THE REPUBLICAN MOTHER:

WOMEN AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT—AN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

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THE GREAT QUESTIONS OF POLITICAL LIBERTY AND CIVIC FREEDOM, OF THE relationship between law and liberty, the subjects of so many ideological struggles in the eighteenth century, are questions which have no gender. Philosophes habitually indulged in vast generalizations about humanity: Montesquieu contemplated the nature of society, Rousseau formulated a scheme for the revitalized education of children, Lord Kames wrote four volumes on the history of mankind. The broad sweep of their generalizations has permitted the conclusion that they indeed meant to include all people in their observations; if they habitually used the generic "he" two centuries before our own generation began to be discomfited by it, then it is a matter of syntax and usage, and without historical significance.

Yet Rousseau permitted himself to wonder whether women were capable of serious reasoning. If the Enlightenment represented, as Peter Gay has remarked, "man's claim to be recognized as an adult, responsible being" who would "take the risk of discovery, exercise the right of unfettered criticism, accept the loneliness of autonomy," it may be worth asking whether it was assumed that women were also to recognize themselves as responsible beings. Is it possible, by definition, for women to be enlightened? The answers to that question have important implications for historians of political thought and for those who seek to write women's intellectual history.

We should be skeptical of the generous assumption that the Enlightenment *man* was generic. Philosophe is a male noun: it describes Kant, Adam Smith, Diderot, Lessing, Franklin, Locke, Rousseau. With the conspicuous exceptions of Catharine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecraft, women are absent even from the second and third ranks. They hover on the fringes, creating a milieu for discussions in their salons, offering their personal and moral support to male friends and lovers, but making only minor intellectual

contributions. Mme. Helvetius and Mme. Brillon, Mme. Condorcet, even Catherine of Russia, are consumers, not creators of Enlightenment ideas. Is it by accident or design that the Molly Stevensons, the Sophie Vollands, the Maria Cosways figure primarily as the addressees of letters by Franklin, Diderot, Jefferson?

A careful reading of the main texts of the Enlightenment in France, England and the colonies reveals that the nature of the relationship between women and the state remained largely unexamined; the use of *man* was in fact literal, not generic. Only by implication did the writers say anything of substance about the function and responsibilities of women in the monarchies they knew and the ideal communities they invented. Just as their inadvertent comments on the mob revealed the limits of their democracy, their comments on women reveal the limits of their definition of civic virtue.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Enlightenment literature is that the more abstract and theoretical his intention the more likely it is that the writer would consider the function of women in the polity. Because a standard way of reinventing natural law was to posit the first family in a state of nature and derive political relationships from its situation, philosophes were virtually forced by the form in which they had chosen to work to contemplate women's political role—even if, with Rousseau, they did so in an antifeminist mode. By contrast, the more the writer's intention was specific criticism of contemporary affairs, as it was apt to be among the Whig Opposition, the less the likelihood of serious consideration of women as political beings. But both groups shared the unspoken assumption that women acted in a political capacity only in special and unusual circumstances.

In the face of a denial that women might properly participate in the political community at all, there was invented a definition of women's relationship to the state that sought to fill the inadequacies of inherited political theory. The republican ideology that Americans developed included—hesitantly—a political role for women. It made use of the classic formulation of the Spartan Mother who raised sons prepared to sacrifice themselves to the good of the *polis*. It provided an apparent integration of domestic and political behavior, in a formula that masked political purpose by promise of domestic service. The terms provided were ambivalent and in many ways intellectually unsatisfying; the intellectual history of women is not a whiggish progression, ever onward and ever upward, toward autonomy and liberation. The tangled and complex role of the Republican Mother offered one among many structures and contexts in which women might define the civic culture and their responsibilities to the state; radical feminist political movements would develop in dialectical opposition to it. This essay seeks to describe the elements of that republican role, and the gaps in available political theory it was intended to fill.

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To what extent was there room for women in the philosophe's vision of the political order? Let us begin with Locke, whose consideration of the relationship of women to public order was extensive, and who was read and generally admired by the philosophes of the eighteenth century.[1] Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* are a direct attack on Richard Filmer's *Patriarcha,* which spins a justification for absolute monarchy by divine right out of the biblical injunction to honor thy father. But the commandment, after all, is to "Honor thy father *and mother*"; Filmer's defense of absolutism in government conveniently forgot mothers; it imagined a power structure that was masculine, that was absolute, and that descended through primogeniture. To create this structure and defend it as he did, Filmer had to ignore a large network of other relationships and impose a hierarchical subordination on all those he did acknowledge. Locke needed for *his* purposes only a reader who would concede that the biblical commandment was to "Honor thy father and mother"; grant him that, and Locke could proceed to race through Filmer, restoring mothers as he went, and by that device undercutting Filmer's analogy between parental power and royal authority. If familial power is shared with women and limited by mutual responsibilities, the nature of royal authority must also be shared and limited. What Locke accomplished in the *First Treatise* was the integration of women into social theory.[2]

"The first society was between man and wife," Locke wrote in the *Second Treatise,* "which gave beginning to that between parents and children; to which, in time, that between master and servant came to be added." But these relationships are not all hierarchical: "conjugal society is made by a voluntary compact between men and women."[3] The grant of dominion made to Adam in *Genesis* is not, as Filmer would have it, over people in general and Eve in particular; it is to human beings over animals. If Adam is lord of the world, Eve is lady. The curse of Eve, Locke thought, could not justify women's permanent and universal submission to men; the curse was part of her punishment for sin, but it was a sin which Adam had shared and for which he too was punished, not rewarded. Husbands reigned over wives, wives suffered the pains of childbirth; but these were descriptions of reality and reality might be changed by human intention. Labor might be medically

[1]See Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation—The Science of Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1969), 189 et passim.

[2]John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government,* Peter Laslett, ed. (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967); see especially *First Treatise,* §§62–65. Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha: or the Natural Power of Kings,* Thomas I. Cook, ed. (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1947).

[3]Locke, *Second Treatise,* §§77, 78.

eased; a woman who was queen in her own right did not become, when she married, her husband's subject.[4]

Locke came closer than most of his contemporaries and successors to defining a political role for women. He underlined the rights and powers women ought to have in their domestic capacity: mothers have a right to the respect of their children that is not dependent on the husband's will; mothers have their own responsibilities to their children; women ought to control their own property. There is not even a hint in his work that women unsex themselves when they step into the political domain.[5] But once Filmer had been disposed of, and Locke could generalize more broadly about civic powers and responsibilities, his insistence on defining the role of women in the social order diminished. He did, however, phrase his most significant generalizations in the *Second Treatise* in terms of *persons:* the legislative body is composed of persons, the supreme power is placed in them by the people, "using Force upon the People without Authority . . . is a state of War with the People."[6] Women were included, presumably, among "the people," but they had no clear mechanism for expressing their own wills.[7] Locke obviously assumed that women contributed in some way to the civic culture, but he was not very clear about what they might do were they to find themselves under a king who had forfeited their confidence. One ends by wishing he had written a *Third Treatise.*

Montesquieu also returned to first principles: "I have first of all considered mankind."[8] The principles by which governments are regulated—virtue in a republic, honor in a monarchy, fear in a despotism—are abstractions apparently devoid of gender. The virtue that buttresses the republic is transmitted by parents (not only fathers) who are responsible for raising virtuous children (not only sons).

Sensitive as he was to the implications of private manners for public style, Montesquieu argued that "The slavery of women is perfectly comformable to the genius of a despotic government, which delights in treating all with severity. . . . In a government which requires, above all things, that a particular regard be paid to its tranquillity, it is absolutely necessary to shut

[4]*First Treatise,* §§30, 47.

[5]*First Treatise,* §§61, 63; *Second Treatise,* §§52, 65, 183. In the *Second Treatise,* §§80–83, Locke argues that the primary justification for marriage is the lengthy dependence and vulnerability of the child, and he permits himself to "enquire, why this Compact, when Procreation and Education are secured, and Inheritance taken care for, may not be made determinable, either by consent, or at a certain time, or upon certain conditions, as well as any other voluntary compacts, there being no necessity in the nature of the thing, . . . that it should always be for Life. . . ."

[6]*Second Treatise,* §§124, 153, 154, 155.

[7]For women as a special case of relatively minor significance, see *Second Treatise,* §§180–83, 233.

[8]Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws,* Thomas Nugent, trans. (New York: Hafner Pub. Co., 1949), lxvii–lxix.

up the women." On the other hand, "In a republic, the condition of citizens is moderate, equal, mild and agreeable . . . an empire over women cannot . . . be so well exerted."[9]

Although women did not play, for Montesquieu, a central role in shaping the civic character of the government under which they lived, the form that government ultimately took *did* have crucial implications for their private lives. By his description of the "connection between domestic and political government," Montesquieu provided strong support for the conclusion that it is in women's self-interest to live in a republic. He offered no mechanism by which a woman unfortunate enough not to be born into a republic might change her condition, but the message that it was of crucial importance for women to live under certain forms of government and not under others was there, strongly phrased, available if anyone wished to use it.

Condorcet came closest to inventing procedure for as well as justification for including women in politics. His feminist comments emerge naturally from his general vision of the social order; they appear most extensively in his essay "Sur l'admission des Femmes au Droit de Cité," and in his "Lettres d'un Bourgeois de New-Heaven" (an appealing typographical error).[10]

Condorcet argued that although it was true that women had not exercised the right of citizenship in any "constitution called free," the right to political voice in a republic is claimed by men on the grounds that they are "sensible beings, capable of reason, having moral ideas," qualities which can be equally well claimed by women. "Men have . . . interests strongly different from those of women," Condorcet said in an unusual and forceful statement (although he did not specify what those differences were), and have used their power to make laws that establish "a great inequality between the sexes." Once it were admitted that people cannot legitimately be taxed without representation, "it follows from this principle that all women are in their rights to refuse to pay parliamentary taxes." Condorcet proceeded to argue that except in matters requiring brute strength, women were obviously men's equals; the brightest women were already superior to men of

[9]Montesquieu, 255–56. Book VII includes a curious pair of paragraphs headed "Of Female Administration" which offer the paradox that "It is contrary to reason and nature that women should reign in families . . . but not that they should govern an empire." In families women's natural weakness "does not permit them to have the pre-eminence"; but in governments that same weakness means that they administer their governments with "more lenity and moderation." It is the classic double bind, and applies, in any event, only to women who inherit their thrones. Despite Montesquieu's defense of women's political ability, he suggests no devices which would increase the likelihood that they will use these abilities.

[10]The essay, "Sur l'admission des Femmes," originally appeared July 3, 1790, in the *Journal de la Société de 1789;* it is reprinted in *Oeuvres de Condorcet* (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1847), X, 119–30. The letters were published as pages 267–71 in Vol. I of Filippo Mazzei, *Recherches Historiques et Politiques Sur les États-Unis . . . avec Quatre Lettres d'un Bourgeois de New-Heaven sur l'unité de la Législation* (Paris: A. Colle, 1788).

limited talents, and improvements in education would readily narrow what gaps there were. He concluded what was perhaps his generation's most detailed statement of the political rights and responsibilities of women:

> Perhaps you will find this discussion too long; but think that it is about the rights of half of human beings, rights forgotten by all the legislators; that it is not useless even for the liberty of men to indicate the means of destroying the single objection which could be made to republics, and to make between them and states which are not free a real difference.[11]

Condorcet is best remembered, of course, for his *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain,* sometimes for the book's own sake, more often for the bravery of his authorship of a testament to the human spirit at the very moment when that same spirit was hounding him to a premature death. In the *Esquisse,* he imagined that women had been an integral part of prehistoric society and important contributors to the social order. The original society consisted of a family, "formed at first by the want that children have of their parents, and by the affection of the mother as well as that of the father." Children gradually extend the affection they naturally have for their parents to other members of their family and then to their clan. But before the first stage of primitive society has been outgrown, women have lost their central position. Condorcet suggests that the origins of governmental institutions resided in the meetings of men who planned hunting trips and wars. It seemed obvious to him that "the weakness of the females, which exempted them from the distant chase, and from war, the usual subjects of debate, excluded them alike from these consultations"; women were thus excluded at the outset from "the first political institutions" and consigned to "a sort of slavery." Their slavery is modified in the second, or pastoral epoch, and manners are "softened" and modified still more in the third epoch, which also sees the invention of alphabetical writing. "A more sedentary mode of life had introduced a greater equality between the sexes. . . . Men looked upon them as companions, . . . [but] even in countries where they were treated with most respect . . . neither reason nor justice extended so far as to an entire reciprocity as to the right of divorce. . . . The history of this class of prejudices, and of their influence on the lot of the human species . . . [evinces] how closely man's happiness is connected with the progress of reason."[12]

The more rational the government, the more improved will be the status of women. It is an important formulation, but Condorcet, oddly enough,

[11] *Lettres d'un Bourgeois* . . ., 281–87, translation mine.

[12] Marie Antoine Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, title usually translated as *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1794), 24, 26, 28, 32, 43. In his list of tasks that remained unaccomplished, Condorcet specifically listed the improvement of the status of women: his words on this point have frequently been reprinted. (p. 280)

does not develop it further. In its omission of women from the fourth through ninth epochs of one of the very few histories that begins as in fact a history of mankind in the generic sense, the *Esquisse* falls into traditionalism: "he" lapses into literal usage, and the assumption that men represent the general case, women the rare and insignificant exception, is reinforced. Those who wish to find in Condorcet reiteration of the rule that the world is a man's world will find it in the *Esquisse.*[13]

Condorcet offered his comments on women in politics in direct challenge to those of Rousseau. Although much that Rousseau wrote implied sharp criticism of contemporary society and envisaged drastic change, what he said about women usually reinforced the existing order. This conservatism about women may well have served to make his radical comments about men's behavior more palatable; if the world were to be changed into a new one, characterized by a new style of men's behavior as demonstrated by Émile, governed by a General Will in accordance with a new Social Contract, it was surely reassuring to know that the women of that world, exemplified by Émile's wife Sophie, would not change—that they would remain deferential to their men, clean in their household habits, complaisant in their conversation.

The key to Rousseau's understanding of women's political function is in his discussion of the origins of government in *The Social Contract.* The General Will, after all, is a concept without gender; the freedom of the social contract comes from the paradoxical identification of the ruler with the ruled. If it is obvious that women are among the ruled, ought they not also be among the legislators?

There is a hidden paradox in this generally paradoxical essay: the women who are ruled are, at the same time, not ruled; because they are not ruled they need not participate in the General Will. They are invisible. As Rousseau explained in *Émile,* they lived in another world. Theirs is "the

[13]See Keith Michael Baker's magisterial *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975). Baker does not, however, comment on Condorcet's treatment of women's role in political society or on the essay "Sur l'admission des Femmes au droit de cité" or the "Lettres d'un Bourgeois. . . ." In 1785 Condorcet's careful analysis of "the calculus of consent" was published as "Essai sur l'application de l'analyse à la probabilité des decisions rendues à la pluralité des voix"; as Baker phrases it, the essay attempts to deal with the problem of "Under what conditions will the probability that the majority decision of an assembly or tribunal is true be high enough to justify the obligation of the rest of society to accept that decision." Condorcet viewed "the process of political decision-making . . . not as a means of ascertaining the strongest among a number of opposing parties—not, that is, as a mere expression of will—but as a method for the collective discovery of truth." Like Turgot, Condorcet rejected the claim that "monarchical government" could "impose a just order in a constant war of corporate claims and counterclaims" in favor of "the doctrine of a nation of individuals united by the common, reciprocal bond of citizenship." (Baker, 228–29) This reasoning has something in common with Rousseau's General Will, in which all individuals choose to submit to the community. But even in Condorcet's formulation, women are not explicitly part of the community.

empire of softness, of address, of complacency; her commands are caresses; her menaces are tears."[14] This is not hyperbole; women have moral and physical relationships to men, but not political ones; not do they relate to any women other than their mothers. Rousseau is explicit. The shift from the generic to the literal "he" occurs before *The Social Contract* has scarcely begun: the most ancient and only natural society is the family, Rousseau remarks, but children soon outgrow their dependence on their *fathers*.[15] After that the specific terms in which the General Will is explained are masculine ones; it is only men, taken literally, whom Rousseau expects to display disinterested civic spirit. In *Émile* he takes it as self-evident that it is "the good son, the good father, the good husband, that constitute the good citizen."[16]

Émile is a book about the task of forming a citizen for an idealized society. Émile is a body at ease with its mind, a sophisticated innocent, a person as paradoxical as the society for which he is educated. But Rousseau did not rethink the terms on which women ought to be educated for his new social order. He did not posit, for Sophie, as he did for Émile, a *tabula rasa* on which a rational mentor writes only what is necessary and natural; he did not end for Sophie, as he did for Émile, with a personality radically different from the one that standard systems of education were geared to create. Sophie is as traditional a woman as it is possible to imagine, reformed only in the sense that she does not dote on fashion or read novels.

Rousseau's refusal to rethink the terms of Sophie's education was intentional. Due to his own private sexual tastes he had, after all, a substantial personal stake in the submissiveness of women. He was not loath to make the broadest generalizations: "To oblige us, to do us service, to gain our love and esteem . . . these are the duties of the sex at all times, and what they ought to learn from their infancy."[17] Relationships between men and women are always sexual, and always verge on the uncontrollable: "Woman is framed particularly for the delight and pleasure of man. . . . Her violence consists in her charms . . . [her modesty masks her] unbounded desires."[18]

Nor did Rousseau need to rethink the bases of Sophie's mental development. As men's education became more highly developed it had strayed further from the natural into bookish abstraction. Rousseau needed a revolution to arrange for Émile to grow up among things rather than books, to postpone learning to read, to postpone foreign languages until he traveled to

[14] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emilius, Or, a Treatise of Education* (Edinburgh: A. Donaldson 1768), III, 10.

[15] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, G. D. H. Cole, ed. (London: Dent, 1913), Book I, Chap. II, p. 6.

[16] *Emilius*, III, 14.

[17] Ibid., III, 74–75.

[18] Ibid., III, 5–6.

countries where they were used. But girls were already barred from books, rarely taught foreign languages, already limited to physical tasks relating to household chores. Only erase excessive attention to fashion, and women's education needed no renovation. Émile thanks his mentor for having been "restored to my liberty, by teaching me to yield to necessity." But Sophie's life is at all times largely directed by necessity; the more that women's lives were shaped by repeated cycles of pregnancy, lying-in, nursing, and child-rearing, the closer they were to nature; the less the need to reform their education.[19]

Rousseau's most substantial target was Plato, who had offered, in Book V of *The Republic,* the classic attack on assigning social roles by gender. Rousseau defended Plato against the charge of encouraging promiscuity by inventing a community of women, but he was horrified by the "civil promiscuousness" implied by the assigning of the same employments to men and women. It represented, Rousseau sneered, the conversion of women into men.[20]

The argument that women ought not be part of the political community (as they are in Plato) was reinforced by Rousseau's insistence that women who seek to do so deny their sexual identity. The woman who seeks to be a politician or philosopher does violence to her own character: "A witty [i.e. articulate] woman is a scourge to her husband, to her children, to her friends, her servants, and to all the world. Elated by the sublimity of her genius, she scorns to stoop to the duties of a woman, and is sure to commence a man. . . ." Rousseau was sure his readers would share his scorn of "a female genius, scribbling of verses in her toilette, and surrounded by pamphlets"; although if she were scribbling emotional effusions, as Julie

[19]Ibid., III, 229. In Book V of *The Wealth of Nations,* Adam Smith expresses similar admiration for the practical aspects of women's education. "There are no public institutions for the education of women, and there is accordingly nothing useless, absurd, or fantastical in the common course of their education. They are taught what their parents or guardians judge it necessary or useful for them to learn; and they are taught nothing else. Every part of their education tends evidently to some useful purpose; either to improve the natural attractions of their person, or to form their mind to reserve, to modesty, to chastity, and to economy; to render them both likely to become the mistresses of a family, and to behave properly when they have become such. In every part of her life a woman feels some conveniency or advantage from every part of her education. It seldom happens that a man, in any part of his life, derives any conveniency or advantage from some of the most laborious and troublesome parts of his education." (*The Wealth of Nations* [New York: Modern Library, 1937], Book V, ch. I, part II, article II, pp. 720, 734) When Smith comes to reform the educational system, women continue to be excluded from it. Men are to envy women the practicality of their education, and the direct relationship between women's education and their adult roles; it is harder to predict what skills boys will ultimately find most useful. That women's education can be directly related to women's adult roles precisely because these roles are so limited and so predictable does not seem to Smith to be a cause for concern.

[20]*The Republic,* H.D.P. Lee, tr. (London: Penguin, 1955), 209–10. Rousseau's comments appear in *Emilius,* III, 14.

does throughout all six books of *La Nouvelle Héloïse,* he apparently had no objection. "The art of thinking is not foreign to women," Rousseau conceded, "but they ought only to skim the surface of abstruse sciences."[21] Attacks on masculine, articulate women are one of the more common themes of English literature (both British and American) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The image would prove to be a formidable obstacle to feminists throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; if the concept is not original with Rousseau, surely he did much to strengthen it in precisely those liberal and reformist circles where it would be logically predicted to die out.

Rousseau's impact on American thought is difficult to measure. There was no American edition of *Émile,* but it was available in translation in even more editions than Locke's *Two Treatises.* Much more widely circulated than either was Lord Kames' *Sketches of the History of Man,* which occasionally cites Rousseau and whose comments on women's place in society are in rough congruence with Rousseau's. For Lord Kames, women's history was "a capital branch of the history of man." It demonstrated a crude progress from women's debased condition among savages to "their elevated state in civilized nations." He explicitly denied that women have a direct responsibility to their nation; their relationship to their country is secondhand, experienced through husbands and sons, and they therefore have "less patriotism than men." Like Rousseau, Kames feared masculinization: "Remove a female out of her proper sphere, and it is easy to convert her into a male." He agreed that women's education ought to fit them to be sensible companions and mothers; the great danger to be guarded against was frivolity and disorderly manners. Having disposed of women in 97 pages, he was free to ignore them in the remaining 1,770 pages of his four-volume treatise; his final conclusion was merciless: "Cultivation of the female mind, is not of great importance in a republic, where men pass little of their time with women."[22]

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We are left with an intellectual gap. The great treatises of the Enlightenment, which provided so changed a framework for attitudes toward the state, offered no guidance on how women might think about their own relationship to liberty or civic virtue. Even Rousseau, one of the most radical political theorists of an age famous for its ability to examine the assumptions it had inherited, failed to examine his own assumptions about women. Ought a woman dare to think? Might a woman accept "the loneliness of au-

[21] *Emilius,* III, 104–05, 139.

[22] Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man* (Edinburgh: W. Strahan & T. Cadell, 1778), II, 1–2, 5, 85, 97.

tonomy"? To be alone, in fact, was to be male; women were invariably described, even by Locke, in relationship to others. Only Condorcet occasionally imagined an autonomous woman: for Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Kames, women existed only in their roles as mothers and wives. If Fred Weinstein and Gerald M. Platt are right in defining the Enlightenment as the expression of "a desire to end the commitments to passivity and dependence in the area of politics," women were not a part of it.[23]

Of all branches of Enlightenment thought, Americans were most attracted to the literature of the Commonwealth and Radical Whig opposition in England. As Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood have shown, eighteenth-century Americans were familiar with the work of Trenchard and Gordon, Sidney, Harrington, James Burgh, Catharine Macaulay. American political theorists made much use of it. But this literature is largely concerned with specific issues of opposition to crown policy; it rarely needed a presocial family to make its argument. One result of the overwhelming influence of the Whig tradition in America was that American political theory was rooted in assumptions that never gave explicit attention to basic questions about women. It was the good fortune of male Whigs that they did not need to begin at the beginning, but that same good fortune inhibited the likelihood that they would include women in their contemplations of the good society.

As Edwin Burrows and Michael Wallace have brilliantly shown, Whigs had a major ideological concern for parent-child relationships, but their discussions faded into the specific case of sons and fathers, or the limits of the obligations of sons to mothers.[24] Other variants of familial relationships were less thoroughly explored. John Trenchard, for example, addressed himself only to the evils of marrying women for money. In all four volumes of vigorously egalitarian rhetoric which rang the changes on the theme of the relationship between the state and the individual, *Cato* always contemplates political man, narrowly defined.[25] Not even so articulate a feminist as Catharine Macaulay felt the need to discuss women in her histories and essays, though she did discuss women's education elsewhere. She attacked Rousseau, and wrote in the seven small pages of her twenty-second "Letter on Education" most of what it took Wollstonecraft hundreds of pages to

[23]*The Wish to be Free: Society, Psyche and Value Change* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 49.

[24]Edwin G. Burrows and Michael Wallace, "The American Revolution: The Ideology and Psychology of National Liberation," in *Perspectives in American History,* VI (1972), 167–306. See especially parts II and III.

[25]John Trenchard, *Cato's Letters, or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious and Other Important Subjects* (London: J. Wilkins, T. Woodward, et al., 1733), II, 201–12. There are no comments on women in Trenchard and Thomas Gordon's *The Independent Whig* (London: J. Peele, 1721).

argue in the *Vindication.* But Macaulay, who was confident enough to plunge directly into public political debate and to criticize a Hobbes or a Burke without even a passing apology for the frailties of her sex, apparently felt no need to address the responsibilities of women to political society. Perhaps she believed she had made her position clear by implication and in practice. But her direct comments speak of the private responsibilities of women—even reformed, chaste, nonfrivolous women—to individual men. In this she was more in agreement with Rousseau than she thought.[26]

American Whigs were as unlikely as their British counterparts to integrate into political theory a concept of the proper relationship between women and the body politic. It may even be that Americans ignored the problem because the British did. Any body of theory that addresses basic issues of sex role must reach back to presocial or psychological sources of human behavior. The issues are so basic that they demand probing to the deepest and most mythological layers of human experience. Americans felt little need to do this; James Otis was one of the few to try, in the opening pages of the 1764 pamphlet, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved:*

> The original of *government* has in all ages no less perplexed the heads of lawyers and politicians than the origin of *evil* has embarrassed divines . . . the gentlemen in favor of [the theory that government is based on] the *original compact* have often been told that *their* system is chimerical and unsupported by reason or experience. Questions like the following have been frequently asked them. . . . Who were present and parties to such compact? Who acted for infants and women, or who appointed guardians for them? Had these guardians power to bind both infants and women during life and their posterity after them? . . . What will there be to distinguish the next generation of men from their forefathers, that they should not have the same right to make original compacts as their ancestors had? If every man has such right, may there not be as many original compacts as there are men and women born or to be born? Are not women born as free as men? Would it not be infamous to assert that the ladies are all slaves by nature? If every man and woman born or to be born has and will have a right to be consulted and must accede to the original compact before they can with any kind of justice be said to be bound by it, will not the compact be ever forming and never finished?

Otis raised embarrassing questions about women's political role:

> If upon abdication all were reduced to a state of nature, had not apple women and orange girls as good a right to give their respectable suffrages for a new King as the

[26]Catharine Macaulay, *Letters on Education with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (London: C. Dilly, 1790); *An Address to the People of England, Ireland and Scotland, on the Present Crisis of Affairs,* 3d ed. (New York: n.p., 1775); *Observations on the Reflections of Edmund Burke . . .* (Boston: Thomas and Andrews, 1791); *Loose Remarks on Certain Positions to be Found in Mr. Hobbes . . .* (London: T. Davies, 1767).

philosopher, courtier, and politician? Were these and ten millions of other such . . . consulted?[27]

Although Otis could ask embarrassing questions and imply their answers, on this as on so many points of theory, his developing mental illness prevented him from suggesting constitutional devices for implementing them. Nor did his sister, the vigorous Mercy Otis Warren, deal with the questions he had opened. She was certainly intelligent and a fluent writer. She could viciously criticize men for their private treatment of women and counsel friends that flirting and deference were "a little game" by which one charmed male admirers into doing what one wished, but even she avoided the theoretical questions: what responsibility does the state have to women? what responsibility do women have to the state? The closest she came was to describe the political woman as observer and commentator, not participant. If the ideas were valid, she wrote, "I think it very immaterial if they flow from a female lip in the soft whispers of private friendship or are thundered in the Senate in the bolder language of the other sex."[28] But it must be said that her belief that private recognition of woman's political potential is more important than public recognition loses some of its force when held up against the fact of her own publication of her history of the Revolution, and the fact that the "soft whispers" of the sister of James Otis and the wife of James Warren were more likely than those of most women to be heard by politically influential men. Warren's comments supported the notion that the family circle is a woman's state.

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It was left to postrevolutionary ideology in America to justify and popularize a political role for women, accomplishing what the English and French Enlightenment had not. Montesquieu had implied that if women had the choice they ought to choose to live in republics; Condorcet had said explicitly that republics were imperfect until they took account of the political claims of half of their people. But Americans did not move directly to the definition of women as citizens and voters. The only reference to women in *The Federalist* is to the dangers to the safety of the state posed by the private intrigues of courtesans and mistresses.[29] Instead, Americans offered an ironic compromise, one which merged Rousseau and Condorcet. It represented both an elaboration of the image of Sophie and a response to attacks like

[27] Reprinted in Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750–1776* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), I, 419–22.

[28] Mercy Otis Warren to Catharine Macaulay, 29 Dec. 1774, Mercy Otis Warren Letterbook, Massachusetts Historical Society.

[29] Edward Meade Earle, ed., *The Federalist* (New York: Modern Library, 1941), 28–29.

Rousseau's on the mental capacity of women. In this, as in so many other cases, Rousseau provided his own oxymoron.

The path *not* taken was suggested by one of the rare direct attacks on Rousseau that appeared in America, a pamphlet that contemplated the details of the integration of women into the political community. It came in 1801 from the pen of an "aged matron" from Connecticut who signed herself "The Female Advocate." She bristled at the arrogance of those who would deride "masculine women": if by

> the word "Masculine" be meant a person of reading and letters, a person of science and information, one who can properly answer a question, without fear and trembling, or one who is capable of doing business, with a suitable command over self, this I believe to be a glory to the one sex, equally with the other . . . custom, which is not infallible, has gradually introduced the habits of seeing an imaginary impropriety, that all science, all public utility, all superiority, all that is intellectually great and astonishing, should be engrossed exclusively by the male half of mankind.

The Female Advocate wished to function primarily as a citizen, only secondarily as a subject. She attacked contemporary refusals to include women in matters of church and public governance. She complained that "men engross all the emoluments, offices, honors and merits of church and state." She would grant that St. Paul had counseled women to be silent in public, and "learn from their husbands at home," but she pointed by contrast to St. Paul's own willingness to appoint women deaconesses. Women were not unsexed by taking part in community decisions:

> What if they have no husbands, or what if their husbands . . . are not of the church, or what if, as is very common, the husband knows less of the scriptures than the wife? . . . the point . . . is carried much too far, in the exclusive male prerogative to teach, to censure, to govern without the voice of women, or the least regard to the judgment or assent of the other sex. If a woman may not vote, or speak, on any occasion whatever, even tho' she have no husband, if she may not take any active part, by approbation or disapprobation, no not even in a silent vote, and that too when perhaps one of her sex is the subject of discipline or controversy, yea, when, farther, as is generally the case, the great majority of the church is female—how, pray you, is the sex to be viewed? Are they mere cyphers . . .?

The proper model for females, she thought, was the biblical Deborah, who lived actively in both the religious and the secular worlds: "Behold her wielding the sword with one hand, and the pen of wisdom with the other: her sitting at the council board, and there, by her superior talents, conducting the arduous affairs of military enterprise! Say now, shall woman be forever

destined solely to the distaff and the needle, and never expand an idea beyond the walls of her house?"[30]

Other Americans had also made demands for the direct participation of women in public affairs: there is the well-known comment by Abigail Adams, which her husband jokingly turned away, that women required the right to participate in the new system of government, arguing pointedly that "all men would be tyrants if they could." All her life Abigail Adams would be a shrewd private commentator on the political scene, assuming as active an obligation to judge good and evil as though she were called on annually to vote on it. But she was known, of course, only in a circle which, though relatively large, remained private. Charles Brockden Brown sneered at the "charming system of equality and independence" that denied women a part in the choice of their governors, but the circulation of *Alcuin* was small; St. George Tucker conceded that laws neither respected nor favored females, but he made the concession in a minor aside in a three-volume work.[31] The women whom Esther de Berdt Reed and Sarah Bache led through Philadelphia collecting contributions for the American soldiers in 1780 encountered many who thought, with Anna Rawle, that "of all absurdities the ladies going about for money exceeded everything." The campaign, as we know, was a success: they collected some 300,000 paper dollars, managed to keep Washington from merging it into the general funds "contributed by the gentlemen"; and they saw to it that the soldiers knew to whom they were indebted for their new and much-needed shirts. The effort formed the model for a score of postwar women's philanthropic groups, but it did not, it has to be said, provide a model of political action except by sacrifice.[32]

Direct political participation and influence require voting and office-holding. American intellectuals who sought to create a vehicle by which women might demonstrate their political competence shrank from that solution, hesitating to join the Female Advocate in the wish that women be admitted to active participation and leadership in civic government. To do so would have required a conceptual and political leap for which they were apparently not prepared. Instead of insisting that competence has no sex, an alternate model was proposed in the 1790s. It contained many traditional elements of the woman's role, but it also had a measure of critical bite.

The theorists of this alternate position were Judith Sargent Murray, Su-

[30] *The Female Advocate* (New Haven, Conn.: T. Green, 1801), 22, 10.

[31] *Alcuin; A Dialogue* (New York: Grossman, 1971), 32–33; St. George Tucker, ed., *Blackstone's Commentaries* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1803), II, 145, 445.

[32] Anna Rawle to Rebecca Rawle Shoemaker, June 30, 1780, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 35 (1911), 398; *The Sentiments of an American Woman* [broadside], Philadelphia, June 10, 1780.

sannah Rowson, and Benjamin Rush.[33] They deplored the "dependence for which women are uniformly educated"; they argued that political independence in the nation should be echoed by self-reliance on the part of women. The model republican woman was to be self-reliant (within limits); literate, untempted by the frivolities of fashion. She had a responsibility to the political scene, though not to act on it. As one fictional woman put it, "If the community flourish and enjoy health and freedom, shall we not share in the happy effect? If it be oppressed and disturbed, shall we not endure our proportion of evil? Why then should the love of our country be a masculine passion only?"[34] But her competence did not extend to the making of political decisions. Her political task was accomplished within the confines of her family. The model republican woman was a mother.

The Republican Mother's life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue; she educated her sons for it; she condemned and corrected her husband's lapses from it. If, as Montesquieu had maintained and as it was commonly assumed, the stability of the nation rested on the persistence of virtue among its citizens, then the creation of virtuous citizens was dependent on the presence of wives and mothers who were well informed, "properly methodical," and free of "invidious and rancorous passions." As one commencement speaker put it, "Liberty is never sure, 'till Virtue reigns triumphant. . . . While you [women] thus keep our country virtuous, you maintain its independence." It was perhaps more than mere coincidence that *virtù* was derived from the Latin for man, with its connotations of virility; political action seemed somehow inherently masculine. Virtue in a woman seemed to require another theater for its display. To that end the theorists created a mother who had a political purpose, and argued that her domestic behavior had a direct political function in the republic.[35]

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Western political theory, even during the Enlightenment, had only occasionally contemplated the role of women in the civic culture. It had habit-

[33]See especially Judith Sargeant Murray, *The Gleaner* (Boston: I. Thomas, 1798), III, 188–224, 260–65; Benjamin Rush, "Thoughts upon Female Education, Accommodated to the Present State of Society, Manners and Government in the United States of America" (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1787), reprinted in Frederick Rudolph, ed., *Essays on Education in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965); Susannah Rowson, *Reuben and Rachel* (Boston: Hanning and Loring, 1798).

[34]Hannah Foster, *The Coquette* (Charlestown, Mass.: E. and S. Larkin, 1802), 62.

[35]*New York Magazine,* May 1795, pp. 301–05. I have discussed this in greater detail in "Daughters of Columbia: Educating Women for the Republic, 1787–1805," in *The Hofstadter Aegis: A Memorial,* Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, eds. (New York: Knopf, 1974), 36–59. For the idealization of the Spartan mother, see Elizabeth Rowson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969).

ually considered women only in domestic relationships, only as wives and mothers. It had not devised any mode by which women might have a political impact on government or fulfill their obligations to it. The Republican Mother was a device which attempted to integrate domesticity and politics.

The ideology of Republican Motherhood also represented a stage in the process of women's political socialization. In recent years, we have become accustomed to thinking of political socialization as a *process* in which an individual develops a definition of self as related to the state.[36] One of the intermediate stages in that process might be called the deferential citizen: the person who expects to influence the political system, but only to a limited extent. Deference represents not the negation of citizenship, but an approach to full participation in the civic culture. The best description of the genre is Charles Sydnor's of the voters of Jefferson's Virginia, who freely chose their social superiors to office rather than exercise a claim on office themselves.

Deference was an attitude that many women adopted and displayed at a time when it was gradually being abandoned by men; the politicization of women and men, in America as elsewhere, was out of phase. Women were still thinking of themselves as subjects while men were deferential citizens; as the restrained, deferential democracy of the republic gave way to an aggressive, egalitarian democracy of a modern sort among men, women invented a restrained, deferential but nonetheless political role. The voters of colonial Virginia did not think themselves good enough to stand for election but they chose legislators; the deferential women whom Judith Sargeant Murray prescribed for the republic did not vote, but they took pride in their ability to mold citizens who would. This hesitancy of American women to become political actors would persist. Are not the women of the postsuffrage twentieth century who had the vote but did not use it to elect people like themselves to office similar to the deferential males of Sydnor's Virginia?

There was a direct relationship between developing egalitarian democracy among men and the expectation of continued deferential behavior among women. Émile needs Sophie; the society in which he functions cannot exist without her. Just as white democracy in the antebellum South rested on the economic base of slavery, so egalitarian society similarly rested on a moral base of continuing deferential behavior among a class of people—women—who would devote their efforts to service: raising sons and disciplining husbands to be virtuous citizens of the republic. The learned woman, who

[36]See Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963). Almond and Verba view politicization as a gradual process by which individuals cease to think of themselves as invariably acted *on* by the state, and end by thinking of themselves as *actors*, who force governments to respond to them. There are many stages along this continuum, and there is room for internal contradictions.

might very well wish to make choices as well as influence attitudes, was a visible threat to this arrangement.[37] A political community that accepted women as political actors would have to eliminate the Rousseauean assumption that the world in which women live is separate from the empire of men. The political traditions on which American politics were built offered little assistance in defining the point at which the woman's private domain intersected with the public one. The Republican Mother seemed to offer a solution.

The notion that mothers perform a political function is not silly; it represents the recognition that political socialization takes place at an early age, and that the patterns of authority experienced in families are important factors in the general political culture. The willingness of American women to discuss politics at home is apparently more characteristic than in other western democracies; so is the rate of women's interaction in their communities, their rate of office holding in voluntary associations.[38] Americans live—and have long lived—in a political culture in which the family is a basic part of the system of political communication. This did not "just happen." It is a behavior pattern that challenges far older ones. The separation of male and female domains within a community is a very ancient practice, maintained by a wide range of often unarticulated but nevertheless very firm social restrictions.[39] There are nations today—even fairly modern democracies—in which these separate domains and premodern patterns still shape the political community: where women are much less likely than their American counterparts to discuss politics; where men are much more likely to carry on their political discussions among men, outside the home. In premodern political cultures mothers do not assume a clear political function. In this sense, Republican Motherhood was a very important—even revolutionary—invention. It altered the female domain in which most women had always lived out their lives; it justified an extension of women's absorption and participation in the civic culture.

In the years of the early republic there developed the consensus that a mother could not be a citizen but that she might serve a political purpose. Those who said that women ought to play no political role at all had to meet

[37] It is hard to find objective grounds for a fear of learned ladies; as Kenneth Lockridge has shown, literacy among women lagged substantially behind literacy among men in the colonial years. The subject has been insufficiently studied, but it appears that women's literacy rates do not catch up with men's until well into the nineteenth century. See Kenneth Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1974), 38–42; Daniel Calhoun, *The Intelligence of a People* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), Appendix A.

[38] Almond and Verba, 377–401.

[39] On female spheres, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1 (1975), 1–30; Rayna Reiter, ed. *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

the proposal that women might play a deferential political role through the raising of a patriotic child. The concept of Republican Motherhood began to fill the gap left by the political theorists of the Enlightenment. It would continue to be used by women well into the twentieth century; one thinks of the insistence of Progressive women reformers that the obligations of women to ensure honesty in politics, efficient urban sanitation, pure food and drug laws were extensions of their responsibilities as mothers. But the ideology of Republican Motherhood had limitations; it provided a context in which skeptics could easily maintain that women should be content to perform this limited political role permanently and ought not to wish fuller participation. For one woman, Republican Motherhood might mean an extension of vistas; for another it could be stifling. The ambivalent relationship between motherhood and citizenship would be one of the most lasting, and most paradoxical, legacies of the revolutionary generation.*

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