Women in Western Political Thought

Women in Western Political Thought. By Susan Okin. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

Women in Western Political Thought, by Susan B. Okin, is an examination of how political philosophers of the West viewed women and the family. Okin selects Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill for detailed analysis, because these thinkers have made substantial, interesting, and thought-provoking contributions to the subject of women (7). She finds that the philosophers' view of women is derivative from their view of the family. Those philosophers who regarded the family as natural "defined women by their sexual, procreative, and child-rearing functions." Consequently, they failed to apply to women their philosophic methods of arriving at man's nature. Okin writes,

> They have sought for the nature of women not, as for the nature of men, by attempting to separate out the effects of nurture, and to discover what innate potential exists beneath the overlay which results from socialization and other environmental factors. The nature of women, instead, has been seen to be dictated by whatever social and economic structure that philosophers favor and to be defined as whatever best suits her prescribed functions in that society (10).

Because this unfair treatment of women is required by the social and economic structures which the philosophers favor, Okin's criticism of their view of women calls into question their understanding of society in general. Okin therefore doubts that "the works which form the basis of our political and philosophical heritage...continue to be relevant" (4).

In the last part of her book, Okin analyzes the place of women and the family in the works of Talcott Parsons and Erik Erikson and in the decisions of the American Supreme Court. She finds that the assumptions about women which she criticized in political theorists are shared by these influential figures in sociology and psychology as well as by Supreme Court judges. Her criticisms of political theorists attempt to expose the incorrect assumptions "behind deeply rooted

modes of thought that continue to affect people's lives in major ways" (13). Her findings therefore shed light, she believes, on why the political gains of the feminist movement-the enfranchisement of women-have not resulted in "real equalities [for women] in the economic and social aspects of their lives" (3) . Her undertaking is no mere academic pursuit, but an attempt to advance the feminist movement. By revealing the misconceptions of traditional political theory, she criticizes the common assumptions that hinder the full achievement of equality.

The assumptions that stand in the way of equality, moreover, are those that support the family, as it currently exists in our society. Okin approves of socialist thinkers, since their understanding of history implies that social institutions are derived not from nature but from a society's economic structure. Socialist thinkers are therefore "less inclined than most other political theorists to regard the family as a necessary and fixed human institution" (9). The contribution of socialist thinkers to the subject of women is so considerable, Okin says, that it requires a separate study, for which her book "constitutes an essential foundation" and which she hopes to undertake (9).

Okin is well aware of the political significance of her criticism of traditional political theory. By discrediting its assumptions about women and the family, Okin is preparing the way for a completely egalitarian society. That society will abolish the family, at least insofar as the family implies different roles for men and women. Okin's study of political theory helps her, I believe, to understand the intimate connection between the family and the regime of which it is a part. Because of her comprehensive view of these issues, her book merits serious consideration.

I shall examine Okin's interpretations of Plato, Aristotle, and Rousseau, the philosophers whom Okin criticizes most severely. Unlike John Stuart Mill, the fourth thinker whom she discusses, these three philosophers base their political theories on the existence of natural differences between men and women. Okin attributes their views primarily to their prejudices in favor of the family. I shall offer different interpretations of the role of women in the political thought of these three philosophers. In general, I shall argue that they tried to preserve a distinct role for women, not out of prejudice, but because they saw that women could make a unique and necessary contribution to human life. We can learn from these thinkers that true feminism does not seek to eliminate the distinction

between the sexes, but explores and develops the capacities or attributes that belong to women.

I. Plato

Okin notices that Plato's dialogues contain both progressive statements about the equality of women and statements that relegate women to inferior status. She examines this apparent contradiction by looking at the Greek culture in which Plato lived. She finds in Plato's "youthful environment" both "a trace of radical thought about women" and "a strong tradition of misogynic prejudice" (22) which viewed women "only as the instruments of reproduction of legitimate heirs" (20). Both radical thought and traditional prejudice, she maintains, are reflected in Plato's philosophy.

One example which Okin gives of the progressive side of Plato's thought is his portrayal of Socrates' approach to virtue. In the *Meno,* Okin writes, Socrates makes "the radical assertion that virtue is the same quality in a woman as in a man, not different, as Meno tried to claim by referring to the traditionally different duties and life styles of the two sexes" (21). Socrates' approach to virtue therefore implies that there is no significant difference between men and women, for the same standard of human excellence applies to both of them. Okin also sympathizes with the *Republic's* communism and equality of the sexes. She credits Plato with understanding that the different roles of men and women come not from nature, but from the conventions and institutions of society. Plato does not make the mistake of millions of people, she writes, of assuming "that the entire conventional female sex role follows logically from the single fact that women bear children" (41).

> The real significance of the treatment of the subject of women in Book V of the *Republic* is that it is one of the very few instances in the history of thought when the biological implications of femaleness have been clearly separated out from all the conventional, institutional, and emotional baggage that has usually been identified with them (41).

According to Okin, Plato believes that nature is not fixed or innate, but the result of environment or education. Good nurtures produce good natures, Socrates says in the *Republic (53).* And the legislator in the *Laws* similarly believes in the flexibility of nature: the dif-

ferences between men and women, no less than the development of right-handedness, he implies, are the result of "a one-sided socialization process" (61-64). Plato's "central standard," Okin concludes, is "the rational, not the natural" (68).

Because Okin herself believes in the indeterminateness of nature, she defends Plato against those scholars who believe that the *Republic's* institutions are unnatural. There are those like Grube, who think that the temporary matings demanded of the guardians "[do] violence to the deepest human emotions," and criticize Plato accordingly. Or there are those, like Strauss and Bloom, who argue that Plato was aware of the unnaturalness of the *Republic's* institutions and did not intend them to be models for cities (34). Both groups, Okin believes, read Plato in light of their own prejudices that favor the family as a natural institution. But the family does not necessarily serve the purposes these scholars attribute to it. In Greek society, Okin points out, the family was primarily an economic institution. Homosexual relationships rather than families provided the locus of a Greek's emotional life. Therefore "Plato and his audience would not have regarded the abolition of the family as a severe limitation *of* their intimate lives" (34). Indeed, Okin maintains that the restrictions Greek society placed upon women were not less severe than the *Republic's* communism (35).

Okin nevertheless criticizes Plato for being insufficiently radical. She disapproves, for example, of the rationale of the *Republic's* communism. Communism of property, an expedient to curb human selfishness, implied to Plato communism of women, whom he regarded as articles of property. Once families had been abolished Plato had no reason to accord different treatment to men and women. The equality of the *Republic is* therefore not established for its own sake, but comes as a concomitant of the institutional arrangements (29-33). Similarly, in the *Laws,* the relationship between the sexes is determined by the institutional arrangements advocated. When the Athenian Stranger establishes a community with private property and families, he also assumes that men and women will have different roles. Plato therefore does not treat men and women equally, in spite of his awareness that sex roles do not follow from nature. He arranges the lives of men and women in accordance with the institutions that he believes are reasonable. He does appeal to nature, but he is merely using "the powerful sanction of nature, in cases where it is applicable, in order to add weight to the conclusions he has reached by means of rational argument" (68).

Okin assumes that Plato uses Socrates and the Athenian Stranger merely as his spokesmen, without considering the possibility that Plato is using them, like his other characters, to serve dramatic purposes. Plato's position should not be identified with any taken by his characters, but it must be understood from an interpretation of the dialogue as a whole. Identifying Plato with his principal interlocutors, Okin views him as searching for a single definition of virtue, advocating communism and equality of the sexes, and believing in the flexibility of nature. In each case, her interpretation attributes to him a denial of natural difference. Interpretation of the dramatic action of dialogues, however, suggests that such a denial is ultimately neither possible nor desirable.

Okin's statement about the *Meno,* for example, ignores the fact that Socrates fails to define virtue in the universal terms he seeks. When he looks for virtue in abstraction from its particular manifestations he finds nothing at all. In the *Meno,* Plato leaves us with two unsatisfactory alternatives. Meno can say what are the conventional virtues of particular groups of human beings, such as men and women, without seeing that anything more is necessary. But Socrates, who tries to find the unity of virtue, cannot say what virtue is. Plato is critical not only of Meno but of Socrates himself: the philosophic tendency to transcend the particulars of time and place can lead to a contentless universality.

In the *Republic,* assumptions about the openness of nature permit, as Okin argues, the institution of communism. But like the *Meno's* search for a single definition of virtue, those assumptions ignore the existence of natural diversity. Far from being Plato's own assumptions, they lead, Plato shows, to a tyrannical rejection of limits to which politics is prone, especially when aided by a certain kind of unrestrained philosophy. This tyrannical rejection of limits stems from a passion Plato calls "spiritedness," which occupies a prominent place in the *Republic.* Spiritedness is central in Socrates' description of the soul. Socrates argues that spiritedness is a distinct part of the soul, having the same status as the more readily recognized desiring and knowing parts. As an example of spiritedness, Socrates refers to a man's anger with himself for looking at decaying corpses *(Rep.,* 439d-440b). Spiritedness, it seems, rebels at the decomposition of the body. It is the urge toward preservation in the face of natural decay, the urge toward unity when disintegration threatens. It is therefore appropriate that spiritedness in the soul corresponds to the warrior class in the city for the warriors preserve

the integrity of the city, when external or internal enemies threaten to dissolve its unity. In both the soul and the city, spiritedness tries to prevent the parts from predominating over the wholes that they form. Spiritedness tends to deny particulars, inasmuch as they might limit or threaten wholeness. The desire for unity thus leads to a spirited denial of natural differences, a denial that Plato believes lies behind political life.

Spiritedness' forceful suppression of natural differences becomes manifest in restrictions on privacy. The institution of communism represents an extreme form of spiritedness. Communism deprives men and women of the distinct identities that emerge when they have relationships with families and friends of their own. In accordance with this assimilation of human beings to one another, the *Republic* denies that there are any significant differences between men and women. The city of the *Republic is* stripped of any element peculiar to women *(Rep.,* 455c).

What this womanly element might be and why spiritedness might attempt to eliminate it become clearer from Plato's presentation of Diotima in the *Symposium.* Diotima is one of the few women in Plato's works, and through her Plato presents a womanly perspective. In the *Symposium,* Socrates recounts Diotima's attempt to teach him about love. For Diotima, as Okin notes, procreation is "the symbol around which the theory of love is built" (24). Diotima pictures all men as pregnant, seeking beautiful beloveds, on whom they can give birth *(Sym.,* 206c). Love is not a disinterested love of the beautiful but a love "of begetting and giving birth on the beautiful" *(Sym.,* 207c-d; 208e-209e; 212a). Consequently, she emphasizes nurturing, noting, for example, how parents are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their children *(Sym.,* 207b; see also 209c). Oddly enough, Diotima's image of pregnant humanity does not apply to Socrates, as he presents himself in the *Theaetetus-a* midwife who helps others to give birth but who himself is barren (Th., 150c). Socrates' image of himself is one of self-denial, whereas Diotima's image of humanity is one of self-assertion. Moreover, in contrast to Diotima, Socrates gives a mythic account of love in the *Phaedrus* that attributes little importance to begetting, giving birth, and nurturing *(Phdr.,* 250e-251a; 256b-d). Presumably, it is because of her role in procreation that a woman understands and feels more surely than a man the human need to have something of one's own. She appears less able to deny the particular, less able to yield what is private for the sake of the corn-

munity, more certain of the limits of nature. She would be less willing to make the sacrifice which the "manly" Glaucon *(Rep.,* 357a) so easily accepts-the abolition of private property and the family. She would find communism unacceptable, for it severs human beings from what they generate. Because her vision focuses on generation and love of one's own, she would moderate the *Republic's* spirited drive for unity. It is now clearer why the *Republic* attacks the womanly. The womanly is not merely one element among others that makes absolute unity impossible. By strengthening love of one's own and the human sense of particularity, it provides psychological support for the ability to make distinctions. It helps to keep men open to the irreducible diversity of nature.

Through Diotima's speech on love, Plato suggests that there are natural differences between men and women. Should such differences exist, living in families might be a way in which those differences could be explored and developed. Of course, there would be other ways of doing this. Families themselves might perform this function more or less well in a given society, depending on their organization and the purposes they serve. Conventions, although they vary from society to society, might support nature to different degrees. If this were the case, even the Greek family, with the severe restrictions on women that Okin may justly deplore, might be more in accord with nature than the communism with which she sympathizes.

Okin believes that although Diotima seems to accept the importance of women by basing her theory of love on heterosexual love, she in fact depreciates the role of women. As she describes the higher types of love, she denigrates physical procreation in favor of a procreation belonging to the mind, whose adherents "conceive and bear the things of the spirit" (24). But women play no necessary role in this form of procreation, which Okin believes Plato reserves for men. It is "quite clear" to her that "Plato's vision of love as a pathway to philosophic joy entirely excludes women" (25). I would argue, to the contrary, that Diotima's move to the highest kind of love, far from eliminating women, carries the womanly love of one's own to a dangerous extreme. In the highest love Diotima describes, the lovers give birth without the aid of human beloveds, for they give birth on the beautiful itself *(Sym.,* 211c-212a). Even in the lesser forms of love that Diotima describes, although they do involve human beloveds, the pregnant lover merely uses his beloved to help him bring forth his child. His offspring remains fundamentally his

own. Insofar as Diotima seeks a beloved, she seems to want someone whom she can use but with whom she does not have to share herself. It is Socrates' image of his midwifery that recognizes the interdependence involved in pregnancy that Diotima denies. It is no wonder that Socrates calls her a sophist *(Sym.,* 208c) for she evinces an intractable selfishness that makes community impossible. Womanly openness to the heterogeneity of nature is necessary to protect individuality, but if unchecked, Plato suggests, it obstructs the spirited formation of communities that give completeness to human life.

In Diotima's praise of love, Plato shows the extreme to which the womanly can lead, if it is not moderated by the manly, while in the *Republic,* he shows the extreme produced by the manly, unrestrained by the womanly. Diotima's lovers use others as means for their own ends, or, at best, isolate themselves from others in order to reproduce themselves. The communism of the *Republic,* on the other hand, eliminates the individuality Diotima craves. Plato's writing attempts to moderate both extremes. It opens human beings to the possibility of community, but it also appeals to their love of their own in order to counter the spirited pursuit of unity. In the *Meno,* for example, Plato shows the failure of the search for an abstract virtue. In the *Republic,* he presents a monstrous regime which sacrifices men's families, friends, their individual loves and hates, and even their souls.

Plato points to the danger of the spirited denial of diversity also in his choice of the dialogue form of writing. To understand the Platonic dialogue, one must interpret the interplay between words, which present general or abstract arguments, and actions, which involve particular men in particular cirumstances. Deeds show us where words go wrong; they tie words down and make them less abstract. On the other hand, deeds are not isolated happenings that can be understood immediately, or in their own terms. They call for interpretations that give meaning, and that strive for comprehensiveness as they encompass the action. Interpretations can be shared because they are articulated. Whereas the presence of deeds makes us aware of the limits particulars place upon words, the possibility and the necessity of interpreting the deeds point the way toward forming a community.

Moreover, Platonic dialogues are famous for leaving the questions clearer than the answers. Questions bring into focus the partiality or incompleteness of our grasp of the whole. They check the spirited

destruction of whatever stands in the way of unity, while they impel us to go forward in our search. We do not rest content with the parts, but model ourselves on Socrates and his interlocutors. Their relationship suggests a community which transcends but does not negate their private existences. Platonic writing, in all these ways, comprehends the manly and the womanly.

Okin's interpretation of Plato denies him this comprehensiveness. When she argues that Diotima's theory of love ultimately excludes women, for example, Okin neglects the love of one's own that moderates the spirited quest for homogeneity but also obstructs the formation of communities. When she accepts without reservation Socrates' approach to virtue in the *Meno,* she ignores the diversity of virtue which Meno, in spite of his shallowness, senses. Finally, Okin's criticism of the *Republic* does not reach the criticism that Plato intended-communism is not merely a curb on human selfishness, as Okin argues, but a result of the tyrannical urge for unity. In all these cases, Okin implicitly denies what Plato thinks of as a womanly element. She therefore implicitly accepts the *Republic's* denial that women have something of their own to contribute.

II. Aristotle

For Okin, Aristotle is the archvillain of the history of political theory:

> To the extent that Plato advances the rational discussion of women and their potential, Aristotle set it back again, and the history of political thought about women has unfortunately up to the present time consisted predominantly of footnotes to the Aristotelian legacy (235).

Okin contrasts Plato, who questions society's conventions, with Aristotle, who develops a philosophic framework that "legitimize[s] the status quo" (80). Aristotle "sets out to acquire knowledge of the way the world is, and, moreover, to explain why it is the way it is" (23). Things are the way they are, Aristotle believes, because of the function they perform in relation to one another and to the world as a whole. Everything has a place in a hierarchical, interconnecting world (74-75). Okin calls Aristotle's view of the world "functionalism." Women have a function within a family, slaves have a function to perform in relation to a master, and men, at least the most capable, have as their function rational activity. As Okin ex-

plains Aristotle, "only those [human beings] at the very top of the hierarchy have a function which is defined only in relation to themselves and not to others" (89).

According to Aristotle, nature sanctions, even determines, the function that belongs to each thing. Okin quotes Aristotle, "nature makes nothing in a spirit of stint... to serve a number of purposes; she makes each separate thing for a separate end" (81). From this statement, one might think that everything is limited to its one natural function. Okin thus presents Aristotle's view of nature as fixed and rigid, with every entity locked into a hierarchical system of relationships. Okin also asserts that what Aristotle views as natural are really the hierarchical relationships of his own society. Because he fails to understand that conventions are imposed upon a malleable nature, he does not see the openness of nature that Okin believes even Plato saw. By presenting Greek conventions as natural, Aristotle legitimizes the status quo. In Okin's view, he believes that "every person...is naturally suited to his or her existing role in society" (80).

It is not the case, however, that Aristotle legitimizes the status quo to the extent that Okin says. By the "function" of something Aristotle means the "work" or "activity" that it performs when it has fully developed its natural potential. Okin to the contrary, Aristotle does not identify the function of each individual with the conventional function he performs in Greek society. Okin argues, for example, that since man's function is rational activity, "society is most properly structured when it enables the privileged few to spend their lives in rational activity" (81). Even if Okin is correct about Aristotle's view of a properly-structured society, does this view legitimize the status quo? Aristotle claimed that most of the societies that existed in his day were democracies or oligarchies-two of his perverted forms of regime. It is unlikely that he thought societies were organized to promote the rational activity of the privileged few. The teaching that the function of man is rational activity and that of political communities is to aim at the good life has revolutionary implications for Greek society. Aristotle is not the conservative Okin believes.

Not only does Aristotle's functionalism fail to legitimize the status quo, it does not even have as much rigidity as first appears. Aristotle seems most rigid in his argument that there are natural slaves. But an examination of his discussion of natural slavery reveals that nature cannot produce a class of men who at the same time are useful to masters and deserve to be enslaved. His argument therefore constitutes an attack on slavery.

Aristotle first defines the slave in contrast to the master: the master foresees what is to be done with his mind; the slave has the body necessary to carry out what the master foresees *(Pol.,* 1252a31-34). But he then mentions that masters need slaves for a variety of purposes, some even necessitating the foresight that was supposed to differentiate the master from the slave *(Pol.* 1253b33-1254a1) . The slave who fits Aristotle's definition of a natural slave and for whom slavery is just would not make a good slave, since a good slave must acquire some of the characteristics of a master. Aristotle indicates that the good slave should be taught not only a variety of skills that require some use of intelligence *(Pol.* **1255b23-28),** but also moral virtue *(Pol.,* 1260a34 ff.). He acknowledges the truth of the proverb, "slave differs from slave, master from master" *(Pol.,* 1255b30). If human beings are more or less masters and slaves, more or less capable of exercising intelligence and using their bodies, the distinction between master and slave is not absolute. There is gradation and the possibility of development rather than the fixed classes which the law of slavery presupposes. That law suffers the defect that Aristotle attributes to law in general: posed in general terms, law may fail to encompass the particulars to which it applies *(Pol.,* 1286a10-13; 1286a23). The injustice of slavery follows from the openness of nature.

This openness of nature to development in different directions applies to women as well. Okin says that Aristotle believed that woman's primary function is reproduction. She implies that such a conception places unjust limitations upon women. But Okin herself notes that whereas Aristotle perceives woman as "fundamentally an instrument for breeding men," "within [Aristotle's] well-ordered society, reproduction is not woman's only function" (83). In fact, Okin notes, Aristotle divides the various purposes of life served by the household between men and women: whereas the man acquires, the woman stores and keeps (84). Intent on criticizing Aristotle for differentiating sex roles, Okin does not realize the significance of Aristotle's statement for his view of the relationship between men and women. Athough men and women originally come together for one purpose, other purposes emerge as they continue to associate. While the original end of the family is the preservation of the species *(Pol.,* 1252a28-30), the highest function of the family is the education of its members in virtue *(Pol.,* 1259b18-22). That the function of the family within the political community goes beyond that of the prepolitical family indicates the family's flexibility *(Pol.* 1252b9-14).

Moreover, the family's function varies from regime to regime *(Pol.,* 1252b10-18). Contrary to Okin, who attributes to Aristotle a rigid notion of function, Aristotle's view allows for the diversity that necessarily emerges when human institutions develop in an infinite number of particular contexts.

Diversity occurs not simply because of different material circumstances but because of human choice. The role of choice in development is obvious from Aristotle's description of the city's growth. The city may be "by nature," but it also has a founder *(Pol.,* 1253a30-32). Like the family, the city is able to acquire ends higher than those implied in its origins. It comes into being for the sake of life, yet it continues to exist for the sake of the good life *(Pol.,* 1252b-28-31).

The development of any institution or capacity, however much it may be modified by human choice acting upon particular circumstances, is grounded in its original nature or purpose. The origins should not entirely determine development, but neither should they be denied. The city, for example, should not forget the necessity of mere life when it tries to institute justice. It should be aware of the limits that its original purpose imposes upon it. Whatever different directions nature may take when modified by particular circumstances and by choice, there is a nature on which the variety is grounded. Similarly, Aristotle did not think that the physical differences between men and women, which account for the original purpose of their union, could be ignored as their relationship developed in different directions. The openness of nature does not imply that natural differences can or should be eliminated. As Aristotle claims, the same moral virtues have different manifestations in men and women: a man should possess the courage of command, for example, a woman the courage of service *(Pol.,* 1260a20-24). Moreover, some virtues are appropriate to women, others to men *(Pal.,* 1260a24-33).

Aristotle illustrates that some virtues are fitting for women by quoting Sophocles' *Ajax:* "silence gives grace to woman" *(Pol.,* 1260a31). The context of this quotation reveals an irony in Aristotle's use of it. Ajax, driven mad by Athena, mistakes a herd of beasts for his enemies, and is about to slaughter them. When his wife Tecmessa questions his intentions, he dismisses her with the words that Aristotle quotes. Honor demands that he avenge himself, and Tecmessa, he believes, has no place in the male world of honor and insult. Yet Tecmessa's caution, had it influenced Ajax, would have

prevented him from further dishonoring himself by slaughtering the beasts. It is a mad man, Aristotle says by quoting the *Ajax,* who does not listen to the good advice of a woman. Tecmessa would have been graced not by silence, as Ajax claimed, but by a more effective way of influencing her husband than mere speech provided her. Moreover, the dishonor involved in Ajax's mad actions later impels him to suicide. Tecmessa wants to prevent his suicide, but she does not find him in time. Her grief affirms the goodness of life. Ajax's suicide, on the other hand, reveals his perception that life is not worth living at all costs. His suicide manifests a distance from what is immediately his own that Tecmessa lacks. Aristotle's quotation of Sophocles therefore reveals the virtues appropriate to men and women in a way much deeper than that suggested by the surface. The woman, perhaps closer to natural necessity than man through her role in childbirth, may curb the manly assertion against necessity-an assertion which lies at the foundation and development of civilization but which also leads Ajax to suicide and men to found cities as tyrannical as that in the *Republic.* This may be the service in which woman's courage is manifest-a service rendered to men who exercise the courage of command.

That women should exercise "the courage of service" does not mean that women should merely serve the purposes of men. When Aristotle states that nature made each thing for a purpose of its own, he was supporting his argument that women should not be treated as slaves. When the barbarians did so, he said, they were acting against nature *(Pol.,* 1252b1-7). He is suggesting that women have an integrity that men should recognize, that they should not be subordinated like a slave to the ends or purposes of others. Both women and men contribute in different ways, Aristotle indicates, to comprehensive human life.

When Aristotle states that those who enumerate the virtues of different persons are more correct than those who give a general definition of virtue *(Pol.,* 1260a25-29), he seems to prefer Meno's position to that of Socrates. I have argued that Plato thinks that both positions are defective but presents no resolution that corrects the defects, other than indirectly through his own writing. Similarly, although Plato is aware of the defects both of the *Republic's* city and of Diotima's praise of love, he himself presents no account of politics or love that remedies the defects. Aristotle differs from Plato in seeing a greater probability that diversity can constitute a healthy tension for human life. Specifically, he suggests that the manly and the

womanly can complete each other rather than be forever at odds. Politics itself for Aristotle incorporates both tradition and novelty, stability and growth *(Pol.,* 1269a13-28; 1273b26-74b26; 1260b26-37), aspects that resemble the masculine characteristic of acquiring and the feminine characteristic of preserving and storing. Aristotle understands statesmanship, including his own, to be a combination of masculine and feminine virtues-the masculine ordering of the parts of a city into a whole, together with a feminine recognition of the integrity of the parts. As Aristotle said in criticism of the *Republic's* communism, any city is made up of a diversity *(Pol.,* 1261a23-24), that is, it is neither the homogeneous unity aimed at by communism nor a random assortment of elements that lack coherence. Oldn's egalitarianism apparently accounts for her inability to appreciate this possibility.

III. Rousseau

According to Okin, modern liberal thought is founded "on the characteristics and rights of individual, atomistic, human beings" (199). She argues, however, that modern liberal thinkers deviate from the standard of individual autonomy in their treatment of women. Although women are as independent in the state of nature as men, they are subordinate to men once civil society is formed. Okin writes,

> Whereas the liberal tradition appears to be talldng about individuals, as components of political systems, it is in fact talking about male-headed families. Whereas the interests of the male actors in the political realm are perceived as discrete, and often conflicting, the interests of the members of the family of each patriarch are perceived as entirely convergent with his own.

In subsuming the interests of the wife under those of the husband, liberal theory makes the unwarranted assumption that the self-interested behavior of individuals in political communities does not operate within the family (281). Thus modern liberal thinkers make the same mistake as Aristotle: they define woman's nature by her function as wife and mother. Okin would like to rid liberalism of this internal contradiction.

Okin centers her examination of modern political thinkers on Rousseau. Rousseau is in the liberal tradition because he accepts the standard of individual autonomy, and even carries it further than early liberals such as Hobbes and Locke. Locke's self-interested man

of commerce, who is protected by liberal regimes in his pursuit of gain and pleasure, is not really free according to Rousseau. Such a man is vain, ambitious, and greedy, and therefore dependent on others both for his opinion of himself and for the satisfaction of his desires. Society, which liberalism thought would protect man's freedom, Rousseau argues, in fact makes man dependent and deprives him of the self-sufficiency that is naturally his. Rousseau's education of Emile aims at restoring this natural condition of independence and autonomy. The *Emile* seeks to produce, as Okin says, "a universal man, adaptable to any situation and free of all restricting attachments" (170). As universal man, he has no particular profession, nor does he belong to a particular class of society (125). At birth, he is removed from his parents, who represent the origins that are uniquely his own. His freedom is manifest as well in his having no habits. Without habits, which distinguish men from one another and give them a character of their own, Emile is truly a "universal man. Not determined by anything accidental or particular, he is independent of all times, places, and people. Rousseau's education of such a free and independent man aims at producing the autonomous individual that liberalism sought but failed to find.

Although Rousseau makes Emile free and independent, he approves of a completely different education for Sophie, Emile's future wife. She is brought up by her own parents, and educated in the laws and customs of her own country. Unlike Emile, who is oblivious to the opinion's of others, Sophie is taught to consider what effect her actions will have on others, and how she may please them (163). She is "connected" in all the ways in which Emile is "disconnected." Her life is made up of relationships with particular people, times, and places.

Okin views Rousseau's education of Sophie as a more blatant example of the inconsistency she spotted in liberalism. Rousseau follows liberalism in failing to apply to women the standard of liberty and equality. This, Okin argues, results in tragedy, not simply for women, but for the family itself. In an unfinished sequel to the *Emile,* Rousseau himself recognizes that Sophie's marriage will not work. Sophie is distraught when one of their children dies, Emile brings her to Paris for distraction, she commits adultery, and Emile rejects her when she becomes pregnant with another man's child. Okin believes that this tragedy stems from Sophie's education, which makes contradictory demands upon her-"that she behave

like a concubine with her husband and like a nun with all other men" (172). The lack of autonomy implied in marital fidelity, however, is only one illustration of the general dependence which Sophie's education fosters. For example, had Sophie not been so dependent on what she cannot control, had she been more like Emile, she would not have been so distressed by the death of her child (L,70). If Rousseau realized that Sophie's dependence would have tragic consequences, why, then, would he educate her in the way he did? According to Okin, Rousseau's treatment of women is due primarily to a fear of their sexual power over men. Rousseau thought, Okin says, "that if women were not subordinated to men in certain important ways, they would predominate over them altogether" (148, see also 100). He therefore deprived them of the education that fosters an autonomous, independent human being.

A principled reason for the education of Sophie, however, can be given. In the first place, the differences between men and woman which Rousseau describes do not necessarily imply the inferiority of women to men, as Okin believes. For example, Okin places Rousseau in a tradition that views man as having "limitless potential for rational thought, creativity, and so on" (99). That tradition sees women as "intuitive and equipped with a talent for detail," but "deficient in rationality and quite incapable of abstract thought" (100). By associating rationality with abstract thought, Okin subtly misrepresents Rousseau's position. Rousseau believes that the abstract rationality he associates with man must be curbed by the rationality of woman, who is better able to understand details or particulars. Moreover, the difference is necessary for community. Absolutely identical persons have no reason to relate to each other. As Okin herself presents Rousseau's reasoning, "if men and women were each endowed with a complete set of talents, instead of being mutually dependent, they would live in never-ending discord, and relations between them would be impossible" (134). Sophie's education fosters her distinctively feminine capacities, and therefore secures the difference that makes community possible.. Moreover, in her connection to particular people, times, and places, as well as in her capacity to deal with details, Sophie provides the abstract Emile with a "particularity" that he lacks. Those connections are necessary, Rousseau thinks, for the sake of community, and community is necessary for happiness. In suggesting that the nuclear family, in which men and women have different but complementary roles, is necessary for happiness, Rousseau is trying to correct

the individualism of the liberal tradition. That tradition provided an insufficient ground for community-the calculation of self-interest. Autonomous individuals are not in need of one another.

Rousseau, then, attempted to correct liberalism by providing men with two goods, autonomy and community, of which liberalism gave men only pallid versions. However, Rousseau also teaches that these goods, as he conceives them, are in irreconcilable tension with each other. We learn this from the failure of Emile's and Sophie's marriage. The marriage between an independent Emile and a dependent Sophie will not work; freedom or autonomy cannot be wed to community. And, contrary to Okin, the fault is with Emile's education at least as much as with Sophie's: Emile cannot tolerate Sophie when she fails to live up to the ideal he sought in a woman, that is, when she reveals that she is not an abstract image of perfection but a human being with particular weaknesses as well as strengths. The independent, natural man Rousseau educated cannot function within the family (179). Rousseau's twofold correction of liberalism therefore leads to tragedy-a tragedy avoided by liberalism, due to its less demanding, if less satisfying, versions of freedom and community.

Okin does not accept Rousseau's tragic teaching. Tragedy would be avoided, she appears to believe, if Sophie were educated so that she possessed more of Emile's autonomy. Although Okin realizes that Emile fails as a social man with a natural education, she still finds him attractive in his independence: "the end of the story is not totally pessimistic either. Emile survives the abortive attempt to make him into a husband, father and citizen, and becomes what he was always intended to be-a natural and autonomous man" (194; see also 169-70). Okin is nevertheless unwilling to sacrifice community in order to attain autonomy. She apparently does not like the fact, for example, that Emile is unfitted "for emotional closeness" (169). Rather than reject community, she rejects Rousseau's teaching that autonomy and community are in conflict. Autonomous individuals will freely choose to form the communities they wish. Long-term, even permanent, social groups besides the family, Okin believes, should be accorded the same status by law and political theory as has been accorded in the past to families alone (283). Moreover, families themselves need not deprive men of freedom, for they do not necessitate the sex roles they have produced in the past. Because a woman's role in childbirth has no deeper implications for her role in the family, and because men and women

could share equally the rearing of children, even the family could provide community without violating individual autonomy. But whether men and women choose to live in families or other kinds of social groups, the communities individuals choose should be recognized, for "Society is becoming atomized enough, even without the complete denial of the groups in which people live their intimate lives and in which they depend on each other for economic, emotional,. and other forms of support" (282).

The free communities Okin approves of have no foundation in nature. In fact, Okin rejects nature as a standard by which men should order their lives. Human nature, she writes, "is not something which has been fixed and will continue to be fixed for all time, but is rather an achievement, a result of thousands of years of history" (298). Nor does Okin believe that individuals today are bound by history, for history itself frees humanity from "the demands of nature" (298). If communities are rooted in neither nature nor history, however, they could be dismissed, it seems, as easily as they are chosen. Okin's position therefore encourages a rootlessness in man. Her reliance on freely-chosen communities does not answer Rousseau's position. Rousseau understood the necessity that communities be grounded in natural differences.

IV. Conclusion

Plato and Aristotle both recognize natural differences between the sexes. For Plato, the characteristics which typically belong to men and those which typically belong to women are both necessary for human life, but they appear to be in conflict, at least at the practical or political level. By showing us the masculine suppression of the feminine in the *Republic,* and the feminine intransigence to community in Diotima's theory of love, he presents the extremes to which the masculine and feminine tendencies lead if each is not balanced by the other. But Plato does not show us how that balancing can occur, except in his own activity as a writer. Aristotle agrees with Plato that without distinct masculine and feminine contributions life is one sided and even threatens to become tyrannical. But he goes beyond Plato by suggesting that the tension between masculine and feminine attributes can foster a healthy political life.

In acknowledging the distinct characteristics of women and in showing how they make necessary contributions to a complete life, Plato and Aristotle attribute a greater importance to women than do

the moderns who deny natural difference. Since the moderns typically maintain that man's natural condition is one of equality and freedom, any exception which they make for women is inconsistent with their philosophic premises. Even Rousseau's position that there are natural differences between the sexes seems inconsistent with the lack of distinction that characterizes man in the state of nature. As Okin points out, for example, Rousseau's explanation of the natural relation between men and women assumes at times that they are fundamentally alike by nature and at other times that they are fundamentally different. The paradoxes in Rousseau's thought stem from his acceptance of the modern understanding of the homogeneity of nature while realizing that modern individualism and equality are insufficient grounds for happiness. His education of Sophie attempts to counter the individualism of modernity, which he nevertheless embodies in Emile. In other words, Rousseau tries to return to Aristotle, through his education of Sophie, while accepting modern premises, as manifest in his education of Emile. But this marriage proves unsuccessful. From Rousseau we learn the difficulty of providing a good life for man on the basis of the modern understanding of nature.

Okin herself accepts the modern goal of liberty and equality and the modern denial of natural difference. But her acceptance of these premises is accompanied by an optimism that is more characteristic of Marx, for example, than of Rousseau or even of the early moderns, who recognized a necessary harshness in human life. She imagines that equally free individuals can live in communities of their own choosing without any impositions on their freedom. She believes in effect that an autonomous Sophie could be wed to an autonomous Emile.

Okin's philosophical perspective makes it difficult for her to do justice to the positions of philosophers with whom she differs. She attributes to Plato a belief similar to her own-a belief in the openness of nature-without realizing that Plato is implicitly criticizing such a belief as the foundation of the *Republic's* tyrannical city. She does not see that in the *Meno* Plato is presenting the failure of an approach to virtue that denies natural difference-the very approach that Okin herself favors. Similarly, she does not take Aristotle's view of nature seriously, since it implies the existence of limits, or obstacles to the radical human freedom she demands. Her quick dismissal of Aristotle, moreover, prevents her from seeing the extent to which he did allow for human freedom and choice in the develop-

ment of both domestic and political arrangements. Finally, because she sees no tension between freedom and community, she attributes the paradoxes in Rousseau's thought to his fears of women rather than to problems inherent in his philosophic premises and goals.

Because of its principle of freedom, with the concomitant denial of natural difference, modern thought encourages a rootlessness in man. It is the task of women, according to the ancients, to restrain mankind's rootlessness, its tendency to divorce itself from nature and nature's distinctions. Should women come to embrace modern assumptions, modernity would have conquered the element from which it was supposed to have met the most resistance. The feminism which Okin espouses, which denies natural difference, accepts and even promotes modern principles. There could be no greater sign of modernity's success than the prevalance of such a feminism. The feminism that denies uniquely feminine characteristics undermines women's ability to give a truly feminine response to modernity's liberalism.

Catholic University MARY NICHOLS