and a standard of behavior that bind a community together. To sidestep the problem of virtue, White emphasizes the more fluid social roles related to practices instead of static moral traits in order to construct moral subjects more consistent with the fluid dynamics of a democratic politics of care premised on vulnerability and the need for care at different points in our lives. To describe this, White states that "because being in need is recognized as a social position than as a character trait - and because social positions can be fluid - a person who is at one point in need may at another point be capable of providing care. This alternative to paternalistic care becomes more mutual relationships of caretaking."[113] Social roles, however, retain moral imperatives associated with positions such as the female housewife and male

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[112] *Moral Boundaries*, 142.

[113] *Democracy, Justice, and the Welfare State*, 164.

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breadwinner. Sidestepping morality and virtues only leaves in place a powerful mechanism for perpetuating parochialism. A shared belief system derived from the deliberations of people involved in the same practices can intensify insularity as the group's position can take on a moral righteousness that closes it off from external influences. In addition, practitioners gain the power to morally justify their practices without the input of the broader society to which its members belong. Although deliberative processes move in a direction away from virtue, they lack the capacity to cross the boundaries between insular groups of practitioners, a process necessary to offer a complete alternative to virtue that offers a means for binding a community together into a common good.

The difficult problem of equality within caring practices turns specific attention to the issues of power relationships and how the assumed normative structure of virtue and vice operate to sustain inequality and hierarchies that undermine the democratic impetus of care ethics. Tronto identifies how caring relationships present inherent problems of inequality as defined in terms of the more powerful care-giver and the less powerful care-receiver characterized as a needy dependent. As Tronto explains, the inequality of caring relationships pose problems of Otherness that marginalize those in need, paternalism in which care-givers assume they know the other's needs best, and privileged irresponsibility which hides the ability of some to demand care, a source of power. One approach to overcoming these inequalities entails envisioning caring relationships as fluid and dynamic in order "to acknowledge that, throughout their lives, all people need care; so the inequality that emerges when some are care-givers and others are care-receivers should

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not be so morally significant."[114] Taking a broader political perspective draws attention to the inequality between society's care-givers such as teachers, day care, health care, and sanitary workers, and care-receivers such as corporate executives whose legion of employees include nannies, maids, dry cleaners, wives, secretaries, and others to care for their personal needs. Women's moral responsibility for care contributes to their unequal status that facilitates relegating care to the margins of political concern. Although Tronto's cyclical relationship of care-giving and receiving helps to resolve the static nature of inequality and expand care as a practice of all citizens, either explicitly or implicitly framing care as a virtue keeps a moral framework in place premised on unequal power relations that oppresses women and, by extension, those who do "women's work" in society. Virtue exercises a great deal of power within relationships by justifying inequality. Identifying virtue's role in creating the moral boundary between morality and politics, Tronto explains that "when the world is rigidly divided between the realms of power and of virtue, we lose sight of the fact that power requires a moral base, and more importantly for our present purpose, that virtue exerts a kind of power. Thus, the rigid boundary between politics and morality prevents us from seeing that moral theory conveys power and privilege."[115] Separated from politics in liberal procedural democracy, morality and virtue appear outside the bounds of exercising power and privilege. As Tronto, however, so clearly states "virtue exercises a kind of power" such as that of moral

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[114] Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 147. Tronto further develops this perspective in "Care as a Political Concept," in *Revisioning the Political*, eds. Nancy Hirschmann and Christine Di Stefano, see page 149-150 especially.

[115] Ibid., 93.

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guardianship which secures women's inequality in American politics. Mona Harrington speaks to how care in American society depended on women's inequality that excluded them from public life in order to secure their reproductive labor in the private sphere.[116] As women move into the paid, productive labor force, they continue to perform the double burden of labor that, however, still fails to prevent the care structure from collapsing as a result of an on-going belief in care as a private virtue not a public concern. Other politicos overlook the relationship between care as a virtue and power as they sidestep morality and virtue in their attempts to solve the problem of inequality.

Christine Koggel addresses the problem of inequality by developing a relational approach to care and deliberative democratic processes as a means for negotiating needs and moral standards. Both attend to the problem of power and hope to achieve the admirable goal of including those excluded from political processes and suffer from paternalistic attitudes. Koggel, however, moves too quickly to deliberative processes that attend to procedure without dealing sufficiently with how morality shapes those entering the process that reverts back to the neutrality and impartiality of liberalism. Without a full conception of the political subject as a moral being, Koggel runs the risk of regenerating inequality, particularly for women, traditionally oppressed and constrained by a moral belief system premised on their virtue.

Focusing on the problem of inequality, Christine Koggel develops a relational theory premised on a relational self "situated in a network of complex and ever-changing

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[116] *Care and Equality: Inventing a New Family Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000).

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relationships [that] provides a richer account of moral agents and agency than is evident in either liberal theory or care ethics."[117] As this suggests, Koggel recognizes the normative frameworks and moral assumptions that constitute society's background and shape relationships. Drawing attention to how morality oppresses certain people by classifying them as Other, Koggel hopes to show how their standpoint can generate more equality in democratic liberal theory. Speaking to how morality justifies inequality, Koggel states that "when applied to people, however, identifying properties and grouping people accordingly gives those properties immediate moral significance."[118] Overall, Koggel's relational self offers a "thicker" moral self than that of liberals and reflects the fluid dynamic of relationships instead of the community's traditions, norms, and rules characteristic of the communitarian moral subject. Despite attention to the moral background of society as a source of inequality, Koggel overlooks virtue and vice which historically function to attribute certain qualities to women that justified their subordination to men. The operation of this dualism in different historical contexts illustrates the fluid relationships of power between men and women as female virtue and vice change to meet the demands of social, economic, and political demands. Although politicos such as Tronto and Harrington see the relationship between virtue and power, Koggel maintains its position in the background of her relational theory directed at overcoming barriers to inequality. In American political discourse, women's virtue serves as a central aspect of their moral identity that translates into a political status as moral guardianship. Overlooking this

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[117] *Perspectives on Equality*, 8.

[118] Ibid., 3.

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particular moral assumption introduces inequality into this relational theory. This moral imperative that structures our normative framework must be deconstructed and ultimately removed to allow for the full force of a relational theory or a democratic politics of care to operate since those engaged in these processes enter with a pre-set conception of morality based on virtue and vice that readily triggers inequality and oppression.

Finally, Sevenhuijsen considers "judging with care" as a means of establishing an alternative process for moral judgement consistent with the care ethic. Sevenhuijsen attempts to address the difficult problem of developing moral standards of judgment based on relations and practices, and inclusive of emotion. To do so, Sevenhuijsen rejects dualisms and the tradition of women as mothers as viable grounds for "judging with care." Instead, she frames the feminist ethic of care in postmodern terms of diverse, fluid identities that start from care rather than traditional and secure value systems such as the virtue-vice dualism. "Judging with care" translates care into the political framework of citizenship:

> If we integrate values derived from the ethics of care, such as attentiveness, responsiveness, and responsibility, into concepts of citizenship this will produce a dual transformational effect: the concept of citizenship will be enriched and thus better able to cope with diversity and plurality, and care will be 'de-romanticized', enabling us to consider its *values as political virtues* [emphasis mine].[119]

Sevenhuijsen rightly identifies judging as a principle task of citizenship and offers "judging with care" as a means of translating the values of care into the political virtues consistent with citizenship. Relying on "political virtues" undermines the transformative potential of Sevenhuijsen's ethical perspective by assuming that diversity, plurality, and care must be

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[119] *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care*, 15.

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'de-romanticized' to achieve the status of virtue that perpetuates a masculine moral framework into which feminist concepts must fit in order to meet the standards of citizenship. Two things happen by trying to fit care into the virtue framework. First, it sustains the tradition of moral guardianship of women's virtue premised on their inequality and exclusion from politics. This perspective undermines Sevenhuijsen's stated goal that the ethic of care should separate from traditions and secure value systems: "It is more productive to see this fact as a constructive starting-point for reflecting on current value systems than it is to fall back on old and secure patterns or, conversely, to fear that a positive evaluation of care will carry women back into tradition."[120] While care as a political concept does not necessarily "carry women back into tradition," framing care as a political virtue does anchor this concept to a virtue tradition oppressive to women in which values of care such as attentiveness and responsiveness join the legion of finite female virtues such as humility, modesty, cheerfulness, and chastity. Instead of offering an ethical alternative, framing care as a virtue maintains this tradition and the masculine moral framework against which feminists must measure their moral concepts. Second, virtue and vice as a dualism perpetuates the binary form of moral and ontological thinking that Sevenhuijsen rejects in terms of categorizing the world according to right and wrong, man and woman, care and justice and creates hierarchies of inequality that justify the moral reasons for excluding women and other oppressed groups from full citizenship. Sevenhuijsen makes important contributions to the ethic of care by realizing morality's critical role in citizenship and the need for creating standards of moral behavior for the

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[120] Ibid., 25.

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collective community that enable it to "judge with care." Reinserting her forward-thinking ethic into the virtue tradition, however, dilutes its transformative potential by locking the ethic into an oppressive tradition based on dualisms that limit moral thinking to a narrow range of choices that perpetuate inequality and exclusion.

## 8.6: Conclusion: The Implications of Vice for Contemporary Feminist Discourse

Despite their attention to morality and virtue, communitarians and feminists omit vice from their ethical considerations. Without an account of vice neither conveys a full understanding of moral personhood that entails both good and bad, positive, and negative, virtue and vice. Unlike vice, virtue, however, guides a political community in the direction of the "good life," a critical aspect of political theory. Alternatively, vice requires delving into the corruption, violence, oppression, and punishment that focus attention on the "dark side" of political life that also contradicts America's exceptional vision of itself as a utopia. For women, vice represents a powerful tool of oppression used to justify their punishment, execution, exclusion, and oppressed status as potential threats to the political community whose departure from virtue causes political decay. As such, focusing on vice entails some dangers for feminists since it aligns them with a source of political oppression and distances women from virtue, a source of protection. Yet, vice grants women a position from which to challenge the prevailing moral and political status quo, a lesson made evident by the rebellious Lowell mill girls and radical feminists of the Sexual Revolution. To offer a fuller account of moral personhood and to consider alternatives to virtue, feminist theorists need to investigate vice as a means breaking with the status quo and

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finding the way towards a more complete feminist ethic that replaces moral perfectionism with contextual reality.

In *Ordinary Vices*, Judith Shklar uses the vices of liberal democracy to offer an alternative to Rawls' liberal "justice first" and MacIntyre's "multiple virtues" approaches. To do so, Shklar rejects Rawls' Kantian premise on universal principles, procedures, neutrality, and moral perfectionism and expresses how liberalism involves emotions and moral values despite communitarian claims to the contrary. Shklar's perspective resonates with feminist ethics in that she argues for a contextual, grounded approach to morality that coincides with the pluralism and diversity prized by liberal democracy. Instead of emphasizing virtue, Shklar takes "another road not in order to criticize or reject metaethics, but merely to seek a more concrete way of thinking about politics, one closer to men and events and to our historical preoccupations and institutions."[121] Shklar complicates the moral terrain by focusing on moral ambiguities and how the cost of freedom entails a tolerance of many ethical perspectives. Linking moral ambiguity to the hard demands of liberal democracy, Shklar states:

> Given that as liberals we have abandoned certainty and agreement as goals worthy of a free people, we have no need for simple lists of vices and virtues. On the contrary, it seems to me that liberalism imposes extraordinary ethical difficulties on us: to live with the contradictions, unresolvable conflicts, and a balancing between public and private imperatives which are neither opposed to nor at one with each other. The ordinary vices, at the very least, reveal what we have to contend with if we want to be fully aware of what we think we already know.[122]

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[121] *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984), 228.

[122] Ibid., 249.

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Such a position correlates with the fluid, dynamic negotiation of moral standards for judgement that constitute a central aspect of political citizenship and action that match the essential thrust of feminist ethics. Accounting for vice complicates democratic ethics. For instance, the vice of snobbery associated with inequality justifies including some and excluding others, the price a liberal society pays for diversity and difference. Hypocrisy operates naturally in representative democracy that requires a disconnection between representatives and their ability to represent constituent interests, creating a gap that engages Americans in a healthy skepticism towards their government. Cruelty functions in conjunction with justice to limit the former, serving a primary duty of government - preventing excessively cruel behavior. Vice plays a natural and necessary role within democracy and draws attention to the moral ambiguity of liberal democracy, creating a fuller picture of the ethics required to meet the complex reality in which people negotiate their moral identities in a context premised on tolerance, diversity, difference, and pluralism. For Shklar, vice also debunks moral perfectionism as the goal for democratic individuals or the community as a whole since such an ethical perspective contradicts the goals of freedom, equality, and inclusion. Understanding vice entails the recognition of human imperfections and the need to navigate the different terrain of making the soundest possible ethical decisions within a complex reality that often presents dilemmas with no clear right or wrong alternatives. The moral perfectionism that informs virtue ethics prevents such a perspective by ignoring vice as part of this normative framework. To develop an ethics grounded in reality and relationships that includes particularity and fluidity, feminists need vice to counter the moral perfectionism of virtue that ignores

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ambiguity and promotes an American exceptionalism dependent on women as moral guardians to keep the nation on its "good" path.

In response to the ethic of care literature, feminist theorists occasionally turn to the moral domain of vice identified with negative emotions and "evil practices." In Hoagland's critique of Nel Noddings, for instance, she questions the idyllic portrayal of the "moral mother" that entails heterosexism premised on the unequal parent-child relationship that can be abusive and damaging to the child. Speaking to this negative power dynamic, Hoagland states that "more important, this model of mothering does not acknowledge the fact that a number of mothers abuse their children...An ethics appealing to the mother/child relationship must take into consideration both the power in the relationship and the social context of the relationship. Ignoring these will only reinforce oppression through ethics regardless of whether the ethics is based on caring or on principle."[123] Hoagland indicates the dangers of focusing on the "good practices" of mothering or caring without fully theorizing "evil practices" and bad care. Suggesting how such considerations seem to challenge the ethical ideal of care, Noddings states, "I am not denying the reality of this dark side of feminine character, but I am rejecting it in my quest for the ethical. I am not, after all, suggesting a will to power but rather a commitment to care as the guide to an ethical ideal."[124] This statement illustrates how a virtue-based ethics draws attention to the ideal and moral perfectionism and away from the contextual realities and moral ambiguities of democratic politics. Further developing this

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[123] "Some Thoughts about 'Caring,'" in *Feminist Ethics*, 253.

[124] *Caring*, 42.

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point, Elizabeth Spelman points out that celebrating women's capacity to care for others overlooks the poor way in which women care for each other. "Such insistence on the importance of feelings amounts simply to a ringing, one-sided celebration of women's virtues," Spelman states, "in having emotions and recounting them - unless we are willing...to look at the expression of emotions among women that reveal the less glorious side of our lives together."[125] Virtue leads women to focus on love and friendship as characteristic of their relationships at the expense of accounting for how women mistreat each other, the negative ethical side of the puzzle. Without attention to this side, Spelman contends, feminists lack a full understanding of the weaknesses related to women's organization and the barriers to their solidarity. Avoiding vice narrows the ethical terrain that shapes women's relationships to women, friends, family, and the political community, resulting in a thin understanding of moral subjectivity.

In addition, omitting vice denies the importance of "negative" emotions such as anger that often generates political change for women. Moral guardianship relies on virtuous emotions such as love and cheerfulness that promote passivity and submissive to the status quo. Breaking with this subordinate political posture involves expressing emotions such as anger, discontent, or lust that landed women such as the Puritan witches, rebellious Lowell mill girls, and pro-pornography feminists on the side of vice. Anger represents perhaps the most negative emotions for a woman since it challenges the cheerful demeanor of a care-giving maternal figure and can inspire political action. Speaking to the transformative anger among women of color against racism, Audre

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[125] "The Virtue of Feeling and the Feeling of Virtue," in *Feminist Ethics*, 213.

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Lourde states "we use whatever strengths we have fought for, including anger, to help define and fashion a world where all our sisters can grow, where our children can love, and where the power of touching and meeting another woman's difference and wonder will eventually transcend the need for destruction."[126] Anger, an emotion consistent with vice, acts as a source of political strength that empowers women to overcome the oppressive structures that bind them. Taking a broader perspective, Christine Koggel theorizes the Other, the standpoint identified with women and also those who deviate from virtue by expressing negative emotions and rejecting accepted standards of behavior. By focusing on the Other, Koggel suggests that "the idea of orientation to other switches the focus from care in and of itself to relationships, of which relationships of care are but one kind. It explains that those who are oppressed and excluded from spheres of power and influence need to adopt stances and strategies in relation to those in power that are sensitive to the effects and implications of their relationships to the powerful."[127] Looking to vice reveals the oppressed and excluded position of the Other, in this case women, to open up an entire realm of ethical and political consideration that alters the moral terrain and develops a fuller conception of moral personhood.

Attending to virtue's shadow - vice - provides feminist ethics with some important advantages. First, vice retains the political power for women by releasing them from virtuous standards of moral behavior in order to grant them a standpoint critical for

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[126] "The Use of Anger; Women Responding to Racism," in *Women's Voices: Visions and Perspectives*, eds. Pat C. Hoy II, et al. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1990), 176.

[127] *Perspectives on Equality*, 177.

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critiquing the moral assumptions operating in society that oppress women and others. This approach entails risk since women who leverage power through their difference and deviance often encounter stiff resistance. Yet, they also mobilize change to achieve important goals such as the sexual freedoms now protected by the federal government that arose from the efforts of second wave and, particularly, radical feminists in the 1960s and 70s. Second, vice exposes the contradictions of moral perfectionism and increases attention to the moral ambiguity necessary for the fluid, contextual relational premise of feminist ethics. Finally, vice provides a fuller consideration of moral life and personhood that exposes how virtue ensures women's oppression as moral guardians and offers freedom by abandoning this framework.

Despite its benefits, vice only takes feminist ethics so far. Developing vice as critical to a feminist ethics compatible with liberal democracy may represent an immediate and necessary step. Yet, it is not sufficient. Turning attention to vice does not challenge the dualistic logic of virtue ethics and, as such, perpetuates the inequality, constraints, and exclusionary logic of this normative framework that still limits moral choices and a complex understanding of moral life. Morality still functions in the categorical terms of virtue and vice that remain embedded in a powerful tradition that contradicts a democratic and feminist ethics. Vice offers a means to move further in the direction of challenging this dualism and the moral guardianship tradition in order to find more promising alternatives.

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# CHAPTER NINE

## Conclusion:
## The Limits of Virtue & Vice for Democratic Politics

### 9.1: Introduction

Political participation serves as the critical force in democratic politics. Amidst the charges of alienation, isolation, and a general *ennui*, scholars, activists, and even politicians tout the need for Americans to get involved by voting, campaigning, and running for office in order to prevent democracy's decay. As women increasingly engage in various areas of politics from interest group organizing to holding high political office, an interesting dilemma arises concerning their citizenship, traditionally tied to moral guardianship, as keepers of the status quo and virtue in the private sphere that denies them active participation in politics. The long-standing suspicions of women's interest-based political roles, in contrast with their acceptable timeless, virtuous private roles, plays out again. The debate about family values arises in such contexts to infer that women's departure from the private sphere places their families and nation in danger, implicating them on the charge of "suspect" citizenship. The virtue-vice dualism drives this and preceding backlashes against women, erecting a critical barrier to expanding democratic politics. With this in mind, this chapter turns to the question, is virtue a political concept compatible with a more participatory democratic politics that would grant women, and others, full citizenship, and include more voices in the deliberative process?

This conceptual history of women's virtue and vice reveals its anti-democratic operations antithetical to the feminist goals of freedom, equality, and inclusion that

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characterize full citizenship, and democracy practices. To indicate some of the broader moral implications of virtue and vice for democratic politics, this chapter first reviews the key elements of the conceptual history of women's virtue to show how it "displaces politics" by rendering it a non-conflictual, harmonious activity in which citizens support the status quo as the political ideal. In this context, the central problems that virtue and vice pose for democratic politics become evident. Second, this discussion briefly explores how women's virtue and vice operate within the current "family values" discourse to deflect attention away from real political concerns. The third section turns to possible means for determining alternatives to the virtue-vice dualism as the moral paradigm that continues to dominate political discourses pertaining to women. This chapter concludes by offering some possibilities for moving towards a democratic and feminist moral alternative consistent with freedom, equality, and inclusion.

## 9.2: The Displacement of Politics: The Anti-Democratic Nature of Virtue and Vice

Virtue and vice's gendered operations generally play a marginal role in discussions of these political concepts. Often, a theorist notes that "virtue" stems from the Latin root "*vir*," meaning man. They may touch on "virago" as the term's feminine aspect that refers to a strong, aggressive woman with masculine traits. While such references to virtue's etymology often introduce the concept, the analysis stops there. A closer look, however, suggests the exercise of political power at the heart of the virtue-vice dualism and within each concept's internal dynamics of the infinite and finite. By ignoring the gendered aspect of the virtue-vice dualism, feminist theorists overlook a central means by which

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morality displaces politics and perpetuates dynamics antithetical to democratic and feminist goals.

Bonnie Honig uses the opposition between virtue and *virtu* to explain how political theorists such as Immanuel Kant, John Rawls, and Michael Sandel engage with virtue theory to displace politics while Nietzsche and Arendt embrace *virtu*, a term used to capture "agnostic conflicts" that indicate the complexities and conflicts of a vibrant political life. Honig primarily focuses on how virtue theorists use institutions and the law to close off political spaces of contestation and how *virtu* theorists open these spaces and help to proliferate others, the position that she supports. Identifying the problems with virtue theory, Honig states, "because virtue theorists displace politics with bureaucratic administration, jurocratic rule, or communitarian consolidation, they tend to remove politics from the reach of democratic contest."[1] Instead of engaging in a thorough criticism of Honig's position, this discussion focuses attention on the usage of virtue and *virtu* as her central analytic categories. Although recognizing the gendered nature of virtue and *virtu*, Honig immediately dismisses this point as essentially irrelevant to her analysis. This move reveals how overlooking the gendered dynamics of virtue and vice actually perpetuates the displacement of politics.

At the end of the introduction to Honig's *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, she notes the gendered elements of *virtu* while ignoring their operations in virtue. Honig essentially argues that *virtu* encompasses Machiavelli's oppositional conflict

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[1] *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 4.

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between *virtu* and *fortuna*, creating a bisexual concept that represents the conflict and complex, dynamic politics that Honig promotes. To do so, she recasts the gendered usages of *virtu* in Nietzche and Machiavelli by claiming that "perhaps this virago, this masculine woman who is both human and a force of nature, is a more appropriate figure for *virtu* than is the thoroughly identifiable, categorically settled and category settling masculine man of war."[2] Emphasizing the contestable nature of the *virtu* figure, she concludes that "the talent of Machiavelli's man of *virtu* is his capacity to cross uncrossable lines (between male and female, man and nature), his willingness to take risks from which ordinary humans withdraw."[3] After three brief paragraphs, Honig dismisses the gendered dynamic of *virtu* without even considering its operations in virtue, stating that "aside from occasional ruminations like this one, I do not engage questions of gender and politics in a sustained way in this book."[4]

Through this approach to virtue and *virtu*, Honig actually engages in the very practice for which she criticizes virtue theorists such as Kant and Rawls - displacing politics. Honig essentially excludes from her analysis the moral assumptions that sustain women's oppression by dismissing gender as significant to these terms and asserting a bisexual virago as the figure for *virtu*. Promoting this androgynous figure reflects a return to gender neutrality, a problem that Honig identifies in the work of thinkers such as Rawls who use neutrality and universals to resolve politics in order to leave, what she calls, the

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[2] Ibid., 16.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 17.

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"remainders" to the side. Women and other oppressed groups *are* the remainders and failing to see that despite a recognition of these concepts' gendered characteristics perpetuates this form of neutrality by completely dismissing the importance of gender in virtue and then neutralizing it by claiming a bisexuality within *virtu*, a concept that Hanna Pitkin clearly identified as not only gendered but central to introducing sexual politics into Western political thought.[5] In the end, Honig neutralizes the subject and degenders it, ultimately displacing politics and rendering these contestable concepts, uncontested, closing off a space for politics and engagement.

The example of Honig represents a specific case of closing off a political space and displacing politics that actually occurs in feminist theory when it fails to address the political dynamics that operate in the virtue-vice dualism and within the finite and infinite dimensions of each concept. These operations, more easily identified from the standpoint of the displaced, or vice-ridden, can be seen to perpetuate an anti-democratic, anti-feminist politics. Examining the role of virtue and vice within key moments of American political history through a feminist lens reveals three central anti-democratic elements of this dualism: the creation of hierarchies, constraint and exclusion; a passive, submissive conception of citizenship; and an ideal view of politics as geared towards harmonious resolutions and the defense of the status quo.

Dualisms, as feminists continuously illustrate, establish hierarchies, exclude certain groups from full activity within the political community, and generate inequality. "A

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[5] See *Fortune is a Woman: Gender & Politics in the Thought of Niccolo Machiavelli* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

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dualism is an intense, established and developed cultural expression of such a hierarchical relationship, constructing central cultural concepts and identities so as to make equality and mutuality literally unthinkable."[6] As this conceptual history reveals, virtue and vice operate in a complex way to establish a hierarchical relationship between women and men and between different groups of women. The complexity arises due to society's attribution of virtue to women that establishes their moral superiority, a status that perpetuates a false sense of power or dominance for women in the moral realm of private life. According to the logic of dualisms, the political realm, in turn, becomes identified with vice and, as such, "beneath" or subordinate to women. Such a view only denies women inclusion in politics. In addition, American society predicates women's virtue on their constraint, or absence of freedom which women must sacrifice for the greater good of their families and, thus, their nation.

To secure this adherence to virtue, vice serves as a tool readily available for punishment. When the radical Lowell mill girls abandoned Victorian True Womanhood for protesting and petitioning, for instance, their adversaries labeled them as self-interested, vice-ridden women who broke with society's moral codes and threatened the political community's stability. Similarly, during the Sexual Revolution feminists labeled as "pro-pornography" due to their failure to reject all pornography as dangerous to women became located on the side of vice for promoting sexual freedom which endangered women by leaving them unprotected by virtue and Traditional Womanhood.

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[6] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 48.

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Vice, as these examples only begin to suggest, defines categories of people as deviant which justifies their exclusion from or marginalization within the political community. For women, their biblical association with vice always maintains their relationship between virtue as an uneasy one since original sin continues to play a part in defining women's moral character. Further justifying exclusionary practices, the virtue-vice dualism creates inequality by establishing hierarchical relationships premised on measuring one's moral worth against standards set by society. This process sustains the power of the dominant group either by granting a group virtue for faithfully serving the status quo or by classifying them as vice-ridden for failing to do so, justifiable grounds for their exclusion from politics.

As this conceptual history illustrates, virtue and vice represent the means by which American women established their relationship to politics, making these concepts central to their political identity. Yet, recognizing how they function according to this dualistic logic exposes the premise of virtue and vice on the undemocratic values of constraint, hierarchy, and exclusion. To the contrary, "democratic politics," Mary Dietz explains, "is collective, inclusive, and generalized (I do not mean 'universalized'). Because it is a condition in which the many aim at acting as peers and equals, it is decidedly nonhierarchic and non-dualistic."[7] As long as the virtue-vice dualism anchors women's political identity, full citizenship will remain beyond their grasp. By perpetuating the exclusion of groups based on moral standards established to sustain the power of the dominant group, the

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[7] *Turning Operations: Feminism, Arendt, and Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 58.

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characteristics of inequality and hierarchy inherent to this and other dualisms undermines the quest for a more "collective, inclusive, and generalized" democratic politics.

Since the Puritans, American political culture has relied on virtue to establish women's passive and submissive political posture. Women's virtue depends on their support for the status quo in the midst of social conflict and larger political, economic, and social shifts beyond the control of the dominant class. During the Puritan era, the French and Indian wars and rising merchantalist class threatened the founding families of ministers and magistrates who targeted women as witches as one means of squelching political disorder, and attributed virtue to women who embraced the very status quo that perpetuated their oppression. After the American Revolution, the republic's leaders assigned virtue to women who became the keepers of morality as virtue shifted from public to private life. In the process of establishing a representative form of government, the citizen participation associated with military valor and courageous political deeds, more consistent with *virtu* in the republican tradition, transformed into a feminine virtue in which a citizen's moral worth emanated from a passive engagement with politics by voting for representatives and accepting their subsequent political decisions. Women's passivity and submissiveness then became the standard of virtue as they only indirectly engaged in politics by giving birth to and socializing future citizens, sustaining morality and religion in the home, and maintaining stability amidst political change. This view intensifies throughout the Jacksonian period during which American society cultivates a Victorian ideology. Although second wave feminists challenged the passivity of Traditional Womanhood that dominated the 1950s, residues of this earlier political identity continued

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to play out as feminists such as those opposed to pornography and Mary Daly supported the use of virtue as a means of reclaiming women's moral superiority, a position premised on submissiveness. Communitarians and maternalists also rely on virtue and moral guardianship to develop a "thicker"moral subject. Overall, the operations of women's virtue reveal the value placed on their lack of political participation. Yet, it also indicates a broader commitment to promoting passivity as a moral value consistent with a representative democracy in which capitalism draws citizens' attention to making money not participating in politics. On a broader scale then, virtue displaces political activity, muting its importance by associating it with passive women in the private sphere, diminishing the *virtu* or aggressive and politically active aspect of this concept, and placing moral value on the diluted form of political participation necessary for representative democracy.

As virtue evolved to promote passivity and submissiveness, vice always lingered as its antithesis, or the category for those who failed to support the status quo. Puritan women who broke with virtue found themselves charged with witchcraft and suffered severe social punishments including execution. Republican women who became impoverished and turned to prostitution or refused to obey society's standards, as ministers such as Fordyce articulated, deserved banishment from the protections of society. During the Jacksonian period, the Lowell mill girls who organized into unions and spoke against corporate greed and oppression became labeled as vice-ridden, unladylike women who not only failed to meet virtuous standards, but actively rejected them and sought alternative discourses in rights, social justice, and even communism.

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During the Sexual Revolution, radical feminists who accepted pornography as one means of sexual expression in a liberatory politics became identified with vice as enemies to women and promoters of their objectification who embraced masculine sexuality. Not coincidentally, anti-pornography feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon found allies in the Christian Right since this supposedly feminist position coincided with restraining women's freedom and promoting a traditional sense of virtue consistent with that embraced throughout American political history.[8] Active women who seek a redress of grievances or political protection as with the Puritans, union protections and social justice such as the Lowell mill girls, or sexual freedom in the case of radical and lesbian feminists of the Sexual Revolution represent a deviant class of citizens who challenge the moral premise of their political identity by actively engaging in political activity and breaking with virtuous standards and the political passivity and submissiveness expected of women and all citizens of America's representative democracy.

Together, passivity and submissiveness as well as exclusion, hierarchy, and constraint operate through virtue and vice to establish the key characteristics of women's political identity as moral guardians, a status that may transform from the daughters of Zion, Republican Mother and True Woman to Traditional Womanhood but remains a definitive feature of women's citizenship. Moral guardianship represents how women's virtue translates into an oppressive political identity that undermines their access to full citizenship and thus limits the possibility for democratic and feminist politics. While first

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[8] For a discussion of MacKinnon and anti-pornography feminists, see Chapter Seven.

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wave feminists did leverage political power through women's "moral superiority" and, thus, guardianship, such political advances then encounter powerful backlashes driven by the calls for a return to virtue that translates into demands that women go back to or remain in the private sphere and limit their political activity. As such, virtue and vice represent a moral belief system readily available to reign in political change quickly. Moral guardianship perpetuates this process by tying women to the fate of America's exceptional future which requires their dedication to the virtuous path laid before the nation by God. Women's deviation from virtue or the moral standards set by society then easily translates into a threat to the nation's moral stability that sets a backlash in motion.

The way in which this passive political posture emanates from women's virtue and vice only becomes clear by investigating the internal operations of virtue and vice. To do so, the typology of infinite and finite virtue and vice identify how religious and political mechanisms work together to link women's morality to their political status as moral guardians. The infinite aspect links women to the broader spiritual plane of religion either as keepers of God's virtue or to infinite vice as the daughters of Eve responsible for original sin. This virtue presumes a purity and higher spiritual calling that takes on a strong Judeo-Christian religious orientation, emanates from our Puritan founding, and retains a notion of purity and promises of Heaven for the virtuous. This religious dimension of women's virtue holds serious implications for American women's relationship to politics. Preserving the nation's morality, in this sense, becomes women's "sacred" task. The finite dimension of virtue then grounds women in the material world of relationships and visible behavior that society can identify as vice if they deviate from

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virtuous standards. By linking women to this higher plane and grounding women in finite reality, infinite and finite virtue create the means by which society assigns to women the double burden of moral responsibility. Whereas finite virtues dictate women's moral responsibility for their families, children, and immediate social network, the infinite translates these actions into a broader responsibility for the nation's common good even though women lack the political power to fulfill this double burden of moral responsibility.[9] Infinite and finite vice, of course, remain the readily available means for blaming women for political decay.

Finite and infinite virtue and vice enable women to maintain the more traditional republican conception of the common good keep that serves the political purpose of binding an diverse nation together. Although morality serves as a primary means to this end, the common good contradicts the thrust of an active democratic politics. Capturing this sentiment in a discussion of social feminism, Mary Dietz states that maternalism's "emphasis as a political theory on 'family values,' moral instruction, and the articulation of what constitutes 'the good' for all position is in an awkward tension with the liberal principles of negative liberty and individual rights."[10] Such views premised on "'the good' for all" promote a given form of political life the emanates from a tradition of women's moral guardianship that denies them the ability to participate in the "good." Yet, more to

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[9] This is not say that men lack any responsibility for the common good. In terms of moral responsibility, however, this equates with, what Joan Tronto calls, "privileged irresponsibility" that enables men to determine when, how, and to what degree that will assume responsibility for the moral upkeep of the common good.

[10] *Turning Operations*, 44.

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the point, the common good, as cast by this tradition, diminishes the value of active participation, conflict, and diversity, key aspects in democratic politics. With that said, the limitations on morality and the common good do not diminish the importance of bonds holding a political community together or the need for moral concepts. The primary issue, from this perspective, becomes how to form these bonds, who participates in their creation, and what are their ends, an issue to which this analysis turns shortly.

The usages of women's virtue and vice in American political discourse reveal their part in the displacement of politics. As huge societal shifts occur beyond the power of any polity to control, American political culture reverts back to the position of blaming the least powerful for instigating large scale political changes, a strategy that deflects attention away from the real political, economic, and social issues at hand. Women's virtue and vice help to resolve the ensuing political conflict by focusing attention on their moral responsibility for the nation that makes women scapegoats for problems such as failing public schools, increased violence and drug abuse among teenagers, and teen pregnancy. Instead of grappling with the massive social changes of which such problems are merely symptoms, the polity focuses on how mothers and wives abandon their families for the workforce. Using women's double burden of moral responsibility in this way identifies women as the source of these social problems which resolves the conflict and closes off debates, discussions, and negotiations about real solutions and public policy alternatives. In order to flesh out this position more clearly, this chapter now turns to the "family values" discourse that further illustrates how women's virtue and vice facilitate the displacement of politics.

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## 9.3: "The Family Values" Debate: Deflecting Politics Through Women's Virtue and Vice

Women's virtue and vice focuses attention on the moral assumptions operating in the contemporary "family values" discourse. Second wave feminists put the family on the political radar screen by pushing for more protective divorce laws, family leave, child care, and domestic violence protections, among a range of other issues designed to create more equality and protections for women and children in the private sphere. In response, social conservatives and then communitarians claimed this political terrain using "family values" rhetoric to build support for such measures as making divorce more difficult to obtain, promoting marriage counseling, and rejecting child care in lieu of "peer marriage" and dual parenting to sustain the integrity of the family. Difficult issues such as domestic violence play a marginal role in this discourse. When they do appear, these thinkers assert that while some families encounter problems, this institution remains critical to socializing future citizens and stabilizing society. The Bush Administration, for instance, promotes marriage and abstinence education as solutions for families in poverty since married couples generate enough income to stay off of welfare and abstinence prevents teen pregnancy, another key source of poverty.

Although a complicated issue, this discussion explores how "family values" rhetoric illustrates the background moral assumptions of virtue and vice that function to blame women for structural changes in American society, ultimately deflecting attention away from political debate about the real issues facing the family. Conservative and communitarian calls for strengthening the family by rejecting child care, promoting

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stronger divorce laws, and advocating for marriage education work from the premise that women's increased employment outside the home caused the family's demise which also endangers democracy. In addition, their arguments against same-sex marriage focus on sustaining the heterosexual gendered dynamic of marriage as a union between a man and woman. As such, they deny the right to gays and lesbians to enter the very institution of marriage that they believe to be essential to America's political future. As such, social conservatives, in particular, reject this form of marriage on the grounds that it fails to fit America's "values" and "traditions." Clearly, this position speaks to the specific gender and sexual dynamic behind the "family values" rhetoric that emanates from the tradition of moral guardianship premised on specific male-female gender relationships of domination and subordination. Indicating this point further, some communitarians promote "peer marriages" in which the father plays a larger role. While an admirable goal, their discussion completely ignores the major social changes necessary to alter the male breadwinner stereotype. Without attending to the moral and cultural assumptions behind such proposals illustrates the continued reliance on women as primarily responsible for the family. Any other position seriously challenges moral guardianship and contradicts their primary position of supporting traditional social institutions.

The "family values" rhetoric detracts from the pressing political problems facing the American family that result from changing economic and political structures which gave rise to the two-parent working family in which both the father and mother work outside the home to earn the income necessary to sustain their families. Avoiding this issue, conservatives and communitarians ignore the fact that "the labor force changes of

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the last 150 years were the result not just of women entering the labor market but rather of both men and women entering the industrial and postindustrial labor force."[11] Failing to account for such broader structural changes, the "family values" rhetoric works from the assumption that women deserted the family for freedom and self-interest in public life at the expense of their husbands, children, and the nation that now confronts a range of social ills from overcrowded schools to increased violence among children. According to the logic of moral guardianship, when such structural shifts remain beyond the polity's control, women become easy targets since their moral responsibility for America's exceptional future empowers society to blame them instead of looking for real political solutions. As Jody Heymann articulates:

> The marked movement of men and women into the industrial and postindustrial labor force has transformed the United States. But we as a nation have failed to respond, leaving a rapidly widening gap between working families' needs on the one side, and the combination of high workplace demands, outdated social institutions, and inadequate public policies on the other. The cost of our country's failure to meet the changing needs of working families is being borne by children and adults alike.[12]

Instead of meeting this challenge by engaging in public debate about policy alternatives for after-school programs, early childhood education, transportation, and child care, the "family values" discourse diverts attention to maintaining a traditional family structure that

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[11] Jody Heymann. "Can Working Families Ever Win?" *Boston Review* 27 (February/March 2002)1: 4. For an excellent historical account of women's changing role in the labor market, see Alice Kessler-Harris' *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[12] Ibid., 5.

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simply does not exist anymore.[13] Understanding the virtue-vice dualism's relationship to women explains why this rhetoric resonates in a political culture where women remain "suspect" citizens easily blamed for structural changes beyond their control since any deviation from virtue as defined in terms of moral guardianship equates with endangering the nation's exceptional future.

Instead of ignoring this moral dynamic or downplaying its importance in lieu of attending to material concerns, feminists, liberals, and others need to respond to the moral assumptions driving the "family values" rhetoric. This position concurs with that of Mona Harrington in *Care and Equality* where she emphasizes the need for a liberal response based on care and equality to the family values rhetoric. Harrington frequently refers to how Americans grant social and political value to women and politicians using female motherhood and male warrior virtues that limit our understanding of women's equality and contributions to society, and the demands of political leadership. Moreover, Harrington points out the bankruptcy of relying on such traditional thinking in order to address the radical changes in private and public life that make the family a critical issue at odds with a framework built on the virtue and vice tradition. Indicating a reliance on vice, Harrington discusses a culture of "wrongdoing" in which "we find continued broad political backing for the idea that failures of the private systems - private market, private family - are due to wrongdoing, and that the solution should be a search for the

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[13] For further discussion on how to address the changing family structure, see also Joan Williams' *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to do About It* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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wrongdoers."[14] Mothers who rely on welfare, according to this logic, qualify as "wrongdoers" who failed to take advantage of the private market system and their family networks enough to prevent them from turning to government support. In this framework, the system escapes the label of "wrongdoer" since it functions merely to allow private institutions to operate unfettered by government intervention except in extreme circumstances. Relating Harrington to how virtue and vice undermine feminist and democratic politics, "wrongdoers" equate with the vice-ridden, a moral status that locates individuals and classes of people on the margins of politics. Breaking with acceptable standards and expectations, society excludes the vice-ridden from politics although occasionally these groups collectively organize, forcing their voices to be heard through mass protest and social movements.

More often, virtue and vice narrow the eligible participants in and scope of public debate on issues such as "family values," circumscribing the deliberative component of democratic practice, a process that many see as critical to the future of political participation in American democracy. Based on assumptions about virtuous women in the home, the "family values" rhetoric diminishes political debate on the more complicated two-parent working family issue down to strengthening the family structure. According to the dualistic logic of this discourse, opponents to "family values" become "wrong-doers" who advocate for weakening the family. In this context, women's virtue justifies the status quo. Those seeking divorce, using child care, requiring government's financial

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[14] *Care and Equality: Inventing a New Family Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 41.

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assistance and police protections, or engaging in alternative family structures such as extended family networks or same-sex marriage become identified with vice as serious challengers to the status quo in order to prevent their voices from being heard.

In addition, an individual or group's moral status in society plays an important part in determining who gets to participate in public debate. Those identified with vice such as welfare, single, and lesbian mothers, gay fathers, black men, and the disabled who experience a life of exclusion, feel as though their voices *do not deserve to be heard.* Such moral assumptions about the virtuous and vice-ridden remain critical to understanding another powerful barrier to deliberative democracy. These assumptions prevent "wrongdoers" from engaging in the deliberative process and influence how participants see each other as they fit people into the moral categories underlying social stereotypes, a process that prevents people from hearing some while listening to others. Speaking to the issue of communication styles in deliberative situations, Iris Marion Young addresses how the existing culture places a premium on the "more controlled," reasoned, argumentative style of white middle-class men while that of women and racial minorities tends to "be more excited and embodied," figurative and expressive, involving emotion and the exploration of ideas.[15] Such behavior violates the accepted moral standards of the dominant class that readily excludes women and racial minorities by identifying who they are, what they say, and how they say it as suspicious and vice-ridden since their mere presence in the deliberation represents a challenge to the status quo.

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[15] "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 124.

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Morality plays a key part in the social constructions pertinent to such deliberative processes that becomes a more pressing issue given women's increased participation in democratic practices. This changing political context contradicts the continued reliance on narrow moral dualisms to categorize women as virtuous "do-gooders" or vice-ridden "wrong-doers" based on their traditional role in the home as moral guardians of the nation. According to the logic of the virtue-vice dualism, voices that challenge the status quo and usually belong to those most directly effected by policies such as those associated with "family values remain excluded from the political discussion.

These powerful negative dynamics operating within the virtue-vice dualism certainly make it tempting to reject moralism as part of politics. Such a position, however, displaces politics and avoids these difficult issues pertaining to how morality does structure politics. Advocating moral neutrality, in effect, returns feminists to universalism and neutrality, problems that they identified as diminishing women's rights and excluding them from politics in liberal political thought. Morality remains a feminist concern. Throughout American political history, for better or worse, virtue and vice as part of a traditional moral belief system continue to shape and define women's political identity. Avoiding this issue leaves available a critical tool for conservatives, communitarians, and anti-feminists to use in generating backlashes that deny the expansion of women's political power.

Without alternatives to this moral tradition, virtue and vice continue to transfer ancient and traditional beliefs into contemporary political discourse that perpetuate this hierarchical, unequal, exclusive, constraining moral framework that acts as a critical

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barrier to a more feminist and democratic politics. Hinting at the importance of breaking with such traditional barriers in order to create a new politics of family care, Harrington states that "I cannot emphasize enough the importance of supplying a positive new way of thinking about care as a public issue, because without new concepts in place, the old idea barriers will inevitably block whatever specific policies liberals propose."[16] Virtue and vice act as "old idea barriers" blocking new concepts and means for considering alternatives to "family values" politics. Seeing care as one of the national values needed to promote true equality and a new politics of care in the family, Harrington further explains that "the major task for liberals is to set out clearly a moral base, a foundation of values, for liberal thinking about families."[17] As this example of "family values" illustrates, the virtue-vice dualism, particularly in relation to women, acts as the traditional moral foundation that focuses on portraying women who break with moral guardianship as "wrong-doers," a situation that requires liberals, feminists, and democrats to look for an alternative that corresponds with a liberatory politics.

## 9.4: Seeking Moral Alternatives for A Democratic Politics

Here this analysis turns to the lessons learned from this conceptual history of women's virtue in order to explore moral alternatives more consistent with democratic and feminist politics. The initial step involves moving beyond the logic of dualisms that creates inequality, constraint, and exclusion for women and other classes of people.

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[16] *Care and Equality*, 48.

[17] Ibid., 82.

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Despite the appearance of virtue and vice as oppositional categories, this conceptual history illustrates how women remain in a more complicated middle ground between virtue and vice since the demands of different political and economic climates moved them from one category to the next. In addition, infinite and finite virtue and vice represent another level of this moral middle ground. Finite virtue and vice located women in the real practical world of actual human behavior whereas infinite virtue and vice also associated them with a transcendent, spiritual, and often explicitly religious plane. This unstable moral position resembles what Patricia Hill Collins calls the outsider-within status of black women who worked inside white homes where they gained first-hand insights into the system oppressing them while remaining outsiders to that system as black women.[18] Similarly, the virtue-vice dualism locates women on the boundary of these two moral categories that places them inside this moral system though also outside it in the sense of existing on its margins which opens this middle ground space, creating an interesting vantage point from which women can identify how morality operates in the exercise of power. As Sherry Ortner explains, women occupy this space between dualisms such as culture and nature by acting as a conduit between the two while men supposedly occupy the higher ground of culture.[19] Although women and men possess virtue and vice, society holds women morally responsible for acting as a conduit of morality to political life,

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[18] *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), Chapter 1.

[19] "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in *Women, Culture, & Society*, eds. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974).

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traditionally as the keepers of virtue in the private sphere of the family that translated into public life through their male children and husbands. Despite the out-dated nature of this scenario, this premise still resonates in contemporary society which retains the moral guardianship view of women as evident in "family values" rhetoric. Still socially constructed as keepers of morality, feminists attempt to determine how this role, especially as care-givers, can positively contribute to women's changing relationship to political life and alter the oppressive forms of morality used to deny women full citizenship.

To do so, the moral middle ground avoids a synthesis of virtue and vice as a means of resolving their conflictual and oppressive dynamics. Instead, the middle ground offers a standpoint from which women can examine how the complex operations of virtue and vice determine their political identities without transcending this moral dualism by retreating to the virtuous moral high ground or the low ground associated with vice. Speaking to overcoming the universal-particular dualism, Anne Phillips discusses the middle ground as an alternative to negotiating the relationship between emotion and abstract reason raised by Carol Gilligan. "If they [feminists] situate themselves more firmly on the middle ground - as increasingly it seems that they do - they may be right but not so strikingly original," Phillips explains, "The power of these arguments then lies in what they reveal as the limitations of previous thought, that exaggerated emphasis on what now emerges as only one part of the whole."[20] As such, the middle ground holds its real power "in what they reveal as the limitations of previous thought" that, in the case of virtue and vice,

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[20] *Democracy and Difference* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 67.

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limits women's political participation and traps them within the moral guardianship status. To recognize the structures of oppression from the standpoint of the middle ground requires women to develop the ability to see with "double vision." Speaking to this practice in relation to freedom, Nancy Hirschmann explains:

> Feminist freedom requires a double vision: while recognizing this social construction is a phenomena or process that happens to and is participated in by everyone through language and discourse, social practices and customs, epistemological frameworks, knowledge claims, systems of ethics and moral beliefs, feminists concerned with freedom also want to acknowledge that some groups of people systematically and structurally have more power to participate in the constructing than others do.[21]

"Double vision" cultivates an ability to recognize the complicated social constructions that include "systems of ethics and moral beliefs" without diminishing their complexity or ambiguity by attempting a synthesis of such social dynamics. This approach, instead, recommends identifying the multiple ways in which virtue and vice operate as structures of oppression to contribute to this web of constructions. With this said, the middle ground offers only a starting point from which to begin interrogating alternatives since the virtue-vice dualism remains in place. As such, the middle ground retains the boundaries and systems of oppression inherent to this dualism and the potential for moving towards a synthesis of virtue and vice as a means of resolving the tension between these categories in order to overcome their limitations and transcend the political complexities of moral life instead of remaining within the real world of practice. As such, the moral middle ground holds some promise for seeking alternatives to the virtue-vice dualism while also holding

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[21] *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 204. For another discussion of "double vision," see Chapter Six.

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the potential for synthesizing these moral categories, a move that would resolve political conflict by removing the political from public life, a position antithetical to democratic and feminist politics.

Although still remaining within the virtue-vice dualism and not yet resolving this dilemma, the middle ground reveals the political power that women have derived from the position of vice at critical moments within political history. Vice remains an under-represented concept within discourses on ethics and morality. Yet, vice serves the critical political purpose of morally justifying punishment under the law, determining what constitutes illegal behavior, and excluding classes of people from politics. In liberal politics, Judith Shklar explains, vice illustrates how liberal government is about survival not the perfectability of man, a path taken by communitarians and liberals such as Rawls who focus on how the moral character of virtue can perfect liberalism:

> Thinking about the vices has, indeed, the effect of showing precisely to what extent ours is a culture of many subcultures, of layer upon layer of ancient religious and class rituals, ethnic inheritances of sensibility and manners, and ideological residues whose original purpose has by now been utterly forgotten. With this view, liberal democracy becomes more a recipe for survival than a project for the perfectability of mankind.[22]

Vice reveals the diversity within a democratic political community and forces it to confront the "darker" side of humanity, essential to understanding the uses of governing authority and exposing the other side of the common good. Failing to explore this moral dimension of human life avoids the practical reality of real political contexts and how humans negotiate their ethical reality. In addition, such a position promotes moral

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[22] *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984), 4.

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neutrality by ignoring the other aspect of the virtue-vice dualism and displacing a central location of political power. Making a plea for complexity by recognizing the role of vices in liberalism, Shklar states that "we have no need for simple lists of vices and virtues. On the contrary, it seems to me that liberalism imposes extraordinary ethical difficulties on us: to live with the contradictions, unresolvable conflicts, and balancing between public and private imperatives which are neither opposed to nor at one with each other. The ordinary vices, at the very least, reveal what we have to contend with if we want to be fully aware of what we think we already know."[23] In order to achieve this, feminists need to stand in the middle ground and see the oppressive force of virtue and vice within their lives that also reveals how vice opens up a space of contestation in which women can achieve a critical distance from virtue and see the positive operations of vice. The fact that women who embrace vice encounter vehement public opposition speaks to their challenge to the status quo and the danger this poses to the power structures aimed at women's oppression. Vice offers a means to the ends of challenging the virtue-vice paradigm by using vice to drive a wedge between women and virtue in order to reveal this system of oppression and open up a contested space in which women can challenge this moral paradigm.

## 9:5: Towards Democratic Political and Feminist Moral Alternatives

As James Farr explains, "conceptual histories are never finished. Not only is there

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[23] Ibid., 249.

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a future history (yet) to tell, but the past is hardly as fixed as it sometimes seems."[24] The conceptual history of women's virtue in American political discourse illustrates the dynamic nature of this concept that, however, serves a similar purpose even when deployed in divergent historical circumstances. Women's virtue ensures a passive and submissive defense of the status quo as women act as the nation's moral guardians or suffer the consequences of deviance as vice-ridden women. This dualism functions to narrow the scope of moral and political choices for women whose citizenship becomes circumscribed within these narrow parameters that perpetuate inequality, constraint, and exclusion for them, limiting democratic politics. Despite advances for women, this underlying moral belief system framed by the virtue-vice dualism redeploys moral guardianship at moments when the nation confronts threats of decay, especially at times when women challenge the status quo and demand equal rights, freedom, and inclusion. Currently, this scenario plays out in the on-going backlash against feminism that coincides with a rise in social conservatism and religious fundamentalism, discourses in which virtue plays a major part. As Farr suggests, conceptual history "encourages thinking about the emergence - and eventually the passing away - of our own concepts and beliefs and actions and practices."[25] Given its continued role in denying women full citizenship and activating backlashes against it, perhaps the time has come to consider the "passing away of" virtue as a political concept useful to the contemporary demands of democratic and

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[24] "Understanding Conceptual Change Politically," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, eds. Ball, Terence, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 39.

[25] Ibid., 41.

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feminist political thinking and practice.

If so, considering alternatives to the virtue-vice dualism as constitutive of an oppressive moral belief system becomes a pertinent exercise. While this project focuses on illustrating the limits of this moral paradigm in order to advocate for a post-virtue ethics, a cohesive alternative remains allusive. However, certain aspects of the ethic of care and deliberative democracy start to bring together a range of ideas such as practice, the middle ground, double vision, and deliberation that offer potential sites for developing an ethics consistent with contemporary feminist and democratic politics.

Feminists who frame care as a political practice explore a moral terrain full of opportunities for considering alternatives to the virtue-vice dualism. In particular, their usage of "practice," a concept linked to the virtue tradition, reframes this concept in terms of its contextual, relational dimensions that, however, remains unable to develop into a complete ethical alternative given the problem of insularity. Elements of the care ethic, however, indicate some solutions to this problem without resorting to universalisms or a synthesis of the particular and universal. Care works from a different premise than virtue and vice by focusing on the real practical needs common to all human beings although historically associated with women in the private sphere. Framing care as a value of democratic politics transfers women's moral responsibility for this practice to all citizens more equally. In addition, this ethical perspective does not presume to move towards a harmonious politics, remaining in the realm of practice. To reach care's potential, feminists need to articulate care's relationship to virtue in order to identify the serious limitations that it imposes on this ethic and possible assets in building an ethical alternative

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to the tradition of virtue and vice.

In conjunction with care, deliberative democracy offers real potential for exploring a means by which the political community can engage in establishing dynamic moral standards that retain the ability to decide "right" and "wrong" without working from traditional pretenses that sustain the status quo and deny classes of people equal and full citizenship. Although the specific operations of this process need much further development, the premise of deliberative democracy remains consistent with the alternative moral grounds for challenging the virtue tradition. Deliberative democracy works from the premise that politics is dynamic, conflictual, and inclusive of as many voices as possible. It responds to changing practices and political contexts such as those pertaining to the two-parent working family. Instead of reverting back to moral guardianship, a deliberative framework addresses the current problem, assesses how to address it from a practical standpoint, and generates standards for determining good and bad recommendations or policies. Instead of importing ancient moral codes that fail to meet the current needs, this approach embraces change without abandoning the need for determining "good" and "bad" practices, but does so without permanently categorizing a class of people as either vice-ridden or virtuous and banishing them to political oblivion. Instead of leaving virtue and vice in the background of democratic society, this approach places such issues of moral standards in the foreground of political debate and recognizes the operations of morality within this context, leaving the matter open for discussion as opposed to operating from tradition. Exploring the ethics of care in conjunction with deliberative democracy represents a starting point for developing an alternative to the

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virtue-vice tradition. Such a move possesses the potential for responding to Sarah Hoagland's claim that we need a moral revolution. Exchanging women's moral guardianship for full citizenship holds out a dynamic hope for the future of a democratic, feminist politics.

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