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Abstract

This thesis will look at the changes brought about in the perception of women's role in society by the advent of Christianity. The early chapters will discuss the actual status of women in ancient Graeco-Roman and Jewish society, so far as that can be discovered; followed by St Paul's views on women, which heavily influenced St Augustine. I shall then examine the status assigned to women and slaves by Plato in his two outlines for ideal societies, the *Republic* and the *Laws*, and shall finish with an examination of Augustine's attitudes to women and slavery.

Plato believed that intelligent women were just as capable as men of achieving the philosophical ideal, and he believed that there would be many intelligent women in any given society. Many of Augustine's *Letters* are addressed to 'holy women', though he was reluctant to accept that these women were not exceptional. Augustine had many female correspondents, most but not all of whom were consecrated virgins or chaste widows. It is quite clear that Augustine believed that these women could achieve salvation on their own account, and also that he respected the intellect of some of them. However, even these women were to live subdued, enclosed lives. In the *City of God* he follows Paul in circumscribing the actions of women, but his estimation of their intellect is consistently higher than Paul's. The major difference between Plato and the Christians on this issue was that for Plato, sex was a part of normal life, and indeed essential to the continuation of the State; whereas for Christians it had become a problem and a hindrance to salvation. Neither Paul nor Augustine considered it necessary to combat slavery, probably because they were more concerned with securing the afterlife than with correcting conditions in this life.

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Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis aims to investigate the causes of the subordination of women in early Christianity, and whether these causes were cultural, religious, philosophical or practical. I shall conduct this examination by means of a discussion of the differing attitudes to women and slaves and their role in society held by Plato and St Augustine of Hippo. Plato was the first philosopher, apart from Socrates, to consider moral rather than scientific issues. Since Socrates wrote nothing, and the only reliable record we have of his thought is that provided by Plato, I shall generally consider their views to be the same. Plato did evolve his own opinions, particularly after the death of Socrates, but he never spoke in his own voice, generally preferring to conduct his dialogues through the mouthpiece of Socrates. For this reason it is extremely difficult to separate the opinions of the two men from each other, and I shall not attempt to do so since it does not affect this thesis. What concerns me are the opinions which Plato/Socrates expressed, not which of them expressed them. For that reason I shall refer throughout to Plato/Socrates as Plato, except in direct reference to quotations which are ascribed to Socrates by Plato.

Plato began the movement towards female emancipation in his *Republic*, which called for the abolition of slavery and for discrimination on grounds of intellect rather than gender. There is some debate about whether or not he actually meant this, but I believe that such discussion misses the point. The important thing is that he made these claims. Furthermore, in his discussion of the formation of an ideal state, he addressed all the major topics of sexual equality which are at issue today.[1] He was concerned with what, if any, role women should be permitted in government; how the performance of such activities related to traditional family life; whether women should be educated, and if so, to what extent; and whether women were different from men on any level other than physical structure. He addressed all these subjects in the *Republic*

[1]Bluestone, N.H., *Women and the Ideal Society: Plato's* Republic *and Modern Myths of Gender* (1987) p 165.

and again in the *Laws*. Although he may well have been derided by his contemporaries because of a cultural background which scorned women as inferior beings fit only for childbirth, we should not now question his sincerity but should give him credit for looking beyond the traditions of his culture and being the first to suggest that women could play a part in government and did not need to be restricted to the roles of wife and mother. In the *Laws* he re-established the family unit, and therefore needed someone to manage it. Since he could not imagine households without slaves, he reinstated slavery which had been abolished in the *Republic*, and decided that women were the obvious people to oversee the household. This necessarily entailed a certain restriction of female roles, but he still allowed women whose childbearing years were over to take part in government, if they were intellectually capable of it. At no point did he declare that the only roles suitable for women were housewifery and motherhood. Furthermore, in both the *Republic* and the *Laws*, education was the bedrock of society. The level of education received depended upon ability rather than gender or class. This was completely different from Athenian society, where girls received little or no education while boys went to school and then were able to enter into discussions with other men in the agora or gymnasium, if their financial status allowed them the leisure. The *Republic* was, as Plato himself admitted, conceived as an ideal which would never be achieved.

> Then it is an ideal pattern we were looking for...rather than to show that the ideal could be realised in practice, was it not?[2]

The *Laws* was written at the end of Plato's life and is generally considered to have been his last work. Its aim was rather different from that of the *Republic*, since it was presented as a practicable solution to the problem of how a new city should be governed, and in response to criticisms of the *Republic*.

> The greater part of Crete is attempting to found a colony, and has given responsibility for the job to the Cnossians, and the state of Cnossus has delegated it to myself and nine colleagues. Our brief is to compose a legal code on the basis of such local laws as we find satisfactory, and to use foreign laws as well - the fact that they are not Cretan must not count against them, provided their quality seems superior. So what about doing me - and you - a favour? Let's take a selection of the topics we have covered and construct an imaginary community, pretending that we are its original founders. That will allow us to

[2]*Republic* 472 C-D.

> consider the question before us, and it may be that I'll use this framework for the future state.[3]

For that reason it was less idealistic, and in many ways more restrictive. One of those ways was its treatment of women, which became less egalitarian and more utilitarian. Indeed, the whole document is more utilitarian than the *Republic*, since it is concerned with the condition of the state above all. Individual fulfilment, which was acknowledged to be good for the state in the *Republic*, was subordinated to the state in the *Laws*. I believe that the *Republic* and the *Laws* provide respectively Plato's opinions on how a state should be run, and the nearest approximation to that ideal. Thus slavery should not exist, women should be completely equal to men, and everyone should be judged on their intellect rather than on accidents of birth or gender as in the *Republic*; but the nearest that humanity could come to this ideal was that slaves were well treated, and that women performed their physical role of childbearing and then fulfilled their intellectual, governmental potential, as described in the *Laws*.

Augustine of Hippo was one of the most influential of the Church Fathers, particularly in the West. He had relatively little influence in the East, at least in part because his lengthy polemic with Pelagius on the subject of divine grace was alien to Eastern thought, which has always been less concerned with grace and divine foreknowledge than is the West. When Augustine was writing, the western Roman Empire was reaching its end. Indeed, when he died at Hippo in 430 AD, the city was under siege by the Vandals who had crossed the Mediterranean to invade Roman Africa. Thus, in his position as one of the last ancient authors, he became a source of wisdom for succeeding ages. He is a suitable culmination point for this thesis because of the depth of his influence upon his successors, and hence upon the development of doctrine in the Catholic Church. For example, the views he expressed in *The Excellence of Marriage* have prevailed in the teaching of the Catholic Church ever since.[4] Augustine's views were strongly influenced by the works of St Paul, but he did not follow Paul on all things. For example, Paul

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[3]*Laws* 702 C-D.

[4]Clark, E.A., *St Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality* (1996) p 43.

forbade married couples to abstain from sexual intercourse on a permanent basis, while Augustine encouraged them to do so. Augustine was also profoundly affected by the teachings of contemporary heretical sects, such as Gnosticism, which as a Catholic Bishop he had to oppose. The need to oppose these sects forced Augustine to rediscover the primary sources from which he had to argue, namely the New Testament and in particular the works of St Paul. He had to read these and the works of Greek philosophers who interested him, among them Plato, in Latin translation as he never read Greek easily. I hope to show that the views of these sects, some of which allowed women to hold high office, contributed to his calls for the subordination of women to their husbands in all non-sexual matters.

There are tensions and conflicts in the thought of both Plato and Augustine on what constituted a good society and what women's role in it should be. Plato demanded that women should have a role in government, but also declared that 'one sex is much superior to the other in pretty well everything'.[5] He believed that, if educated properly, his populace would always behave correctly; but he also insisted that they be shielded from the malign influences of creative arts which portrayed characters doing misdeeds, because he feared that his citizens would be inspired to do likewise. This restriction calls into question whether Plato really believed in the power of his education system to produce a human who would do no wrong, and suggests a basic mistrust of human nature. Augustine believed that women should be subordinate to men in their earthly life; but also believed that all souls were equal, unaffected by the gender of their earthly bodies, though he also declared that, on the occasion of the resurrection of the body, bodies would have the gender they had carried in life. These and other tensions and conflicts will be discussed in the relevant chapters.

The early chapters of this thesis will be concerned with the societal, cultural and religious background against which Plato and Augustine developed their thought. Keuls can find no trace

of a Mediterranean culture in which women had more political power than men. She attributes this to the physical fact that men are stronger than women and find it easy to dominate because all power structures are rooted in brute strength.[6] I find this a plausible explanation of how patriarchy came to be universally adopted, but one must also look more closely at the development of individual societies to determine to what extent and in what aspects of life women were subordinate, and the effects upon each society of that subordination. To that end I shall examine in turn the position of women in pre-Christian Judaism and in pagan Greek and Roman society. Since Plato was an Athenian, the focus of the Greek section of the latter chapter will primarily be upon Athenian customs. Christianity has its roots in Judaism, so it is necessary to discover what role Judaism ascribed to women before examining Christian attitudes, particularly since Paul was a Jew before his conversion to Christianity. Augustine was heavily influenced by the letters in the Bible which are generally ascribed to Paul, so I shall also examine the occasionally contradictory rulings of those letters on the behaviour suitable to Christian women. The difficulty with writing about the works of Paul is that although the letters to the Romans; the Corinthians; the Galatians; the Ephesians; the Philippians; the Colossians; the Thessalonians; Timothy; Titus; Philemon and the Hebrews all purport to come from his pen, it is now considered probable that some of them, including those to the Ephesians and the Hebrews, were not written by Paul but by someone else, who used Paul's name to gain credibility and authority. This situation will not have affected early Christianity as it was then believed that they were all by Paul. This thesis is concerned with the effect which these works had on the thought of Augustine, particularly with regard to his views on women. Augustine lived from 354 to 430 AD, and will not have known about the debated authorship of the letters, apart from queries surrounding the letter to the Hebrews, of which he may have heard. I shall therefore do as he did and take the entire Pauline corpus as having been written by Paul.

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[5]*Republic* 455 D.

[6]Keuls, E., *The Reign of the Phallus* (1993) p 65.

Having examined the status of women in influential societies and writings, I shall begin to move towards the main purpose of this thesis. However, before I examine Platonic and Augustinian attitudes to the role of women and slaves in society, it seems wise to discover their views on what constitutes good human behaviour in general. To that end, chapter 5 will focus on their attitudes to human liberty, free will and doing right. Since their contemporary societies were patriarchal, both authors assumed at least the initial dominance of men, and regarded the free man as the societal norm. One must take this into account when examining their attitudes to women and slaves, and must first ascertain what liberty men had, in order to establish a norm against which to compare the status of women. For example, in the *Republic*, women were not permitted to own property; but crucially, neither were men, since everything was to be held in common. Knowing the former regulation but not the latter would lead to a distorted view of Plato's work, so it is essential to obtain a clear overview of the restrictions placed on behaviour in general before considering the conditions of specific groups. Similarly, Augustine was deeply concerned with moral behaviour for men as well as for women, and contradicted contemporary society by forbidding men as well as women to commit adultery. Were it to be assumed that he, like pagan Roman society, allowed men extra-marital affairs but demanded fidelity of women, this would again be a distortion of his views.

Chapter 6 will examine Plato's attitudes to the institution of slavery and the status of women in society and their potential to participate in government. His views on these subjects were expressed most coherently and explored most fully in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, since these are his two most complete expositions of the nature of the ideal society, and for this reason I shall focus upon these two texts. However, his views on sexuality and marriage are central to his thought on society in general, so I shall also examine his views on these topics as expressed in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. The *Symposium* is of additional interest for the character of Diotima, the 'wise woman' who educated Socrates on the nature of love in the dialogue. Her status is interesting for many reasons, not least because she was a female character at a

symposium, which was usually an exclusively male event with the exception of dancing girls and musicians, none of whom were there to participate in intellectual conversation. Although she was not intended to be thought of as having been physically present at the symposium in question, her intellectual presence was strong in the dialogue, since Socrates claimed that his speech to the symposium had first been made to him by Diotima. Chapter 7 continues the theme of the previous chapter in that it is focused upon Plato's views on women, and elaborates a subject raised in that chapter, namely what Plato thought constituted a good education and who should receive it. Once again, I shall focus mainly upon his theories expounded in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Education was of overwhelming importance in the societies which Plato envisaged, and he was convinced of the need for universal education for both sexes and all classes. This could be seen as a form of indoctrination, and has indeed been interpreted thus.[7] However, I shall argue that Plato's aim was not so much to make everyone the same as to allow all citizens to perform to their utmost ability in support of the state.

Having thus examined in depth Plato's views on women and slavery, I shall turn in chapter 8 to a discussion of Augustine's views on the same subjects. He had little to say on the subject of slavery, since he followed Paul in condoning the institution and advising slaves who were born or became Christians not to seek freedom in this life but to work and live in such a manner as would be most likely to ensure their salvation in the next life. His general attitude to women was markedly similar, in that he did not encourage them to seek release from male domination if they were married. However, he did insist upon sexual equality for married couples, following Paul in declaring that marital sex was a duty owed by both parties to each other. In short, he believed that women were inferior to men physically and mentally but their equals spiritually, because all humans have immortal souls. The only ways in which women could achieve temporal release from male domination were by becoming either consecrated virgins

[7]de Ste Croix, G.E.M., *The Class Struggle in the Ancient World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (1981) p 411.

before marriage or holy widows after the death of their husbands. Both of these alternatives involved the sacrifice of women's sexual, reproductive role. This sacrifice is highly significant to Augustine's thought, as it displays his deep distrust of sexuality. Augustine's thought on women was not synthesised by him so neatly and conveniently as Plato's so I shall need to examine many more sources. The chief Augustinian sources throughout this thesis will be the *Confessions* and the *City of God Against the Pagans*. However, Augustine also wrote specific works *On Holy Virginity*, *The Excellence of Marriage* and *The Excellence of Widowhood* addressed to people, usually women, undertaking these three states, so I shall refer extensively to these sources. Much can also be gleaned from Augustine's *Letters*, particularly those addressed to women, and the sermons which he preached during his time as Bishop of Hippo. The basis of chapter 8 will appear in the theological journal *Borderlands*, under the title 'Forever subordinate? Augustine of Hippo's attitudes to women in society', to be published in April 2003.

The final chapter will discuss the conclusions which can be drawn as a result of this examination of the status of women. I hope to show that the movement towards female emancipation was started by Plato but then effectively halted by the advent of Christianity, which taught that women should be restrained for their own good. Augustine was responsible for a good deal of this because, influenced by Paul, he supported the idea that women's societal roles were reproduction or contemplation of the divine, definitely not government. Furthermore, he and Paul both taught that slavery was the result of sin, and although unjust, should not be opposed, any more than the subordination of women should be challenged. Ultimately, both Paul and Augustine believed that conditions in this life were irrelevant: it was life after death which mattered. Plato also believed that the soul existed after death, but he was certain that its status and conditions could be affected by the mortal life it had led, rather than by any external force equating to the Christian concept of grace. This was one of the reasons for his concern for temporal society. He also wanted to ensure that the state should be as good as possible, which he considered entailed creating the best possible citizens.

Note on translations of texts.

I have throughout this thesis used the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, in accordance with current scholarly practice. Translations of other texts are as listed in the bibliography, save where emendations have been made on the advice of and with the assistance of Dr Fitzpatrick. These emendations are clearly indicated. I have also altered American usage for English, where necessary, but have not indicated these changes.

Chapter 2

The Position of Women in Pre-Christian Judaism

This chapter will discuss the role and status of women in pre-Christian Judaism, focusing specifically upon portrayals of women in the Old Testament, which constitutes the Jewish Torah and books of the Prophets, and upon their participation in religious practice.[1] Current Orthodox Jewish practice sheds some light on historical practice, since changes have been slight. It is important to examine the status of women in Jewish society before discussing their position in early Christianity for several reasons. As can be seen from its inclusion of the Old Testament in its holy books, Christianity developed out of Judaism and was heavily influenced by it. Some 'Christian' behaviour developed as a reaction against 'Jewish' practice: for example, a man entering a Church should remove his hat, while a man entering a Synagogue should cover his head. This conflict in Christianity between following Jewish custom and rebelling against it is particularly clear in the writing of Paul. He was a Jew and a Pharisee before his conversion to Christianity, a background which informed all his subsequent work, as I shall discuss further in chapter 4. As was usual at the time, Jewish society was patriarchal, so that men were considered to be socially superior to women. Women stayed at home in the background, while men filled the important societal roles, such as those of priest, soldier and politician.

Education and social status

Women in Jewish law were secondary to their male counterparts in other ways too. They were not taught to read the classical texts of Judaism, and thus could not participate fully in religious life.[2] As was customary, maleness was associated with rationality and femaleness with

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[1]After the Fall of Jerusalem in 587BC and the subsequent Babylonian Exile, which lasted until 538BC, the five *Books of Moses* became known as the Torah. These five books are: *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* and *Deuteronomy.*

[2]Davidman, L. & Tenenbaum, S. (eds.) *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies* (1994) p4.

irrationality, an attitude which can be seen in other patriarchal societies up to modern times, as in the Victorian view that education was bad for girls because it impaired fertility by diverting blood from the menstrual cycle to the brain.[3] The *bar mitzvah*, the coming-of-age ceremony, applies only to boys and had no female equivalent until the *bat mitzvah* was invented in the twentieth century. Thus until very recently women had no coming-of-age ceremony and were for religious purposes ranked with under-age boys all their lives. Plaskow is of the opinion that women have always been 'other' in relation to a male norm, such that a Jewish woman is described as a female Jew.[4] This is probably a result of two conflicting attitudes. Firstly, whether or not someone is considered to be racially Jewish depends on whether their mother was Jewish, and not on their father's race. This is an example of the intense practicality of Judaism, since while there may be questions of paternity, questions of maternity are rare. This is because there are usually witnesses to a birth, but seldom to the intercourse which preceded it. Secondly, in conflict with this, is the ancient theory which associates reason with the masculine and irrationality with the feminine.[5] Hauptman points out that in the *Mishnah* it is the uncontrollable sexuality of men that shapes guidelines for the relations between the sexes.[6]

Marriage and the ideal wife

Women were also subject to men in the home. Men arranged the fate of the women in their families. Husbands had control over their wives' affairs, while fathers supervised their daughters' lives until their marriage to a man approved by their father. Furthermore, a woman's

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[3]Bluestone (1987) p 187.

[4]Plaskow, J., 'Jewish Theology in Feminist Perspective' in Davidman & Tenenbaum (1994) p 69.

[5]Tirosh-Rothschild, H., '"Dare to know": Feminism and the discipline of Jewish philosophy' in Davidman and Tenenbaum, (1994) p 88.

[6]For more on women's position in Jewish texts see Wegner, J.R., *Chattel or Person? the status of women in the Mishnah* (1988) and Hauptman, J., 'Feminist perspectives on Rabbinic Texts' in Davidman and Tenenbaum, (1994). Both these works deal with the *Mishnah*, which is not directly relevant here as it was written in the second century AD, and thus had little effect on Pauline Christianity. From its rules one can however gain some idea of how women were treated and regarded up to an including the time in which it was written.

vows of any sort, including religious, were rendered invalid if the head of her family objected.[7] One of the few ways for a Jewish woman to achieve autonomy was for her to be widowed after giving birth to a son who would carry forward his father's name for another generation. A woman who was widowed before she had produced a son was known as a Levirate widow, and had a very different fate. She had to marry her husband's brother and hope to have a son, who would then take the name of his late 'father'. This state of affairs illustrates the importance of the family in Jewish life, and the relative unimportance of the individual, since brothers also have to help each other to have sons![8]

It has been argued that the fundamental moral flaw of the Bible is that it does not treat all humans as equals.[9] This is undeniably true, but it is also true of most writings of the period. Women and slaves were not regarded as equal to men by society, and this attitude is reflected in the literature. Individuals could and did become powerful, as in the case of Deborah the prophet, whom I shall discuss later, but the structure of society disadvantaged women, as I discussed in Chapter 1. The model of patriarchy was almost universal, and was inherited by Israel.[10] As in any society, the wealthy had more freedom of action than the poor. This also extended to wealthy women, who were considerably freer than the poor, as exemplified by the woman of Shunem who succoured Elisha, as discussed below.[11] Furthermore, marrying well could bring a woman power through her husband's position. As I have said, if a woman were widowed after she had produced a son, she became autonomous, and, if her husband were wealthy, she took control of his affairs until their son reached his majority. Perhaps the most important role open to women in early

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[7]Kee, H.C., 'The Changing Role of Women in Early Christianity' in *Theology Today* vol. 49 (1992) p 227.
[8]However, it should be noted that Levirate marriage was considered objectionable by Talmudic times, and was practised out of a sense of duty. There was a difference of opinion between the Spanish and the Northern schools, with the former upholding Levirate marriage while the latter preferred the alternative of halizah, in which the brother renounced his right to marry his sister-in-law. The practice of Levirate marriage has now been outlawed by Rabbis and almost universally dropped. See Singer, I., et al *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* vol. 8.
[9]Frymer-Kensky, T., 'The Bible and Women's Studies' in Davidman & Tenenbaum (1994) p 18.
[10]Frymer-Kensky (1994) p 18.

Israelite society was that of queen-mother. These women may have helped to determine national policy, and certainly often managed to put their own sons on the throne rather than the old king's first-born.[12] For example, Bathsheba, wife of king David, had her son Solomon proclaimed king although he was not the eldest of David's surviving sons. The obvious candidate was Adonijah.

> Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying 'I will be king'; and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, 'Why have you done thus and so?' He was also a very handsome man and he was born next after Absalom.[13]

Absalom was already dead, having tried to establish himself as a rival king and been killed for his trouble.[14] Bathsheba was assisted in her plans by Nathan the prophet, whose support Adonijah had not obtained. Nathan and Bathsheba told king David what Adonijah had been doing, and reminded him of his promise that Solomon would succeed him.[15] David's response was as they had hoped.

> And the king swore, saying, 'As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, saying, "Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead"; even so will I do this day.'[16]

Solomon was anointed king by Nathan and Zadok the priest, which had not happened to Adonijah. When Adonijah heard about his, he and his supporters fled, and Solomon was unopposed.[17] Solomon was clearly aware of the role his mother had played in securing his succession, and rewarded her by having 'a seat brought for the king's mother; and she sat on his right.'[18] Thus Bathsheba, through her marriage to a king, became very powerful, though she was not truly autonomous even after David's death because she was still subject to the king, who was now her son.

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[11]Frymer-Kensky (1994) p 21.
[12]Frymer-Kensky (1994) p 23.
[13]*1 Kings* 1: 5 - 6.
[14]*2 Samuel* 15 - 18: 18.
[15]*1 Kings* 1: 11 - 28.
[16]*1 Kings* 1: 29 -30.
[17]*1 Kings* 1: 32 - 53.
[18]*1 Kings* 2: 19.

As we have seen, marriage could be extremely beneficial to women as a means of gaining status. There was nothing ascetic about the Israelite faith, although all sexual relationships outside marriage were condemned. Sacred prostitution was widespread in the Canaanite religion which preceded Judaism in the land of Israel, but was regarded by Israelite prophets as no better than secular prostitution.[19] This was made particularly clear by the prophet Hosea:

> Therefore your daughters play the harlot, and your brides commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with harlots, and sacrifice with cult prostitutes.[20]

Polygamy was allowed, but carried a caveat that it brought bitterness, as in the case of Hannah the mother of Samuel, whose husband's other wife had children while Hannah was barren:

> He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children...And her rival used to provoke her sorely, to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb.[21]

The ideal state was that of mutual loyalty and affection at home, with a relationship built upon a sound religious base. The combined eroticism and sanctity of the *Song of Songs* served as a reminder that home life should not be remote from religion. However, the active role of the bride in the *Song of Songs* differentiates her from the standard bride, and indicates that this is not secular marriage poetry.[22] As Ringgren observes, Judaism has no female divinity, so there can be no sacred marriage.[23] The *Song of Songs* is thus clearly allegorical of the relationship between God and his people.

The ideal wife described in *Proverbs* 31: 10 - 31 reveals some interesting attributes which suggest that wives had a good deal of autonomy in the running of their own homes. For example, 'she considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard'. And again, 'she makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers girdles to the merchant'. Perhaps most

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[19]Rowley, H.H., *The Faith of Israel* (1961) p 131.
[20]*Hosea* 4: 13 - 14.
[21]*1 Samuel* 1: 2 & 6.
[22]Rowley (1961) p 132.

significant is the statement that 'strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come'. This does not sound like a woman who was not allowed any independence. Furthermore, it is clear that women like this were allowed to transact business on their own account, unlike their Greek and Roman sisters, as I shall discuss in the next chapter. If trading had been considered unacceptable in women, the fact that a woman did so would have been used to criticise her, rather than being phrased in admiring terms as it was here. There is also a neat summary of the kind of woman who was most admired by Israelite society, and of the type who was not.

> Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
> Give her of the fruits of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.[24]

The fact that such a woman is presented as an ideal, who is 'far more precious than jewels' suggests that the common conception of the repressed Israelite woman may be erroneous. It is also clear that wise, loyal women were valued, since another attribute is that 'she opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.' This is a voicing of a theme which runs throughout Jewish literature, namely that Wisdom is identified as a woman. In *Proverbs*, the woman Wisdom is frequently referred to, as in 'Say to wisdom, "You are my sister"' and 'Does not wisdom call, does not understanding raise her voice?'[25] She is described as a being who can save men from error, if they will only listen to her, and displays many of the characteristics of the ideal wife discussed above.

> Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids to call from the highest places in the town, 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!' To him who is without sense she says, 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave simpleness, and live, and walk in the way of insight.'[26]

This ties in with the description of the ideal woman, since the concrete woman would run her house well and be a good influence on her husband, while any man who heeded the promptings of the abstract female Wisdom would also be influenced for good.

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[23]Ringgren, H. *Israelite Religion* (1976) pp 197 - 8.
[24]*Proverbs* 31: 30 - 31.
[25]*Proverbs* 7: 4 and 8:1.
[26]*Proverbs* 9: 1 - 6.

Public and private worship

Jewish women were and are forbidden to worship in the same part of the synagogue as men.[27] Usually women would be on an upper gallery, but sometimes they would be on the same floor as men, with a curtain dividing the sexes. This latter arrangement recalls Temple custom, since in the Temple at Jerusalem the sexes were segregated in the courtyard by a curtain. There were three areas of the inner courtyard: one for priests, one for men and one for women. The outer courtyard could be entered by anyone, even Gentiles.[28] The Temple at Jerusalem was destroyed in AD70 by the Roman army under Titus, the son of the emperor Vespasian and himself a future emperor. Those early Christians who were converts from Judaism would, therefore, have been aware of Temple customs, and it seems likely that the segregation and more especially the silence of women in the Temple and synagogues had a lasting influence on the customs which developed in the Christian church. Women were, moreover, not permitted to perform solo in religious services, though they were allowed to sing in groups of three or more, since individual voices could not then be distinguished. Women were permitted to lead services which were attended only by other women, but otherwise services were led by men. This restriction of the participation of women in religious matters clearly had a great effect on Paul. He was always conscious of his Pharisaic ancestry, though he said that by accepting Christ he had cast Judaism off, as this passage from Philippians shows:

> Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a perscutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless.[29]

However, I shall argue in a later chapter that although Paul may have left all his worldly advantages on the road to Damascus, he found his habits of mind, formed by his religious

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[27]Newsome remarks that firm historical evidence for segregation in the synagogue is lacking (Newsome, J.D., *Greeks, Romans and Jews: Currents of culture and belief in the New Testament world* (1992) p 128), but it is certainly customary now.

[28]Ringgren (1976) p 324.

[29]*Philippians* 3:4-7.

upbringing and inheritance, much harder to change. Certainly he kept the Jewish rule that women should not participate actively in religious services.

> Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.[30]

Women do, however, play a much greater part in the religious life of the family in Judaism than that allowed to them in public worship. For example, they prepare the Sabbath meal and all other important feasts including Passover, and perform the ceremony of lighting the sacred candles every Friday night and on other holy occasions celebrated at home. Women are also responsible for the early religious education of their children. Early Jewish women had other ways of experiencing God, although they were not permitted to worship in the same part of the Temple or synagogue as men, and did not receive such an extensive education. They had texts which were specifically relevant to them, such as the story of Naomi and Ruth; and learned to seek and worship God through domestic routines and what Davidman and Tenenbaum term 'biological experiences', by which I assume they mean the bearing and rearing of children.[31] From the Old Testament it is clear that women were not as secluded as is often thought. At intervals they have been permitted to be singers, dancers, poets and prophets, but never priests.[32] There are several examples of famous prophetesses. Miriam the sister of Aaron witnessed the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea and led the Israelites in rejoicing.

> Then Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing. And Miriam sang to them: 'Sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.'[33]

This passage is particularly interesting as it shows not only a Jewish woman singing in public, but also the whole group of Israelite women dancing and rejoicing.

Deborah, Huldah, Jael, Esther and Judith

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[30]*I Timothy* 2:11-12.
[31]Davidman & Tenenbaum (1994) pp 11-12.
[32]Frymer-Kensky (1994) p 17.

There are several instances of powerful, resourceful, clever women in the Old Testament. Deborah and Huldah were prophetesses, and Deborah was also a judge. Esther became Queen, and successfully vanquished her enemies by using her intelligence. Jael and the apocryphal Judith killed their people's seemingly indestructible enemies. I shall begin by discussing these five women and shall then move to other less remarkable though still noteworthy women. The Song of Deborah is one of the oldest parts of the Old Testament, and is part of the continuous list of officials and their deeds related in the *Book of Judges*. Neither Esther nor Judith are likely to have been historical figures, but it is important to Jewish perceptions of women that their stories are told in the sacred writings. Perceptions of women are more important than historicity to this chapter, so their stories are essential. In any case, the narrators of the Old Testament had little notion of history: they simply relayed what had been handed down to them through oral tradition.

Deborah was a very prominent character in the struggle of the Israelites against the king Jabin of the Canaanites and his military commander Sisera. She is introduced thus: 'Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time'.[34] She seems to have had considerable authority as well as physical freedom, since she could summon Barak, a military commander of the Israelites, to her; and she could also accompany him on his expeditions.[35] Barak clearly respected her, since he obeyed her summons and on hearing her orders said to her 'If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.'[36] She went. Deborah continues to feature in the tale of the fall of Sisera, though the initiative passes to another woman, Jael, who was responsible for his actual death. Barak and his armies routed Sisera, who promptly fled to a place where he thought he would be safe. Jael's husband,

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[33]*Exodus* 15:20-21.
[34]*Judges* 4:4.
[35]*Judges* 4:6 & 9-10.
[36]*Judges* 4:8.

Heber the Kenite, was at peace with Jabin, Sisera's king.[37] Jael welcomed and fed him, and he fell asleep, telling her to guard the door.

> But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, till it went down into the ground, as he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died.[38]

Thus the mighty Sisera was vanquished in an unexpected manner, as Deborah had foreseen when she said to Barak 'the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman'.[39] This story is interesting for several reasons. Two of the principal Israelite roles are played by women. The husbands of both women are mentioned in passing to clarify who the women are, but otherwise they do not figure. Deborah's freedom to accompany Barak and his army to war is remarkable in an age when women were generally kept at home. Jael's behaviour could be regarded as treacherous, since her husband and his people were at peace with the Canaanites, but no mention is made of this aspect. Indeed, she was clearly proud of her achievement, since when Barak came looking for Sisera, Jael went out to meet him saying 'Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking'.[40] We are not told what Heber thought of this murder, since his opinion clearly did not matter. While Jael was simply in the right place at the right time and is not noted for any other deed, Deborah was clearly used to a public life.

> She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the people of Israel came up to her for judgement.[41]

No remark is made on the fact that she was a woman, so it seems reasonable to assume that she was not the only female judge, though she was the only one mentioned. Had she been unique, there would probably have been an account of how she came to be in such an important position.

When Josiah sent his priest Hilkiah to discover God's will concerning a book of the Jewish law which had been found, Hilkiah went to Huldah, a prophetess whose husband Shallum,

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[37]Kenites were nomads attached to the tribe of Judah. See Ringgren (1976) p 34.
[38]*Judges* 4:21.
[39]*Judges* 4:9.
[40]*Judges* 4:22.
[41]*Judges* 4:5.

like Lappidoth, is mentioned only to clarify her identity.[42] Huldah prophesied the destruction of Judah and its people, saying

> Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched.[43]

Josiah took her seriously and called a meeting of the entire population in the Temple and read the newly-discovered book to them, after which he did his best to avert disaster.

> And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book; and all the people joined in the covenant.[44]

Huldah's role in this episode was sufficiently important for her name, that of her husband, and her speech to be related in almost identical terms in both versions of the tale, that told in the *Second Book of Kings* and that in the *Second Book of Chronicles*. This is interesting since it shows that she was significant enough to be remembered accurately by history. It can be seen from these tales of Miriam, Deborah and Huldah that Jewish practice and belief have always been broader than texts by the male elite would have us believe, since such texts are essentially androcentric and prescriptive in their rules for society rather than descriptive of them.[45] Schussler-Fiorenza is of the opinion that Judaism associated virginity with prophecy.[46] It is hard to find Old Testament support for this view, since it is not stated that Miriam was a virgin; and we are specifically told that both Deborah and Huldah were married. Since the concept of a celibate marriage dedicated to God is a Christian innovation rather than an adoption of Jewish practice, it seems unlikely that any of these women were virgins. The theory may hold good for some male prophets, since neither Elijah nor Elisha were married, but again, their virginity is not stated.

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[42]*II Kings* 22:14 and *II Chronicles* 34:22.
[43]*II Kings* 22:16-17, see also *II Chronicles* 34:24-25.
[44]*II Kings* 23:1-3 and *II Chronicles* 34:29-32.
[45]Plaskow (1994) p 74, and Schussler-Fiorenza, E. *In Memory of Her* (1985) p 108.
[46]Schussler-Fiorenza (1985) p 295.

Esther and the apocryphal Judith were two other remarkable women, though for a different reason. The character Ahasuerus in the story of Esther is thought to be the Persian king Xerxes, but there is no other source for the story. The story of Judith is entirely fictitious, but what matters is that these stories were told. The women destroyed their powerful enemies by using their wits. The story contained in the *Book of Esther* tells of a beautiful, intelligent woman who, through her obedience to her guardian Mordecai, won the heart and mind of King Ahasuerus and saved the lives of her people. Ahasuerus was angered when 'Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs' and dismissed her from his palace.[47] The king grew lonely, and acted on the advice of attendants on how to find a new queen.

> 'Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the capital, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch in charge of the women; let their ointments be given them. And let the maiden who pleases the king be queen in stead of Vashti.' This pleased the king, and he did so.[48]

Esther was duly brought to the palace, but Mordecai did not forget her, and gave her good advice before she went, which she obeyed.

> Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had charged her not to make it known. And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was and how she fared.[49]

In due course it was Esther's turn to see if she could win the king's favour. The king thought her so beautiful that 'he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti'.[50] Mordecai exposed a plot to kill Ahasuerus and became important enough at court to annoy Haman, the king's aide, who found out that he was Jewish.[51]

> So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.[52]

Haman plotted to exterminate all the Jews in the kingdom, and got the king to agree, but news of the plan came to Mordecai. He turned to Esther, the queen, as the only person who could help.

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[47]*Esther* 1:12 - 22.
[48]*Esther* 2:2 - 4.
[49]*Esther* 2:10 - 11. See also 2: 19 - 20.
[50]*Esther* 2:17.
[51]*Esther* 2:22 - 3:5.
[52]*Esther* 3:6.

She, unsurprisingly, quailed at the idea of approaching the king, and tried to tell Mordecai that she would be killed.[53] Mordecai pointed out the facts to her in no uncertain terms.

> 'Think not that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'[54]

True to form, Esther obeyed and agreed to try to turn the king from his purpose. She told Mordecai to fast and pray for her with all the Jews in Susa, and 'Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him'.[55] Mordecai's behaviour is interesting for several reasons here. Firstly, he was not afraid to ask his ward to face death to save her people; secondly, he obeyed her instructions when once she had agreed; and thirdly, there is no suggestion that the plan for Haman's downfall came from anyone other than Esther. One would expect that a guardian would want to protect his ward by any means possible from a danger which might not affect her because of her royal status and because, as we have seen, no-one at court knew of her race. A man who did not wish to keep his ward safe, but who intended to use her for the salvation of his people, would be more likely to go to her with his own plan fully formed and tell her what to do, rather than leaving everything up to her. His willingness to fast and pray in support of Esther's campaign showed his faith in God's power and the power of prayer, which confirmed his status as a devout Jew. His trust in Esther showed that she was an intelligent woman and was an example of the Jews' acceptance that women could sometimes succeed where men would fail, usually by using their sexual charms against men. Mordecai's trust was not misplaced, as Esther brought about the downfall of Haman and the exaltation of Mordecai, as well as saving the Jews from persecution.[56]

Judith came to Israel's aid against Holofernes and the forces of Nebuchadnezzar the king of the Assyrians. Holofernes had a huge army: 'one hundred and twenty thousand foot soldiers

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[53]*Esther* 4:1 - 12.
[54]*Esther* 4:13 - 14.
[55]*Esther* 4:15 - 17.

and twelve thousand cavalry'; while the Israelite army was relatively tiny.[57] Judith was a widow, 'beautiful in appearance, and had a very lovely face' and devout, and also recognised as intelligent by those in authority, including Uzziah the governor.

> 'Today is not the first time your wisdom has been shown, but from the beginning of your life all the people have recognised your understanding., for your heart's disposition is right.'[58]

Like Esther, Judith agreed to help Israel but refused to disclose her plans. In Judith's case this was probably because what she intended to do was potentially lethal for her, but she could see that it was the only way of saving Israel. Uzziah would have been unlikely to agree to Judith going into Holofernes' camp as a refugee, pretending to be in love with him, and cutting off his head in his own tent; but this is exactly what Judith did. Her nerve must have been quite astonishing, since she could have been killed at any time as she was utterly defenceless. Holofernes' men reacted interestingly to Judith:

> And they marvelled at her beauty, and admired the Israelites, judging them by her, and every one said to his neighbour, 'Who can despise these people, who have women like this among them? Surely not a man of them had better be left alive, for if we let them go they will be able to ensnare the whole world!'[59]

Yet it does not appear to have occurred to either Holofernes or his men that Judith might be deceiving them. This could be considered a lesson to the proud, that they will fall, and as such would be the second lesson contained in the *Book of Judith*; the first being that the weak can, through intelligence and cunning, defeat the strong if God is on their side. The story of Judith is designed to cheer the spirits of faithful Israelites in bad times. Judith bided her time, waiting three days to ensure that Holofernes was infatuated with her. On the fourth day, Holofernes summoned her to a banquet from which he had excluded his military officers.

> Then Judith came in and lay down, and Holofernes' heart was ravished with her and he was moved with great desire to possess her; for he had been waiting for an opportunity to deceive her, ever since the day he first saw her. [60]

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[56]*Esther* 5 -10.
[57]*Judith* 2:5.
[58]*Judith* 8: 7 & 29.
[59]*Judith* 10:19.
[60]*Judith* 12:16.

Judith's tactics were entirely successful. Holofernes drank himself into a stupor; his servants tactfully withdrew; and Judith was alone with him. Surrounded by her enemies, Judith once again acted with astonishing calm. She called upon God to help her, and then she acted.

> She went up to the post at the end of the bed, above Holofernes' head, and took down his sword that hung there. She came close to his bed and took hold of the hair of his head, and said 'Give me strength this day, O Lord God of Israel!' And she struck his neck twice with all her might, and severed his head from his body. Then she tumbled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the posts; after a moment she went out, and gave Holofernes' head to her maid, who placed it in her food bag. Then the two of them went out together, as they were accustomed to go for prayer; and they passed through the camp and circled around the valley and went up the mountain to Bethulia and came to its gates.[61]

This all required amazing sang froid, nerve and courage, not only from Judith but also from her maid, who had to carry the grisly parcel as they walked out of the Assyrian camp. It is somewhat surprising that the patriarchal society of ancient Israel could credit women with such courage and could find the story of Judith credible. Since the *Book of Judith* comes from the apocrypha, and is not therefore part of the main Jewish or Christian Scriptures, this story could be taken as a aberration, were it not for the fact that the story of Jael shows similar courage in a woman. Jael's deeds are recounted in the *Book of Judges* which is one of the books of the Prophets included in the Jewish Canon. In neither of these cases is there any condemnation of the women's deeds. I have discussed Jael's actions earlier in this chapter. Judith's murder of Holofernes was even more morally suspect, since he had given her sanctuary when she came to him claiming to be a refugee, although admittedly he intended to seduce her. These aspects of the women's actions did not matter and were not mentioned, since the important points were firstly, that they acted to liberate Israel, God's chosen people, from oppression; and secondly, that they could reassure their fellow Israelites, as Judith put it, that

> 'As the Lord lives, who has protected me in the way I went, it was my face that tricked him to his destruction, and yet he committed no act of sin with me, to defile and shame me.'[62]

Jael, already discussed, and Judith are good examples of women who succeeded where men had failed, though they both avoided intercourse with the enemy. Esther used her charms on the king

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[61] *Judith* 13:6 - 10.
[62] *Judith* 13:16.

her husband, and also did not have sex with Haman her enemy. Thus all three women remained virtuous in the eyes of society, which was vital to their status.

Women who helped the prophets

Esther, Judith and Jael all saved Israel from persecution or extermination, but fame also accrued to women who helped the Israelite nation in more minor ways. For example, there are several cases of women who succoured the prophets. Possibly the most well known of these are the widow who took in Elijah and fed him; and the woman of Shunem who gave hospitality to Elisha. In the former case, Elijah went to the woman after he had called down a drought upon the land. He asked her to bring him food and drink, whereupon the woman explained the gravity of her situation to him.

> And she said, 'As the Lord your god lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a cruse; and now, I am gathering a couple of sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.'[63]

This passage shows the accuracy of Elijah's prophecy of drought, as well as the woman's concern for her son, not just for herself. Elijah had been previously told by God that a widow in Zarephath had been marked out as his helper, and so when this woman did not mention a husband, only a son, he knew that she was the chosen one. He said to her

> 'For thus says the Lord the God of Israel, "The jar of meal shall not be spent, and the cruse of oil shall not fail, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth"'[64]

Elijah stayed with her and her family throughout the drought. We can only guess at the envy and suspicion which must have been aroused in the other villagers at this woman's never failing supplies, and the mysterious appearance of a strange man in her household. These aspects were not mentioned, since the point of the story was to illustrate God's concern for his prophet and the miraculous way in which he ensured Elijah's survival. All was not easy in that house, however. While Elijah was staying there, the woman's son fell ill and died. Naturally, she was angry with God for allowing this when she had helped his servant, and she accosted Elijah.

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[63] *1 Kings* 17:12.
[64] *1 Kings* 17:14.

> And she said to Elijah, 'What have you against me, O man of God? You have come here to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!' And he said to her, 'Give me your son.' And he took him from her bosom, and carried him up into the upper chamber, where he lodged, and laid him upon his own bed. And he cried to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, hast thou brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?' Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, let this child's soul come into him again.'[65]

The boy was revived and returned to his mother, who was amazed.

> And the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God, and that this word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.'[66]

Thus the death and revival of the boy served to convince the woman and also the reader that Elijah was a 'man of God', and to show that God's power acted through him.

The story of the woman of Shunem was similar in that Elisha was welcomed into her house and revived her son, but there are some marked differences. Firstly, this woman was married, though her husband was clearly a man who listened to his wife, since he followed her suggestion that they should make permanent provision for Elisha.

> And she said to her husband, 'Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, who is continually passing our way. Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him an bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us, he can go in there.'[67]

Secondly, she was childless, and likely to remain so as her husband was old.[68] Elisha promised her that she would have a son in return for her hospitality to him, and this duly happened, so that the child was regarded as a gift from God even more than he would otherwise have been.

> And he said, 'At this season, when the time comes round, you shall embrace a son.' And she said, 'No, my lord, O man of God; do not lie to your maidservant.' But the woman conceived, and she bore a son about that time the following spring, as Elisha had said to her.[69]

In the Old Testament it was always the woman who was blamed if a marriage were childless. The man might be given the excuse of old age, but women had no excuse, as is clear from Sarah's joy at the birth of Isaac.

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[65] *1 Kings* 17: 18-21.
[66] *1 Kings* 17: 24.
[67] *2 Kings* 4: 9 - 10.
[68] *2 Kings* 4: 14.
[69] *2 Kings* 4: 16 - 17.

> And she said, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'[70]

This is interesting, since at this time it was believed, as in Greek and Roman society, that the woman provided nothing more than shelter and nourishment for the man's seed. However, it was not the seed which was infertile, but the womb which failed to provide what was required. Thus a man in a childless marriage could maintain his social standing and superiority over his wife by blaming her inferiority and defectiveness with no hint that it might be his biological defect rather than hers. The birth of a son to an otherwise childless woman is a theme which occurs frequently in the Old Testament, and is always designed partly as a reward for faithfulness and partly as a demonstration of God's power. For example, Sarah and Hannah were both barren, though their husbands had children by other women, until they asked for God's help, whereupon they gave birth to Isaac and Samuel respectively.[71] Both these sons of God grew up to be highly influential Israelites. Curiously, we do not hear anything further of the woman of Shunem's son after his revival by Elisha, although he, like Isaac and Samuel, was a gift from God. This revival was fully as dramatic as that performed by Elijah. The boy died, of what sounds like heat-stroke, thus:

> When the child had grown, he went out one day to hsi father among the reapers. And he said to his father, 'Oh, my head, my head!' The father said to his servant, 'Carry him to his mother.' And when he had lifted him, and brought him to his mother, the child sat on her lap till noon, and then he died.[72]

The boy's mother wasted no time. She clearly considered that, since Elisha had promised her son's birth, he should be informed of his death. She sped to Mount Carmel, where the prophet was, telling no-one what had happened. Gehazi, Elisha's servant, was sent to meet her. She told him that her family was all well, and came to Elisha. She accused him of raising her hopes by giving her a son, only to dash them by his death. Elisha tried to send Gehazi as his deputy, but the woman was adamant: "'As the Lord lives, and you yourself live, I will not leave you"', so he got up and followed her.[73] The woman's persistence paid off, for Elisha revived her son.

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[70] *Genesis* 21: 7.
[71] *Genesis* 21: 1 - 3 and *Samuel* 1: 1 - 20.
[72] *2 Kings* 4: 18 - 20.
[73] *2 Kings* 4: 21 - 30.

> When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. So he went in and shut the door upon the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. Then he went up and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm. Then he got up again, and walked once to and fro in the house, and went up, and stretched himself upon him; the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.[74]

There are obvious similarities between Elisha's method of revival and Elijah's, which would seem to show a belief that the 'man of God' could conduct life through their bodies if God willed it.

All the women whom I have mentioned were used to embody virtues which Israel would do well to emulate in its position as God's chosen people.[75] The quality they all had in common was a deep faith in God, coupled in most cases with immense courage. The bravery of Jael, Esther and Judith was immediately obvious, since they all faced death at the hands of their powerful enemies. Huldah also needed courage to speak to the king as she did, since leaders occasionally turn on those who are bearers of bad news, as Holofernes did to Achior, who tried to warn him against attacking the Israelites.

> 'But if there is no transgression in their nation, then let my lord pass them by; for their Lord will defend them, and their God will protect them, and we shall be put to shame before the whole world.'[76]

This was not popular advice. Holofernes refused to countenance leaving the Israelites in peace, and promised an unpleasant end to Achior.

> 'And who are you, Achior, and you hirelings of Ephraim, to prophesy among us as you have done today and tell us not to make war against the people of Israel because their God will defend them? Who is God except Nebuchadnezzar?...But you, Achior, you Ammonite hireling, who have said these words on the day of your iniquity, you shall not see my face again from this day until I take my revenge on this race that came out of Egypt. Then the sword of my army and the spear of my servants shall pierce your sides, and you shall fall among their wounded, when I return.'[77]

However, Achior had prophesied on behalf of the Israelites that their enemies would perish, and had his reward, though a different one from that promised by Holofernes. Achior was taken in by the Israelites and questioned about Holofernes.

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[74] *2 Kings* 4: 32-35.
[75] Frymer-Kensky (1994) p 20.
[76] *Judith* 5: 21.
[77] *Judith* 6: 2 & 5 - 6.

> He answered and told them what had taken place at the council of Holofernes, and all that he had said in the presence of the Assyrian leaders, and all that Holofernes had said so boastfully against the house of Israel.[78]

When Judith had disposed of Holofernes, and brought his head back to Behulia, Achior received his reward, as the narrator of the *Book of Judith* would see it, of faith in the Israelites' God.

> And when Achior saw all that the God of Israel had done, he believed firmly in God, and was circumcised, and joined the house of Israel, remaining so to this day.[79]

This verse spells out to us the reward to be given to all God's faithful prophets, whether or not they were punished for their prophecies by dissatisfied rulers; and this belief is what gave prophets such as Huldah the courage to say the truth, even when lies would suit their earthly masters better. The woman who succoured Elijah and the woman of Shunem also faced censure, this time for supporting 'holy men of God', and had their faith rewarded. It is curious that such important women are not named: we do not even know the name of the husband of the woman of Shunem. This is unusual, since women whose stories are related in the Old Testament are almost always identified, if only as 'wife of x', as in the case of Samson's mother who was defined in these rather unflattering terms:

> And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children.[80]

Deborah and Miriam were examples of faith in God coupled with leadership and in Deborah's case, discernment, as she was important as a judge in Israel. All these stories featuring women were intended to spur men to greater faith, courage, leadership and discernment, since the fact that women could behave thus would act as a reproach and encouragement to men to do likewise, lest they be outdone by the weaker sex.

Bathsheba and Tamar

The treatment of women was often used in the Old Testament as a test of whether a society or a person is truly just, since it is not through the treatment of equals that a man's true morality is revealed, but through his treatment of inferiors. This was the reasoning behind the divine dictum that:

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[78]*Judith* 6: 17.
[79]*Judith* 14: 10.

> You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.[81]

Thus two of the weakest, most vulnerable groups in society, widows and orphans, were brought under divine protection. However, humans being fallible, women and children were sometimes badly treated, and tales from the Old Testament reflect this, and warn readers to avoid such ill-treatment in the future for fear of divine punishment.[82] Such warnings are usually implied, in the form of relating what happened to men who ill-treated women, but are none the less powerful. Two examples of women suffering at the hand of powerful men are the stories of Bathsheba and Tamar. Bathsheba was so beautiful that she attracted the attention of David, the king.

> It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking upon the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, 'Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?'[83]

This identification of Bathsheba was important, since it made quite clear that David knew she was married and could not claim ignorance in defence of his subsequent actions.

> So David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house.[84]

Thus David broke the commandment forbidding adultery, and also broke his own cultic purity, since it was forbidden to have sex with women when they had not been purified after their period. David committed three crimes in his seduction of Bathsheba: adultery; destruction of cultic purity; and perhaps most importantly, coercion of a vulnerable woman, since Bathsheba's husband Uriah was away soldiering, so she had no man to defend her and was at the king's mercy even more than other subjects were. Bathsheba became pregnant, so David tried to cover his crime by sending Uriah home. However, Uriah's position as the just man in the story was further enhanced by his refusal to go back to home comforts while the country was at war.

> Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat

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[80] *Judges* 13: 2.
[81] *Exodus* 22: 22 - 24.
[82] Frymer-Kensky (1994) p 30.
[83] *2 Samuel* 11: 2 - 3.
[84] *2 Samuel* 11: 4.

> and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.'[85]

This refusal sealed Uriah's fate, since it was not now possible for Bathsheba's child by David to be passed off as Uriah's. Incidentally, David was also attempting to force Uriah to detroy his own cultic purity, albeit unwittingly, since it was considered cultically impure to have sex with a pregnant woman. This attitude carried over into Christianity, as Augustine showed when he spoke in disgust of 'men who are so lacking in self-control that they do not spare their wives even when they are pregnant.'[86] The notion that sexual intercourse under such circumstances was impure had disappeared by Augustine's time, but it was still considered to be wrong, chiefly because it could not lead to reproduction. Having failed to make Bathsheba's baby appear legitimate, David decided to have Uriah killed so that he could marry Bathsheba himself, and made use of the ongoing siege of Rabbah to dispose of Uriah, through his commander Joab.

> In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.'[87]

Uriah was duly killed in battle, and David married Bathsheba, 'but the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.'[88] David was punished by the death of his first son by Bathsheba, as the prophet Nathan foretold.

> Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die.'[89]

Thus the seduction of Bathsheba is used to show that not even kings are immune to God's displeasure. Interestingly there was no hint that Bathsheba was to blame for David's actions: the fault lay solely with him. This was somewhat unusual, since women who were raped were often accused of 'encouraging' their attackers.

Tamar was considerably more unfortunate than Bathsheba. She was the daughter of king David, but this did not protect her from rape. Her half-brother Amnon fell in love with her. At

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[85] *2 Samuel* 11: 11.
[86] *The Excellence of Marriage* 6.
[87] *2 Samuel* 11: 14 - 15.
[88] *2 Samuel* 11: 27.

the beginning of the story it is clear that Amnon was a good man, because 'he thought it an impossible thing to approach her since she was a virgin'.[90] The dictates of morality forbade that he should approach Tamar herself, because her virginal status clearly indicated that she was virtuous. A virtuous woman, especially a virgin, would never consent to an extra-marital affair. However, Amnon was unfortunate enough to have a friend called Jonadab who came up with a plan to get Amnon what he wanted.

> But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimenah, David's brother; and Jonadab was a very crafty man. And he said to him, 'O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?' Amnon said to him, 'I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister.' Jonadab said to him, 'Lie down on your bed, and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, "Let my sister Tamar come and give me bread to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it from her hand"'[91]

Amnon did exactly as Jonadab suggested, and king David granted his request, sending Tamar to bake for him. When the food was ready, Amnon went further than seems to have been suggested by Jonadab. He ordered everyone except Tamar to leave the room, and said to Tamar, '"Bring the food into the chamber, that I may eat from your hand."'[92] Poor unsuspecting Tamar obeyed, still thinking that Amnon was ill and wanting to aid his recovery, as she had been commanded by David.

> But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, 'Come, lie with me, my sister.' She answered him, 'No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this wanton folly. As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the wanton fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray you, speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you.'[93]

This passage shows that Tamar had several qualities which would have been considered desirable in Jewish women of the time. We have already been told that she was a virgin, and unmarried. Here we learn that she was devout, with knowledge of and respect for the law, since she says 'such a thing is not done in Israel'. She also knew that her shame and Amnon's disgrace in the eyes of society would be immense. She refused to obey a command which was

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[89] *2 Samuel* 12: 14.
[90] *2 Samuel* 13: 2.
[91] *2 Samuel* 13: 3 - 6.
[92] *2 Samuel* 13: 10.
[93] *2 Samuel* 13: 11 - 14.

wrong, but she showed herself willing to obey a lawful order from the king, if he should give her to Amnon in marriage, though at no point did she express any desire to marry Amnon unless told to do so. This passage gives an interesting insight into the obedience required of all Jews, since Tamar is portrayed as virtuous for her refusal to have sex with Amnon without being married to him; and also for her willingness to marry him if the king should lawfully demand it. It seems reasonable to conclude that Jews in general should refuse to obey unlawful orders, but submit to lawful dicta even if they do not want to. This possibility that the king might give Tamar to Amnon in marriage sheds interesting light on Old Testament attitudes to sexual relations between half-siblings. They were not regarded as incestuous and therefore wrong, but seem to have been acceptable. For example, Abraham described his familial relationship to Sarah in terms which would now make it incestuous, but which he appeared to have regarded as perfectly acceptable.

> Besides she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.[94]

Thus a modern reader may regard both Abraham and Amnon as guilty of crimes which their contemporaries would not consider them to have committed.

Amnon's lust then turned to hatred after he had raped Tamar, and he turned her out of his house. Tamar's reaction was similar to the actions of mourning.

> And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent the long robe which she wore; and she laid her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went.[95]

This mourning behaviour is to be expected, as Tamar was grieving for her lost virginity, honour and respectability, all of which Amnon had stolen when he raped her. She would also have been in considerable physical and mental distress, not least because her half-brother, whom she trusted, had attacked her. Her physical pain is not mentioned, but 'so Tamar dwelt, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house.'[96] Tamar could do nothing to avenge herself, and had

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[94]*Genesis* 20: 12.
[95]*2 Samuel* 13: 15 - 20.
[96]*2 Samuel* 13: 20.

to rely on Absalom for support, though, like Bathsheba, she was never accused of inciting her rape. The whole episode caused considerable distress to other members of the family.

> When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry. But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar.[97]

One of the messages of this story is clearly that one man's wicked deed does not just affect him; it affects his whole family, and therefore unjust actions should be avoided. We are not told what happened to Tamar after the rape. Amnon was killed by Absalom in revenge.[98] Interestingly, Absalom had a daughter whom he called Tamar, perhaps in honour of his sister.

> There were born to Absalom three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar; she was a beautiful woman.[99]

There is a similarity here between the ancient Greek idea that family members should avenge each other's wrongs, as displayed by Orestes among others, who avenged his father's murder, and Absalom's hatred and eventual murder of his half-brother for the rape of his sister. Both these characters suffered for their act of vengeance, as Orestes was pursued by the Furies, and Absalom was himself killed by one of David's officers.

> Joab said, 'I will not waste time like this with you.' And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them into the heart of Absalom, while he was still alive in the oak. And ten young men, Joab's armour bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him.[100]

Both Absalom and Orestes were punished for the murders they committed, but the general feeling is that they were right to commit them to avenge their relations who had been wronged, although they themselves had to be punished. It is interesting that this tension between believing vengeance to be right and also believing murder to be wrong is noticeable in both ancient Greek and early Jewish culture.

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[97] *2 Samuel* 13: 21 - 22.

[98] *2 Samuel* 13: 23 - 33.

[99] *2 Samuel* 14: 27.

[100] *2 Samuel* 18: 14-15. Compare with Orestes' fate as pronounced by Castor: But thou, leave Argos, for thou mayst not tread her streets, since thou hast wrought thy mother's death. The dread Weird Sisters, hound-eyed Goddesses, shall drive thee mad and dog thy wanderings. (Euripides *Electra* 1250-1253.)

Creation and the Fall

The story of Eve at the Creation is one of woman's equality with man in one version, and of her inequality in the other. Perhaps significantly, the first and longer Creation story is the one which has the words

> So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.[101]

Thus the first mention of men and women in the Old Testament shows their equality at the dawn of time. The second version of Creation, which is considerably shorter, tells that Adam was created first, Eve second.

> So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.[102]

Ringgren remarks that the account in *Genesis* chapter one is relatively late, and that chapter two probably preceded it in the oral tradition from which both came.[103] This may be true, but whatever their relative antiquity, both versions are old enough to be included in the Jewish canon. The question of which version came first is not relevant here, since I am concerned not with how the Old Testament was formed, but rather with the images of women in it. Therefore the fact that the first mention of women implies their equality is significant, since it shows clearly that men and women were considered to have been equal before the Fall. This is borne out by God's words to the woman after the Fall.

> To the woman he said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'[104]

The judgement that Adam would from now on be Eve's master implies that in the ideal conditions in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, this was not the case. Since the Garden of Eden is portrayed as being created perfect by God, according to his plan, it seems reasonable to assume that the authors of *Genesis* did not consider the subordination of women to be an ideal situation,

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[101]*Genesis* 1: 27.
[102]*Genesis* 2: 21 - 22.
[103]Ringgren (1976) p 105.

but rather one brought about by divine retribution for sin. As I shall discuss in chapter 4, St Paul's interpretation of these stories had a considerable impact on his writings and on the development of Christianity. However, the doctrine that no-one is sinless, which is so important to Christianity, can be found frequently in the Old Testament.[105] For example, there is the question 'Who can say, "I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin"?'[106] However, the wise are able to distinguish right from wrong, and can act accordingly, with the assistance of the Commandments.[107] The choice presented by God to Moses and the Jews was quite clear.

> 'See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments, and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you this day, that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land which you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.'[108]

Thus we can see that mankind has a choice. As Ringgren points out, the prophets' frequent calls to repentance and righteousness would otherwise be in vain.[109]

Conclusions

Schussler-Fiorenza considers that demands for women to be submissive and quiet usually increase when women's actual status and power are increasing.[110] Since the extant texts on women are prescriptive rather than descriptive, this would seem to meet the case. If we are to achieve an accurate picture of the role ascribed to women in early Judaism, we must look past the prescriptions, most of which are religious, to the descriptions of individual women. Many of these, such as Deborah, Huldah and Judith, had considerable freedom. The fact that such

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[104]*Genesis* 3: 16.
[105]Ringgren (1976) pp 139 - 140.
[106]*Proverbs* 20: 9. See also *1 Kings* 8: 46 and *Psalms* 103: 3.
[107]Ringgren (1976) p 140.
[108]*Deuteronomy* 30: 15 - 18.
[109]Ringgren (1976) p 143.
[110]Schussler-Fiorenza (1985) p 109.

women had their stories included in the Jewish canon provides a powerful role model for other women, and suggests that they were not unique.

From the description of the ideal woman's activities, and from the fact that women played a major part in familial worship, it is also clear that Jewish women were expected to be practical and to lead lives devoted primarily to their families and only secondarily to God. This may have been the cause of Paul's belief, which Augustine also supported, that only an unmarried woman could be truly dedicated to God. Men, partly because they were able to study the Torah and to take part in worship, could lead more religiously absorbed lives. Women were also exonerated from all religious obligations which were related to time, though they were bound by all others. Thus men had greater religious duties than women. Perhaps one of the most significant elements of Jewish life is displayed most clearly in the Morning Blessings which every Jewish man should recite every day. After thanking God for the new day and for the world, men thank him 'that thou didst not make me a woman'. Thus the inferiority of women was declared by every Jewish man every morning. It was against this background that Paul developed his thought which was so highly influential upon Augustine and upon Christianity in general, so it is not surprising that women were regarded by both religions as inferior.

Chapter 3

Women and Slaves in Greek and Roman society

In this chapter I shall examine the roles assigned to women in pagan Greek and Roman society. The customs of these societies, together with Jewish customs discussed in the previous chapter, provided the background against which the thought of Plato, Paul and Augustine developed, and it is therefore necessary to study them before turning to the individuals who are the main subject of this thesis. I shall begin by discussing the position of women in secular society, and then their roles in religious rites, and then shall examine briefly the portrayal of women in literature. It is difficult to know how women were treated in ancient Greece, since most of the records we have were written by free men for use by themselves and their equals, which did not include women. Society was patriarchal, and thus the voices most easily heard were male. However, a certain amount can be ascertained about women's lives, though the picture will never be complete.

Roman Marriage

In Roman society, women were always under the control of their *paterfamilias*, a legal guardian who was usually but not invariably their father or their husband. The only exceptions to this rule were the Vestal Virgins, who were freed from their paterfamilias.[1] Widows came under the guardianship of their sons, or else returned to their fathers or other male blood relation. They did not inherit their husband's property unless he had specifically willed it, and thus would need their dowry to live on or to try to attract another husband.[2] The rule of the paterfamilias became weakened during the late Roman Republic and early Empire, culminating in Augustus' *jus trium liberorum* which liberated a freeborn woman from guardianship if she had had three children, and

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[1]Pomeroy, S., *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (1994) p 213.
[2]Cameron, A. & Kuhrt, A. (eds) *Images of Women in Antiquity* (1993) p217.

liberated a freedwoman who had had four children.[3] Furthermore, it is clear that aristocratic women in the late Republic had considerable control over their own finances.

> You are a great lady, and he is a youth who has a stingy and parsimonious father; and so you intend to use your riches to keep him in your grasp.[4]

The 'great lady' here is Clodia, whom Cicero was describing as thoroughly disreputable and sexually immoral, but it is interesting that she was able to use her own wealth to seduce young men such as Caelius, regardless of her family's opinion. It seems in this passage that the young man was being kept on a far tighter rein than the wealthy woman, which is something of a reversal of roles.

The only political role open to women was that they might improve their own and their family's status and, in the case of upper-class or royal women, make valuable connexions, by marriage.[5] The marriage would be arranged by their legal guardian, and the couple would not normally meet before the ceremony. In Roman society, there existed two types of marriage: those with *manus* and those without. A marriage with manus meant that the bride was given entirely to her husband's family, to the extent of abandoning her ancestral gods and adopting her husband's. In marriage without manus, the bride remained part of her father's family and kept to her own gods. In the former, her dowry went to her husband if she died, and in the latter it returned to her father's family.[6] The institution of manus was concerned chiefly with property, though it had some consequences for women's personal freedom too. A marriage with manus gave a woman and her property to her husband, and consequently gave her some rights over his property. Marriage without manus came to be preferred, not least because it eliminated the transfer of property from one family to another. It also gave women slightly more liberty, since the bride remained under the legal jurisdiction of her father or other guardian, who did not live with her. However, even in the case of marriage with manus, the bride's family remained involved in

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[3]Pomeroy (1994) p 151.
[4]Cicero, *In Defence of Marcus Caelius Rufus*.
[5]Blundell, S. & Williamson, M. (eds) *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece* (1998) p 107.

her life and could protect her interests. For example, although a woman accused of adultery could not defend herself against the charge, her guardian could do so, though only with difficulty and it is unclear what his chances of success were.[7] Furthermore, a paterfamilias could force his ward to divorce or to break off engagements, and often did so for political reasons.[8] This was particularly common among the Roman upper classes, where one woman was often betrothed or married to several men. For example, Julius Caesar broke off his daughter's engagement to Servilius Caepio in order to engage her to Pompey, his erstwhile enemy with whom he wished to make peace. Sometimes, women refused to divorce their husbands, as in the case of Octavia, Augustus' sister, whom he urged to divorce Mark Antony. Paradoxically, in spite of these manoeuvrings before and within marriage, the *univira*, the woman who had had only one husband, was honoured by Roman society.[9]

Augustus introduced minimum marriageable ages of twelve for girls and fourteen for boys. Both parties had to consent to the marriage, but it seems unlikely that a twelve-year-old girl could raise much objection. Older women and girls occasionally benefited from the absence of their fathers to choose their own husbands, often with the assistance of their mothers. The typical age of puberty for Roman girls was between thirteen and fourteen, so it is probable that some brides were prepubescent. Furthermore, the bride sometimes lived with her future husband before she was legally of age, and in these circumstances the union would usually be consummated before the marriage. The reason for girls being married off so young was that virgin brides were considered highly desirable.[10] Roman girls received a little education, though not as much as their brothers, since they were educated by tutors at home, or occasionally

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[6]Pomeroy (1994) p 152.
[7]Pomeroy (1994) p 86.
[8]Pomeroy (1994) p 158.
[9]Pomeroy (1994) p 161.
[10]Pomeroy (1994) pp 157 & 164.

attended an elementary school in the Forum.[11] This took place only until their marriage, after which they received no formal education but depended on their husbands for tuition.

Greek Marriage

Another type of enforced divorce took place in Athens in the case of daughters who inherited all their father's property. In this case, the girl had to marry her nearest male relation, even if this meant that either he or she or both of them had to divorce their original spouses. Thus, although women could and did inherit property, they never controlled it as it passed to their husbands. A Spartan girl in this situation had to marry her kinsman only if she were unmarried, so there was no enforced divorce.[12] There are similarities between this treatment of heiresses and the Jewish custom of Levirate marriage discussed in the previous chapter, in that Greek and Roman heiresses and Levirate widows were compelled to marry their kinsmen. These customs illustrate the pre-eminence of society over the individual in the ancient world, since in Jewish society the continuation of a family name was assured by Levirate marriage, while in Greece and Rome the marriage of an heiress to her nearest blood relation ensured that her father's money remained in his family.

Girls were also married young in Greece. In Athens this was partly to reduce the risk of illegitimate children by being as sure as humanly possible that the girl was a virgin when she married; and partly to enable her husband to mould her behaviour and character according to his will. This desire for mentally unformed girls was illustrated by Xenophon.

> 'What could she have known when I took her as my wife, Socrates? She was not yet fifteen when she came to me, and had spent her previous years under careful supervision so that she might see and hear and speak as little as possible. Don't you think it was adequate if she came to me knowing only how to take wool and produce a cloak, and had

[11]Pomeroy (1994) p 170.

[12]Pomeroy (1994) p 61; Blundell & Williamson (1998) p 48; Burn, A. R. *The Penguin History of Greece* (1990) p 255.

> seen how spinning tasks are allocated to the slaves? And besides, she had been very well trained to control her appetites...'[13]

The reaction of Ischomachus' wife to being handed over to a man she barely knew was probably representative, though at fifteen she was not as young as some brides. Unsurprisingly she had to be 'tamed and domesticated so as to be able to carry on a conversation' with her husband.[14] The fear which brides felt was widespread, and was remarked upon by Plutarch, who also pointed out that husbands might well be apprehensive about their new wives. However, Plutarch advocated perseverance on both sides, with a harmonious marriage as the reward.

> In Boeotia, when they veil the bride, they give her a garland of asparagus. This is a plant that gives the sweetest fruit from the sharpest thorn, just as the bride will give a life of calm and sweetness to the man who does not shrink from, or feel distaste for, the first harsh and disagreeable impressions. Men who cannot put up with a young girl's first quarrels are like people who leave the ripe bunch to others because the unripe grape was tart. Many newly married girls also show distaste for their bridegrooms because of the first experience; they are like people who put up with the bee's sting but let the honeycomb go.[15]

It is clear from both Plutarch and Xenophon that marriages in the ancient world could be something of an ordeal for both parties, though for very different reasons. The bride had to adapt to being uprooted from her family and transplanted to a strange household ruled over by that unknown quantity, her husband. To a well brought up young girl who had been secluded in her parental home, this must have been terrifying. Her husband, on the other hand, had to cope with the disturbance of his bachelor existence and the presence of a wife in his house, with all the tears and tantrums likely to result from her upheaval.

Principal Duties

Once married, a woman's principal tasks in Greece and Rome were childbearing and household management. Once again, Xenophon gave a clear description of what a married woman should do, and why it was women's work.

> Because the woman was less physically capable of endurance, I think the god has evidently assigned the indoor work to her. And because the god was aware that he had

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[13]Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 7:5 - 6.

[14]*Oeconomicus* 7:10.

[15]Plutarch, *Advice to the Bride and Groom* 2.

> both implanted in the woman and assigned to her the nurture of newborn children, he had measured out to her a greater share of affection for newborn babies than he gave to the man. And because the god had also assigned to the woman the duty of guarding what had been brought into the house, realising that a tendency to be afraid is not at all disadvantageous for guarding things, he measured out a greater portion of fear to the woman than to the man.[16]

With women in charge at home, men were free to go out, socialise, earn wages to support their households, and do all outdoor activities.

> Those who intend to obtain produce to bring into the shelter need someone to work at the outdoor jobs. For ploughing, sowing, planting and herding is all work performed outdoors, and it is from these that our essential provisions are obtained.[17]

That 'someone' was the man, because the Greeks considered that men were 'more capable of enduring cold and heat and travelling.'[18] It is interesting that Xenophon was concerned only by physical differences between the sexes, which he considered to be the reason for women being in charge of the household while men went out to work. He did not claim that women were less intellectually able than men, or that they were less moral.

> Because it is necessary for both of them to give and to take, he gave both of them equal powers of memory and concern. So you would not be able to distinguish whether the female or male sex has the larger share of these. And he gave them both equally the ability to practise self-control too, when it is needed.[19]

This assertion would have surprised Xenophon's contemporaries, since Greek society generally considered women to be less intelligent than men; and in need of restraint because of their moral laxity to such an extent that they were not allowed to go shopping, as I shall discuss later.

Athenian women passed through three stages of life. An unmarried girl was called παρθενος, which roughly but not exactly equates to virgin; then she was known as νυμφη from marriage until the birth of the first child, whereupon she achieved the title of γυνη, adult woman.[20] Because of the lack of understanding of female medicine, many women died in childbirth, and thus were never considered to be adult. Their clothes were dedicated in the temple to Artemis at

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[16]*Oeconomicus* 7:23-25.
[17]*Oeconomicus* 7:20.
[18]*Oeconomicus* 7:23.
[19]*Oeconomicus* 7:26.
[20]Blundell & Williamson (1998) p 33.

Brauron, which encouraged young women to believe that such death was glorious.[21] Indeed, it was considered the equivalent for women of death on the battlefield for men, and the Spartans put names on the tombs only of those women who died in childbirth and those men who fell in battle.[22] It is unclear whether the Athenians practised contraception, but the Romans certainly did. Some contraceptives were magical, and probably ineffectual, such as an amulet of cat's liver worn on the left foot. Others were more practical, including condoms made of goats' bladders.[23] Unwanted or weak children were also exposed after birth in both Athens and Rome.[24] Since daughters were more expensive, requiring dowries, they were more likely to be exposed. Such children, if found alive, became their finder's slave, and many probably became prostitutes.[25]

Roman attitudes to adultery

The ancient laws on adultery and extramarital sex reveal the operation of a considerable double standard. For respectable women, extramarital sex was utterly forbidden, while for men it was condoned if not actually encouraged. However, married men could and did use prostitutes, and have affairs; and it was expected that young unmarried men would do the same.

> All the same, if anyone thinks young men ought to be forbidden affairs even with prostitutes, he is certainly very austere (that I would not deny), but he is out of touch with our present permissive age.[26]

Cicero himself probably deplored such behaviour, but in this speech he was defending a young man who had been accused of murder, and the attempted murder of his mistress, and so he had to condone such behaviour. As in Athens, divorce was compulsory for an adulterous Roman woman, and the penalties became even more severe after the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*, passed in about 18 BC., which made adultery a public crime and enabled husbands to prosecute

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[21]Keuls (1993) p 320.
[22]Keuls (1993) p 138.
[23]Pomeroy (1994) pp 166 -7.
[24]Pomeroy (1994) p 165.
[25]Keuls (1993) pp 146 & 149.
[26]*In Defence of Marcus Caelius Rufus.*

their ex-wives with their lovers.[27] Augustus decreed that adultery was an offence only in women, though adulterous men did not have an easy time, as Horace explained.

> It's worthwhile to hearken, you who wish misfortune upon adulterers, how they suffer at every turn, how their pleasure is spoilt by tremendous pain and how rarely it falls to their lot, in the midst of cruel and constant dangers. One man has hurled himself headlong from a roof, another's been scourged to death, this one, whilst making his escape, has stumbled into a fierce band of robbers; this one's paid cash to save his person; this one's been irrigated by grooms; why, it's even come to the point where a man took his sword and scythed off his victim's balls and lustful cock. 'Fair enough' said all; Galba didn't agree.[28]

It is clear from this that men who committed adultery were the targets of vengeance by their mistress' lawful husbands, even though the law would not prosecute them. However, the law did concern itself with adulterous women, even decreeing that the father of an adulterous woman could kill her. A woman convicted of adultery in a trial lost half her dowry, her lover was also fined, and they were sent into exile, separately. However, a man caught in adultery could be divorced by his wife, but did not have to be, and was not prosecuted.[29] Men were forbidden to have sex with unmarried or widowed upper class women, and rapists could be prosecuted by the victim's guardian.[30] If a woman were divorced for adultery, poisoning her children or counterfeiting her keys, her husband kept her dowry and all his possessions. If she were divorced for any other reason, she received half of everything.[31]

The seaside seems to have been a hotbed of adulterous intrigue. The resort at Baiae was particularly popular with the upper classes, who used it to escape the summer heat of Rome. Cicero described the social activities of Clodia, which seem to have been surprisingly wide-ranging for a supposedly respectable woman.

> The prosecutors are making play with orgies, cohabitations, adulteries, trips to Baiae, beach parties, dinner parties, drinking parties, musical parties, concert parties, boating

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[27]Scullard, H. H., *From the Gracchi to Nero* (1992) p 231.
[28]Horace, *Satires* I: 2, 37-46.
[29]Pomeroy (1994) p 159.
[30]Pomeroy (1994) p 160.
[31]Pomeroy (1994) p 154.

> parties - and they indicate that everything they are talking about is said with your approval.[32]

The implication is clearly that such behaviour would be permissible in a young man but not in a woman. However, Clodia was not alone in availing herself of such opportunities. Propertius also had cause to regret his lover's presence at Baiae.

> Only, depart with all speed from corrupt Baiae: those shores will cause many to part, shores which have ever been harmful to virtuous girls: a curse on the waters of Baiae, that bring reproach on love![33]

Thus it can be seen that Roman women were permitted some licence in their behaviour, though they were reproached for excesses, and the view of what was excessive for a woman was very different from that for a man.

Greek attitudes to adultery

Marriage was an important social institution in ancient Greece, as it was the foundation of society. Monogamous marriage was enforced, and marital sex was the only sexual activity allowed to respectable women. The archetype of respectable behaviour by a Greek wife was Penelope, Odysseus' wife who stayed in Ithaca looking after the estate, bringing up their son and fending off suitors while her husband was absent. Such behaviour had divine approval.

> 'And yet,' said the goddess of the flashing eyes, 'with Penelope for your mother, I cannot think that your house is doomed to an inglorious future.'[34]

In Athens, the husband of an adulterous woman was compelled to divorce her; she had no opportunity to defend herself, and she lost all legal status. Her lover could also be killed by her husband with impunity.[35] However, this was never imagined to be incompatible with polygamous sexual activity for men.[36] Once again, this was illustrated by Homer. Penelope fended off her suitors and remained chaste until Odysseus' return. He, on the other hand, had numerous love affairs on his journey home. Among his lovers were the witch Circe and the goddess Calypso.

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[32]*In Defence of Marcus Caelius Rufus.*
[33]Propertius, *Elegies I* 11:27-30.
[34]Homer, *The Odyssey* 1:221.
[35]Pomeroy (1994) pp 86 - 87; Keuls (1993) p 208.

> (Circe speaks): 'But now put up your sword and come with me to my bed, so that in making love we may learn to trust one another.'
> 'Circe', I answered her, 'how can you order me to be gentle with you, you who have turned my friends into pigs here in your house, and now that you have me too in your clutches are inveigling me to your bedroom and inviting me to your bed, to strip me naked and rob me of my courage and manhood? Nothing, goddess, would induce me to come into your bed unless you can bring yourself to swear a solemn oath that you have no other mischief in store for me.'
> Circe at once swore as I ordered her. So when she had duly sworn the oath, I went with the goddess to her beautiful bed.[37]

Calypso kept Odysseus prisoner on her island for many years, but it was she who was rebuked for keeping him rather than he for staying.

> 'Then send him off at once,' the Messenger, the Giant-killer said, and so avoid provoking Zeus, or he may be angry and punish you one day.'[38]

The roots of this double standard can be seen in Solon's legislation for Athens of about 594 BC., which instituted state-controlled brothels while allowing fathers to sell their daughters into slavery if they lost their virginity before marriage.[39] It was not considered possible by the Athenians for sexual desire to be contained by marriage. It is possible that men were legally obliged to have sex with their wives three times a month.[40] This legislation, if it existed, was similar to the Jewish regulations that stipulated the regularity with which men of different social situations were expected to have sex with their wives. Among the Athenians, conjugal sex was strictly for the procreation of children, not for pleasure. Prostitutes and male lovers were used for pleasurable, non-generative sex, but marital sex was performed out of duty.[41] Many Athenian men had concubines, and the penalties for the rape or seduction of these women were the same as for raping or seducing a wife, although after 451 BC., the children of concubines were not Athenian citizens.[42] Pomeroy states that the husband of a raped or adulterous woman had to divorce her and kill or fine her molester because it was very easy for illegitimate children to be passed off as

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[36]Finley, M. I., *Aspects of Antiquity* (1991) p 129.
[37]*The Odyssey* 10:345.
[38]*The Odyssey* 5:145.
[39]Keuls (1993) p 5.
[40]Keuls (1993) p 114.
[41]Keuls (1993) p 130.
[42]Pomeroy (1994) p 91.

legitimate, and thus legislation was necessary to protect the citizen body.[43] In the case of lawful wives, this seems a probable reason. However, these penalties also applied to concubines, whose children could not be citizens, so it seems likely that, although nominally framed to protect society, these laws were also concerned with protecting male pride and allowing cuckolded men a chance to avenge themselves on a personal level. The Athenians' low regard for marital sex, and the legalisation of brothels, meant that women were divided into respectable mothers and disreputable whores. Men combined pleasure and procreation in their sexual activities, but this was considered impossible for women.[44] This clearly influenced later Christianity, including Augustine, who believed that the only reason Eve was female rather than male was that she was thus able to assist Adam in procreation. He considered that another man would have been a better helper, companion and friend for Adam in every other way, as I shall discuss in chapter 8.

The marriage of slaves

Formal marriage was not possible between slaves either in Athens or Rome, though cohabitation without legal validity was permitted. Unions were generally encouraged between slaves of one owner, since any children belonged to the mother, if she were free, or to her master if she were not. Once again we see here maternity being more important than paternity in deciding a child's fate, slavery or freedom, just as it is used to decide whether a child is Jew or Gentile.[45] Roman slaves could accumulate wealth of their own, and could use this capital to buy slaves themselves. Legally these would belong to their owner's master, but they were generally considered to be the slave's property. Male slaves could also acquire wives in this manner; and while it is unclear whether female slaves could buy husbands, it is probable that they could, at least in theory.[46] Free Roman men of below senatorial rank could manumit a female slave to

[43]Pomeroy (1994) p 86.
[44]Keuls (1993) p 205.
[45]Pomeroy (1994) p 193 and Chapter 2, above.
[46]Pomeroy (1994) p 194.

marry her, though this was forbidden to senators and women of senatorial rank. No Roman woman could free her own slave without permission from her legal guardian, as Cicero showed.

> The prosecutors inform us that the slaves to whom the poison was allegedly being handed have been made free men, with the approval of the woman's aristocratic and illustrious relatives.[47]

Thus free women were in the somewhat strange position of being able to own slaves but unable to free them. This was probably to prevent 'weak' women, which would have meant all women, from freeing slaves out of pity rather than as a reward for good service. It is also noteworthy that Cicero was obliquely questioning Clodia's motives in freeing these slaves, since they could not be forced to give evidence under torture once they had been freed.

The children of mixed marriages between free men and freed women were slaves if they were born when their mother was a slave, and freeborn if they were born after her manumission. Furthermore, those whose father was free were his legitimate offspring. Male slaves sometimes persuaded their master to free their 'wives' so that her children could be free, though if their father were a slave, they would be illegitimate. Slaves of both sexes could use their savings to buy freedom.[48] Roman slaves who had been freed were legally obliged to serve their former owner, but not so much that they had no time to earn their living. Freed prostitutes and those aged over fifty were exempt, as in practice were women who had married with their master's consent. This opportunity to continue working in the family gave the freed slave some security.[49] However, such an arrangement meant that freed slaves never actually escaped servitude to their masters, apart from those in the categories just mentioned.

Ordinary Greek women

So far I have discussed the lives of wealthy women and of slaves in ancient Athens and Rome. But what of those who were neither rich nor slaves? Wealthy women in Athens were

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[47]*In defence of Marcus Caelius Rufus.*
[48]Pomeroy (1994) pp 195 & 197.
[49]Pomeroy (1994) p 201.

mainly confined to their houses, but it seems unlikely that poorer families could afford to keep their women indoors, rather than sending them out to work in shops or to fetch water.[50] Thus the sequestering of women became a status symbol, since a man whose wife did not go out to work was showing that he was rich enough not to need her income. This attitude to women leaving the house is clearly illustrated by Xenophon.

> And the law declares honourable those duties for which the god had made each of them more naturally capable. For the woman it is more honourable to remain indoors than to be outside; for the man it is more disgraceful to remain indoors than to attend to business outside.[51]

Athens was originally a small city based upon agriculture, but as it became larger and more urban, its women became more sequestered as they became less involved in rural activities such as farming. Women's work became the same as slaves' work and was therefore despised by men.[52] That free women's duties involved overseeing slaves is clear from Xenophon.

> You will have to stay indoors and send forth the group of slaves whose work is outdoors, and personally supervise those whose work is indoors.[53]

Women did not even go out to market, as the transactions there were thought to be too difficult for them.[54] It seems likely that men were occasionally guilty of bringing home the wrong thing, since they were not in charge of the household management, and therefore did not actually know what was needed.

> Praxinoa: Why, only the other day we told him 'Buy some soda, Daddy, and some red dye from the store.' The godalmighty fathead brought back salt![55]

However, poorer women did have to work outside the home, and thus had greater liberty. They were employed as washer women and in the textile industry and also as nurses. Some even had shops and stalls.[56] This last employment seems curiously at odds with the idea that women could not go to market to buy things, but is perhaps explained by the fact that these female stallholders had their property managed by men. Another opportunity to leave the house was

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[50]Cameron & Kuhrt (1993) p 81.
[51]*Oeconomicus* 7:30.
[52]Pomeroy (1994) p 71.
[53]*Oeconomicus* 7:35.
[54]Pomeroy (1994) p 72.
[55]Theocritus, *Idyll 15*, 'The Devotees of Adonis'.

provided by the custom that women prepared corpses for burial and were the principal mourners, as I shall discuss later. Work in the textile industry kept women indoors, and since most cloth was made domestically, kept them at home. However, drawing and carrying water was also a female activity, which brought women into public. In the sixth century BC, Peisistratos and his sons built the 'Nine Springs Fountain' in central Athens. This led to private wells being blocked up and forced women into public to fetch water.[57]

Ordinary Roman women

Roman women were not sequestered as they were in Athens. Upper class women were interested in affairs of state, and formed action groups, notably that led by Hortensia in 42 BC which successfully campaigned against further taxation to fund the civil war.[58] From the time of the late Republic, women formed their own literary salons, which was made possible by the fact that they were, as I have said, better educated than Athenian women.[59] The growth of the Roman Empire led to increasing emancipation for Roman women, since their men were absent fighting for and running the empire.[60] Poorer free woman still had hard lives with little chance for improvement. However, for female slaves there was a change. The invention of the aqueduct meant that water no longer had to be fetched from wells. Furthermore, clothing manufacture moved out of the home and into workshops. Thus female house-slaves were available for other tasks, and could be trained in a number of ways. They became clerks or secretaries; maids, hairdressers or masseuses; readers or entertainers; midwives or nurses. Thus a girl born a slave to a wealthy Roman family stood a good chance of receiving some education. Rural female slaves could also become *villica* on an estate, the chief housekeeper who had considerable

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[56]Pomeroy (1994) p 73.
[57]Keuls (1993) pp 235 - 6.
[58]Pomeroy (1994) p 176.
[59]Pomeroy (1994) p 174.
[60]Pomeroy (1994) p 181.

responsibility and was second only to the male overseer.[61] Of the lives of free poorer Roman women, there is little evidence. It seems that they led lives similar to those of their Athenian counterparts, discussed above.

Roman women's religion

I shall now move to an examination of the roles filled by women in the religious life of Athens and Rome. The role of cult priestess was the only public office open to women in either city. Roman women could become Vestal Virgins or priestesses of Ceres.[62] The cult of the Vestal Virgins is worthy of further discussion, as it was unique in many ways. The Vestals served for thirty years each, from the age of about six, after which they received dowries and could marry. Their lives were heavily circumscribed, but during their service they were not subject to any one man; though the *Pontifex Maximus* selected and supervised them, he was not their legal guardian. Their principal duties were to tend the eternal sacred flame of Vesta and to preserve their virginity. For this they received many privileges. For example, they were the only women allowed to drive through Rome in a two-wheeled wagon: everyone else had to walk. They were also attended by *lictors* and sat with the emperor at the theatre and the games. Indeed, the privileges of Vestals were so great that imperial women were often awarded the 'rights of Vestals' so that they should not be exceeded in status by commoners. However, the punishment for a Vestal who erred was also great. Because the welfare of the state was connected in the Roman mind to the morality of its women, and because the Vestals guarded the flame of the national hearth, any Vestal Virgin who was discovered to have lost her virginity was buried alive.[63] The cult of Ceres at Rome was the only other state cult to be administered by women, but because Ceres' worship was open exclusively to women it never achieved the national status of either the cult of Ceres at Eleusis or the cult of Vesta at Rome, both of which were open to men, the latter

[61]Pomeroy (1994) pp 191 - 2.
[62]Cameron & Kuhrt (1993) p 1; Pomeroy (1994) p 214.
[63]Pomeroy (1994) pp 210 - 214; Finley (1991) p 133.

being a national cult.[64] In the Empire, the religion of Isis grew extremely important. Isis was an Egyptian goddess and had many characteristics not found in traditional Graeco-Roman goddesses. As her cult grew, she acquired the attributes of other important gods and goddesses. For example, she absorbed Athena's wisdom, Venus' love and Ceres' fertility, as well as Jupiter's creative powers and control of lightning.[65] Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, believed herself to be Isis incarnate, and because of this Octavian forbade the building of any temples to Isis in Rome in 28 BC after his defeat of Antony and Cleopatra.[66] However, because Isis appealed to everyone, regardless of sex or social status, she came to be worshipped throughout the Empire, except in the army, where Mithras held sway.[67] Caligula was the first emperor to admit defeat, and from his reign onwards Isis had imperial support.[68]

Although he was a Greek, Plutarch wrote after the Roman conquest, when the cultures had become intermingled, and as such is useful when discerning true Graeco-Roman culture and when attempting to distinguish the two strands. As such I shall use him as evidence for both Greek and Roman custom. He was quite clear about whose gods a married woman should worship, and also about how she should choose her friends.

> A wife ought not to have friends of her own, but use her husband's as their common stock. And the first and most important of our friends are the gods. A married woman should therefore worship and recognise the gods whom her husband holds dear, and those alone. The door must be closed to strange cults and foreign superstitions. No god takes pleasure in cult performed furtively and in secret by a woman.[69]

Plutarch would have disapproved strongly of the custom which developed of allowing Christian women to follow their religion even when married to pagan husbands. Augustine's mother Monica was one such, who was brought up a Christian and whose devout behaviour eventually brought about her husband's conversion, as I shall discuss further in chapter 8. A considerable change

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[64]Pomeroy (1994) p 217.
[65]Pomeroy (1994) p 218.
[66]Pomeroy (1994) p 224.
[67]Pomeroy (1994) p 219.
[68]Pomeroy (1994) p 225.
[69]*Advice to the Bride and Groom* 19.

must have taken place in society to enable wives to practise a different religion from their husbands. This may have been due to the spread of the Roman Empire and the demise of marriages with manus. The former event led to many more people being subject to Roman laws and customs, while the latter meant that women who had been brought up as Christians could continue in their faith even if they married a pagan.

Athenian women's religion

Although Athenian women could become priestesses of Demeter, Artemis or Hera, those women who were not priestesses were, as I have said, kept indoors for most of their lives. An exception to this was that they were allowed out in public to partake in religious festivals and activities.[70] There were some festivals which were celebrated exclusively by women, among them the *Adonia*, a festival of Adonis which gave women an opportunity for rebellion as it required them to leave the house.

> Praxinoa: Bring me my cloak and hat. Take care how you put it on. I'm not taking you, child. Bogey get you. Horsey bite. All right, cry! I'm not going to have you lamed, that's all. Let's get going. Phrygia, take the boy and play with him. Call the dog in, and mind you bolt the outer door.[71]

They made lamentations from the roofs of their houses and filled the city with wailing, before carrying an effigy of Adonis around the city and casting it into the sea.[72] Unlike the Adonia, which was open to all women, the *Thesmophoria* was open only to free women. For three days the women moved into the place of assembly and took over the city. The costs of the festival were covered by men, but they had no other part.[73] Other festivals took place outside the city walls, among them festivals of Artemis. These were often celebrated in remote areas on the border of the city-state. Since men were not present, it was a good gauge of the political climate. If the celebration passed off peacefully, it symbolised the peace of the city, but if the rites or the

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[70]Cameron & Kuhrt (1993) p 124.
[71]*Idyll 15*, 'The Devotees of Adonis'.
[72]Keuls (1993) p 25.
[73]Keuls (1993) pp 352 - 3.

women were attacked, the city itself was vulnerable.[74] The Eleusinian Mysteries were unusual, in that although they focused on two goddesses, Demeter and Persephone, they were open to everyone, male and female, which may explain the cult's popularity.

The rituals attendant upon death were largely the responsibility of women in Athens. All classes of women, rich and poor, slave and free, were involved in mourning and preparation of corpses for burial.[75] The professional mourners were women, and due to their enthusiasm Solon restricted the number of women who might be at a funeral.[76] Women were also responsible for laying out the body and preparing it for the transition to the next life. Since it was believed that an incorrectly prepared body would not be able to cross the River Styx into Hades, but would be condemned to wander as a ghost, this was a highly responsible task which, in spite of the ritual pollution caused by contact with death, bestowed high status upon those who performed it.[77] Thus women were responsible for several rites of passage in the lives of every person, male and female. Women assisted at birth, marriage and death rituals, and were heavily involved in the physical and spiritual health of both the individual family and the wider city. No family, and by implication no city, could survive without the rituals performed by women.[78]

Roman literature

In Roman literature, women often appear as exemplars or warnings for their sex. Creusa, the wife of Aeneas, and Dido, the Queen of Carthage who attempted to detain Aeneas against divine will, typify these two extremes. Creusa recalled Aeneas to his duty not just once but twice. The first time, she reminded him of his family, including their son.

> But if what you have seen of the fighting leads you to suppose that there is any hope for us in resuming battle, your first care should be in the defence of our home here.

[74]Cameron & Kuhrt (1993) p 28.
[75]Pomeroy (1994) p 80; Keuls (1993) p 149.
[76]Cameron & Kuhrt (1993) p 117.
[77]Cameron & Kuhrt (1993) p 120.
[78]Cameron & Kuhrt (1993) pp 122 - 3.

> Otherwise, to whom will you leave our little son Iulus, your father, and me, whom you once called your wife?[79]

The second time, she appeared to him as a ghost which freed him to leave Troy and showed him his destiny as founder of Rome. Her death was convenient, since it enabled Aeneas to take a new wife when he reached Italy.

> 'Sweet husband, why do you allow yourself to yield to a pointless grief? What has happened is part of the divine plan...You have to plough through a great waste of ocean to distant exile...There happiness and a kingdom are in store for you, with a queen for you to marry. Dispel your tears for the Creusa whom you loved.'[80]

Thus Creusa was, in the ghostly form in which she appeared in this passage, the instructress and one who recalled the errant to duty, a reversal of the usual male-female roles. It is also clear, from his reaction to seeing her ghost and realising that she was dead, that Aeneas loved her, which was unusual in literature but further confirmation of Creusa's status as a remarkable woman.

> Three times I tried to cast my arms about her neck where she had been; but three times the clasp was in vain and the wraith escaped my hands, like airy winds, or the melting of a dream.[81]

Dido, however, although she was a queen, was portrayed as far from virtuous. This was probably so that the Carthaginians, who had been Rome's great enemy, could be classified by Virgil's audience as powerful but essentially corrupt, inferior to the virtuous Romans. When Dido persuaded Aeneas to become her lover, she did not marry him.

> Henceforward Dido cared no more for appearances or her good name, and ceased to take any thought for secrecy in her love. She called it a marriage; she used this word to screen her sin.[82]

Furthermore, when it became clear that their destinies lay in different directions and that Aeneas would leave her, she did not fade quietly out of the picture as Creusa had done. Instead she railed against Aeneas and the fates.

> 'Traitor, did you actually believe that you could disguise so wicked a deed and leave my country without a word? And can nothing hold you, not our love, not our once plighted hands, nor even the cruel death that must await your Dido?'[83]

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[79]Virgil, *Aeneid* 2:676-8.
[80]Virgil, *Aeneid* 2: 776 - 784.
[81]Virgil, *Aeneid* 2:792-4.
[82]Virgil, *Aeneid* 4:171-172.
[83]Virgil, *Aeneid* 4:305-308.

As usual, trying to prevent Aeneas from obeying the gods was pointless. There are similarities between this speech of Dido and Creusa's call to Aeneas to remember his family, but the former is trying to recall him from his duty, while the latter is reminding him of it. Dido's desperation at being abandoned drove her to hatred and suicide.

> 'I shall die, and die unavenged; but die I shall. Yes, yes, this is the way I like to go into the dark. And may the heartless Trojan, far out on the deep, drink in the sight of my fire and take with him the evil omen of my death.' There she ended. And even while she still spoke she had fallen upon the blade.[84]

Virgil wished his audience to infer that the 'evil omen' of Dido's death signified the conflict and war which would arise between her city and Aeneas' Roman settlement.

In later Roman lyric poetry, particularly in love poems, some women appear with distinct, strong characters. I have already mentioned Propertius' mistress Cynthia, whose trips to Baiae upset her lover. She was clearly a forceful woman who kept Propertius firmly in line.

> She is not like flighty girls and is not to be compared with them: she will not be able to restrain her anger with you. And if by chance she does not turn a deaf ear to your prayers, yet what countless sorrows will she cause you! Soon she will not allow you to sleep or close your eyes: she is fierce and just the one to curb men with her will.[85]

Catullus' mistress Lesbia was another woman who drove her lover to extremes of emotion. She inspired one of the shortest poems ever written, which nevertheless distils the poet's turmoil.

> I hate her and I love her. Perhaps you wonder how I do it? I do not know, but I am made to feel it, and I am in agony.[86]

Even allowing for a certain amount of poetic licence, it is clear that these were forceful women; and their characters were inspired by real women. Thus as Roman society developed, the women in literature became more realistic and less artificial paragons of male perceptions of perfection or embodiments of their fears.

Greek literature

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[84]Virgil, *Aeneid* 4:659-664.

[85]*Elegies I* 5:7-12.

[86]Catullus, *The Poems* 85, (my translation).

The portrayal of women in Greek literature bore little resemblance to the actual status of women in society. In tragedy and comedy, strong assertive women figure largely. Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, although it shows women taking over the city, is nonetheless disparaging. The women's only weapons are sex, and some cunning. Lysistrata was reproved by Kalonike for taking on the men at politics:

> But dearest Lysistrata! How can women do a thing so austere, so political? We belong at home. Our only armour's our perfumes, our saffron dresses and our pretty little shoes![87]

Lysistrata knew better, however, as she could see that men would not be able to concentrate on the war with Sparta if they were deprived of sex. Kalonike was, not surprisingly, sceptical, but was eventually persuaded by Lysistrata saying

> We'll just sit snug in our very thinnest gowns, perfumed and powdered from top to bottom, and those men simply won't stand still! And when we say No, they'll go out of their minds! And there's your peace. You can take my word for it.[88]

Lysistrata was proved right when a desperate delegation of sex-starved men came to her begging her to broker a peace between Sparta and the Athenians. She did so, and both sides agreed to her terms. Their reward was predictable:

> Then we'll open our baskets for you, and all that we have is yours. But you must promise upright good behaviour from this day on. Then each man home with his woman![89]

Aristophanes used the power of sex to comic effect, but it is interesting that it is women who were shown to be stronger. While seeming to suggest that all women are good for is sex, Aristophanes poked fun at men for being so completely at the mercy of their libidos that they allow themselves to have their political decisions influenced by 'weak' women. Since not one man held out against the torture, the conclusion seems to be that men should beware of angering their women, because in a battle of wills women have more powerful weapons, although they are not credited with much intelligence.

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[87]*Lysistrata* prologue.
[88]*Lysistrata* prologue.
[89]*Lysistrata* scene 5.

In Greek tragedy, especially in plays by Euripides, women were often forced into terrible relationships. For example, Cassandra was forced to become Agamemnon's concubine after he had destroyed her home.[90] Cassandra had been given the gift of prophecy by Apollo, but condemned never to be believed. It was for taking her as his mistress and for sacrificing Iphigenia that Clytemnestra murdered him. However, according to Euripides, Clytemnestra was most offended by the fact that Agamemnon had a mistress.

> Had he, to avert Mycenae's overthrow, - to exalt his house, - to save the children left, - slain one for many, 'twere not past forgiving...Howbeit for this wrong, how wronged soe'er, I had not raged, nor had I slain my lord; but to me with that prophet maid he came, made her usurp my couch, and fain would keep two brides together in the selfsame halls.[91]

This reaction confirmed her status as a bad woman, since Greek women should be most concerned for their children, and prepared to tolerate adultery. They were also easy prey, as in the case of Electra who was banished by her mother and her father's murderer and married to a peasant.

> In a poor hovel I abide, an exile from my father's door...my mother with her paramour in murder-bond the while is dwelling.[92]

Women in tragedy are rarely the instigators of violence, being more often the victims, but in *Electra* there are two powerful women; Clytemnestra, who arranged the murder of her husband, and Electra, who assisted her brother to murder their mother and step-father. That Clytemnestra's force of personality was unusual and unseemly is clear: 'yet shame is this, when foremost in the home is wife, not husband.'[93] Electra seems to have taken an active role in the murder, since she said to Orestes 'and I set with thee mine hand to the sword', and it is typical that women in Greek myth killed men rather than ruling them.[94] Keuls remarks that the exception to this rule is Circe, who held men captive but had to change them into animals to do so.[95] This is not strictly accurate, since Circe, persuaded by Odysseus, changed his men back into humans,

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[90]Pomeroy (1994) p 110.
[91]Euripides, *Electra* 1025-1029.
[92]*Electra* 207-212.
[93]*Electra* 932 - 3.
[94]*Electra* 1225.
[95]Keuls (1993) p 323.

but they did not leave. Indeed, 'we stayed on day after day for a whole year, feasting on lavish quantities of meat and mellow wine.'[96] Odysseus was by now Circe's lover, so she overcame his and his companions' desire to leave with food and sex, just as Lysistrata and her friends stopped a war by withholding sex.

However, it is significant that the only person who ever successfully tricked Odysseus was not only mortal, but female. On his return to Ithaca, after the death of the suitors, Penelope needed to be absolutely certain that it really was Odysseus who had returned to her. She told Odysseus to move their bed outside. Since Odysseus had built the bed round a tree, this would be difficult, but only he, Penelope and one maid knew this. It was thus a good test to find the real Odysseus, and he passed it.

> This was her way of putting her husband to the test. But Odysseus flared up at once and rounded on his loyal wife. 'Lady,' he cried, 'your words are a knife in my heart! Who has moved my bed?...A great secret went into the making of that complicated bed; and it was my work and mine alone.'[97]

This trick of Penelope's served a dual purpose. Firstly, it showed her that Odysseus really was who he claimed to be. Secondly, it confirmed her status as a virtuous wife who kept her marriage bed chaste while waiting for her husband's return. Women in Greek literature tended to conform to society's view of the two polarised types of women, in that they were either immoral like Clytemnestra or highly virtuous like Penelope.

Conclusions

For free women in Athens there was very little personal freedom, and no political power at all. They were kept indoors, and were responsible for the management of their households. In effect, they were reduced to the status of slave overseers. Sexually, they were also subordinate

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[96]*The Odyssey* 10: 465.
[97]*TheOdyssey* 23:181-190.

to their husbands and had to tolerate his affairs with young men and prostitutes while being completely forbidden to follow suit. Poorer women had some degree of personal freedom as they were forced by necessity to leave the house to carry water and occasionally to work in retail. Slaves were entirely dependant upon their owners and had no freedom at all, that being the nature of slavery. Keuls suggests that the only reason this situation was viable was that almost any degree of repression is tolerable so long as the subject has someone to pity who is in an even worse position.[98] Thus aristocratic women pitied ordinary women, who in turn pitied slaves. Slaves had no-one below them, but had absolutely no say over their conditions. The only freedom which Athenian women had was some degree of religious expression, since they were allowed out of the house for some religious festivals. One may imagine that these became high points in many women's lives, since they were an opportunity to meet and gossip as well as to worship.

By comparison with Athenian women, women in the late Roman Republic and the Empire were liberated, since they could attend school in the Forum as children and wealthy women could form literary groups. However, in comparison with men, women were by no means equal. They had no political power, and could not stand for office. Women who were related to the emperor had some influence, occasionally a considerable amount, but they had no direct power over government. As in Athens, poorer women had more personal freedom than wealthy, because they had to work to support their families. Slaves had slightly improved prospects, since they were able to save their money to buy freedom. However, they were still completely at the mercy of their masters with no legal redress. Religious freedom for Roman women increased with the fall in popularity of marriages with manus, since they were then free to worship the gods of their own families rather than those of their husbands. This, combined with the spread of the Roman Empire, led to some degree of religious emancipation for women of conquered nations, since it became permissible for them also to continue in the religion of their families. This will have

[98]Keuls (1993) p 306.

contributed to the spread of Christianity, since Christian women who married pagans could continue their faith. If their husbands allowed it, they could bring up their children as Christians, and they might even convert their husbands to Christianity by their devout behaviour, as Monica did.

Chapter 4

An Examination of St Paul's Attitudes to Women

This chapter will examine the teachings of Paul on women's roles in society and in the Church. Paul's writings, as preserved in the New Testament, were enormously influential upon Augustine's thought and upon the development of Christian doctrine, so it is necessary to determine what he said before turning to Augustine's own thought. Paul is often perceived as having totally opposed the equality of women with men, and indeed he did teach that women should be subordinate to men in many ways. However, he also made several declarations of the equality of all humans under the new rule of Christ, and it is these which I shall examine first. I shall then explore the instances of women who were cited as examples of faithful Christians, and I shall argue that these women were very similar in role to the women in the Gospels who were the first to see and acknowledge the risen Christ. Paul was insistent in his demands for sexual equality within marriage, by which he meant equality of sexual rights and duties. His notions of equality of the sexes extended no further than this. In these demands he was highly influential upon the development of Augustine's thought, so I shall examine Paul's teaching on marital equality at some length. He also taught that celibacy was preferable to marriage for those who were able to achieve it; and that married couples could abstain from intercourse for a time in order to worship God more devotedly, but should not embark upon a lifetime of married celibacy for fear of temptation to adultery. Augustine followed the first of these teachings closely, but he also believed that permanent marital celibacy was a desirable state, ignoring Paul's warnings that it could lead to trouble, as I shall discuss in chapter 8. Paul decreed that married women should be submissive to their husbands in all other aspects of life; and that women should be subordinate to men in society as a whole. I shall examine the conditions and demands of this subordination, as they were also influential upon Augustine.

Equality under Christ

Pauline remarks on the equality of women with men were so heavily outnumbered by assertions of their inequality that it is easy to forget that he did in fact have some positive things to say about women. Perhaps the most startlingly egalitarian statements were made in *Galatians* 3:28 and *Colossians* 3:11.

> There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female: for you are all one person in Christ Jesus.
> There is no question here of Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman; but Christ is all, and is in all.

These statements are remarkable in that they flouted all the conventions of contemporary society. In Paul's time, the Jews believed themselves to be God's chosen people, and thus superior to the gentile Greeks. The passage from *Colossians* also discarded another great distinction, that between Graeco-Roman civilisation and the rest of the 'barbarian' world. Thus Paul struck at the accepted hierarchy of virtually all his contemporary readers, both Jew and Gentile. Not only did he tell Jews to accept Gentiles as their equals; he also expected the socially superior Greeks and Romans to accept citizens of other nations as their equals. These two demands would be shocking to Paul's readers, but were probably designed to prevent the congregations of the young Churches who had been Jews claiming superiority over Gentile converts, and to encourage them all to believe themselves to be equal in Christ. Free men were, naturally, higher in the social scale than slaves. Similarly, Jewish society was a male-centred patriarchy in which men were considered to be superior to women, as I discussed in chapter 2.

The progression from life under the old Jewish Law to life in the new faith in Christ was described in *Galatians*.

> Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained by angels through an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one; but God is one.....Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor

> free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.[1]

This passage is interesting because it not only illustrated Paul's vision of heaven, where earthly inequalities would be no more; but also made a contrast between the status quo under the law of Moses on one hand, and the new freedom brought by faith in Christ. This liberation would reach its ultimate fulfilment in heaven, but the 'adoption as sons' applied to all Christians on earth as well as in heaven. Thus it is clear that, rationally at least, Paul believed in the equality of all Christians, both male and female. The conflict between his rational thought and his irrational reactions is a subject to which I shall return. The law, which dictated the superiority of Jew over Greek, free over slave, male over female, was described as 'our custodian until Christ came'.[2] There is also a passage in the *Letter to the Romans* which spoke analogously of the death of the law.

> Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning her husband.[3]

The analogy is clear, particularly when compared with the reference to the Law as a custodian, cited above. The bond between wife and husband ceased to exist when it was overtaken by the death of one spouse. Similarly, the bond between Jews and their law had been superseded by the advent of Christ and faith in him. Although it would have been wrong either for a wife to leave her husband before his death or for a Jew to abandon the law before it became redundant, when a husband dies his wife may marry again; and now that the law is dead because of Christ's coming, Paul believed that Jews could and should embrace the new religion of Christianity through faith in Christ. He also believed that Gentiles could and should become Christians without first becoming Jews. There is a similarity between Paul's doctrine of obedience to the law

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[1] *Galatians* 3: 19-20 & 3: 23-4: 5.
[2] *Galatians* 3: 24-5.
[3] *Romans* 7: 2.

being replaced by faith in Christ and Plato's account of the release of the mind from the body in its ascent to the realm of Forms, as described in the *Republic* by the simile of the cave.

> The visible realm should be likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside it to the power of the sun. And if you interpret the upward journey and the study of things above as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm, you'll grasp what I hope to convey, since that is what you wanted to hear about. Whether it's true or not, only the god knows. But this is how I see it: In the knowable realm, the form of the good is the last thing to be seen, and it is reached only with difficulty. Once one has seen it, however, one must conclude that it is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, that it produces both light and its source in the visible realm, and that in the intelligible realm it controls and provides truth and understanding, so that anyone who is to act sensibly in private or public must see it.[4]

Just as Plato's philosopher began by being tied to his body, with the truth of the Forms unrevealed to him, so Paul's human began with obedience to the law, which governed all aspects of physical life, until Christ came and freed his mind through faith from the physical restrictions of the law. The release from worldly concerns brought about by faith in Christ is thus similar to the release from the illusory world made possible by knowledge of the Good.

Rejection of Jewish law, which assigned very specific roles to men and to women, suggested that all Christians should regard each other as equals, whatever their position in wider, non-Christian, society might be. Paul evidently did not believe that the Jewish law applied to Christians. It had already been shown to the Apostles that the Jewish food laws were not to apply to Christians, by means of the dream which came to Saint Peter in Joppa, in which he saw 'unclean' animals and was ordered by God to kill one and eat it, although the historicity of this event is doubtful. As the narrator of the *Acts of the Apostles*, St Luke tended to tidy up loose ends, and may have included this story as a useful precedent without much concern for historical accuracy. Be that as it may, when Peter refused to eat one of the animals in this tale, he was rebuked thus: 'What God has cleansed, you must not call common'.[5] It had also been decided by a conference of the apostles and elders of the Church that Gentile converts to Christianity did not

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[4]*Republic* 517 B-C.
[5]*Acts* 10: 15.

need to be circumcised in accordance with Jewish law.[6] The verdict was expressed in a letter to Antioch.

> For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. [7]

Paul was quite willing to reject Jewish law in the matters of diet and circumcision; indeed he was among those who first said that circumcision was unnecessary.

> But some men came down from Judaea and were teaching the brethren, 'unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about the question.[8]

Paul evidently had some difficulty in persuading his congregations that circumcision was really unnecessary, since he urged the congregation at Galatia to believe that anyone who was circumcised had to keep the entire Jewish canon of law, which was considered unnecessary for Christians.

> Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.[9]

The argument given in *Galatians* in favour of rejecting Jewish law demanded that Jewish rules on the treatment of women should also be rejected. However, logical argument was not a strong feature of Paul's writings, and he does not seem to have pursued this argument about release from the law to its ultimate conclusion, namely that women should be regarded as the equals of men in all things. Radicalism such as this was not a regular feature of Paul's work on the regulation of society, though it does occasionally appear, and its roots can be found in the teachings of the synoptic Gospels.

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[6] *Acts* 15: 1-21.
[7] *Acts* 15: 28-9.
[8] *Acts* 15: 1-2.
[9] *Galatians* 5: 2-6.

Faithful women

There are many examples of startling acts of faith performed by women in the synoptic Gospels. I shall here discuss just one, since I am not concerned with the role of women in the Gospels in general, but rather with the influence which these women had upon Paul. Perhaps the most startling act of faith performed by women was their recognition of the risen Christ on Easter morning before any of the male disciples.

> Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you.' So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, 'Hail!' And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.'[10]

The other versions were similar in essentials, though they varied slightly in particulars. For example, St Mark added Salome to the party of women going to the tomb, while St Luke replaced her with Joanna. Mark and Luke were agreed that, when the women told the disciples what they had seen, 'these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.'[11] The disciples did not believe the women until they saw the risen Christ for themselves. This seems to be a precursor to the Church's later reluctance to take women seriously or to assign them important roles, although these and other passages in which women play prominent roles were preserved, rather than being recast with men in the lead roles. The women were simply reminding the disciples of what Christ himself had said, and yet they were not believed. One gets the impression that Christ himself did not approve of this attitude, since in all three synoptic *Gospels* he was recorded as rebuking the apostles for their lack of faith.

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[10]*Matthew* 28: 1-10.
[11]*Luke* 24: 11.

> Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.[12]

This rebuke went against Jewish tradition, which did not accept women as competent witnesses to anything which occurred outside their traditional domain of house and home.[13]

The unusual women of the *Gospels* seem to have had some influence upon Paul, since he was prepared to accept unusually devout and authoritative women among his acquaintance. However, he did not extend this to an acceptance that Christian women in general should be allowed to behave in such ways. In his *Letter to the Romans*, Paul mentioned Phoebe among many women who had been of service to him and to the Church.

> I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well.[14]

This passage is interesting not only because it indicated that some women were important in the Church, but moreover because it showed that Paul was using Phoebe as a messenger to deliver his letter to the Church at Rome. Although her name, derived from that of the Greek god Phoebos, indicates that she was a Gentile rather than Jewish convert to Christianity, she must have been a highly trusted friend of Paul, whom he knew well, otherwise he would not have trusted her with such a mission. The names of those who delivered the *Letters* may not be historically accurate, but all the others mention men as the designated deliverers, which makes one wonder why Phoebe was singled out to deliver this particular letter. We shall never know, but the very fact that she was gives us an insight into the position of women in the early Church. Indeed, the word used for Phoebe's position in the Church at Cenchreae is διακονος, a word which is still used in the Church for someone who is appointed by the Church to assist the priest.

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[12]*Mark* 16: 14 (though this passage is probably a later addition to the original). See also *Matthew* 28: 16-20; *Luke* 24: 36-43.

[13]See *Encyclopaedia Judaica* vol. 16, eds Roth, C & Wigoder, G. on 'witnesses' This entry adds that in post-Talmudic times women were often accepted as witnesses where there were no others; or in matters not considered important enough to concern male witnesses. The disqualification of women as witnesses was abolished in Israel by the Equality of Women's Rights Act, 5711-1951.

[14]*Romans* 16: 1-2.

Paul showed here that he was able to modify his socially conditioned views of a male-dominated society in order to allow for essential roles to be taken by women in missions to Gentile cities.[15] Thus the major roles would be filled by men, but women were essential as members of the Church for their support, instruction and testimony.[16] Paul went on to greet many female members of the Church at Rome by name, some but not all in conjunction with their husbands, among them Mary 'who has worked hard among you'; Priscilla; Junia and Julia, though these last two may be men or they may be a married couple.[17] Priscilla and Aquila appear to have been in business together, and it is interesting that Priscilla was often mentioned before her husband, which suggests that the business may have come from her family.

> And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them; and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers.[18]

Although they were clearly Jews when they first met Paul, they converted to Christianity, probably due to his influence, and helped him considerably in his missionary work.

> Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks.[19]

The woman's name has changed slightly, but it is the same couple. In fact, they were mentioned six times, and of those, three name Priscilla/Prisca first, and three name Aquila first.[20] Neither was mentioned without the other, which suggests a high degree of partnership and equality in their relationship. All this goes to show that some women in the early Church did hold important positions, as they must have done so to merit greetings addressed to them in an open letter. There is one very tantalising reference to a woman in this *Letter*, when Paul sends his greetings

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[15]Kee (1992) p 231.
[16]Kee (1992) p 235.
[17]*Romans* 16: 3ff.
[18]*Acts* 18: 2-3.
[19]*Romans* 16: 3-4.
[20]*Acts* 18: 18; *Romans* 16: 3; *2 Timothy* 4: 19 named Priscilla/Prisca first. *Acts* 18: 2 and 18: 26 and *I Corinthians* 16: 19 named Aquila first. Thus Paul himself named Priscilla/Prisca first twice out of three times.

to 'Rufus, eminent in the Lord, also his mother and mine.'[21] These two people may have been related to Paul, though it is not clear whether they were, and if so, in what degree. 'Mother' could be a title of respect, or a literal description of relationship. In the *Second Letter to Timothy* there was further praise for the faith of specific Christian women.

> I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you..[22]

Thus Paul knew of and acknowledged many devout Christian women who worked hard in their communities and were an example to others, including men, but does not seem to have considered them to have been suitable role models for other women, so that he did not call for other women to emulate them. This may have been because he regarded them as exceptional, in contrast to the usual quiet women, and did not think that all women were capable of such faith and works. In this he was similar to Augustine who, as I shall discuss in chapter 8, knew of many examples of devout, intelligent Christian women but did not expect other women to emulate them.

Equality in marriage and celibacy

In Paul's writings, and indeed in Christianity in general, marriage was always considered to be the second best state in which humans can live, with celibacy taking first place because of the greater devotion to God which it allows. A celibate would be able to detach himself from everything which might distract him from God's will, and to concentrate on spreading the Gospel and strengthening the new Christian community. Paul was afraid that marital affection and responsibilities might become rivals to the worship and love of Christ. He ignored the Jewish view that marriage enables the human race to survive, and was therefore essential.[23] However, celibacy was preferable only if it is fully and devoutly held. Lapses from an avowed state of celibacy were condemned, and Paul probably regarded such a lapse in the same light as adultery, since a Christian celibate was, and indeed is, considered to have taken Christ and the

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[21]*Romans* 16: 13.
[22]*II Timothy* 1: 5.
[23]Ziesler, J., *Pauline Christianity* (1983) p 114.

Church as his spouse. Therefore a lapse from celibacy would be tantamount to cuckolding Christ and the Church, and would be punished.

> To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.
> Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous.[24]

Thus, while such lapses might pass undetected in this world, Paul was convinced and wished his readers to be sure that God would punish the souls of adulterers for eternity after death. Whiteley points out in addition to this that Paul , in his opposition to fornication, wished to emphasise the theological significance of the human body as the temple of God.[25] Christianity enabled the body to be set apart as the temple of God without the usual integration into and involvement in society's sexual encounters, wars and domestic arrangements.[26] Kahler remarks that Paul never said that the only purpose of marriage was to avoid fornication. While this is true, it is also the case that at no point did Paul give any other reason for marriage. The modern Anglican marriage service gives two additional reasons for the institution of marriage, namely the procreation of children and mutual help and comfort in both prosperity and adversity, and Augustine saw that there were three goods of marriage, namely procreation, fidelity and the sacramental bond, as I shall discuss in chapter 8. I believe that this omission on Paul's part highlights the supremacy of celibacy in his thought, since the reason he gave for marrying was that it enabled one to avoid sin, which seems a rather negative reason. As Kahler says, Paul's opinion of women and marriage was not especially high.[27]

Although Paul believed the marriage bond between Christians to be unbreakable in life, he was equally sure that it was broken by death, as I have shown above. This conviction is reiterated in the *Letter to the Romans*. In chapter seven he spoke of two contrasting cases: firstly

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[24]*I Corinthians* 7: 8-9 and *Hebrews* 13: 4.
[25]Whiteley, D.E.H., *The Theology of St Paul* (1964) p 214.
[26]Elshtain, J.B., 'Christianity and Patriarchy: the odd alliance' in *Modern Theology* vol. 9 (1993) p 111.
[27]Kahler, E., *Die Frau in den paulinischen Briefen* (1960) pp 16 & 11.

the woman who remarried while her husband was alive, and who was thus an adulterer; secondly the woman who remarried after her husband's death, who was free to do so and could not be called an adulterer.

> Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.[28]

Although it was not explicitly stated here, I think we may assume that this rule also applied to men. Perhaps Paul did not feel it necessary to state the equal application of this rule because widows were more common than widowers, owing to women who survived childbirth having a longer life expectancy than men. Alternatively, and this seems more likely since men whose wives did not survive childbirth would be numerous, it may have been generally understood that widowers could marry again, while it was assumed that widows could not do so but should instead depend upon their families for support. Having reassured his readers that they may remarry after the death of their spouses, Paul then reminded them that celibacy is preferable to marriage. He even told them that he believed that a widow who does not remarry will be happier than one who does.

> But in my judgement she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I have the Spirit of God.[29]

Once again, although this advice is addressed only to women, I think that it can be assumed to apply to men as well, bearing in mind Paul's preference for the celibate state as a way of life for all Christians.

Paul realised that the majority of his readers did not have what the Christian marriage service describes as 'the gift of continency', and would thus be married. Indeed, he considered that marriage was for the majority, while celibacy was for the few to enable them to carry out

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[28]*Romans* 7: 2-3. See also *I Corinthians* 7: 39, cited above.
[29]*I Corinthians* 7: 40.

sacred tasks more devotedly.[30] Bearing this in mind, he gave a good deal of advice to married couples in his letters about how they should behave towards each other and in the wider community of Christians. Paul's basic rule for marriage was that the relationship between Christ and the Church provides the prototype for the relationship between husband and wife in marriage.[31] There is an obvious disadvantage in this for women, in that the Church would always be subordinate to God, so that if human marriages were regarded in such terms there would be no hope for equality or a balance of power. This lay at the root of all Paul's calls for submissive wives, since he often used the analogy of God and the Church for husband and wife.[32] In the Old Testament, Ezekiel showed Jerusalem as God's bride:

> When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yea, I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine.[33]

This analogy continues in the New Testament with Christ and his Church.[34] In *I Corinthians*, Paul has some interesting things to say about the sexual duties owed by husbands and wives to each other. It might be expected that Paul would consider that sex was a duty owed by a wife and a right exacted by a husband. However, this was not the case. Rather, he considered that sex was a duty owed by both wife and husband to each other.

> The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.[35]

In the next verse he went still further, giving each power over the other's body.

> For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.[36]

The first part of this statement might be expected, but the second part comes as a surprise. It shows that he took the Christian doctrine of two becoming one flesh on marriage very seriously, though only with regard to sexual relations, and understood it to apply equally to both parties in

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[30]Whiteley (1964) p 216.
[31]Lincoln, A.T. & Wedderburn, A.J.M., *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (1993) p 93.
[32]See, among others, *I Corinthians* 11: 3.
[33]*Ezekiel* 16: 8.
[34]Lincoln & Wedderburn (1993) p 99.
[35]*I Corinthians* 7: 3.
[36]*I Corinthians* 7: 4.

the union. In the next verse he forbade either party to deny sex to the other, unless they had both agreed to abstain for a while in order to fast and pray more devotedly. Such prohibition, while interesting for its even-handedness, could only have been made by a celibate with little knowledge of sex, but the equality of the principle is good. Even though mutual abstinence was allowed for a while, Paul was adamant that it should not go on for too long.

> Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control.[37]

This temptation would presumably take the form of encouraging adultery, the punishment for which we have seen above. Paul also explained his views on the difference between marital and extra-marital sex very clearly in his letter to the Hebrews.

> Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous.[38]

Interestingly, Paul did not realise that married couples can do some things, such as providing hospitality to travelling Christians, more easily than celibates. He also did not accept that a couple's commitment to each other could be a way of fulfilling and deepening their commitment to Christianity.[39] Augustine began to see this in his ideal of marriage based on fidelity, which I shall discuss in chapter 8.

Upon the subject of Christians married to non-Christians, Paul was again even-handed in his remarks. However, this is one of the areas where the reader encounters contradictory remarks in different letters, in this case in two letters to the same people. In *I Corinthians*, Paul adjured couples of mixed faith to stay together:

> To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace. Wife, how do

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[37]*I Corinthians* 7: 5.
[38]*Hebrews* 13: 4.
[39]Ziesler (1983) p 115.

> you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?[40]

In this passage he reasoned that a Christian married to an unbeliever might be able to make a convert of his spouse. Thus marriage could provide an opening for evangelism, but Paul added a caveat: 'but if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so.' This caution may have been added to prevent zealous Christians deliberately marrying non-Christians in order to try to convert them. If so, this could be seen as showing a belief that the fate of souls lies in God's hands, not in human hands, so that it is ultimately up to God whether a person converted to Christianity and thus saved his soul. Christians could be the instruments of salvation, but not the cause. Furthermore, Paul added that a Christian should consider his marriage dissolved if his unbelieving spouse departed from the union. It is made clear that this applies equally to men and women, but only if the unbeliever is the one who ends the marriage. Christians were forbidden to institute divorce proceedings in this passage. Whiteley believes that it is unclear in this passage whether the Christian partner may remarry after such a divorce. Although, as he points out, χωριζεσθαι has a secular technical meaning of divorce, implying the freedom to remarry, he is of the opinion that Paul did not mean this to be the case.[41] I do not agree with Whiteley here. If the original marriage was not conducted according to Christian rite, the couple was not joined by God, hence Paul's permission to separate. To forbid remarriage would imply that the first marriage was valid, which contradicts the permission to separate. Therefore remarriage to a fellow Christian would have been allowed because the first spouse was not a Christian and also the first, non-Christian, marriage was not binding in God's sight. The second passage was equally clear in its instructions, but advised the opposite.

> Do not be mismated with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?...Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you.[42]

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[40] *I Corinthians* 7: 12-16.
[41] Whiteley (1964) p 217.
[42] *II Corinthians* 6: 14-15 & 17.

The discrepancy in the advice given in these passages may indicate that Paul had hoped when he wrote his *First Letter to the Corinthians* that mixed marriages would be likely to produce more converts, but had discovered by the time he wrote the *Second Letter* that this did not tend to happen. Paul may also have been influenced by the fact that Judaism forbids its members to marry non Jews, unless the unbeliever converts to Judaism before the marriage. Paul's first concern would be for those who had already converted to Christianity, that they should not revert to the paganism or Judaism whence they came, and he would thus wish to help them to guard against this happening. If he had realised that a pagan spouse made the new Christian more likely to relinquish his new faith, this would prompt him to warn his readers not to marry unbelievers; or if already married to one, to divorce them. It is interesting that Paul seems to have realised what many religious leaders since have also known, namely that for a religion to flourish, it is best if members marry each other, rather than outsiders.

Subordination in marriage

I now turn to an examination of the instances where Paul was not concerned with being equal in his rules for women and men. As we have seen, Paul had a good deal to say on the equality of women with men, particularly where marriage was concerned. He evidently believed that the laws governing marriage applied equally to men and women. He also recognised the contributions of individual women to the work of the early Church, but this recognition of a few does not seem to have extended to acceptance of women as a group. He made clear at several points in his works that women in general were subordinate to men and should be kept in the background.

> But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.[43]

This injunction was repeated in the *Letter to the Ephesians.*

> Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.[44]

[43] *I Corinthians* 11: 3.

In this *Letter* Paul went on to describe the love which husbands should have for their wives. He likened this love to the love which Christ had for his Church, which had a cleansing and consecrating effect on the beloved.

> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.[45]

It seems here that Paul regarded women as inferior, more sinful beings who needed the love of a man to bring them to God. This attitude will probably have come from a belief that Eve was responsible for the expulsion from Paradise. This is a viewpoint which was clearly expressed in Paul's *First Letter to Timothy*, and is an area which I shall examine more closely later. The notion that women need a man's love to be holy is at odds with Paul's stated preference for celibacy as a way of life for Christians. There is therefore a tension between Paul's belief that an unmarried woman could live as devout a life as a man; and his belief that married women needed their husbands' help to be devout. The latter viewpoint reflected his general opinion of the passive nature of women, in that they needed male assistance in worship. However, this raises a problem for Christian women married to pagan or Jewish husbands. How were they to pursue their religion alone, if they did not divorce their husbands? Paul never addressed this issue. At no point does he say that celibacy is not the preferred state for women, or that celibate women cannot worship God fully. The reverse is true, since he advised virgins and widows to remain celibate so that they might worship God more devotedly than they would be able to if they had a husband and family to worry about.

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[44]*Ephesians* 5: 22-4.

[45]*Ephesians* 5: 25-33. The verb translated here as 'respect' is φοβουμαι, which in fact means 'fear'. This probably comes closer to Paul's actual meaning.

> To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.[46]

Perhaps Paul believed that if a woman chose to marry, she had to submit herself to her husband in order to be holy, but that if she chose to remain a virgin she need submit only to the will of God.

At no point in his works did Paul advise women to love their husbands. He often told them to be subordinate to their husbands, and seems to have thought female submission and reverence more desirable than love.

> Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands...and let the wife see that she respects her husband.[47]

On the other hand, he told husbands to love their wives as Christ loved his Church.[48] Thus male love is held up as the ultimate state. Perhaps Paul, believing women to be inferior, thought that they were incapable of loving as men could. Alternatively, this may have been an extension of Paul's notions of 'headship'. Thus Christ is the Head of the Church and loves it, and man is head of the woman and loves her. Love would then be seen as a gift from the superior lover to the inferior beloved, which is in contrast to Plato's views expressed in the *Symposium*, where love was described as the longing for something which one lacked and needed.

> The main point is this: every desire for good things or for happiness is 'the supreme and treacherous love' in everyone.[49]

Whatever Paul's reasons were for requiring female submission, it seems to be at odds with the notion that, on marriage, two bodies become one body; and with the assertion of the equality of all parts of the body, which occurs in the first letter to the Corinthians.

> For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he

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[46]*I Corinthians* 7: 8 and above.
[47]*Ephesians* 5: 22-4 & 33.
[48]*Ephesians* 5: 25 & 33.
[49]*Symposium* 205 D.

> chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honourable we invest with the greater honour, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.[50]

Here it was asserted that the parts of the body which seemed to be inferior were in fact just as important as other parts, and had been given more honour by God to compensate for their inferior appearance. If this reasoning were followed ruthlessly, Paul's inferior women would have to be regarded as quite as important as men, and submission and subordination would have no place in society, save that all Christians submit to Christ as head of the Church. Paul could not reconcile his personal approval of submissive women with his belief in the equality of all humans in God's sight. His constant demands that women submit to their husbands but that men love their wives was also in opposition to the equality of all parts of the Body of Christ, that is the Church. If the Body is held to be composed of equal parts, and men are to love their wives, then it would seem that for the good of the Body wives should love their husbands in return, rather than being confined to a submissive and reverent role. Perhaps Paul did not believe that a marriage of loving equals was possible, and therefore promoted the marriage of one loving and one submissive partner as the next best thing. This seems unlikely, since where he knew of an ideal state and an acceptable normal state he always promoted the ideal while pointing out the norm as an option for those who could not attain the ideal. A prime example of this is his promotion of celibacy as ideal and his acceptance of marriage as the norm.[51] Lincoln and Wedderburn hold that the practice of mutual submission and the husband's exercise of 'headship' in terms of loving sacrifice gave Christian marriage a different dynamic from marriages in other faiths.[52] I am not convinced of the truth of this opinion, partly because I can find few, if any, passages where Paul

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[50]*I Corinthians* 12: 14-26.

[51]*I Corinthians* 7: 8-9 and above.

[52]Lincoln & Wedderburn (1993) p 124.

advocated mutual submission, other than the submission of all Christians to Christ. In his *Letter to the Colossians*, Paul reminded all family members of their duty to each other.

> Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.[53]

Lincoln and Wedderburn remark that this passage was clearly influenced by Graeco-Roman ideas which originated with Aristotle's pairings of husband and wife, parent and child, master and slave, with the first named partner always holding the dominant position. They go on to state that all members of the household should submit to one another, but I can find no support for this view in this passage or in the verses immediately succeeding it.[54] Paul's views on marriage echo those found in *Ezekiel*, in which all the activity was performed by the man, with the woman as passive receptor of everything from love to children. The relationship of humans with their God, which was used by Paul, Ezekiel and Augustine as the model for Christian marriages, cannot be one of equals, so that the equality of the sexes in marriage was jeopardised by the analogies used to describe it. Paul's Jewish background, in which women were subordinate to their husbands in life as well as in Scripture, coloured his view of Christian marriage so that he could not imagine a marriage of equals. Since he was himself unmarried, the only experience of marriage he will have had will have been that of his parents, who were Jews and who probably had a typically unequal Jewish marriage. This is another example of Paul being unable to break away from the influences of his past, in spite of the dramatic change in his religious beliefs.

Women in Christian society

Paul also had a good deal to say on women's behaviour in Christian communities, much of which also reflected his view of an established order of society entailing a hierarchy of God to Christ to man to woman.[55] He considered it a shameful thing that any woman should speak in Church, even to ask a question.

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[53]*Colossians* 3: 18-20.
[54]Lincoln & Wedderburn (1993) pp 122-3. See also Kee (1992) p 237.
[55]Ziesler (1983) p 116.

> As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.[56]

One wonders what would happen if the husband did not know the answer, or gave the wrong answer. Preventing the people who were supposed to be the primary educators of children from seeking information themselves seems to be a somewhat haphazard method of educating a society as a whole, since the wisdom of the Church leaders would then have to go through many mouths before it reached the children. However, Paul did not seem to see this, and was once more influenced by his upbringing, which led him to state that 'it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.'[57] This dictum was said in the passage above to be 'as even the law says'; but in the case of men, Paul was often prepared to go against Jewish law, most notably in his rejection of circumcision, and in *Galatians,* he remarked that the law was merely a custodian 'till faith came'. Thus Paul would seem to be using the law when it suits him, to back up arguments which he knew were unpalatable, or in disagreement with the teachings of Christ, and to reject it when that best serves his purpose.

The demand for public silence from women was preceded by a strict injunction that they should cover their heads when in Church.

> Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonours her head - it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.) That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels. (Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.) Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature herself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognise no other practice, nor do the churches of God.[58]

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[56]*I Corinthians* 14: 34-5.
[57]*I Corinthians* 14: 35.
[58]*I Corinthians* 11: 4-16.

Paul believed that a woman who prayed or prophesied with her head uncovered or who had her hair cut short brought shame upon herself. Conversely, any man who prayed or prophesied with his head covered brought shame upon himself. However, for a man to have long hair was said to be disgraceful, though no reason was given for this latter judgement other than 'does not nature herself teach you?'.[59] This judgement seems curious, since men's hair, if left uncut, will usually grow as long as women's. This passage from verses four to fifteen can be divided into three sections: verses four to ten explained the inferiority of women to men; verses eleven and twelve argued their equal importance in Christian fellowship; and verses thirteen to fifteen reasserted women's inferiority. I shall now examine each of these sections in turn. In the first section, Paul summed up his argument in one verse.

> For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.[60]

Paul went on to argue that woman was created from man, not vice versa, and that woman was created 'for man,' and is therefore inferior.[61] In the *Book of Genesis* there are two versions of the creation of man. In the former, man and woman were created together from nothing, equal, both in God's image.

> So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.[62]

The second version described Adam being created first out of the dust of the earth, and woman created from his rib.

> Then the Lord God formed man out of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being...So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the men he made into woman and brought her to the man.[63]

Neither was created from nothing in this version. Man was thus the origin of woman, which made it easy for someone like Paul, brought up in a patriarchal society, to conclude that man is superior. This was certainly the conclusion to which Paul's instincts brought him in this first

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[59]*I Corinthians* 11: 6 & 14.
[60]*I Corinthians* 11:7.
[61]*I Corinthians* 11: 8-9.
[62]*Genesis* 1: 27.

section. However, there was in the second section a suggestion of the struggle which I believe existed between his intellect and his emotions. Having said that women are inferior to men he then contradicted himself and said

> Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman.[64]

This reads remarkably like an admission of equality between men and women, similar to the passage in *Galatians* cited above. As such, it was probably a product of Paul's intellect, which told him that all people are equal in God's sight. In the third section of this passage Paul returned to the theme that women must cover their heads. He never made clear why women need to wear a veil as well as to have long hair which was 'given to her for a covering'. [65] The injunction that men should uncover their heads when praying or prophesying seemed to be a reaction against Judaism. Orthodox Jewish men, of which Paul in his early life as a Pharisee was one, wear a yarmulke at all times except when asleep. Perhaps Paul wished to define the outward differences between Judaism and Christianity by making Christian men go bareheaded. If this were the case, he clearly did not consider it necessary or desirable to allow women to flout convention in a similar manner. It seems that the Corinthians were allowing their women to go bareheaded, and that Paul felt his argument against this practice was somewhat weak, as the last verse of this passage sounds somewhat irritated.

> If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognise no other practice, nor do the churches of God.[66]

On this somewhat weak note Paul left the subject and turned to the Eucharist.

Paul returned to the subject of female obedience in his *First Letter to Timothy*. In this passage he was rather less stringent in his demands than he had been in his correspondence with the Corinthians.

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[63]*Genesis* 2: 7 & 21-22.
[64]*I Corinthians* 11: 11-12.
[65]*I Corinthians* 11: 15.
[66]*I Corinthians* 11: 16.

> Also that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire but by good deeds, as befits women who profess religion. Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.[67]

It is interesting that no mention was made in this passage of covering for women's heads, which took up so much of the *First Letter to the Corinthians*. Indeed, the condemnation of 'braided hair' suggests that no covering veil was either expected or worn. However, the passage soon becomes repressive again, assigning woman a silent role of listening and learning, forbidding her to teach or 'have authority over man'. The reason Paul gave for this was the same as that given in the *First Letter to the Corinthians*, based on *Genesis* 2:7, namely that Adam was created first and Eve second, and that Eve was the first sinner. This seems a curious statement, since although Eve took the apple, Adam ate it too.[68] He knew just as well as she did that the fruit was forbidden, and thus was equally guilty, though he tried to blame Eve, telling God 'the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the fruit of the tree, and I ate.'[69] Paul seems to be following the trend of blaming woman for the Fall, which Augustine also followed, and which has been used by him and many other Christian writers as an explanation for their insistence upon the inferiority of women.

Conclusions

I am inclined to think, therefore, that Paul's requirement that women play only a submissive role in marriage is an example of his instincts, fostered by a patriarchal society, overcoming his reason. Paul knew with the rational part of his mind, which believed in the new regime of Christ rather than the old law of Judaism, that Christian women should be the equals of Christian men.[70] However, as a Jew he had been brought up in a society where men had the

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[67]*I Timothy* 2: 9-15.
[68]*Genesis* 3: 6.
[69]*Genesis* 3: 12.
[70]*Galatians* 3: 28 and above.

upper hand and played the important roles in life, both publicly and privately. Upbringing often influences one's thought, and I contend that for Paul this was the case, with a conflict being established between what his reason told him and the influence of his instinct. Whiteley supports this view of Paul's attitude to women, and believes that Paul would have employed different analogies if he had lived in a different civilisation.[71] I would add further that Paul was afraid to be as unconventional as Christ had been, and as Mark's Gospel is. Perhaps he was afraid of the consequences for himself and for the Church as a whole, and thought that such radical views could not work in reality. As Lincoln and Wedderburn remark, the general message of Paul's writings cannot be improved by an exegesis that tries to make him egalitarian before his time. His instructions on the subordination of women would have had implications for the role of women in society and the Church as a whole by identifying positions of power and authority as male prerogatives.[72] The law governed all aspects of Jewish life, including the social position of women. The release from the law which Christianity provided was limited in Paul's writings to religious practices, and did not affect social customs.

Ultimately I agree with Ziesler's view that it is not merely the imitation of Christ which mattered to Paul, but dying with him and being in him, which is the foundation of Paul's ethics.[73] Perhaps this gives us another clue to the reason for Paul's pronouncements upon the behaviour and treatment of women. He may have considered that women, whom he believed to be by nature more sinful than men, should have their 'death' with Christ made more difficult and more obvious to the world. A good way of ensuring this would be to cause women to suffer humiliation

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[71]Whiteley (1964) p 223.
[72]Lincoln & Wedderburn (1993) pp 141 & 161.
[73]Ziesler (1983) p 117.

in this world, and a good way to get them to put up with such treatment would be to promise eternal life after death.

Chapter 5

An examination of Platonic and Augustinian norms governing human behaviour

Before I examine Platonic and Augustinian attitudes to the role of women in society, it seems wise to discover their views on male behaviour. In this chapter I shall examine the different attitudes of Plato and Augustine to liberty, free will and doing right. I shall begin with Augustine, looking at what he said about these issues and at his vision of a world where free will is never misused. Then I shall look at what Plato said on these subjects. In both authors I expect to find a tension between the desire for free will; and a concern that it should be correctly directed. External directions render the will unfree, so the guidance must come from within, but even so there is an unresolved problem for both Plato and Augustine as to what extent such restricted will can be said to be free, and the degree to which free will is desirable or possible. Human behaviour must be regulated by something if anarchy is to be avoided, but by what?

Augustine's problems with evil and free will

Augustine's views on evil and freedom of the will were complex and underwent dramatic changes during his life, both before and after his conversion to Christianity. For example, before his conversion he was for ten years a Hearer, or junior member, of the cult of Manichaeism, and some of the beliefs which he held at this time, together with the reasons why such beliefs appealed to him, are worthy of note. Augustine always felt uncomfortable with the memory of his sexuality, as *Confessions*, written after his conversion, shows.

> Bodily desire, like a morass, and adolescent sex welling up within me exuded mists which clouded over and obscured my heart, so that I could not distinguish the clear light of true love from the murk of lust.[1]

However, it is probable that the actual events were less traumatic and scandalous than this passage implies, since he had a stable union with his concubine and lived with her for ten years.

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[1] *Confessions* 2:2.

Indeed, they had a son together, Adeodatus, whom Augustine loved deeply and whose death affected his father so much that he never wrote of it in detail.[2] Augustine appears in fact to have been far from promiscuous, in spite of the image he painted of himself in the *Confessions*; though having abandoned his original concubine he did take another mistress before his intended marriage.

> But I was still held firm in the bonds of woman's love. Your apostle did not forbid me to marry, although he counselled a better state, wishing earnestly that all men should be as he was himself. But I was a weaker man and was tempted to choose an easier course, and this reason alone prevented me from reaching a decision upon my other problems. I was listless, exhausted by the canker of anxiety, because there were other reasons too why I found it irksome to be forced to adapt myself to living with a wife, as I was pledged to do.[3]

It is essential to remember that concubinage, while lacking the status of marriage, was a socially acceptable domestic arrangement during this period.[4] However, Augustine wrote his *Confessions* after his conversion to mainstream Christianity, a religion which frowns upon extramarital sexual relations, so it was in the light of this that he recorded his previous behaviour. Furthermore he wished to refute the Manichees, who attributed sex and everything to do with it to a dark, uncontrollable element within humanity. This made Augustine feel at ease while he was a Hearer, since he could blame the devil for his errors and renounce all personal responsibility.

> I still thought that it is not we who sin but some other nature that sins within us. It flattered my pride to think that I incurred no guilt.[5]

However, upon his conversion to Christianity, Augustine adopted the Christian belief that the only way for a person to avoid sin is with the assistance of God's grace, and it was this view which he promoted in *Confessions*.

> For you, O Lord, give your benediction to the just, but first you make a just man of the sinner.[6]

Christianity also opposes the Manichaean removal of blame for sexual desire, so a conflict was created between Augustine's reason and faith, which considered sex to be sinful; and his libido, which desired it. This tension could explain his views on women, since he was always at pains to

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[2]*Confessions* 9:6 and Brown, P., *Augustine of Hippo* (1967) p 135.
[3]*Confessions* 8:1.
[4]Brown (1967) p 39.
[5]*Confessions* 5:10.

avoid their company after his conversion, for fear of temptation. Bonner remarks that Augustine is concerned not only with the heights to which mankind can be raised by God's grace, but also with the depths to which he has fallen through sin.[7] This is illustrated clearly by Augustine's preoccupation with his own past misdeeds as described in the *Confessions*. The boyish prank of scrumping pears became a serious crime in his eyes. He went into detail about the story in order to impress upon his audience the extent to which childish games could reinforce the performers' innate sinfulness.[8]

> There was a pear tree near our vineyard, loaded with fruit that was attractive neither to look at nor to taste. Late one night a band of ruffians, myself included, went off to shake down the fruit and carry it away, for we had continued our games out of doors until well after dark, as was our pernicious habit. We took away an enormous quantity of pears, not to eat them ourselves, but simply to throw them to the pigs. Perhaps we ate some of them, but our real pleasure consisted in doing something that was forbidden.[9]

Augustine's language makes the thieves sound more like hardened criminals than boys of sixteen. He inflated the importance of this episode to make it emblematic of all human sin and to explain a reason for sin, namely that it is often enjoyable because of humanity's fallen condition.

> But it was not the pears that my unhappy soul desired. I had plenty of my own, better than those, and I only picked them so that I might steal. For no sooner had I picked them than I threw them away, and tasted nothing in them but my own sin, which I relished and enjoyed. If any part of one of those pears passed my lips, it was the sin that gave it flavour.[10]

By the time he wrote the *Confessions*, Augustine held the view which had become current in the Western church that Original Sin came to mankind through Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit.[11] He illustrated this attitude in many passages.

> Man, however, whose nature was to be in a manner intermediate between angels and beasts, God created in such a way that, if he remained subject to his Creator as his true Lord, and if he kept His commandments with pious obedience, He should pass over into the company of the angels and obtain, without suffering death, a blessed immortality without end. But if he offended the Lord his God by using his free will proudly and

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[6]*Confessions* 10:2.

[7]'Bonner, G., *God's Decree and Man's Destiny* (1987) p 293.

[8]Paffenroth, K., 'Bad habits and bad company: education and evil in the *Confessions*' in *Augustine and Liberal Education* eds Paffenroth, K. & Hughes, K.L. (2000) p 7.

[9]*Confessions* 2:4.

[10]*Confessions* 2:6.

[11]*Genesis* 3.

> disobediently, he should live, as the beasts do, subject to death: the slave of his own lust, destined to suffer eternal punishment after death.[12]

Thus all his thought on social relations became linked to the context of the Fall, its effect on human nature, and the conflict between a desire to do good and mankind's inability to avoid sin, which affects all human undertakings.[13] It is essential to understand, when considering Augustine's social dicta, that he considered humanity to be doomed, and capable of salvation only by grace, which is given by a loving God to an undeserving species. However, although grace restored an individual's ability to make the right choice and avoid sin, a grace filled person was nevertheless still vulnerable to temptation.[14] This conviction led to a further conflict in Augustine's work between his desire that humans should behave in a manner as pleasing to God as possible; and his belief that it is possible for people to please God only with the assistance of his grace. This latter belief was expounded in response to the Pelagian heresy, which taught that people could achieve salvation through good works alone, without the need for God's grace. As an orthodox Christian bishop, Augustine had to oppose such heresy, and indeed wrote a treatise *Against the Pelagians*. However, this did not ease the conflict in his mind, for it increased his conviction that grace is essential, but he still wanted his congregation to behave morally out of respect for God and each other, though this is difficult for humans, tainted as they are by sin.

> If, therefore, as the true faith holds, even infants are born sinners, not by their own act but because of their origin (and this is why we confess the necessity for them of the grace of remission of sins), then, by the fact that they are sinners, they are also recognised as transgressors of the law which was given in Paradise.[15]

Augustine believed that God would listen more willingly to prayer if the author were morally virtuous and the request were unworldly.

> On the other hand, He will most readily hear those whose lives are upright. Let our prayers be not, therefore, that wealth or honours or any fleeting and changeful things of that sort come to us - things that quickly pass away, no matter who may strive to hold them. Rather, let us pray for what will make us virtuous and happy.[16]

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[12]*City of God* 12:22.

[13]Markus, R.A., *Sacred and Secular* (1994) p 113.

[14]Dyson, R.W., *The Pilgrim City: social and political ideas in the writings of St Augustine of Hippo* (2001) p 7.

[15]*City of God* 16:27.

[16]*On Order* 2:20:52.

Thus it could be argued that it would be in Christians' interest to behave well so that God would be more likely to grant their requests.

Augustine acknowledged his personal need for the grace of God, perhaps partly in an attempt to persuade his audience of their need for it by demonstrating that even he, a bishop, was dependent upon God for his salvation, though probably also in part due to his preoccupation with the misdeeds he committed before his conversion to Christianity.

> There can be no hope for me except in your great mercy. Give me the grace to do as you command, and command me to do your will! You command us to control our bodily desires. And, as we are told, when I knew that no man can be master of himself, except of God's bounty, I was wise enough already to know whence the gift came.[17]

This reference to God's command to control the 'bodily desires' is an illustration of Augustine's concerns about sex in the Christian life, mentioned above and which I shall discuss at greater length elsewhere. He became celibate on his conversion to Christianity, and made many references to the advantages of celibacy and the need for sexual continence among those who are not called to celibacy. Continence, for Augustine, also meant a single-minded devotion to God above all else as well as the more obvious avoidance of illicit sexual relations. His view was that reason should restrain the unreasoned promptings of lust and concupiscence.[18]This is strongly reminiscent of Plato's view expressed in the *Phaedrus* that true philosophers would refrain from sexual intercourse with their beloved, restraining the 'bad horse' of their sexual desire.

> They are modest and fully in control of themselves now that they have enslaved the part that brought trouble into the soul and set free the part that gave it virtue.[19]

Similarly, in the *Republic* sexual intercourse was to be controlled and directed towards the good of the state, and thus the ultimate good of the individual, as I shall discuss in chapter 6.

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[17]*Confessions* 10:29.
[18]Deane, H.A., *The Political and Social Ideas of St Augustine* (1963) p 55.
[19]*Phaedrus* 256 B.

Augustine's views on free will were related to his changing thought on evil. The nature of evil was a question which occupied him for much of his life, both before and after his conversion. During his time as a Manichee, and indeed until his conversion, Augustine said that he 'did not know that evil is nothing but the removal of good until finally no good remains', which is Christian doctrine.[20] The Manichees believed that evil was a substance which acted upon the created world and was in constant conflict with the goodness of God. Eventually Augustine concluded that the Manichees were wrong.

> I repudiated these people with all my heart, because I could see that while they were inquiring into the origin of evil they were full of evil themselves, since they preferred to think that yours was a substance that could suffer evil rather than that theirs was capable of committing it.[21]

However he continued to deliberate upon the problem of evil and how the 'removal of good' might occur. He decided that the misuse of free will was to blame.

> And when I asked myself what wickedness was, I saw that it was not a substance but perversion of the will when it turns aside from you, O God, who are the supreme substance, and veers towards things of the lowest order, voiding its inmost parts and swelling outwards. [22]

Because of the importance of free will to the problem of evil, Augustine declared that the struggle for and against God takes place in the human soul, between free will and its abuse, rather than in the created universe as the Manichees would have it.[23] Similarly, Augustine realised later in his life that Godly order is not possible in human affairs, and that the Platonic ideal of perfectly wise rulers was illusory.[24] In his early life Augustine seems to have overlooked the fact that Plato considered the *Republic* to be a description of an impossible ideal, and to have thought that terrestrial rulers could bring self-knowledge and complete happiness to their subjects. In *On Order* he instructed potential rulers as to the mode of life they should adopt, and clearly considered that ruling was a divine art but one which humans could learn.

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[20]*Confessions* 3:7.

[21]*Confessions* 7:3.

[22]*Confessions* 7:16, translation adapted by Fitzpatrick. The final metaphor appears to be medical, akin to blisters on the soul.

[23]Hoffmann, E. *Platonismus und Christliche Philosophie* (1960) p 223.

[24]Markus (1994) p 109.

> Now, this science is the very law of God, which, ever abiding fixed and unshaken with Him, is transcribed, so to speak, on the souls of the wise, so that they know they live a better and more sublime life in proportion as they contemplate it more perfectly with their understanding and observe it more diligently in their manner of living.[25]

As often in Augustine's descriptions of the correct life, there are clear parallels between this passage and the Platonic ascent to the contemplation of the Good. Later, Augustine realised that only God can bring true order, peace and happiness, and that this would not happen on earth until the Second Coming. He expressed this view in the opening lines of the *City of God*.

> Most glorious is the City of God: whether in this passing age, where she dwells by faith as a pilgrim among the ungodly, or in the security of that eternal home which she now patiently awaits until 'righteousness shall return unto judgement', but which she will then possess perfectly, in final victory and perfect peace. In this work, O Marcellinus, most beloved son - due to you by my promise - I have undertaken to defend her against those who favour their own gods above her Founder. The work is great and arduous; but God is our helper.[26]

Augustine decided that the *Republic*'s ideal of philosopher-kings was impossible to achieve on earth because of the imperfect nature of humanity. The only perfect ruler would be God.

Augustine continued his meditations upon free will in the *City of God*. Having already concluded that evil is 'perversion of the will when it turns aside from...God,' he was led to a consideration of what might cause such a deviation; and of what is meant by 'free will'. Augustine's views on this latter term were connected to his beliefs about mankind's original condition.

> He [i.e. God] did not intend that His rational creature, made in his own image, should have lordship over any but irrational creatures: not man over man, but man over the beasts.[27]

Thus in the ideal, sinless world, all people should be equals, living in harmony. This view comes from the Bible, where Adam was given dominion over all animals while he was still in the Garden of Eden.

> Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'[28]

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[25]*On Order* 2:8:25.
[26]*City of God* 1:1.
[27]*City of God* 29:15.
[28]*Genesis* 1:26.

According to this view, rule of humans by one another is unnatural, and is the result of sin, since there were neither rulers nor sin before the Fall. Since slavery was an accepted reality in Augustine's time, and slaves were generally despised and considered inferior to free people, the term 'slavery of sin' would have been a particularly potent and readily comprehensible one for Christian congregations to hear. Augustine was convinced that temporal slavery of bodies to masters was akin to the eternal slavery of souls to sin.

> For we believe that it is with justice that a condition of servitude is imposed on the sinner. That is why we do not read the word 'slave' anywhere in the Scriptures until Noah, the just man, punished his son's sin with this name. That son deserved this name, not because of his nature, but because of his fault.[29]

This passage also gives an insight into what Augustine considered mankind's true nature to be. He believed that all humans had, in their most natural condition, free will, but that because of Adam's sin, they were bound by sin and could not act entirely freely. Instead, they were compelled to do things which they knew to be wrong, and thus to sin themselves. However, although the will lost some of its true freedom through Adam's sin, some form of free will is, in Augustine's view, part of the essence of humanity.

> The choice of the will, then, is truly free only when it is not the slave of vices and sins. God gave to the will such freedom, and, now that it has been lost through its own fault, it cannot be restored save by Him Who could bestow it. Hence the Truth says 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' This is the same as saying, 'If the Son therefore shall redeem you, ye shall be redeemed indeed'; for He is our redeemer for the same reason that He is our Saviour.[30]

Lamberigts holds that, for Augustine, free will is non-forfeitable and unchangeable.[31] However, I do not think that this view is borne out by Augustine's texts. Adam and Eve forfeited their true free will when they misused it by choosing to eat the forbidden fruit. In the passage from the *City of God* just cited, Augustine said that the free choice of the will had been lost 'through its own fault'. Thus it had changed from being truly free to being bound by sin, and had forfeited its true freedom as punishment for sin. There is, of course, a paradox here, in that Augustine clearly believed that true free will was that which by God's grace did not sin. Thus, in order to remain

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[29]*City of God* 29:15.
[30]*City of God* 14:11.

free, it was not able to do wrong, and so could be said not to be free at all, but bound to God. However, this was the paradox supported by Christian doctrine and which Augustine could not deny without risking the charge of supporting Pelagianism. He reasoned that one could talk of free will although grace is essential, because anything else diminished the will and enslaved it to evil. The will was created dependent upon God, and its true freedom could only be found in obedience to its Creator. Any condition other than this would be a move away from God and freedom towards nothingness and enslavement. In this context, grace would be God's gift which broke the chains of enslavement. On the other hand, supposed 'freedom' to sin is in fact the opposite of freedom.

Augustine had a good deal to say on the subject of angels who fell from grace, much of which parallels his thought on the human condition. According to Augustine, God created the angels as intelligent spirits 'capable of contemplating and apprehending him'.[32] Like humans, the angels were given free will, and left to choose their destinies, be that apostasy or blissful communion with God.

> But He bestowed upon these intellectual natures a power of free choice such that they might forsake God if they wished to do so: might, that is, relinquish their blessedness and receive misery as the immediate consequence. And He foreknew that, in their pride, some of the angels would indeed wish to be self-sufficient for their own blessedness, and hence would forsake their true Good. Yet He did not deprive them of the power to do this; for He judged it an act of even greater power and goodness to bring good even out of evil than to exclude the existence of evil.[33]

The angels who did not mistakenly believe that they themselves were responsible for their blissful condition continued in communion with God. Those angels whose arrogance deceived them became wretched apostates. The obvious difference from the state of humanity is that, angels being immortal beings who do not reproduce, God did not visit their sins upon their children. However, just as humans in their successive generations were eternally condemned, so the apostate angels suffered for eternity.

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[31]Lamberigts, M., 'Some Critiques on Augustine's view of Sexuality Revisited' in *Studia Patristica* vol. 33, 1997, pp 154 -5.
[32]*City of God* 22:1.

> But God inflicted upon the fallen angels, for their voluntary fall, the most just punishment of everlasting unhappiness, while to the others, who remained faithful to their highest Good, He gave, as the reward of their fidelity, an assurance that they would remain with Him world without end.[34]

There is a parallel here between the state of human unbelievers and that of fallen angels. To Augustine, people who do not believe in God; those who profess insincerely; and those who are not granted God's grace, are spiritually wretched whatever their physical situation.

> If, therefore, we are asked what response the City of God makes when questioned on each of these points, and, first, what it believes concerning the Final Good and Evil, we shall reply as follows: that eternal life is the Supreme Good, and eternal death the Supreme Evil, and that to achieve the one and avoid the other, we must live rightly. For this reason it is written, 'The just man lives by faith.' For we do not yet see our good, and hence we must seek it by believing. Moreover, we cannot live rightly unless, while we believe and pray, we are helped by Him. The philosophers, however, have supposed that the Final Good and Evil are to be found in this life. They hold that the Supreme Good lies in the body, or in the soul, or in both (or, to state it more clearly, in pleasure, or in virtue, or in both); in rest, or in virtue, or in both; in the combination of pleasure and rest, or in virtue, or in both; in the primary objects of nature, or in virtue, or in both. With wondrous vanity, these philosophers have wished to be happy here and now, and to achieve blessedness by their own efforts. The Truth has mocked such philosophers in the words of the prophet: 'The Lord knoweth the thoughts of men' - or, as the apostle Paul gives the passage, 'the Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise' - 'that they are vain'.[35]

The aim of the earthly Christian community is to live in a manner as pleasing to God as possible, without regard to earthly pleasures, since those who have the gift of God's grace also have eternal life. In return for such blessings, Augustine believed that it was the Christian duty to try to please God, although salvation could not be achieved by human effort.

Augustine and Plato on Liberation

Augustine considered that it was the gift of grace, which set those Christians who received it free to avoid evil and follow God, which allowed them to fulfil their true potential.

> Moreover, we cannot live rightly unless, while we believe and pray, we are helped by Him Who has given us the faith to believe that we must be helped by Him.[36]

It is on subjects such as the paradox of free will being bound by grace that Augustine's training in rhetoric was very useful to him. He was afraid that his audience might think that free will was

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[33]*City of God* 22:1.
[34]*City of God* 22:1.
[35]*City of God* 19:4.
[36]*City of God* 19:4.

incompatible with doing the will of God, and took pains to disprove this theory. In his view the benefit of free will, as it existed before the Fall, was that it gave mankind the opportunity to choose not to sin. However, once the original couple had sinned, they were condemned, and humanity needed God's grace to avoid sin. In this sinful world, Augustine believed that, without God's grace, mankind had no choice but to sin. Humanity is estranged from its ultimate destiny and its true home because it has abandoned its true good for a perversion of morality.[37] In the true City of God, the heavenly City, souls will be entirely free from any desire to sin, being full of grace, as Adam and Eve were before the Fall.

> Also, they will then no longer be able to take delight in sin. This does not mean, however, that they will have no free will. On the contrary, it will be all the more free, because set free from delight in sinning to take a constant delight in not sinning. For when man was created righteous, the first freedom of will that he was given consisted in an ability not to sin, but also in an ability to sin. But this last freedom of will will be greater, in that it will consist in not being able to sin. This, however, will not be a natural possibility, but a gift of God. For it is one thing to be God, and another to be a partaker of God: God is by nature unable to sin; but he who partakes of God's nature receives the impossibility of sinning only as a gift from God.[38]

For Augustine, then, it is only when free will is combined with grace that a person can avoid sin. In this context, the grace of God is a force which liberates and assists a person struggling against sinful desires.[39] In heaven, everyone will be freed from sin and the desire to sin. However, they will not forget what earthly life was like. Augustine described this reminiscence in a passage strongly suggestive of Plato's analogy of the cave.

> Yet it (the soul) will not forget its own redemption, nor be ungrateful to its Redeemer. As a matter of rational knowledge, therefore, it will remember even its past evils, even while entirely forgetting the sensory experience of them.[40]

Thus the soul must be freed from subjection to the body, the passions and the imagination, in order to be true to its nature and to fulfil its destiny.[41] This is very similar to the Platonic ideal of a philosopher who can separate himself from the world of the senses and pass on up to the world of

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[37]Markus (1994) p 449.
[38]*City of God* 22:30.
[39]Lamberigts (1997) p 160.
[40]*City of God* 22:30.
[41]Markus (1994) p 443.

the mind, as exemplified by the case of those who escaped from the Cave. The one who had escaped would congratulate himself on abandoning illusion.

> And when he thought of his first home and what passed for wisdom there, and of his fellow prisoners, don't you think he would congratulate himself on his good fortune and be sorry for them?[42]

Here there is a reluctance to return to the cave, and a determination to avoid its illusions should a return be necessary. Plato decreed that people who had escaped from the illusions of the sensible world to the intelligible world were the only good rulers, and must therefore be compelled to return to the cave of the sensible world and spend some time there as rulers.

> Therefore each of you in turn must go down to the common dwelling place of the others and grow accustomed to seeing in the dark. When you are used to it you'll see vastly better than the people there. And because you've seen the truth about fine, just and good things, you'll know each image for what it is and also that of which it is the image.[43]

The context of the *Republic* itself echoes the analogy of the Cave. Socrates, who lived in Athens, was on his way there from Piraeus, when he was waylaid and persuaded to stay.[44]

> Polemarchus saw us from a distance as we were setting off for home and told his slave to run and ask us to wait for him.[45]

Socrates stayed in Piraeus to enlighten his friends just as the guardians had to stay in the Cave to assist their fellow citizens. Augustine's people were unable to return to their previous physical condition, while Plato's philosophers had to do so, albeit without returning to their ignorant state, but the gratitude for liberation is the same in both groups.

Plato's view that the true philosopher must detach himself from self-imposed bonds is elaborated further in the *Phaedo*.

> Socrates: Do you think it is the part of a philosopher to be concerned with such so-called pleasures as those of food and drink?
> Simmias: By no means.
> Soc: What about the pleasures of sex?
> Sim: Not at all.
> Soc: What of the other pleasures concerned with the service of the body? Do you think such a man prizes them greatly, the acquisition of distinguished clothes and shoes and the

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[42]*Republic* 516C.
[43]*Republic* 520C.
[44]Osborne, C., *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the god of Love* (1994) p 89.
[45]*Republic* 327 B.

> other bodily ornaments? Do you think he values these or despises them, except in so far as one cannot do without them?
> Sim: I think the true philosopher despises them.
> Soc: Do you not think that in general such a man's concern is not with the body, but that, as far as he can, he turns away from the body towards the soul?
> Sim: I do.
> Soc: So in the first place, such things show clearly that the philosopher more than other men frees the soul from association with the body as much as possible?
> Sim: Apparently.[46]

Wild believes that this is in contrast with the Manichaean teaching that the Elect should free themselves from natural bonds as well.[47] However, Platonism and Manichaesim do not in fact appear to differ widely here, since they both advocate separation of the soul from physical desires. The difference between self-imposed and natural bonds is essentially a difference of cause. Self-imposed bonds are those dictated by pride, such as the desire to be beautiful; while natural bonds are those caused by physical yearning, such as the desire for food. Manichees believed that every human contained a spark of immortal, good, soul, and that by distancing themselves from everything which came from 'evil', they could liberate their souls.[48] They were concerned chiefly with this liberation of their souls rather than with the healing, renewal and forgiveness which feature in mainstream Christianity. However, orthodox Christianity also promoted abandoning earthly desires, as can be seen from St Paul's advocacy of celibacy and the tradition of asceticism.

> Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress it is well for a person to remain as he is.[49]

Plato was also concerned with liberating the soul, but with the aim that the mind thus liberated would function better and would be able to attain knowledge of Truth, rather than the Christian aim of serving God to the best of one's ability, as Paul described it.

> The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord,

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[46]*Phaedo* 64 D - 65 A.
[47]Wild, J., *Plato's Theory of Man* (1946) p 141.
[48]Brown (1967) chapter 5.
[49]I *Corinthians* 7:25-26.

> how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband.[50]

Thus the three streams of influence on Augustine's intellect and the development of his thought, Manichaeism, Platonism and Christianity, all advocated renouncing worldly things in favour of the pursuit of the cerebral and spiritual realm, although Plato never required celibacy, especially not in the *Republic* in which the continuation of the state demanded that children be produced. He did, however, advise that philosophers should curb their desires. Augustine believed firmly in a universal order in the created world where even sin and punishment have a place.[51]

> God foreknew that man would sin by forsaking God and transgressing God's Law; yet He did not deprive man of his freedom of will, for He foresaw, at the same time, the good that He would bring forth from man's evil [52]

If there were no free will and no evil, there would be no need for what Augustine considered to be God's greatest gift of all: his grace.

Plato's views on freedom and doing right

Plato's opinion of Greek democracy was poor, partly due to the fact that the Athenian democracy put Socrates to death in 403 BC. The charges brought against Socrates were that he corrupted the young and rejected the city's gods, substituting his own. These accusations were based on ignorance of Socrates' teaching, and upon the fact that Socrates had the misfortune to be regarded as a crony of the treacherous Alcibiades. Unsurprisingly, Plato, who believed his teacher to be a great man, had a poor opinion of a system of government which could believe such charges and put Socrates to death in punishment for them.

Plato too became sceptical about the benefits of civil freedom provided by democracy, and described it as the extreme of liberty, close to anarchy.

> Socrates: First of all then, aren't they free? And isn't the city full of freedom and freedom of speech? And doesn't everyone in it have the licence to do what he wants?[53]

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[50]I *Corinthians* 7:32-34.
[51]Markus (1994) p 35.
[52]*City of God* 22:1.
[53]*Republic* 557 B.

The important thing was not to be free, but to live well and justly in all circumstances, since a population which lived thus would lead to a good and just state. Socrates believed that it was essential to obey the state and its laws, whatever their judgement, as he demonstrated in the *Crito*, where he refused to evade the punishment of death which his fellow citizens had decreed he should suffer; although he knew that this punishment was unjust, he was convinced that he would be equally unjust to try to evade it.

> Socrates: I should like you to consider whether we still agree on this point: that the really important thing is not to live, but to live well.
> Crito: Agreed.
> Socrates: And is it still agreed or not that to live well amounts to the same thing as to live honourably and justly?
> Crito: Yes.[54]

Socrates explained that to live unjustly would injure his soul, as would dishonourable actions. Since he believed that the 'soul is immortal and never perishes'[55] he considered that damage inflicted upon the soul by unjustly evading death would have far more serious, long term effects than killing his mortal body. In order to illustrate the undesirability of injustice, Plato encouraged his readers to consider it a sickness or imbalance which attacked the individual soul and as a result also damaged the corporate body of the state because it was made up of individuals. A state cannot be better than the souls which compose it.

To emphasise the necessity for healthy souls he drew a parallel between living with a sick, damaged body and living with a similarly unhealthy soul, saying that in neither case is life worth living, but particularly not in the latter as the soul is more important than the body, being immortal, and will carry its injuries after the death of the body..

> Socrates: There is a part of us which is improved by healthy actions and ruined by unhealthy ones. If we completely wreck it by taking advice contrary to that of the experts, will life be worth living when this part is once ruined? The part I mean is the body; do you accept this?
> Crito: Yes.
> Soc: Well, is life worth living with a body which is worn out and ruined?
> Crito: Certainly not.

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[54]*Crito* 48 B.
[55]*Republic* 608D.

> Soc: What about the part of us which is impaired by unjust actions and benefited by just ones? Is life worth living with this part ruined? Or do we believe that this part of us, whatever it may be, with which justice and injustice are concerned, is of less importance than the body?
> Crito: Certainly not.
> Soc: It is really much more precious?
> Crito: Much more.[56]

Having established that the soul is more important than the body, Socrates spent the remainder of the dialogue persuading Crito that although it would save Socrates' body to escape the death decreed by the Athenians, it would damage his soul to do so. Assuming the persona of the Laws, he said that one who had been brought up under the Laws and who owed his education to them had a duty to obey them as a child his father or a slave his master.

> Socrates: Then since you have been born and brought up and educated, can you deny, in the first place, that you were our child and slave, both you and your ancestors? Both in war and in the law courts and everywhere else you must do whatever your city and your country commands, or else persuade it that justice is on your side; but violence against mother or father is an unholy act, and it is a far greater sin against your country.[57]

This passage bears striking similarities to a passage in the *Republic* which describes why the Republic's philosophers would have a duty to their state.

> But we've made you kings in our city and leaders of the swarm, as it were, both for yourselves and for the rest of the city. You're better and more completely educated than the others and are better able to share in both types of life. Therefore each of you in turn must go down to live in the common dwelling place of the others...[58]

However, there is a key difference in that just before this passage, it has been declared that those who become philosophers through their own efforts rather than with the state's assistance have no debt to society.

> When people like you come to be in other cities, they're justified in not sharing in their city's labours, for they've grown there spontaneously against the will of the constitution. And what grows of its own accord and owes no debt for its upbringing has justice on its side when it isn't keen to pay for that upbringing.[59]

Socrates undoubtedly went against the grain of contemporary Athens when he developed his philosophy, though he seemed to forget this in the *Crito*. By the reasoning in the *Republic* he could have argued that he owed no loyalty to Athenian law, and that he would be right to evade its punishment. However, such an attitude would have confirmed the worst suspicions of those who

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[56]*Crito* 47 D - 48 A.
[57]*Crito* 50 E & 51 C.
[58]*Republic* 520B-C.

accused Socrates of corrupting the youth of Athens, since he would seem to be promoting anarchy, so it is not surprising that the opposite view was expressed in the *Crito*, which was written as part of Plato's defence of Socrates.

It is interesting that, in this relatively early passage from the *Crito*, Socrates left room for the possibility that a citizen might persuade the Laws of the justice of his objection. This suggests that the Socratic Plato was perhaps not so opposed to the idea of civil liberties as he later became. It also leads to some conjectures about the nature of the Laws as Plato conceived them. However, by the end of the *Crito* there is no possibility for argument with the Laws as they are the only audible voice. Such is the ecstasy of communion with them that all else falls away. The Laws argued that it was not they who were at fault, but human interpretation of them.

> As it is, you depart, if you depart, after being wronged not by us, the laws, but by men.[60]

The argument from the *Republic* that, because Socrates developed his ideas alone and educated himself, he owed nothing to the state is also contradicted on the grounds that he chose to live in Athens.

> Socrates, we have convincing proofs that we and the city were congenial to you. You would not have dwelt here most consistently of all the Athenians if the city had not been exceedingly pleasing to you. You have never left the city, even to see a festival, nor for any other reason except military service; you have never gone to stay in any other city, as people do; you have had no desire to know another city or other laws; we and our city satisfied you. So decisively did you choose us and agree to be a citizen under us. Also you have had children in this city, thus showing that it was congenial to you.[61]

This argument is intended to advocate consistency, and to discourage indecision. It is clear from this that Plato wanted his philosophers to make correct decisions and to adhere to what they knew to be right, whatever the personal consequences. Socrates was held up as an example because he adhered to his decisions and died for them.

Socrates held that a readiness to learn proved the possession of wisdom, as he showed in the Apology.

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[59]*Republic* 520A-B.
[60]*Crito* 54B.

> Socrates: Well, one day he [Chaerephon] actually went to Delphi and asked this question of the god - as I said before, gentlemen, please do not interrupt - what he asked was whether there was anyone wiser than myself. The Pythian priestess replied that there was no one.[62]

He went on to say that at first he doubted that he was the wisest of men, and set out to disprove the oracle.

> Socrates: I went to interview a man with a high reputation for wisdom, because I felt that here, if anywhere, I should succeed in disproving the oracle and pointing out to my divine authority, 'You said that I was the wisest of men, but here is a man who is wiser than I am.' [63]

He was forced to the conclusion that his wisdom lay in the fact that 'I do not think that I know what I do not know'.[64] This was in complete contrast to the Sophists and other people generally considered, by themselves and the populace, to be wise, since these men had very inflated ideas of their own intelligence. Socrates must have made himself thoroughly unpopular with his unmasking of frauds, as he performed it in public.

> Socrates: Well, I gave a thorough examination to this person - I need not mention his name, but it was one of the politicians that I was studying when I had this experience - and in conversation with him I formed the impression that although in many people's opinion, and especially in his own, he appeared to be wise, in fact he was not. Then when I began to try to show him that he only thought he was wise and was not really so, my efforts were resented both by him and by many of the other people present. However, I reflected as I walked away: 'Well, I am certainly wiser than this man. It is only too likely that neither of us has any knowledge to boast of; but he thinks that he knows something which he does not know, whereas I am quite conscious of my ignorance. At any rate it seems that I am wiser than he is to this small extent, that I do not think that I know what I do not know.'[65]

This approval of self-knowledge is significant to the characteristics required of the guardians in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. They would, in order to fulfil the criteria for true wisdom, need to be aware of their failings and skilled in the art of self-criticism; furthermore they would have to allow their fellow guardians to criticise them and to act upon it. Since the guardians were to be the wisest people in the land, and in charge of government, it is plausible that the laws which they administered would also be open to criticism and aware of their failings. However, it is significant that it was only criticism by equals that was worthy of note. The only equals of the laws are other

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[61] *Crito* 52B-C.
[62] *Apology* 21 A.
[63] *Apology* 21 C.
[64] *Apology* 21 D.

laws, as became evident at the end of the *Crito* when Socrates approached the Laws of Athens and lost all his argumentative skill.

> Crito, my dear friend, be assured that these are the words I seem to hear, as the Corybants seem to hear the music of their flutes, and the echo of these words resounds in me, and makes it impossible for me to hear anything else.[66]

Furthermore the Laws had already admitted their failing, namely that they were administered by fallible humans, as I have said. It seems that Plato considered it impossible to question the laws themselves, but only their interpretation. Since the guardians administered the laws, probably only guardians would be allowed to question the interpretation, since criticism by peers was the only type encouraged. Even in this case, it would probably be the questioner who adapted, not the laws.

Freedom to appeal had to be limited to guardians since there would be total anarchy if anyone could question the rulings of the guardians. In Plato's view the end result of a 'free' state is in fact the reverse of freedom.

> Socrates: Extreme freedom cannot be expected to lead to anything but a change to extreme slavery, whether for a private individual or for a city.[67]

This conclusion was reached after a discussion of what the fatal flaw in democracy which leads to its destruction might be. The flaw was deemed to be an 'insatiable desire for freedom',[68] and its consequences were extrapolated to extremes which may well have been prompted by Plato's observation of events in Athens. In 429 BC Pericles, the orator and statesman who was leading Athens in the war against Sparta, died of plague. No equally intelligent and charismatic leader rose to replace him; the Athenian war effort became fragmented. The war was lost in 404 BC, and the Thirty Tyrants came to power, replacing democracy.[69] Plato expounded his conviction of the inevitability of the fall of democracy in detail.

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[65]*Apology* 21C-D.
[66]*Crito* 54D.
[67]*Republic* 564 A.
[68]*Republic* 562 C.
[69]For greater detail see Hornblower, S., *The Greek World 479-323 BC* (1992) Chapter 12 'The Peloponnesian War'.

> Socrates: I suppose that, when a democratic city, athirst for freedom, happens to get bad cupbearers for its leaders, so that it gets drunk by drinking more than it should of the unmixed wine of freedom, then, unless the rulers are very pliable and provide plenty of that freedom, they are punished by the city and accused of being accursed oligarchs.
> Adeimantus: Yes, that is what it does.
> Socrates: It insults those who obey the rulers as willing slaves and goodfornothings and praises and honours, both in public and in private, rulers who behave like subjects and subjects who behave like rulers. And isn't it inevitable that freedom should go to all lengths in such a city?
> Adeimantus: Of course.[70]

Such freedom and lack of discipline would become total anarchy, where even animals did as they liked.

> Socrates: No one who hasn't experienced it would believe how much freer domestic animals are in a democratic city then anywhere else. As the proverb says, dogs become like their mistresses; horses and donkeys are accustomed to roam freely and proudly along the streets, bumping into anyone who doesn't get out of their way; and all the rest are equally full of freedom.[71]

Having painted this grim picture of the utter chaos into which he believed democracy must descend, Plato wondered what kind of government would rise from the ruins. His conclusions, predictably, were not encouraging to supporters of democracy, since he considered that the natural successor to democracy was tyranny of the worst kind.

> Then I don't suppose that tyranny evolves from any constitution other than democracy - the most severe and cruel slavery from the utmost freedom.[72]

It was in an attempt to avoid these extremes that Plato drew up his plans for states in the *Republic* and the *Laws*.

Plato also drew upon his experiences as a citizen of Athens when he illustrated various types of government in the *Laws*. He used two examples of actual states: Attica and Persia. Attica was taken as an exemplar of democracy.

> Athenian: Next we come to the political system of Attica. We have to demonstrate, on the same lines as before, that complete freedom from all authority is infinitely worse than submitting to a moderate degree of control.[73]

The participants in the dialogue were moved to wonder what had brought about this lack of authority, and, having decided that it began with people feeling at liberty to criticise music,

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[70]*Republic* 562C-E.
[71]*Republic* 563 C.
[72]*Republic* 564A.

concluded that such liberty gradually spread until citizens felt able to disregard the laws. The succession of events may seem a little implausible, but Plato managed to draw a reasonable conclusion from them.

> Athenian: But if this democracy had been limited to gentlemen and had applied only to music, no great harm would have been done; in the event, however, music proved to be the starting point of everyone's conviction that he was an authority on everything, and of a general disregard for the law. Complete licence was not far behind. The conviction that they knew made them unafraid, and assurance engendered effrontery. You see, a reckless lack of respect for one's betters is effrontery of a peculiar viciousness, which springs from a freedom from inhibitions that has gone much too far.[74]

This state of affairs was contrasted with the conditions in Persia under Cyrus' benevolent rule, which Plato seems to have considered to be something of a Golden Age, thanks to the king's wisdom.

> Athenian: Under Cyrus, the life of the Persians was a judicious blend of liberty and subjection, and after gaining their own freedom they became the masters of a great number of people. As rulers, they granted a degree of liberty to their subjects and put them on the same footing as themselves, with the result that soldiers felt more affection for their commanders and displayed greater zeal in the face of danger. The king felt no jealousy if any of his subjects was intelligent and had some advice to offer; on the contrary, he allowed free speech and valued those who could contribute to the formulation of policy; a sensible man could use his influence to help the common cause. Thanks to freedom, friendship, and the practice of pooling their ideas, during that period the Persians made progress all along the line.[75]

All this sounds splendid, but one wonders how long such a state of affairs can last. The answer is probably that it will endure as long as the ruler is as wise as Cyrus evidently was. Herodotus said that the Persians regarded Cyrus in a paternal light, since he was 'in the kindness of his heart always occupied with plans for their well-being.'[76] There is one major difference between Plato's description of the problems with democracy and his account of the reasons for Cyrus' success. Plato considered that the licence to have free opinions on music led to the downfall of democracy, and clearly had a poor opinion of private, unregulated thoughts, fearing that they would lead to societal breakdown. However, he described Cyrus as a benevolent ruler who 'allowed free speech' and listened to any of his subjects who had sound counsel to offer. There is evidence in

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[73]*Laws* 698 B.
[74]*Laws* 701 A-B.
[75]*Laws* 694 A-B.
[76]Herodotus *The Histories* book 1.

these two passages of a conflict between Plato's desire for some civil liberty and his conviction that it was ultimately bad for the state. In the *Republic* he made room for freedom of personal development by abolishing the traditional family unit and allowing people to fulfil the roles for which they were best suited. In the *Laws*, the reintroduction of the family restricted both sexes by compelling them to marry and have children. He still demanded universal education to find the best leaders, but the primary task for guardians had changed from simply ruling well to also ensuring the continuation of the race by raising the children who were sent to municipal nurseries in the *Republic*.

Of course, in Plato's utopia, rulers will be trained in guardianship from the cradle, and only those most suited to rule will be able to do so. Thus there will be no bad rulers. There is, however, a major difference between the upbringing proposed for the guardians in the *Republic* and that detailed in the *Laws*. In the *Republic*, Plato abolished the family, and made the state entirely responsible for each citizen's upbringing.

> our men and women Guardians should be forbidden by law to live together in separate households, and all the women should be common to all the men; similarly, children should be held in common, and no parent should know its child, or child its parent.[77]

On the other hand, in the *Laws* Plato reinstated the family unit as the basis for society.

> When a man of twenty-five has observed others and been observed by them and is confident that he has found a family offering someone to his taste who would make a suitable partner for the procreation of children, he should get married.[78]

Indeed, Plato went so far as to impose a penalty for failure to marry:

> If anyone disobeys (except involuntarily), and unsociably keeps himself to himself so that he is still unmarried at the age of thirty-five, he must pay an annual fine: one hundred drachmae if he belongs to the highest property class, seventy if to the second, sixty if to the third, and thirty if to the fourth; the sum to be consecrated to Hera.[79]

This passage also illustrates the fact that in the *Laws*, Plato allowed citizens to own property, which he outlawed in the *Republic*, for guardians at least.

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[77]*Republic* 457 C-D.
[78]*Laws* 772 D.
[79]*Laws* 774 A.

> First, they shall have no private property beyond the barest essentials. Second, none of them shall possess a dwelling-house or storehouse to which all have not the right of entry.[80]

The meaning of the words 'except involuntarily' in Saunders' translation with reference to a refusal to marry is unclear. According to Saunders, Plato probably meant that if a man were in the army, or detained overseas, or on a long journey or in some similar situation, he would not be liable to the usual fine for being unmarried. It is not clear whether homosexuality would be considered an 'involuntary' cause for disobedience of the marriage law, though it seems unlikely. In most of Plato's writing, homosexual love is considered superior to heterosexual love, as is exemplified by this passage from the *Symposium*.

> In my view, you see, when he makes contact with someone beautiful and keeps company with him, he conceives and gives birth to what he has been carrying inside him for ages. And whether they are together or apart, he remembers that beauty. And in common with him he nurtures the newborn; such people, therefore, have much more to share than do the parents of human children, and have a firmer bond of friendship, because the children in whom they have a share are more beautiful and more immortal.[81]

However, in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, citizens are expected to put their personal needs below the demands of the state, as I have shown elsewhere in this chapter. In the *Republic*, Plato abolished marriage in favour of a programme of eugenics. Homosexual men would almost certainly be required to take part in this, in order to produce the next generation. In the *Laws*, marriage is reinstated, and homosexual men would almost certainly be required to marry, for the good of the state. Life might be rather easier for homosexual men under the rules of the *Republic* than under those of the *Laws*, since the *Republic* forbade its citizens to live together in mixed couples, while the *Laws* required them to do so. This linguistic difficulty does not occur in other translations or in the Greek itself, which read simply

> If anyone does not willingly obey, and unsociably keeps himself to himself so that he is still unmarried at the age of thirty-five, he must pay an annual fine: one hundred drachmae if he belong to the highest property class, seventy if to the second, sixty if to the third and thirty if to the fourth; the sum to be consecrated to Hera.[82]

This dispenses with the difficulty raised by Saunders' translation.

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[80] *Republic* 416 D.

[81] *Symposium* 209 C.

The lawgivers and rulers of this state will bear in mind this piece of advice given in the Laws.

> One should always remember that a state ought to be free and wise and enjoy internal harmony, and this is what the lawgiver should concentrate on his legislation.[83]

Plato's use of the word 'free' here is interesting, and I think illustrates his conviction that freedom for wise people to ask questions is essential, which was no doubt an attitude which he inherited from Socrates. But would Plato's definition of wise coincide with Socrates' opinion that the truly wise man is he who knows the limit of his knowledge, or would the later Plato say that people should question only what they know? In fact, in the *Republic* at least, Plato held neither of these views, but something in the middle. The power of dialectic to reveal truth is still extolled, but with a caveat.

> Socrates: And mustn't we also insist that the power of dialectic could reveal it (i.e. truth) only to someone experienced in the subjects we've described and that it cannot reveal it in any other way?[84]

These subjects are arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Thus guardians may question what they do not know, but only after they have a solid grounding in the mathematical foundations of the workings of the physical world.

For Plato, the end result of a city where the citizens exercise their free will correctly and are concerned with doing right is the ideal state as described in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. A good lawgiver will produce a peaceful, happy, unified city where everyone can flourish.

> Athenian: We said that a lawgiver should frame his code with an eye on three things: the freedom, unity and wisdom of the city for which he legislates. That's right, isn't it?
> Megillus: Certainly.
> Athenian: That was why we selected two political systems, one authoritarian in the highest degree, the other representing an extreme of liberty; and the question is now, which of these two constitutes correct government? We reviewed a moderate authoritarianism and a moderate freedom, and saw the result: tremendous progress in each case. But when either the Persians or the Athenians pushed things to extremes (of subjection in one case and its opposite in the other), it did neither of them any good.[85]

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[82]Fitzpatrick's adaptation of Saunders' translation.
[83]*Laws* 693 B.
[84]*Republic* 533 A.
[85]*Laws* 701 D-E.

Plato came to favour a moderate state of government, and was not as opposed to freedom as might appear. What he was opposed to was extremes of anything, an attitude which paved the way for Aristotle's Golden Mean.

Conclusions

There appears to be some disagreement about whether Plato was more concerned with the State or with the individual. It is clear that there is an important relationship between the individual and the State. In a poorly run State, the individual deteriorates rapidly, as there is no widespread knowledge of or desire for truth. On the other hand, a well organised State allows its citizens to develop their true selves. However, a well organised State cannot be achieved without truthful, well developed citizens; and similarly such citizens are unlikely to be produced by a badly run State. Plato had realised by bitter experience that his ideal city is impossible to achieve in the real world when he tried and failed to put his ideas into practice in Sicily under Dionysius and Dion.[86] Nevertheless, this failure did not cause him to abandon his ideals, since he still believed that cities should be governed in as good a manner as possible. His experiences in Sicily caused him to revise his ideas somewhat, and led to the writing of the *Laws*, a less radical version of the *Republic*. Temple believes that Plato was more concerned with the individual than with the State. He argues that Plato sacrificed the temporal concerns of the individual to those of the State, for the sake of the individual's eternal welfare.[87] This seems rather too convoluted an argument. Lange believes that Plato was not motivated by fairness, to women or to anyone else, but that his goal was in fact the good of the city.[88] Adam agrees with this view, adding that Plato's institution of education makes sense in this context, since nothing is better for the State than that women as well as men should be as good as possible.[89] The only way to achieve such goodness in the

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[86]Chanteur, J. *Platon, le Desir et la Cite* (1980) pp 111-112.
[87]Temple, W. *Plato and Christianity* (1916) p 33.
[88]Lange, L. 'The Function of Equal Education in Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*' in *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory* eds Clark, L.M.G. & Lange, L. (1979) p5.
[89]Adam, A.M., *Plato: Moral and Political Ideals* (1913) p 98.

State is by education, and thus women are the accidental beneficiaries of Plato's concern for the State. Ultimately for Plato, the State is even more dependent upon the individual than vice versa, since the State is the individual enlarged, while the individual is the State in miniature.[90]

There seem to be several differences between Augustine and Plato's attitudes to freedom and doing right. For Augustine, free will means that man can do whatever he wants, good or evil. The gift of God's grace enables him to do only good, as God wills, so that all good deeds are divinely inspired. For Plato, free will also means the ability to do what one wants, but in this case the check on evil deeds is the philosopher's acceptance of the laws which would govern an ideal state; these laws mean that he will do only good, as such a state has only good laws. However, a philosopher who lives in an ordinary city will also obey its laws, even if he believes them to be wrong, because he knows that to do otherwise would be to cause anarchy, as is shown in the case of Socrates himself, who believed the sentence of death given against him to be unjust, but refused to flee. It could be said that Plato's free government is like a person who has Augustinian free will but lacks Christian morals, and of course also has no religious belief in a grace-giving God. For Plato, the laws of a city provide its morals. A person who is not governed by morals will end badly, just as a city without laws ends in anarchy. Plato uses the larger analogy of a city to make his point about the need for laws, while Augustine concentrates on the individual, although he does mention cities. This is fairly typical, as Plato seems to be more concerned with the welfare of the city, while Augustine's chief mission is saving souls. There is nevertheless a parallel between deserting Augustine's God and deserting Plato's Laws, since both these actions lead to destruction.

For Augustine, the best possible condition for humanity is to live by God's laws, while for Plato it is to live in a safe, well ruled city, which is possible only if each individual is well disciplined. Augustine believed that a person endowed with God's grace is able to sin but will not

[90]Wild (1946) p 132 & Hoffmann (1960) p 223.

do so, because of the preventing power of grace. Plato's philosophers are prevented from doing wrong by the influence of their intellect which has been highly developed. This is a striking difference, since Augustine's grace is an external gift from God, while Plato's intellect is the development of a pre-existing internal feature. The possibility of human error on the part of the lawgiver leads to interesting compensations on the part of Plato and Augustine. Plato leaves room for fallibility by allowing some citizens to question the laws, as I have shown. Augustine allows for the intangible, for a trust in God. God's criticism takes the place of Platonic self-criticism. Christians must be open to the former; Platonists to the latter. Ultimately the views of Plato and Augustine are remarkably similar. They both held that too much freedom is bad for those who do not know how to use it correctly. The only people who do know how to use their freedom are the philosophers for Plato; and for Augustine, Christians.

Chapter 6

Plato's attitudes to women and slaves

In this chapter I shall discuss Plato's changing attitudes to slavery and to the role of women in government and society as he expressed them in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. I shall also examine the status accorded to sexual love in these two texts and in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. I hope to show that, while Plato's attitude to slavery changed quite dramatically, in that in the *Republic* it was abolished and in the *Laws* it was reinstated, his views on women changed less, since in both societies they were allowed to be educated, to take part in government and to serve in the army. There was some limitation to their activity in the *Laws*, which seems to have been due to the reinstatement of the family and the need to have someone to run the household. I shall argue that, for Plato, the existence or abolition of the family unit had a direct impact upon his views on slavery and the position of women, since he could not conceive of a household without slaves and without a free woman in charge, owing to the social conditioning of his time. I shall touch only briefly on Plato's views on education, as this will be the subject of the next chapter.

Plato on contemporary women

As I discussed in chapter 3, 'respectable' Greek women received little education and were rarely seen in public. Hetairas, who were more or less analagous to latter-day courtesans, being more cultivated than prostitutes, were often at symposia and other men-only events, but were generally valued more for their physical attributes than for their mental prowess. Keuls defines the problems facing women in Classical Athens clearly. Deprived of education, they were then barred from politics because of their ignorance. Forbidden to take part in athletics, they were scorned for their lack of physical prowess. Valued chiefly for their sexual attractiveness, which was linked to reproductive ability, they were then mocked for being concerned with their

appearance.[1] Plato seems to have seen through this male-generated illusion of women to the reality beneath, and to have realised that, educated, trained and valued correctly, women could contribute much to the running of the state. Socrates was the instigator of this emancipation of women, owing to the conviction that women are equal to men in virtue.[2] Intelligent women were not unknown in public life; they were simply unusual. Pericles' mistress Aspasia was one such. She was not Athenian, being a hetaira from Miletus whose name meant 'Welcome'. In contrast to the virtuous ladies of Athens, she was intelligent and cultivated, as well as being beautiful.[3] It appears that Socrates enjoyed her conversation, and she gives her name to a female character in Plato's anachronistic dialogue *Menexenus*, although rhetoric was never her profession.[4] She is described thus:

> Socrates: I happen to have no mean teacher of oratory. She is the very woman who has produced - along with a multitude of other good ones - the one outstanding orator among the Greeks, Pericles, son of Xanthippus.[5]

Although, as Menexenus points out, Socrates is 'always making fun of the orators', Aspasia comes in for no such criticism.[6] Plato may have been influenced by her mental ability when he was formulating his ideas about female guardians for the *Republic*. He must have known many foolish, uneducated Athenian women, among them Socrates' wife Xanthippe, who was generally shown in the character of a standard Athenian woman, shrewish and not very clever.

> We found Socrates recently released from his chains, and Xanthippe - you know her - sitting by him holding their baby. When she saw us, she cried out and said the sort of thing that women usually say: "Socrates, this is the last time your friends will talk to you and you to them." Socrates looked at Crito. "Crito," he said, "let someone take her home." And some of Crito's people led her away lamenting and beating her breast.[7]

This passage illuminates the state of Socrates' marriage and reveals its sad state. Even immediately before his death, Socrates and Xanthippe had nothing to talk about. She tried to

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[1]Keuls (1993) p 10.
[2]Blair, E.D., 'Women: the unrecognised teachers of the Platonic Socrates' in *Ancient Philosophy* vol. 16 (1996) p 345.
[3]Burn (1990) pp 256-7.
[4]Burn (1990) p 257 and Blair (1996) p 336.
[5]*Menexenus* 235 E.
[6]*Menexenus* 235 C.
[7]*Phaedo* 60 A and Blair (1996) p 338.

open his eyes to the effect on other people of his imminent death, which was not what he wanted to hear, so he had her removed. Their relationship can have been nothing like the marriage of intellectual equals which Plato envisaged, which is a poor reflection upon Socrates' ability to educate those closest to him. If he were in earnest about education, he should surely have started with his wife, if only to make his own life more pleasant, but he did not. On the contrary, theirs seems to have been a typical Greek marriage, where the spouses had little understanding of each other. However, in *Republic* book 5, Plato seems to think that there were more intelligent women like Aspasia than was generally supposed, since he said that 'many women are better than many men in many things' and

> there is no way of life concerned with the management of the city that belongs to a woman because she's a woman or to a man because he's a man.[8]

This assertion was the foundation for his demands that people should be selected on the basis of intellectual merit rather than gender.

Diotima the female exemplar

Another prime example of an intelligent woman to whom Socrates listened is Diotima, the person whose speech about love he relates in the *Symposium*.

> She was wise about many things besides this: once she even put off the plague for ten years by telling the Athenians what sacrifices to make.[9]

In the *Crito*, Socrates also had truth revealed to him by a woman, this time in a dream.

> I thought that a beautiful and comely woman dressed in white approached me. She called me and said: "Socrates, may you arrive at fertile Phthia on the third day.[10]

Socrates took this to mean that he was to die in three days, which was the case. Blair holds that Plato used the woman in the dream and Diotima to make points about Socrates' mystical characteristics rather than about the potential ability of women. She argues that women here are metaphors, because Greek society considered them to be associated with knowledge gained by

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[8]Both exerpts from *Republic* 455 D.
[9]*Symposium* 201 D.
[10]*Crito* 44 B.

irrational means.[11] This seems a reasonable explanation for the role of the woman in the dream, but does not so conveniently account for Diotima's wisdom. Firstly, she was described as 'wise about many things besides this'.[12] Secondly, her argument with Socrates followed customary dialectic lines, and Diotima behaved 'in the manner of a perfect sophist'.[13] Therefore, I would argue that Plato used Diotima to make points both about Socrates and about women's potential intelligence.

Socrates' willingness to listen to and be instructed by Diotima illustrated his, and by association Plato's, acknowledgement that wisdom may come from unexpected sources. Diotima's obvious intelligence could be seen as a description of the heights to which women could rise if they were correctly educated, and thus as an example of the female guardians which Plato described in the *Republic*. After all, she was established as so wise a woman that she could even instruct Socrates. Diotima's final remarks on the power of love are clear precursors of the analogy of the Line later found in the *Republic*.

> This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is the learning of this very Beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful.[14]

In the analogy of the Line, Plato described the soul's ascent from knowledge simply of the visible to understanding of the intelligible.

> It is like a line divided into two unequal sections. Then divide each section - namely, that of the visible and that of the intelligible - in the same ratio as the line. In terms now of relative clarity and opacity, one subsection of the visible consists of images. And by images I mean, first, shadows, then reflections in water and in all close-packed, smooth and shiny materials...In the other subsection of the visible put the originals of these images, namely the animals around us, all the plants, and the whole class of manufactured things...[then the section of the intelligible] In one subsection, the soul, using as images the things that were imitated before, is forced to investigate from hypotheses, proceeding not to a first principle but to a conclusion. In the other

[11]Blair (1996) p 334.
[12]*Symposium* 201 D.
[13]*Symposium* 208 C.
[14]*Symposium* 211 C.

> subsection, however, it makes its way to a first principle that is not a hypothesis, proceeding from a hypothesis but without the images used in the previous subsection, using forms themselves and making its investigation through them.[15]

Plato's decision to give a woman as the source of Socrates' speech about Love in the *Symposium* would have startled his contemporaries, who were unused to hearing women speak publicly, let alone teaching. It also reinforces his theory that women were intelligent beings by saying that even Socrates, described by the Delphic Oracle as the wisest of men, could learn from women. Socrates believed that his only claim to wisdom was that he was aware of his ignorance, saying 'when I do not know, neither do I think I know.'[16] He was willing to learn from those who had genuine knowledge of a subject, whatever their gender or class, but he was always ready to expose the gaps in the understanding of those who thought themselves clever but were not, and of those who thought that their limited knowledge gave them authority on many subjects.

> Finally I went to the craftsmen, for I was conscious of knowing practically nothing, and I knew that I would find that they had knowledge of many fine things. In this I was not mistaken; they knew things I did not know, and to that extent they were wiser than I. But, gentlemen of the jury, the good craftsmen seemed to me to have the same fault as the poets: each of them, because of his success at his craft, thought himself very wise in other most important pursuits, and this error overshadowed the wisdom they had, so that I asked myself, on behalf of the oracle, whether I should prefer to be as I am, with neither their wisdom nor their ignorance, or to have both. The answer I gave myself and the oracle was that it was to my advantage to be as I am.[17]

This passage shows Socrates' respect for the technical skill of the craftsmen and poets, as well as his annoyance at their presumption that such skill gave them other, unrelated, knowledge. The message is clearly that those who are truly wise know the limits of their wisdom.

Plato on women in general

Plato's attitude to women was that, like men, they should be able to develop themselves, and that

> men and women are by nature the same with respect to guarding the city, except to the extent that one is weaker and the other stronger.[18]

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[15]*Republic* 509 D - 510 B.
[16]*Apology* 21 D.
[17]*Apology* 22 D-E.
[18]*Republic* 465 A.

Plato means here physical strength and weakness rather than mental. Plato believed that able women should be given equal opportunities with able men, and therefore proposed discrimination on grounds of ability rather than gender.

> Then women of this sort must be chosen along with men of the same sort to live with them and share their guardianship, seeing that they are adequate for the task and akin to the men in nature.[19]

He began thinking along these lines in the *Meno*, which is probably an earlier dialogue than the *Republic*. In the *Meno*, Socrates discussed geometry with a slave, thus demonstrating that education can work on anyone, even slaves, as I shall discuss later. The degree of its effectiveness would depend upon individual ability. The discussion began with the search for a definition of virtue. Meno himself took the traditional view.

> First, if you want the virtue of a man, it is easy to say that a man's virtue consists of being able to manage public affairs and in so doing to benefit his friends and harm his enemies and to be careful that no harm comes to himself; if you want the virtue of a woman, it is not difficult to describe: she must manage the home well, preserve its possessions and be submissive to her husband.[20]

There is a striking similarity between this passage and the demands made by Paul for female behaviour, since he said, 'wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.'[21] Thus it is clear that Paul's views on female virtue were very similar to those current in classical Athens. Socrates pointed out that all the tasks designated to men and to women require the same attributes if they are to be done well.

> Socrates: Is it possible to manage a city well, or a household, or anything else, while not managing it moderately and justly?
> Meno: Certainly not.
> S: Then if they manage it justly and moderately, they must do so with justice and moderation?
> M: Necessarily.
> S: So both the man and the woman, if they are to be good, need the same things, justice and moderation.
> M: So it seems.[22]

The final, most important conclusion is that 'all human beings are good in the same way, for they become good by acquiring the same qualities'.[23] Plato built on this conclusion in the *Republic*,

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[19]*Republic* 465 A-B.
[20]*Meno* 71 E.
[21]*Colossians* 3: 18.
[22]*Meno* 73 A - B.

culminating in his acceptance of women as guardians, as I shall discuss later. He did not, however, support equality of the sexes in an Athenian style democracy. In such circumstances, women and slaves should be kept in their place.

> The utmost freedom for the majority is reached in such a city when bought slaves, both male and female, are no less free than those who bought them. And I almost forgot to mention the extent of the legal equality of men and women and of the freedom in the relations between them.[24]

Women in Athenian society were, as I discussed in chapter 3, ignorant and uneducated. Such people could not be the equals of educated men. Plato could easily reconcile sexism towards the reality of Athenian women with egalitarianism towards the idealized women of the *Republic* and the *Laws* because in Athens there was no attempt to educate women, or to develop their abilities, while in the ideal states envisioned by Plato, there would be education and instruction for all, so the circumstances were very different.[25]

Slavery in the *Republic*

Plato abolished slavery in his blueprint for the *Republic*, a move which must have struck his contemporary readers as extraordinary, since slavery was fundamental to ancient Greek society. He had a poor opinion of the effect which slavery had on slaves themselves; and also, perhaps more importantly, of the effect it had on free slave masters. He even went so far as to say that a master of slaves was equivalent in his own home to a tyrant of a city.

> Let us consider a wealthy private slave-owner with a large number of slaves. The control of large numbers is a point of likeness to tyranny; the difference is one of degree.[26]

This was more likely to be the case in a timarchic society, since a citizen of such a state

> will be harsh to his slaves, because his imperfect education has left him without a proper sense of his superiority to them.[27]

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[23]*Meno* 73 C.
[24]*Republic* 563 B.
[25]Vlastos, G., 'Was Plato a Feminist?' in Tuana, N. (ed) *Feminist interpretations of Plato* (1994) pp 17 & 18 and Smith, N.D., 'Plato and Aristotle on the Nature of Women' in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* vol. 21 (1983) p 470.
[26]*Republic* 578 D.
[27]*Republic* 549 A.

However, it was not only the ownership of slaves which was a bad thing for the character of citizens, but the slaves themselves could also mar their owners' characters by their pernicious influence. Plato seems to have regarded slaves as inferior to free men in every respect, and to have a detrimental influence on children.

> Servants who seem quite loyal will sometimes repeat the same sort of thing [i.e. criticism of their master by their mistress] to the children behind their master's back.[28]

Probably because of this conviction of slaves' inferiority to free men, and because of the humiliation associated with becoming and being a slave, Plato said that the citizens of his republic 'are to be free and fear slavery more than death.'[29] In this society, the workers would be free and would have legal rights protected by governmental authority, so that the guardians and the auxiliaries could not exploit the social strata below them.[30] Slaves in ancient Athens had no legal protection, so this was a major innovation on Plato's part. Yet he clearly believed that if a society were to include slaves, they should always be considered subordinate to free men, and not allowed to forget their status:

> The extreme of popular liberty is reached in this kind of society [democracy] when slaves - male and female - have the same liberty as their owners.[31]

It is interesting that Plato's views were clear-cut on this matter. Either slaves would exist and would be well treated but nevertheless always subject to free men; or there would be no slaves at all, and everyone would be free, which was the ideal. There was no middle ground in which slaves could possess some kind of semi-autonomy. As the passage above shows, Plato was critical of democracy for, among other reasons, the fact that it could provide slaves with such a condition, which would be confusing to all concerned. One of Plato's key aims was to enable all citizens of his republic to be sure of their position in society, and his treatment of slavery can be seen as part of this plan.

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[28]*Republic* 549 E.
[29]*Republic* 387 B.
[30]Wild, (1946) p 107.
[31]*Republic* 563 B.

The origins of Plato's theory about the potential merits of slaves can be seen in the *Meno*, where Socrates used an uneducated slave boy to illustrate his theory that knowledge is innate in all human beings and need only be recollected in response to questions. Socrates questioned the boy, and led him to various correct conclusions about geometry.

> Socrates: What do you think, Meno? Has he, in his answers, expressed any opinion that was not his own?
> Meno: No, they were all his own.
> S: And yet, as we said a short time ago, he did not know?
> M: That is true.
> S: So these opinions were in him, were they not?
> M: Yes.
> S: So the man who does not know has within himself true opinions about the things that he does not know?
> M: So it appears.
> S: These opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone's?
> M: It is likely.
> S: And he will know it without having been taught but only questioned, and find the knowledge within himself?
> M: Yes.
> S: And is not finding knowledge within oneself recollection?
> M: Certainly.[32]

This theory about the latent innateness of knowledge, that it need only be called forth by questions rather than inculcated, supports Plato's view that slaves could be good, and also his programme of education for women outlined in the *Republic*. Knowledge is held in the soul and recollected by the mind, as the following passage shows.

> Then if the truth about reality is always in our soul, the soul would be immortal so that you should always confidently try to seek out and recollect what you do not know at present - that is, what you do not recollect?
> Somehow, Socrates, I think that what you say is right.[33]

There are also echoes here of the ascent to knowledge of the Good, described in the *Republic* and by Diotima in the *Symposium* and discussed above. Furthermore, the human soul is part of the great soul which existed before all created matter. As such, it is immortal and sexless. The gender of the body to which the human soul is temporarily attached does not affect the soul, for it existed before and will continue to exist after the body's death.

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[32]*Meno* 85 C-D.
[33]*Meno* 86 B.

> The soul is far older than any created thing, and... it is immortal and controls the entire world of matter; and second (a doctrine we've expounded often enough before)... reason is the supreme power among the heavenly bodies.[34]

This pre-eminence of the immortal sexless soul and the power of reason paves the way for universal education on grounds of ability rather than gender, since it is the soul which has knowledge rather than the body. Mental ability affects the capacity for recollection, but since, as we have seen, even slaves are capable of recollection, it seems reasonable that free women, inherently superior to slaves by virtue of their free status, should have an equal ability to recollect from their souls, since their gender is an attribute purely of their physical bodies, not of their souls. Plato accepted that some people, female and male, would have less mental capacity and thus less ability for recollection, but he did not consider that gender was an indicator of potential, owing to the sexless nature of the soul.[35] Therefore, he ruled that able women were just as eligible to become guardians as able men. The body's capacity for good and wisdom depends upon which part of the soul is dominant. As in a correctly regulated city, reason is pre-eminent in the wise person's soul, and governs the spirited and appetitive parts, thanks to education.

> Socrates: Therefore, isn't it appropriate for the rational part to rule, since it is really wise and exercises foresight on behalf of the whole soul, and for the spirited part to obey it and be its ally?
> Glaucon: It certainly is.
> S: And isn't it, as we were saying, a mixture of music and poetry, on the one hand, and physical training, on the other, that makes the two parts harmonious, stretching and nurturing the rational part with fine words and learning, relaxing the other part through soothing stories, and making it gentle by means of harmony and rhythm?
> G: That's precisely it.
> S: And these two, having been nurtured in this way, and having truly learned their own roles and been educated in them, will govern the appetitive part...[36]

Thus a person's character depends not upon their gender, but upon the correct balance being struck between reason, spirit and appetite.

Slavery in the *Laws*

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[34]*Laws* 967 D.
[35]Smith (1983) pp 472 -3.
[36]*Republic* 441 E-442 A.

In the *Laws*, Plato did not abolish slavery as he did in the *Republic*. He did, however, have a good deal to say on the subject. For example, he decreed that his citizens should own the best possible slaves. Some of his contemporaries had a poor opinion of slaves, but Plato pointed out that good ones can be more loyal to their owners than people are to their own kin.

> We know we'd all agree that a man should own the best and most docile slaves he can get - after all, many a paragon of a slave has done much more for a man than his own brother or son, and they have often been the salvation of their masters' persons and property and entire homes...And don't others take the opposite line, and say that a slave's soul is rotten through and through, and that if we have any sense we won't trust such a pack at all?[37]

Plato realised that a slave was 'a difficult beast to handle', prone to getting out of control and rioting, as exemplified by 'the frequent and repeated revolts in Messenia' and set himself to conquer this problem.[38] He observed that all the slaves in these revolts spoke the same language, and thus found it easy to organise themselves, so he decided that

> if the slaves are to submit to the condition without giving trouble, they should not all come from the same country or speak the same tongue.[39]

This insistence on foreign slaves may suggest that Plato's Greek chauvinism caused him to consider foreigners to be incapable of an adult Greek's level of reason. Interestingly, the slave boy questioned in the *Meno* is Greek, though a slave by birth.[40] Thus Plato does not enter into discussion of whether a foreign slave, inferior to a free Greek on two counts, could recollect geometrical facts as this boy did. However, since Plato had insisted that only the best possible slaves should be owned, perhaps he did consider foreigners to be the equals of Greeks, otherwise he would have to insist on only Greek slaves. This insistence on the best possible slaves is an extension of the idea that all members of the state should, for the sake of the city, be as good as possible.[41] Plato went into detail about how slaves should be treated, and why. They must be trained well, and treated as well as free people, not only for their own benefit but for the sake of society as a whole.

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[37]*Laws* 776 D-E.
[38]*Laws* 777 B-C.
[39]*Laws* 777 D.
[40]*Meno* 82 B.
[41]Adam (1913) p 98.

> We ought to train them properly, not only for their sakes but above all for our own. The best way to train slaves is to refrain from arrogantly ill-treating them, and to harm them even less (assuming that's possible) than you would your equals. You see, when a man can hurt someone as often as he likes, he'll soon show whether or not his respect for justice is natural and unfeigned and springs from a genuine hatred of injustice.[42]

There was also an unexpressed reason for treating slaves well, which reflects Plato's opinion that good slaves can provide immense help to their owners, and that one should have the best slaves possible. Clearly, if slaves are well trained and well treated, they are more likely to be loyal and hardworking. However, treating slaves well must not extend to familiarity and a reluctance to punish them for misdemeanours.

> Even so, we should certainly punish slaves if they deserve it, and not spoil them by simply giving them a warning, as we would free men. Virtually everything you say to a slave should be an order, and you should never become at all familiar with them - neither the women nor the men.[43]

This prohibition of familiarity was made in order to enable everyone, slave and free, to be sure of their relative position in society, which as I mentioned earlier was one of Plato's main aims in the *Republic* and the *Laws*.

> This is how a lot of silly folk do treat their slaves, and usually only succeed in spoiling them and in making life more difficult - more difficult, I mean, for the slaves to take orders and for themselves to maintain their authority.[44]

As the previous passage shows, slaves were also to be punished the first time they misbehaved, rather than being warned the first time and punished the next, as a free adult would be. Clearly the rule that slaves should be treated as equals does not extend very far, since they are to be punished like children, who are subject to discipline from their parents and teachers. After the age of three, a child was to be disciplined.

> We should now stop spoiling him, and resort to discipline, but not such as to humiliate him. We said, in the case of slaves, that discipline should not be enforced so high-handedly that they become resentful, though on the other hand we mustn't spoil them by letting them go uncorrected; the same rule should apply to free persons too.[45]

Furthermore, slave owners are not to become familiar with their slaves. Perhaps what Plato really meant was that slaves should be treated like the children of equals, since for him neither child nor slave was capable of reason on the level of a free adult.

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[42]*Laws* 777 D.
[43]*Laws* 777 E.
[44]*Laws* 778 A.

The origin and characteristics of slaves in the *Laws* are somewhat confusing, since as we have seen, slaves are to be of many nationalities. The most likely source of foreign slaves would be prisoners taken in war, since it would be too expensive to buy in all the slaves necessary for a city. It is difficult to understand how people who were born free would become slaves upon their capture, since Plato's descriptions of slaves, their nature and treatment in the *Laws* seem to assume a basic difference in nature between slave and free. Perhaps Plato believed that the humiliation of capture would bring about this change. It is unlikely that slaves acquired through war would meet the criteria that 'a man should own the best and most docile slaves he can get'.[46] Former soldiers would be more inclined to belligerence than docility, particularly towards those who had deprived them of their freedom. Furthermore, war would produce only one generation and one gender of slaves, since in the ancient world women did not serve in armies, apart from the armies of the cities of Plato's utopias. Another source of slaves might be captured cities, in which there would be plenty of women and children but few men. In either of these cases the slaves thus obtained would be unlikely to wish their conquerors well. Plato does not seem to have addressed this difficulty. Perhaps he thought that by judicious breeding, the Guardians could in a few years produce a population of docile, tractable slaves. Another problem lies in the rule that slaves must be of different nationalities to avoid riots, since the state would have to wage war with several cities, rather than just one, and to acquire a few slaves from each war, so that they cannot all communicate privately in a language unknown to their captors. In fact, the more one examines Plato's rules on slavery in the *Laws*, the clearer it becomes that the theory is unworkable as it stands. This is perhaps unsurprising since it is clear from the *Republic* that Plato considered slavery to be undesirable, as I have shown. Moreover, the insistence upon justice in the treatment of slaves in the *Laws* would eventually lead citizens to the conclusion that slavery is

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[45]*Laws* 793 E.
[46]*Laws* 776 D

unjust, and ultimately to its abolition, as in the *Republic*.[47] This development of the *Laws* towards the *Republic* is that of an actual towards an ideal, since the *Laws* is presented as a workable blueprint, while the *Republic* is only ever an ideal. Plato clearly hoped that by starting a city off on the framework of the *Laws* it would be able to evolve into the ultimate ideal of the *Republic*, just as philosophers start with love of good things and ascend to love of the Good. The awkwardness of some of the rules laid down in the *Laws*, not least those surrounding slavery, highlights the need for a move towards the idealism of the *Republic*.

Property and equality in the *Republic*

In the *Republic*, the abolition of slavery paved the way for acceptance of the true worth of all human beings. The state is to be ruled by guardians, assisted by auxiliaries.

> Then isn't it most truly correct to call these people complete guardians, since they will guard against external enemies and internal friends, so that the one will lack the power and the other the desire to harm the city? The young people we've hitherto called guardians we'll now call auxiliaries and supporters of the guardians' convictions.[48]

Those who are neither guardians nor auxiliaries will be workers: farmers and craftspeople whose work would be as essential to the city as that of the other classes. In order to maintain this arrangement, Plato invented a myth and a warning which would be told to the citizens.

> The god who made you mixed some gold into those who are adequately equipped to rule, because they are most valuable. He put silver in those who are auxiliaries and iron and bronze in the farmers and other craftsmen...there is an oracle which says that the city will be ruined if it ever has an iron or bronze guardian.[49]

People within each class are to produce children, and it would seem reasonable to expect Plato to say that children will be in the same class as their parents, so that children of guardians will automatically become guardians, and so on. However, this was not the case.

> For the most part you will produce children like yourselves, but, because you are all related, a silver child will occasionally be born from a golden parent, and vice versa, and all the others from each other. So the first and most important command from the god to the rulers is that there is nothing that they must guard better or watch more carefully than the mixture of metals in the souls of the next generation. If an offspring of theirs should

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[47]Hoyland, J.S., *The Great Forerunner: studies in the inter-relation of Platonism and Christianity* (1928) p 158.

[48]*Republic* 414 B.

[49]*Republic* 415 A & C.

> be found to have a mixture of iron or bronze, they must not pity him in any way, but give him the rank appropriate to his nature and drive him out to join the craftsmen and farmers. But if an offspring of these people is found to have a mixture of gold or silver, they will honour him and take him up to join the guardians or auxiliaries.[50]

This stipulation that children of gold, silver or bronze could be born to parents in any of the three new classes of society meant that social mobility both up and down the ranks would depend entirely on individual merit, rather than birth. Plato's chief intention was to find the people best suited for each task in the city, and to that end he refused to put artificial barriers such as birth or gender between people and the duties for which they were best suited by ability.[51] Social mobility was facilitated by the abolition of the family, which meant that selected guardians rather than parents were responsible for detecting the abilities of children.

> And then, as the children are born, they'll be taken over by the officials appointed for the purpose.[52]

Women who had just had children would then breastfeed a child from the nursery, but not their own. All other care of the children was left to the official nurses.

> And won't the nurses also see to it that the mothers are brought to the rearing pen when their breasts have milk, taking every precaution to insure that no mother knows her own child and providing wet nurses if the mother's milk is insufficient? And won't they take care that the mothers suckle the children for only a reasonable amount of time and that the care of sleepless children and all other such troublesome duties are taken over by the wet nurses and other attendants?[53]

The aim of all this was that Plato's citizens should value themselves for their abilities and achievements rather than their birth. However, Temple holds that the abolition of the family ignores some basic facts of human nature and would ultimately make people more selfish rather than less, as Plato wanted.[54] This might be the case in a city without a highly developed education system, but education in the republic was nothing if not comprehensive. Such an education would help and enlarge each child's nature, and lead them as far as each could go in their quest for truth and knowledge.[55]

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[50]*Republic* 415 B-C.
[51]Adam (1913) p 126.
[52]*Republic* 460 B.
[53]*Republic* 460 C-D.
[54]Temple (1916) p 41.

It is often overlooked that Plato, as well as saying that men should be allowed to take up the tasks for which they were best suited, also extended this to women. Saxonhouse, for example, holds that by minimising the female role in reproduction simply to childbearing, women would be made weaker and inferior. She believes that by forcing women to join in the activities of warriors and rulers, Plato removed women's particular sphere of excellence.[56] This statement seems to ignore Plato's rule that the best results are achieved when everyone does the jobs for which they are best suited, which I have just discussed. Saxonhouse does not seem to realise that a woman will become a guardian only if that is where her talent lies. Equally, she will become a nurse, or anything else, only if she is naturally inclined to do so. Saxonhouse also believes that the women of the republic would be 'distorted'.[57] On the contrary, Plato saw through the distortion and repression of Athenian women to the potential beneath, and tried to release it. He did not issue a blanket statement that 'women are naturally suited to childbearing and everything associated with it, and therefore should not expect to do anything else', but gave them the chance to become anything, from guardians to farmworkers, that their individual nature suited. I wonder whether a man who wished to take up the 'female' task of looking after the state's children would be allowed to do so. We are told that the people in charge of taking new-born children from their mothers to the nurseries 'may be either men or women or both, since our offices are open to both sexes', but the gender of the nurses is not mentioned.[58] There is a possible clue in the obvious biological fact that women can breastfeed but men cannot. However, since provision had already been made for new mothers to breastfeed a child, though not their own, the remaining duties are simply the care of the children between feeds. Men would be just as capable physically of performing these duties as women, since wet nurses were clearly to be a

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[55]Chanteur (1980) ``p 153.

[56]Saxonhouse, A.W., 'The Philosopher and the Female in the Political Thought of Plato' in Tuana (1994) p 72.

[57]Saxonhouse (1994) p 74.

[58]*Republic* 460 B. It is worth noting at this point that the Greek word for nurse is ἡ τιτθη, which is feminine. This supports the view that nurses would at any rate be more likely to be women than men.

separate group of people from the ordinary nurses. There are two possibilities: firstly that Plato considered it so obvious that these nurses could be of either sex, since he had just pointed out that the guardians in charge of children could be male or female, that he did not deem it necessary to state it; or secondly that he thought it so unlikely that any man would wish to become a nurse that they would all be women, and again, it was not necessary to remark on this. The answer to which of these two possibilities comes closest to the truth depends on how deeply held his conviction was that

> there is no way of life concerned with the management of the city that belongs to a woman because she's a woman, or to a man because he's a man.[59]

I think that he did mean it, and that he was genuinely egalitarian in his views on the sexes, though he seems to have become less so by the time he wrote the *Laws*. I do not, however, call him a feminist, for several reasons. Firstly the term is anachronistic, since feminism did not exist in ancient Greece. Secondly, feminism generally means considering women to be the equal of men in all things, and this was clearly not the case for Plato, since as I have already mentioned, he considered men to be stronger than women physically. Thirdly, Plato produced innovative ideas, but did not change the reality of women's position in society. His pupils and wider audience will have been shocked by his radical ideas, and some of them may have been made to reconsider their preconceptions, but as far as we know he had no effect upon contemporary society. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, Plato was not motivated by any idea of fairness; his main aim was the good of the city, which incidentally could best be achieved by allowing women to participate.[60] I shall return to this last point later.

Contemporary feminists are apt to see Plato's views on women with purely modern eyes, and fail to acknowledge how radical he was for his time. For example, Lange takes issue with this dictum of Plato's:

Curiously, the word for nipple is masculine, ὁ τιτθος, which suggests that perhaps any conclusions drawn from word genders in this case may be unreliable.

[59]See note 5, above.

[60]Lange in Clark, L.M.G. & Lange (1979) p 5.

> Then you, as their lawgiver, will select women just as you did men, with natures as similar to theirs as possible, and hand them over to the men.[61]

Lange does not believe that Plato would have written this passage had he been concerned with the equality of the sexes.[62] In the first place, Plato never claimed to be concerned with theoretical equality, but rather with allowing people to fill those roles for which they were best suited. As with the officials in charge of children, posts could be filled by 'either men or women or both', and it was thus entirely possible that all officials in charge of a certain aspect of civic life could be male, or female. The key point is that there were no restrictions based on gender. Secondly, it is clear from the passage which concerns Lange that the most able men have already been selected in the same way, and this selection of women is simply continuing under the premise already established, namely that people are not all the same. Lange is concerned with whether Plato deserves to be called a feminist, and does not seem to realise that the epithet he most deserves is 'radical reformer'. Adam considers that Plato was 'perhaps the most daring innovator the world has ever seen.' She points out that he disregarded the opinion of contemporary society on many things, especially the education and duties of women.[63] All he was concerned with was finding the best person to do a given job. If that meant putting a woman in a job previously reserved for men, then so be it.

In the *Republic*, Plato could have assigned women to the male guardians as he distributed material goods after abolishing personal property.[64] Instead, he extended communality of property to cover women and children too, so that they belonged to the state rather than to individuals. Since women were also to be relieved of the duty of looking after their children, they were freed to take part in government and to have career opportunities equal to those of men. Plato expressed this state of affairs very clearly.

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[61]*Republic* 458 C.
[62]Lange in Clark, L.M.G. & Lange (1979) p 10.
[63]Adam (1913) pp 124 & 126.
[64]Smith (1983) p 471.

> If a city is to achieve the height of good government, wives must be in common, children and all their education must be in common, their way of life, whether in peace or war, must be in common, and their kings must be those among them who have proved to be best, both in philosophy and warfare.[65]

Furthermore, the ownership of property and the existence of familial attachments would render it difficult for guardians to be truly disinterested philosophical rulers, since they would be concerned with their own affairs rather than those of the state.

> But if they acquire private land, houses and currency themselves, they'll be household managers and farmers instead of guardians - hostile masters of the other citizens instead of their allies.[66]

This passage sheds interesting light on what Plato saw as the principal duties of the guardians. They were to be allies of the other citizens rather than their masters. This confirms the idea that the *Republic* described an ideal state whose citizens worked together in harmony towards a common goal.

Property and equality in the *Laws*

In the *Laws*, the principle that all property should be held in common was still the ideal, though Plato had concluded that it was unrealistic, and promulgated a second-best alternative.

> You'll find the ideal society and state, and the best code of laws, where the old saying 'friends' property is genuinely shared' is put into practice as widely as possible throughout the entire state. Now I don't know whether in fact this situation - a community of wives, children and all property - exists anywhere today, or will ever exist, but at any rate in such a state the notion of 'private property' will have been by hook or by crook completely eliminated from life...And so men need look no further for their ideal: they should keep this state in view and try to find the one that most nearly resembles it. This is what we've put our hands to, and if in some way it could be realised, it would come very near immortality and be second only to the ideal.[67]

Thus personal property was allowed by the *Laws* but was to be strictly regulated.

> Anyone buying or selling his allotted land or house must suffer the penalty appropriate to the crime.[68]

In the *Republic*, Plato could have abolished the family unit and personal property and still have restricted women to the roles of consorts, nurses and general aides. However, he took the radical

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[65]*Republic* 543 A.

[66]*Republic* 417 A. See also Lange in Clark, L.M.G. & Lange (1979) p 9.

[67]*Laws* 739 C & E.

[68]*Laws* 741 C.

step of allowing them to become guardians, rulers who shared political authority with men.[69] Though this equal participation became somewhat less than equal in the *Laws*, when women were needed to bring up children and run the household, he never returned them entirely to the house, though the only roles in government which he specifically assigned to women were those of regulating marriage and training young children.

> They should be kept in order and restrained from bad behaviour by their nurses, who should themselves be supervised, along with their groups as a whole, by the twelve women elected for the purpose, one to be in charge of one group for a year at a time, the allocations to be made by the Guardians of the Law. The twelve must be elected by the women in charge of supervising marriage, one must be chosen from each tribe, and they must be of the same age as their electors.[70]

These women, although subordinate to the guardians, had considerable power of their own. They were to have slaves working for them, and were able to punish slaves and free people, though with certain restrictions.

> The woman allotted to a given tribe will discharge her duties by visiting the temples daily and punishing any cases of wrongdoing. She may use a number of state slaves to deal with male and female slaves on her own authority; however, if a citizen disputes his punishment, she must take the case to the City Wardens, but if he does not dispute it, she may punish him too on her own authority.[71]

It is not clear whether female citizens would be allowed to have their punishment referred to the city wardens, but since slaves were the only group of people mentioned as being unable to do so, it seems likely that female and male citizens were to be treated similarly. These twelve women would have been able to devote their whole time to their duties, as they were to be 'the same age as their electors'. These electors were the women in charge of marriage, who were eligible for office only after their child-bearing years were over, which Plato considered to be above the age of forty. It follows that the twelve elected women would also have finished bringing up their families.

> The age limits for marriage shall be: for a girl, from sixteen to twenty (these will be the extreme limits specified), and for a man, from thirty to thirty-five. A woman may hold office from the age of forty, a man from thirty.[72]

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[69]Vlastos in Tuana (1994) p 21.
[70]*Laws* 794 A- B.
[71]*Laws* 794 B - C.
[72]*Laws* 785 B.

It appears that women would be expected to devote at least twenty years to their husbands and children, while a man's first duty was to the state, since he was also required to serve in the armed forces for forty years. However, it could also be argued that women's first duty was to the state, given Plato's frequent emphasis on the importance of producing and bringing up children. The rules for women's military service were much vaguer than those for men.

> Service in the armed forces shall be required of a man from twenty to sixty. As for women, whatever military service it may be thought necessary to impose (after they have finished bearing children) should be performed up to the age of fifty; practicable and appropriate duties should be specified for each individual.[73]

This seems like an unfinished thought, and suggests that Plato was not quite sure what military service it would be best for women to do. He seems to have realised that some girls and women are warlike while some are not, and made allowances for this in their education.

> The males should go to teachers of riding, archery, javelin-throwing and slinging - and the females too, if they are agreeable, may attend at any rate the lessons, especially those in the use of weapons.[74]

He made allowances for differences in character of girls by allowing them to attend lessons in warcraft 'if they are agreeable', but made no such concession to boys, all of whom had to learn. Perhaps Plato felt a conflict here between the traditional Greek idea that women should not fight, and his own theory that women are capable of anything, and could not see how to resolve it. That would explain his uncharacteristic vagueness on the subject. Another possibility is that he thought the idea of women fighting in the army was too radical to be expounded in any detail, and therefore should be hinted at but left unexplained. This seems unlikely, since Plato was prepared to be radical on many other things, such as education and the place of women in society in general, and there seems to be no reason why he should balk at putting women in the army. A third, and I think most plausible, explanation is that since in the *Laws* Plato had reinstated the family unit as the basis for society, he was reluctant to make both parents eligible for military service, since this could leave children orphans. As I shall show later in this chapter, Plato considered that widows were quite capable of bringing up their children alone. It would seem to

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[73]*Laws* 785 B.
[74]*Laws* 794 C-D.

Plato in these circumstances that men rather than women were the obvious choice for enforced military service, owing to their superior physical strength.

Sex in the *Republic*

Marriage was abolished in the *Republic* together with the family unit. Reproduction became a state matter, and was directed towards producing the best possible future citizens. Sexual intercourse was to be strictly regulated by the guardians, in order to ensure the best possible results. Furthermore, only superior babies were to be allowed to survive.

> The best men must have sex with the best women as frequently as possible, while the opposite is true of the most inferior men and women, and, second, that if our herd is to be of the highest possible quality, the former's offspring must be reared but not the latter's.[75]

This combination of eugenics and exposure of unwanted infants makes unpleasant reading for a modern audience. It is interesting, and significant of Plato's belief in the essential value of women, that while only strong babies were to be reared, there was no mention of exposing babies just because they were female, as happened in Athens to superfluous daughters. As I discussed in chapter 3, exposure of weak, sickly or unwanted female babies was practised in ancient Athens, so these remarks would probably not have concerned Plato's intended audience unduly. Certainly no opposition is offered in the *Republic* itself. Plato also decreed that men and women were to reproduce only during a specific period in their lives.

> A woman is to bear children for the city from the age of twenty to the age of forty, a man from the time that he passes his peak as a runner until he reaches fifty-five.[76]

These years were considered to be the physical and mental prime, and therefore most likely to produce good, healthy children. It is interesting that Plato disapproved of very young mothers, which were quite normal in Athens since girls were sometimes married at twelve, though more often at fourteen.[77] He realised that these girls, although pubescent, were immature physically

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[75]*Republic* 459 D.

[76]*Republic* 460 E.

[77]Perlman, P., 'Plato Laws 833C - 834D and the bears of Brauron' in *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* vol. 24 (1983) p 117.

as well as mentally, and not ready for childbirth. To be legitimate, a child had to be the result of sex authorised by the state, otherwise it was liable to exposure.

> Then, if a man who is older or younger than that engages in reproduction for the community, we'll say that his offence is neither pious not just, for the child he begets for the city, if it remains hidden, will be born in darkness, through a dangerous weakness of will, and without the benefit of the sacrifices and prayers offered at every marriage festival, in which the priests and priestesses, together with the entire city, ask that the children of good and beneficial parents may always prove themselves still better and more beneficial...The same law will apply if a man still of begetting years has a child with a woman of child-bearing age without the sanction of the rulers. We'll say that he brings to the city an illegitimate, unauthorised and unhallowed child.[78]

To produce legitimate children, sexual union was to be the result of drawing of lots, carefully orchestrated by the guardians in charge of marriage to ensure that only superior specimens are allowed to breed.

> Then there'll have to be some sophisticated lotteries introduced, so that at each marriage the inferior people we mentioned will blame luck rather than the rulers when they aren't chosen.[79]

Thus men and women, during their reproductive years, were both to be strictly regulated, with sex outside eugenic unions equally forbidden to both men and women. However, Plato's remarks on what people were allowed to do once their official reproductive years were past would have astonished his contemporaries. Athenian men were permitted considerable promiscuity, but women were not, as I discussed in chapter 3. However, Plato decreed that older men and women were both to be permitted total sexual liberty, provided no children were born.[80]

> However, I think that when women and men have passed the age of having children, we'll leave them free to have sex with whomever they wish.[81]

Since there is no mention of brothels in the *Republic*, and there were to be no slaves, one may assume that recreational sex, like procreational sex, would take place only between free consenting adults. The passage above also contains one of very few references, albeit veiled, to homosexual practices. From the remark that people who have passed their child-bearing years may have sex 'with whomever they wish', it would appear that men (and indeed women) who had fulfilled their civic duty by producing children were then free to indulge their homosexual desires if

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[78]*Republic* 461 A-B.
[79]*Republic* 460 A.
[80]Vlastos in Tuana (1994) p 12.

they wished. During their childbearing years, homosexuals of both genders were expected to sublimate their urges for the good of the state, and to have heterosexual intercourse in order to produce children.

Sex in the *Laws*

Marriage was reinstated as the foundation of society in the *Laws*. The guidelines for marriage were formed with primary concern for the state, though there was also concern that the unions should be pleasant for the individuals concerned.

> We should seek to contract the alliance that will benefit the state, not the one that we personally find most alluring.[82]

However, Plato believed that the state would benefit most if marriages took place between persons of complementary, rather than conflicting, temperaments. Indeed, Plato cited failure to observe this rule as one of the reasons for divorce.

> It's quite likely that the existing partners are people of rough temper, so one should try to fit them in harness with mates of a more phlegmatic and gentle disposition.[83]

It is interesting that Plato was clearly aware that women could be as difficult tempered as men. Once again, he saw beneath the projected image of meek, submissive Athenian womanhood to the reality. This may have been due to the character of Socrates' wife Xanthippe, who was a typical uneducated Athenian woman.[84] Equally, he did not claim that, after their superior education, all men in his state would be perfectly even-tempered, but allowed for the variations of human nature. Thus a highly strung person should marry someone placid, so that husband and wife balance one another and, Plato's main concern, produce children of even temperaments.

> The state should be like a mixture in a mixing bowl. When you pour in the wine it seethes furiously, but once dilute it with the god of the teetotallers, and you have a splendid combination which will make you a good and reasonable drink.[85]

However, Plato knew enough of human nature to see that achieving this balance would be difficult.

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[81]*Republic* 461 B.
[82]*Laws* 773 B.
[83]*Laws* 930 A.
[84]Blair (1996) p 338.

> Very few people have it in them to see that the same principle applies to the alliance that produces children.[86]

In order to deal with this difficulty, he decreed that there should be 'women in charge of supervising marriage', who supervised and regulated it.[87] These women were also to supervise procreation, and seem to have been intended to oversee all aspects of family life.

> They should be supervised by women whom we have chosen (several or only a few - the officials should appoint the number they think right, at times within their discretion).[88]

This is in fact the first mention of these women, so it is not entirely clear whom Plato meant to select, or what their roles were to be. However, it is clear that only women were to be appointed to this office, and that they answered directly to the guardians. Thus women were in charge of the survival of the city on a very basic level, since they supervised marriage and procreation, and could even force barren couples to divorce and remarry.

> If children come in suitable numbers, the period of supervised procreation should be ten years and no longer. But if a couple remain childless throughout this period, they should part, and call in their relatives and the female officials to help them decide terms of divorce that will safeguard the interests of them both.[89]

Since the ancient Greeks generally believed that women provided only the womb for housing the foetus, while men provided the life, there would be scope here for blaming either sex for causing the childlessness of the marriage, and it is interesting that Plato simply accepted that some couples are barren, and that he gives them plenty of time to conceive, rather than expecting babies to follow immediately upon marriage, though having children is to be a newly married couple's first priority.

> So the bridegroom had better deal with his wife and approach the task of begetting children with a sense of responsibility, and the bride should do the same, especially during the period when no children have yet been born to them.[90]

However, the importance of the state rather than the individual emerged once again when Plato insisted that barren couples must separate and, we must assume, remarry if they are childless

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[85]*Laws* 773 D.
[86]*Laws* 773 D.
[87]*Laws* 794 B.
[88]*Laws* 784 A.
[89]*Laws* 784 B.
[90]*Laws* 783 E.

after ten years, which could well cause considerable anguish to the people concerned, though this is not mentioned.

Men and women in the state described by the *Laws* were to be allowed to see each other, and even dance together, before they married, which would have horrified Plato's fellow Athenians. As I discussed in chapter 3, Athenian women and girls were kept indoors apart from religious festivals, and had no say in whom they married. Certainly they never danced with boys, though girls did dance together at some festivals, which were exclusively for women, such as that held at Brauron in honour of Artemis.[91] In his anxiety to prevent marital mistakes, Plato believed that there should be no familial or physical secrets on either side.

> You see, when people are going to live together as partners in marriage, it is vital that the fullest possible information should be available about the bride and her background and the family she'll marry into. One should regard the prevention of mistakes here as a matter of supreme importance - so important and serious, in fact, that even the young people's recreation must be arranged with this in mind. Boys and girls must dance together at an age when plausible occasions can be found for their doing so, in order that they may have a reasonable look at each other; and they should dance naked, provided sufficient modesty and restraint are displayed by all concerned.[92]

It is clear from this passage that boys and girls were to be equally on show, and also that these dances were not merely a chance for marriage arrangers to match pairs. Rather, the young people concerned were able to look at each other and make their own selections. This passage must have caused considerable outrage for advising that boys and girls should dance together naked, since it was considered shameful for respectable women to be seen naked by anyone, possibly even their husbands. Such women were rarely seen in public even fully dressed, as this passage describing what happened during the sack of a town shows.

> They shame the most beautiful women. The others they strip naked so that those who previously were not to be seen by strangers even fully adorned, are now seen in the nude by many.[93]

What is perhaps even more surprising, though not from Plato's point of view, is that the bride should know all about her groom's family as well as vice versa. For Plato, this made perfect

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[91]Perlman (1983) p 123.
[92]*Laws* 721 E - 722 A.

sense, since his policy of eugenic unions demanded that the 'pedigree' of both parents should be known. Plato's decision that boys and girls should be allowed to see each other naked may also have had roots in the fact that when Athenian men entered a homosexual relationship with a boy, they had always seen their beloved exercising naked in the gymnasium first, and had initially fallen in love with his physical body. The intellectual side of the relationship developed later, if at all. Perhaps Plato thought that the same progression from physical love to mental love could take place in heterosexual relationships if both parties were well educated and allowed to see each other naked. The very idea that men could have an intellectual relationship with their wives was unprecedented, since the general idea prevalent in Athens was that a man had a wife only to bear him legitimate children.

> We keep *hetairai* for pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our bodies, and wives for the bearing of legitimate children and to keep faithful watch over our house.[94]

Plato stood this on its head and proposed that one woman, namely a wife, would be able to fill all these roles and provide intellectual stimulation as well.

Whereas in the *Republic*, sexual partners were to be chosen by a carefully supervised lottery, as I have shown, in the *Laws* there was to be an element of personal choice, though the guardians guided individuals.

> You must make a marriage that will be approved by sensible folk. They will advise you not to be over keen to avoid marrying into a poor family or to seek to marry into a rich one; other things being equal, you should always prefer to marry somewhat beneath you. That will be best both for the state and the union of your two hearths and homes, because it is infinitely better for the virtue of a man and wife if they balance and complement each other than if they are both at the same extreme. If a man knows he's rather headstrong and apt to be too quick off the mark in everything he does, he ought to be anxious to ally himself to a family of quiet habits, and if he has the opposite kind of temperament he should marry into the opposite kind of family.[95]

This passage contains several interesting points. Firstly, it seems that the wife should be inferior to her husband, at least in the matter of wealth. However, Plato seems to have expected wives to be able to influence their husbands' conduct, for example making them either less impetuous or

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[93]Isocrates, *Letter to Archidamus* 10. See also Keuls (1993) p 116.
[94]Demosthenes, *Against Neaera*, 122.
[95]*Laws* 773 A - B.

more so, as necessary. His stated intention was that they should produce balanced children, but it is also clear that Plato wished to create harmonious households, since he said it 'will be best both for the state and the union of your two hearths and homes.' He may have realised that it is generally better for children to grow up in peaceful families rather than in ones dominated by quarrelling parents. However, radically differing personalities are just as capable of arguing as similar ones! If men were to marry women financially inferior to them, one wonders what would become of the daughters of wealthy guardians. This was not mentioned by Plato, so we can only speculate. Perhaps they should marry men even wealthier than them, if possible, though this would soon lead to a concentration of wealth. Alternatively, they could marry poor men, which would assist distribution of wealth. Plato remarked that a man should marry beneath him 'other things being equal', a useful escape clause upon which he did not elaborate but which was probably meant to cover the scenario just mentioned. If a young man decided upon an unsuitable marriage, he was to be dissuaded by argument rather than the law.

> If we give explicit instructions in the form of a law - 'no rich man to marry into a rich family, no powerful person to marry into a powerful house, the headstrong must be forced to join in marriage with the phlegmatic and the phlegmatic with the headstrong' - well, it's ludicrous of course, but it will also annoy a great many people...For these reasons we are forced to omit such topics from our actual laws. However, we must resort to our 'charms' and try to persuade everybody to think it more important to produce well-balanced children than to marry his equal and never stop lusting for wealth. Anyone who is set on enriching himself by his marriage should be headed off by reproaches rather than compelled by a written law.[96]

This is a highly realistic passage, and shows that while Plato may have wanted everything to be explicitly laid down in law, he realised that such an approach is not always feasible where humans are concerned. He probably also realised that human relationships cannot always be governed by logic, and wished to make sure that there was no explicit law forbidding anything to do with marriage, so that the rules could be broken if necessary. This made it possible for a daughter of a wealthy guardian to marry a man who suited her temperament best, regardless of his financial status. Plato made it easy for people to avoid marrying for immediate financial gain by strictly regulating dowries, though his remarks on the subject are somewhat contradictory.

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[96]*Laws* 773 C - E.

First he said that 'when a man marries or gives in marriage, no dowry whatsoever must be given or received'.[97] This later became somewhat altered, to allow small dowries but to enforce a tax on ones outside the legal limit.

> If a man obeys this law, so much to his credit. If he does not, and gives or receives more that fifty drachmas for the trousseau in the case of the lowest property class (or more than a hundred or a hundred and fifty or two hundred according to class), he must owe as much again to the treasury, and the amount given or received must be dedicated to Hera and Zeus.[98]

The poor who could not afford dowries were not to be penalised 'because in this state no one will go without the necessities of life.'[99]

On the subject of divorce, Plato also combined concern for the state with concern for the individuals involved.

> Whenever a man and his wife find it impossible to get on with each other because of an unfortunate incompatibility of temperament, the case must come under the control of ten men - middle-aged Guardians of the Laws - and ten of the women in charge of marriage of the same age. Any arrangements they make which reconcile the couple should stand, but if feelings are too exacerbated for that they must do their best to find each some other congenial partner.[100]

There was no idea that squabbling parents should stay together 'for the sake of the children'. As in the case of widows and widowers, remarriage was essential only in the cases where enough children had not already been produced.

> And when the quarrelling couple have no children or only a few, the procreation of children must be kept in view in the setting up of the new homes.[101]

However, a remarkably humane touch comes when Plato described the second marriages of divorced people who had children.

> Where sufficient children already exist, the divorce and the remarriages should facilitate companionship and mutual help in the evening of life.

This remark is particularly interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it shows Plato's concern for his citizens, which was considerable though always secondary to his concern for the state. If they had fulfilled their civic duty, he wanted them to be happy for the rest of their lives. Secondly, it

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[97]*Laws* 742 C.
[98]*Laws* 774 D.
[99]*Laws* 774 C.
[100]*Laws* 930 A.

suggests that Plato had changed his views to believe that heterosexual relationships could be mutually satisfying on a mental level. In the *Symposium*, it was clear that he believed homosexual relationships between men to be the best kind, because they could produce beautiful ideas.

> In my view, you see, when he makes contact with someone beautiful and keeps company with him, he conceives and gives birth to what he has been carrying inside him for ages. And whether they are together or apart, he remembers that beauty. And in common with him he nurtures the newborn; such people, therefore, have much more to share than do the parents of human children, and have a firmer bond of friendship, because the children in whom they have a share are more beautiful and more immortal.[102]

Perhaps Plato thought that, since the women of the state described by the *Laws* would be as well educated as the men, heterosexual relationships would also be able to produce immortal children in the form of ideas. This would fit in with his general tendency to allow women in his states to do things which Athenian women were not allowed to do, such as take part in government and fight in wars.

When it came to forming, bearing and raising children, Plato had very definite ideas about the behaviour of both parents, particularly with regard to consumption of alcohol.

> On the day of their wedding particularly, when they are at a turning-point in their lives, bride and groom ought to show restraint, so as to make as sure as they can (it being practically impossible to tell the day or night in which by the favour of God conception will take place) that any child they may have should have parents who were sober when they conceived him. Apart from that, children should not be conceived when the parents' bodies are in a state of drunken relaxation; the foetus should be compactly formed and firmly planted, and its growth should be orderly and undisturbed.[103]

However, Plato believed that a child could be damaged by more than simple overindulgence in alcohol on the part of its parents.

> All the year round, throughout his life (but particularly during the age of procreation), a man must take great care to do nothing to injure his health, if he can help it, and nothing with any hint of insolence or injustice, which will inevitably rub off on to the souls and bodies of his children.[104]

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[101]*Laws* 930 A.
[102]*Symposium* 209 C.
[103]*Laws* 775 C.
[104]*Laws* 775 D.

Presumably such behaviour was also to be avoided by prospective and actual mothers, though this is not stated. Since Plato wished to produce the best possible citizens for his state, he realised that the people responsible for rearing children should also be educated. In the *Republic*, this task was to be performed not by parents, but by specially appointed nurses. However, in the *Laws*, much of the responsibility for children's early development was returned to their mothers. This made it imperative that women should be educated themselves, since they were to be responsible for the early education of future generations, which was supremely important.

> A lot of people actually maintain that in the case of man, the first five years of life see more growth than the next twenty.[105]

Furthermore, a state realises only half its potential if its women are not permitted to develop their abilities.[106] That parents were to be responsible for their children is clear from the advice to widowers and widows.

> If a wife dies and leaves male and female children, we'll lay down a law advising, though not compelling, the husband to bring up his existing children without importing a stepmother; but if there are no children, he must be obliged to remarry so as to beget sufficient children for his home and for the state. If the husband dies, leaving an adequate number of children, their mother should remain in her position and bring them up...[107]

This passage shows Plato's concern both for the individuals concerned and for the state, since he was opposed to step-parents, but also wished to be certain that there would be enough children for the state. He was also less dictatorial than might be expected on the subject of remarriage, ultimately leaving it up to personal preference, though as ever there is the caveat that enough children must be produced.

> The minimum acceptable number of children is to be fixed by law as one of each sex.[108]

Furthermore, it is remarkable that a Greek of this period should consider women to be as capable as men of bringing up children alone. The typical Athenian woman of good reputation would be unable to bring up her children alone, as she was so restricted in her movements. However, a

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[105]*Laws* 788 D.
[106]Adam (1913) p 131.
[107]*Laws* 930 B-C.
[108]*Laws* 930 C.

woman of the state described in the *Laws* was to be much freer, and would be able to bring up her children and 'remain in her position' rather than return to her parents.

I shall discuss Plato's views on education and training in the next chapter, but it is worth noting here that they differ in the *Laws* and in the *Republic*. The basic tenet remains the same, however, that for the sake of the city male and female citizens should be trained and educated equally.

> The state of affairs in our corner of Greece, where men and women do not have a common purpose and do not throw all their energies into the same activities, is absolutely stupid. Almost every state, under present conditions, is only half a state and develops only half its potentialities, whereas with the same cost and effort, it could double its achievement.[109]

This is a state of affairs of which Plato will have been well aware from his own observation in Athens, where women were largely uneducated and had nothing to do with the government of the city. Plato's city needed the best possible guardians, wherever they were found. To exclude women from education and public life would necessarily exclude some potential guardians. Such action would serve neither the interests of the city, which needed the best rulers available; nor the interests of the individual citizens, least of all the women thus overlooked, who would be unhappy because they could not do the job for which nature had equipped them. As I have said, the *Laws* was intended to be more practical than the *Republic*. It is interesting to see how Plato's views on such matters as marriage, family life, the position of women, and slavery differed in the *Laws* from those expressed in the *Republic*. The basic idea is still that in an ideal state all property, including women and children, should be shared, though Plato realised that this was unrealistic.

> Our ideal, of course, is unlikely to be realised fully so long as we persist in our policy of allowing individuals to have their own private establishments, consisting of house, wife, children, and so on.[110]

In the *Republic*, as I have shown, farming was to be done only by those best fitted for it by nature. Early in the *Laws*, however, it was decreed that each citizen would be given land and property, though in essence it still belonged to the state. There is also a suggestion that guardians were

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[109]*Laws* 805 A.
[110]*Laws* 807 B.

not ideally suited to farming, which developed later into a statement that slaves would run the farms.

> First of all, the citizens must make a distribution of land and houses; they must not farm in common, which is a practice too demanding for those born and bred and educated as ours are. But the distribution should be made with some such intention as this: each man who receives a portion of land should regard it as the common possession of the entire state.[111]

When Plato discussed the citizens' activities, it became clear that farming was not among them, any more than other forms of skilled or unskilled manual labour, as this was to be performed by slaves.

> Now that our citizens are assured of a moderate supply of necessities, and other people have taken over the skilled work, what will be their way of life? Suppose that their farms have been entrusted to slaves, who provide them with sufficient produce of the land to keep them in modest comfort...[112]

The 'other people' who will take over the skilled work probably correspond to the worker class in the *Republic*, though this is not elaborated upon. It is also not entirely clear whether these skilled labourers will be free, or whether the only free citizens will be guardians. I am inclined to the opinion that there would be three classes of free people, as in the *Republic*, and then the additional slave population, since Plato realised the dangers of revolt inherent in the Spartan system where a small, free, ruling class depended upon a large slave population.

Comparisons with the *Phaedrus*

Plato's silences on women and the roles he ascribes to the few women who appear in his dialogues are also interesting, and worthy of examination. In the *Phaedrus,* there was no mention made of heterosexual love. Socrates mentioned mistresses in his first speech, in which he argued against lovers of either sex.

> A flatterer, for example, may be an awful beast and a dreadful nuisance, but nature makes flattery rather pleasant by mixing in a little culture with its words. So it is with a mistress - for all the harm we accuse her of causing - and with many other creatures of that character, and their callings: at least they are delightful company for a day.[113]

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[111] *Laws* 740 A.
[112] *Laws* 806 D-E.
[113] *Phaedrus* 240 B.

Incidentally, this passage sums up the charm of hetairas, who were slightly more educated than 'respectable' Athenian women, and were good company. As Demosthenes said, 'we keep hetairai for pleasure.' Mistresses were guilty of flattery, which can be pleasant but which is ultimately harmful and should be avoided by wise men. This first speech by Socrates said that love in all forms was bad, which caused him to say that the speech was 'foolish and close to being impious'.[114] His next speech was what he actually thought, and was very different. There was no mention of women at all, though homosexual lovers are acknowledged to be inspired by divine madness, which is a good thing.

> There's no truth to that story that when a lover is available you should give your favours to a man who doesn't love you instead, because he is in control of himself while the lover has lost his head. That would have been fine to say if madness were bad, pure and simple; but in fact the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god.[115]

Interestingly, inspired poetry is here described as a good thing, and a gift of the gods, like love.

> Third comes the kind of madness that is possession by the Muses, which takes a tender virgin soul and awakens it to a Bacchic frenzy of songs and poetry that glorifies the achievements of the past and teaches them to future generations.[116]

This is a very different attitude from that expressed in the *Republic*, where poets are accused of impiety and lack of self-control, and banished from the state.

> If a man, who through clever training can become anything and imitate anything, should arrive in our city, wanting to give a performance of his poems, we should bow down before him as someone holy, wonderful and pleasing, but we should tell him that there is no one like him in our city and that it isn't lawful for there to be.[117]

The reason for this is the poets' lack of self-control, criticism of which is foreshadowed by Socrates' remark that

> self-controlled verses will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds.[118]

Throughout the *Phaedrus*, there is no mention of female philosophers or lovers, which could be said to be proof of Plato's essential misogynism. However, he redeems himself to some extent in the *Symposium* where, as we have seen, it was a woman, Diotima, who educated Socrates

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[114]*Phaedrus* 242 D.
[115]*Phaedrus* 244 A.
[116]*Phaedrus* 245 A.
[117]*Republic* 398 A.
[118]*Phaedrus* 245 A.

about the true nature of love. Admittedly, in the other speeches homosexual love was talked of most and generally considered to be preferable. For example, in his speech Aristophanes described boys who prefer men as 'bold and brave and masculine'.[119] True love was accepted as possible between men and women in this speech, but was considered to be inferior to love between men.

> A man who is split from the double sort (which used to be called androgynous), runs after women. Many lecherous men have come from this class, and so do the lecherous women who run after men. Women who are split from a woman, however, pay no attention at all to men; they are oriented more towards women, and lesbians come from this class. People who are split from a male are male oriented.[120]

It is interesting that Plato acknowledged female homosexual love, not just male. This conviction of the superiority of homosexual love, which runs through much of Plato's work, is lacking in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, where sex is regarded in its reproductive role, and there is very little mention of love. I can find no mention in the *Republic* of the benefits of an older male lover to a young boy's intellectual development. In the *Laws*, Plato strongly opposed homosexual love, decreeing that everyone must marry, or face the consequences.

> If anyone disobeys, (except involuntarily) and unsociably keeps himself to himself so that he is still unmarried at the age of thirty-five, he must pay an annual fine...he should also be barred from receiving the respect due to him from his juniors, none of whom should ever readily take the slightest notice of him.[121]

This seems to rule out the practice of older men taking younger boys as lovers, at least without first marrying a woman. It is curious that Plato here came down so firmly on the side of heterosexuality, when so much of the rest of his work, perhaps most notably the *Phaedrus*, promoted homosexuality as the only truly satisfying human relationship It seems that his desire to see the state survive, which is possible only if children are born, overcame his previous distrust of heterosexual relationships. Perhaps he considered that there was no positive role for homosexuality in either of his ideal states, since in the *Phaedrus* an elder lover is charged with educating his young beloved, while in both the *Laws* and the *Republic* this task is consigned to the state.

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[119] *Symposium* 192 A.
[120] *Symposium* 191 D-E.

Conclusions

Many of Plato's rules about the role of women in society were linked to his concern that sex should be directed towards the good of the state, rather than individual pleasure, hence his strictures about sex during the reproductive years, discussed above. He considered sex 'for the state' would be impossible if women were excluded from public life, since it would be impossible for the guardians to regulate female behaviour. Furthermore, if men and women were unequal, with women confined to the house, regulation of the family would be according to the husband's will rather than the state's requirements. This is why even in the *Laws*, where family life was reinstated, much of life was to be led in public. In the *Republic*, Plato tried to eliminate the conflict between private life and public duties by abolishing all private existence, from family groups to property. However, in the *Laws*, he gave up this ideal and tried instead to lessen and control the conflict by increasing public influence on private life while keeping the family as the basic unit for society.[122] By rejecting homosexuality in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, Plato enabled women to assume the role of lovers which was denied to them in Athenian society. Thus in the *Laws* where marriage was reinstated it became possible for a woman to be regarded as both wife and lover.

In the *Republic* there were no families, so women were freed from their traditional roles and enabled to follow their natural inclinations. The absence of families also negated the need for slaves, so everyone was free. Universal education would enable all citizens to fill the roles in the society for which nature had equipped them, even if this meant men becoming children's nurses or women becoming guardians. Since Plato is said to have had at least one female student at the Academy, he did to some extent practice what he preached. Unfortunately the chronology of the writing of the *Republic* and Plato taking female students is too vague to tell whether this admission of women to the Academy was a cause of his views expressed in the *Republic* or a

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[121]*Laws* 774 A-B.

[122]Lange in Clark, L.M.G. & Lange (1979) p 13.

result of them. In the *Laws*, family life was reinstated, and women were needed to run it and to bring up their children. Plato considered this to be a serious task which would take up all the women's time for some years. Therefore, the age at which women were eligible for office was one at which they could reasonably expect to be freed from responsibility for their children. Men were not expected to have so much to do with the up-bringing of their children, and were therefore eligible for military service, governmental office and fatherhood all at the same time. It is interesting that Plato never denies, even in the less radical *Laws*, the view first expressed in the *Republic*, that some free women are as capable of reason as some free men. We can see therefore that this opinion was very sincerely held and was probably not the result of other opinions but the cause of them. As I have said, Plato still believed that some women were capable of holding office, so he did not forbid them to do so at any time. His main priority was the state, and its future generations, so he ensured the well-being of children before turning to the fulfilment of their mothers; but he did not ignore women, or condemn them to a life surrounded only by children and slaves, as his conviction that they were capable of more than running a household held firm. The reinstatement of the family unit and thus of individual households led to acceptance of slavery, since Plato probably considered that a household could not be run without slave labour. It is interesting that while Plato freed slaves in the *Republic* and then chained them up again in the *Laws*, he did not do the same to women. Having acknowledged that women were capable of reason and should not be treated like children or second class citizens all their lives, he was not affected in this view by his opinion that slaves were necessary to the running of small family units.

Chapter 7

Plato on Education

In this chapter I shall discuss at greater length a subject upon which I touched in the last chapter, namely Plato's views on education. I shall focus mainly upon his theories expounded in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. In the *Republic*, education was to be a development of natural abilities, so that everyone would be contented and support the state which enabled them to fulfil their talents. In the *Laws*, however, which is a much sterner document though it purports to be more realistic, there is less freedom to develop individual abilities and more emphasis on subduing personal desires to the good of the state. In both texts, however, the acquisition of knowledge remained of paramount importance. The ascent to knowledge of the Good was not outlined explicitly in the *Laws* as it had been in the *Republic*, but the emphasis placed upon education suggests that knowledge of the Good was still the ultimate goal. I shall examine these similarities and differences in this chapter, as well as what, in Plato's view, constituted a good education. This will involve some discussion of his opinions on artists and poets, though only in so far as they affect his ideas on what should and should not be taught to the inhabitants of his ideal states.

The importance of universal education

For his contemporaries, Plato's most surprising stipulation about education was probably that girls as well as boys should be educated, and that their ability to learn depended upon their mental capacity rather than their gender. In classical Athens, 'respectable' women and girls were largely uneducated, while their brothers benefited from schooling, discussions in the agora, and physical training in the gymnasium. In the *Republic* and also in the *Laws*, Plato made it clear that girls were also to be educated. Girls and boys of similar ability are to be taught the same things,

> without any reservations whatever about horse-riding or athletics being suitable activities for males but not for females.[1]

This idea may have its roots in Spartan practice, since Spartan girls and women were trained in athletics, equestrianism and gymnastics like their male counterparts.[2] This aspect of Spartan life was one of the things which made Athenians think them uncouth, since their women were not kept decently hidden from view. Hence, this rule of Plato's was probably one which his Athenian hearers found somewhat ridiculous, and one which he realised would meet with considerable opposition, not least from the women themselves.

> Women have got used to a life of obscurity and retirement, and any attempt to force them into the open will provoke tremendous resistance from them.[3]

This insistence upon equal education has its roots in the *Republic*, and is a result of Plato's conviction that failure to educate women was a waste, and did not serve the interests of the city, Plato's main priority.

> Socrates: Is there anything better for a city than having the best possible men and women as its citizens?
> Glaucon: There isn't.[4]

Plato disregarded superficial differences such as baldness or hirsuteness when judging ability to perform specific tasks. He also included gender in his list of superficial distinctions, and discounted it along with the others. His technique is interesting, since he selected a characteristic which had no impact upon ability and then enlarged the rule to include gender, which he would argue had no impact, but which his contemporaries would have regarded as an insuperable barrier to equality.

> Therefore we might just as well, it seems, ask ourselves whether the natures of bald and long-haired men are the same or opposite. And, when we agree that they are opposite, then, if the bald ones are cobblers, we ought to forbid the long-haired ones to be cobblers, and if the long-haired ones are cobblers, we ought to forbid this to the bald ones.[5]

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[1] *Laws* 804 E.
[2] Perlman (1983) p 134.
[3] *Laws* 781 C.
[4] *Republic* 456 E.
[5] *Republic* 454 C.

This hypothesis was rejected as absurd, which enabled Plato to move to a discussion of whether female guardians should exist. He asserted that men and women capable of the same task have the same type of soul, regardless of their physical differences.

> We meant, for example, that a male and female doctor have souls of the same nature.[6]

This claim was followed up by an explicit denial that men and women have different abilities because of their genders, leading to a conclusion that women should therefore be allowed to lead the same kind of lives as their male counterparts with similar souls.

> Therefore, if the male sex is seen to be different from the female with regard to a particular craft or way of life, we'll say that the relevant one must be assigned to it. But if it's apparent that they differ only in this respect, that the females bear children while the males beget them, we'll say that there has been no kind of proof that women are different from men with respect to what we're talking about, and we'll continue to believe that our guardians and their wives must have the same way of life.[7]

No contradiction to this was offered, so Plato continued to affirm that women should be selected and trained for guardianship or other tasks in the same way as men. These passages, I believe, prove that Plato was serious when he said that women could play the same parts as men in government. The fact that he spent a considerable part of the *Republic* asserting this suggests not only that he believed it wholeheartedly but also that he knew it would be a difficult concept for his audience to grasp.

> Socrates: We've come round, then, to what we said before and have agreed that it isn't against nature to assign an education in music, poetry and physical training to the wives of the guardians.
> Glaucon: Absolutely.
> Socrates: Then we're not legislating impossibilities or indulging in mere wishful thinking, since the law we established is in accord with nature. It's rather the way things are at present that seems to be against nature.[8]

It is remarkable that Plato, whose female acquaintance would mostly have been uneducated, repressed, ignorant and concerned with their physical appearance and their children, could look beneath these traits and see what women could become.

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[6]*Republic* 454 C.
[7]*Republic* 454 D-E.
[8]*Republic* 456 B-C.

Since female guardians were, as I discussed in the last chapter, to be allowed to fulfil all the same tasks as male guardians, Plato considered that it made sense for them to be taught the same things, though with the proviso that men are physically stronger.

> Socrates: Do we think that the wives of our guardian watchdogs should guard what the males guard, hunt with them, and do everything else in common with them? Or should we keep the women at home, as incapable of doing this, since they must bear and rear the puppies, while the males work and have the entire care of the flock?
> Glaucon: Everything should be in common, except that the females are weaker and the males stronger.
> Socrates: And is it possible to use any animals for the same things if you don't give them the same upbringing and education?
> Glaucon: No, it isn't.
> Socrates: Therefore, if we use the women for the same things as the men, they must also be taught the same things.[9]

It is interesting that Plato used the analogy of a pack of hunting dogs to introduce his theory that male and female guardians should do the same things and be educated in the same way. Working dogs were a fact of Athenian life, and his audience would be well acquainted with their breeding and training, and would know that dogs and bitches were equally useful as guard dogs and hunting dogs. By describing his guardians in such terms, Plato enabled his audience, from Glaucon onwards, to accept that female guardians should be treated in the same way as male. Glaucon's caveat that 'the females are weaker and the males stronger' has often been taken in a moral sense. However, I agree with Farrell Smith that it means that women should do the tasks associated with guardianship for which they are best suited.[10] This theory is supported by a later passage in the *Republic* outlining women's tasks in war.

> They must share in war and the other guardians' duties in the city and do nothing else. But the lighter parts must be assigned to them because of the weakness of their sex.[11]

In case Plato's audience had not quite grasped the importance of equal education and equal participation in guardianship, he reiterated it in a later passage, making Glaucon agree to the principle again.

> Socrates: You agree, then, that the women and men should associate with one another in education, in things having to do with children, and in guarding the other citizens in the way we've described; that both when they remain in the city and when they go to war,

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[9]*Republic* 451 D-E.
[10]Farrell Smith, J. 'Plato, Irony and Equality' in Tuana (1994) p 28.
[11]*Republic* 457 A.

> they must guard together and hunt together like dogs and share in everything as far as possible; and that by doing so they'll be doing what's best and not something contrary either to women's nature as compared with man's or to the natural association of men and women with one another.
>
> Glaucon: I agree.[12]

This reiteration shows how important equal education was to Plato's social organisation, since there are few statements which he repeated so often.

The purpose of education in the *Republic*

Education in the *Republic* was based on an assumption that all people are capable of learning, though to varying degrees.

> The power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good.[13]

This universal education had two key aims, which were interconnected and difficult to separate, though easily distinguished. It was designed to enable all citizens to fulfil their potential, whether for philosophy, carpentry, or any other skill, and to encourage them to support the state to the best of their ability. These two aims were interconnected because Plato believed that the state would be best served if its citizens each performed the task for which nature had equipped them; the rule that each citizen, male or female, be allowed to do the job for which they are best suited by natural inclination and talent, which is central to the whole social organisation of the *Republic*, is established early on.

> We aren't all born alike, but each of us differs somewhat in nature from the others, one being suited to one task, another to another...The result, then, is that more plentiful and better-quality goods are more easily produced if each person does one thing for which he is naturally suited, does it at the right time, and is released from having to do any of the others...A farmer won't make his own plough, not if it's to be a good one, nor his hoe, nor any of his farming tools.[14]

This rule, together with the meritocratic society which Plato envisaged, would put an end to 'upper class' children being forced into politics for which they were not suited, instead of being allowed to

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[12]*Republic* 466 C-D.
[13]*Republic* 518 C.
[14]*Republic* 370 A-C.

take up the carpentry they were born to do. Conversely, there would be no 'working class' children of great political talent being forced to take up carpentry. Citizens would be enabled to follow their natures by the fact that, as we have seen, no one but the guardians in charge of children would know whose children were whose, which would eliminate all parental pressure and free children from the burden of their parents' expectations. It has been said that Plato's innovations about people following their natural talents applied only to the guardian class, and that life for the auxiliaries and workers would continue much as it had been in Athens.[15] However, I do not believe that this is the case, given Plato's strictures that children of iron or bronze who were born to guardian parents should become workers; and that children of gold should become guardians regardless of their parentage. Furthermore, in the passage just cited, Socrates remarked that farmers would not make their own tools, and added that

> Neither will a builder - and he, too, needs lots of things. And the same is true of a weaver and a cobbler, isn't it?[16]

This suggests that manual workers were to be allowed to follow their talents too, and shows a surprising insight on Plato's part into the minds and abilities of those very different from him. As an intellectual theorist, it would have been very easy for him to assume that everyone suited to manual work would be able to succeed in any branch of it with equal ease. However, he realised that, for example, farming, building and carpentry require very different skills from those who perform them, and that natural aptitude for physical work varies. Plato's motivation for these rules was not, however, any form of desire for fairness.[17] His goal was not that everyone should participate equally in the running of the state on any form of democratic basis, though the worker and the guardian would be just as important to the city in terms of their work. Plato's overriding motivation was the good of the state, which he saw was best served by allowing each citizen to follow their talents. This belief was clearly stated.

> It isn't the law's concern to make any one class in the city outstandingly happy but to contrive to spread happiness throughout the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with each other through persuasion or compulsion and by making them share with each

[15]de Ste Croix (1981), p 70.
[16]*Republic* 370 D.
[17]Lange in Clark, L.M.G. & Lange (1979) p 5.

> other the benefits that each class can confer on the community. The law produces such people in the city, not in order to allow them to turn in whatever direction they want, but to make use of them to bind the city together.[18]

Furthermore, it would be wrong to assume that Plato's guardians would spend all their time in thought, for he realised that it did not serve the interests of the state for its most well educated people to be divorced from practical politics any more than for it to be governed by the uneducated.

> And what about the uneducated who have no experience of truth? Isn't it likely - indeed, doesn't it follow necessarily from what was said before - that they will never adequately govern a city? But neither would those who've been allowed to spend their whole lives being educated. The former would fail because they don't have a single goal at which all their actions, public and private, inevitably aim; the latter would fail because they'd refuse to act, thinking that they had settled while still alive in the faraway Isles of the Blessed.[19]

Since the guardians owed their enlightenment to the education provided by the state, they were to pay for it in service to their city and fellow citizens. Therefore, although it was the last thing they wanted to do, a return to the darkness of the cave in order to help their fellow citizens became an essential part of the guardians' duties. This is a good example of Plato's belief that the state's needs took precedence over individual wishes, since the guardians had to sublimate their desire to do nothing but philosophy to the state's need for good rulers.

> When people like you come to be in other cities, they're justified in not sharing in their city's labours, for they've grown there spontaneously, against the will of the constitution. And what grows of its own accord and owes no debt for its upbringing has justice on its side when it isn't keen to pay anyone for that upbringing. But we've made you kings in our city and leaders of the swarm, as it were, both for yourselves and for the rest of the city. You're better and more completely educated than the others and are better able to share in both types of life. Therefore each of you in turn must go down to live in the common dwelling place of the others and grow accustomed to seeing in the dark.[20]

Thus the chief purpose of education in the *Republic* was to create the best kind of rulers for the state. That Plato believed that only those suited to philosophy should be taught it, regardless of their birth or gender, and thus served the interests of the individual by allowing each citizen to follow the natural inclinations of their intellect, was coincidental. His first purpose was to provide the city with the best possible rulers and so to free it from internal strife.

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[18]*Republic* 519 E - 520 A.
[19]*Republic* 519 B-C.
[20]*Republic* 520 A-C.

> A city whose prospective rulers are least eager to rule must of necessity be most free from civil war, whereas a city with the opposite kind of rulers is governed in the opposite way.[21]

This assertion is true only if the prospective rulers have a strong sense of duty and realise that they owe it to their city to rule even though they would rather spend their time in thought. Plato clearly thought that this sense of duty would be inculcated by education, and also that someone so educated could only do what was right. However, such rule also requires that those ruled accept their masters' authority, which depends upon the quality of the rule, and the education given to the lower classes of society, so it is clear that education was important for everyone in the republic.

The extent and limitations of education in the *Republic*

For citizens of the *Republic*, education was to begin early in life. Mental development began before physical training, and was initiated by telling stories.

> Don't you understand that we first tell stories to children? These are false, on the whole, though they have some truth in them. And we tell them to small children before physical training begins.[22]

Socrates here seems to be describing actual Athenian practice. It is interesting that Plato recognised the importance of these stories upon the mental growth of children. The most usual storytellers for children will have been mothers and female slaves, since Athenian fathers did not concern themselves with their children's early years, considering it to be women's work. Plato, however, saw that a child's early life was crucial to its later development.

> You know, don't you, that the beginning of any process is most important, especially for anything young and tender? It's at that time that it is most malleable and takes on any pattern one wishes to impress on it.[23]

There is also a reference here to Plato's belief that the development of the immortal soul was more important than the growth of the mortal body. It is interesting that Plato left these very important responsibilities in the hands of women. Since he did this, it was another reason why

[21] *Republic* 520 D.
[22] *Republic* 377 A.

education of both sexes was imperative, because early education, particularly of guardians, could not be left to chance.

> Then we must first of all, it seems, supervise the storytellers. We'll select their stories whenever they are fine or beautiful and reject them when they aren't. And we'll persuade nurses and mothers to tell their children the ones we have selected, since they will shape their children's souls with stories much more than they shape their bodies by handling them.[24]

Plato was particularly opposed to stories in which gods and heroes behaved badly or immorally. He believed that gods were essentially good, and should not be shown indulging in human behaviour such as adultery and deceit.

> A god, then, is simple and true in word and deed. He doesn't change himself or deceive others by images, words, or signs, whether in visions or in dreams.[25]

Plato considered that representations of bad behaviour by gods and heroes would encourage his citizens to misdeeds, since they would see the perpetrators going unpunished. Since poets were the narrators of such stories, the *Republic* placed them under strict supervision for the good of the citizen body.

> We'll compel the poets either to deny that the heroes did such things or else to deny that they were children of the gods. They mustn't say both or attempt to persuade our young people that the gods bring about evil or that heroes are no better than humans. As we said earlier, these things are both impious and untrue, for we demonstrated that it is impossible for the gods to produce bad things.[26]

The overall effect of this on the literature itself would be to render it much less macho and aggressive, since gods and heroes could not be shown raping and molesting women. Women would not be reduced to the roles of victim or whores, as so often happened in classical Greek literature. Such literature would thus become more accessible to women and more relevant to their new educated existence. There would also be an impact upon the relations between the sexes, since men would no longer have their supremely dominant role models any more than women would have their victim/whore models. Plato clearly believed that art could make a

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[23]*Republic* 377 A.

[24]*Republic* 377 B-C. It should be remembered that this passage in which mothers are described as rearing their own children precedes the discussion leading to the abolition of the family. This passage does not, therefore, oppose the idea that no mother should know her own child, which comes at 460ff, since such a proposition has not yet been made.

[25]*Republic* 382 E.

[26]*Republic* 391 D-E.

difference to human behaviour, which was why it had to be regulated correctly. However, this restriction of the freedom of speech seems at odds with Plato's rule that everyone should be able to develop their natural abilities, since poets would not be permitted to fulfil their talents. Therefore this legislation on the arts appears to be an instance of Plato's concern for the good of the state taking precedence over the good of the individual, since he thought it was more important for all citizens to have good moral guidance and suitable role models in the arts than for a few poets to be able to express themselves freely. However, this removal of bad examples from art could imply a certain moral weakness on the part of the guardians, since they were not allowed to make their own decisions on moral behaviour. It is not only misdeeds by the gods and heroes which were barred from poetry: poets were to speak of only good mortals and happy events.

> Because I think we'll say that what poets and prose-writers tell us about the most important matters concerning human beings is bad. They say that many unjust people are happy and many just ones wretched, that injustice is profitable if it escapes detection, and that justice is another's good but one's own loss. I think we'll prohibit these stories and order the poets to compose the opposite kind of poetry and tell the opposite kind of tales.[27]

This raises the question of how the guardians are to distinguish bad behaviour from good if they encounter it, having no previous experience, however theoretical, of bad behaviour. Perhaps any behaviour which was not laid down by legislation as 'good' would automatically be classified as 'bad'; in which case all moral judgement would be removed from the guardians and made the responsibility of the law-givers, which allows no scope for adaptation according to circumstance.

Musicians were also to be strictly controlled in the *Republic*. Greek music was composed according to different modes, each suited to expressing different emotions and conditions, and it is upon these modes that Plato's discussion focuses. First of all, 'we no longer needed dirges and lamentations among our words.'[28] This excluded the 'lamenting modes.' Next, the modes used for drinking songs were forbidden, because 'drunkenness, softness and idleness are also most

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[27]*Republic* 392 A-B.
[28]*Republic* 398 D.

inappropriate for our guardians.'[29] Socrates concluded that only two modes were suitable for use by the citizens.

> Leave me, then, those two modes, which will best imitate the violent or voluntary tones of voice of those who are moderate and courageous, whether in good fortune or in bad.[30]

Having decided upon these regulations for music, Plato was led to conclude that all forms of art must be strictly controlled to prevent bad influences affecting the populace.

> Is it, then, only poets we have to supervise, compelling them to make an image of a good character in their poems or else not to compose them among us? Or are we also to give orders to other craftsmen, forbidding them to represent - whether in pictures, buildings, or any other works - a character that is vicious, unrestrained, slavish, and graceless?[31]

Thus freedom of artistic expression was effectively reduced in the *Republic* to permission to celebrate the good aspects of life and a prohibition on mentioning the bad, which in this instance leads one to agree with de Sainte Croix that Plato was an enemy of freedom, at any rate in the arts.[32] This was so that citizens would learn only about the good, which would leave them, I suspect, incredibly naive and unable to deal with life, which always has some bad periods. There is, therefore, a conflict between Plato's desire that his citizens should know the difference between right and wrong; and his desire to protect them from malign influences. He never fully resolved this conflict, but seems to have favoured the latter option, at least for those under the level of guardian. Guardians, in their ascent to the Good, would eventually attain knowledge of the ultimate Good, which would itself protect them.

The rest of the stipulations for education in the *Republic* follow this pattern of learning only what is good and avoiding all that is bad. This strategy, begun with children's stories, continued with their games, which were to be carefully supervised.

> Socrates: Then, as we said at first, our children's games must from the very beginning be more law-abiding, for if their games become lawless, and the children follow suit, isn't it impossible for them to grow up into good and law-abiding men?
> Adeimantus: It certainly is.

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[29]*Republic* 398 E.
[30]*Republic* 399 C.
[31]*Republic* 401 B.
[32]de Ste Croix (1981), p 284.

> Socrates: But when children play the right games from the beginning and absorb lawfulness from music and poetry, it follows them in everything and fosters their growth, correcting anything in the city that may have gone wrong before - in other words, the very opposite of what happens when the games are lawless.[33]

The stories, music and poetry which children were taught are a good example of Plato's view that education was vital for everyone. At this age children had not yet been divided according to their ability, and this basic education was to be given to all of them. Apart from carefully regulated music, poetry and physical activity, education in the *Republic* also covered mathematics, dialectic, and for the guardians as those most able, philosophy. However, children were to be subjected to rigorous testing to determine which level of education they should aspire to: that for a worker, for an auxiliary, or for a guardian. Only the elite few would be permitted to train to be guardians.

> Therefore they must be tested in the labours, fears and pleasures we mentioned previously. But they must also be exercised in many other subjects - which we didn't mention but are adding now - to see whether they can tolerate the most important subjects or will shrink from them like the cowards who shrink from other tests.[34]

Plato's views on mathematics are interesting, since he clearly considered that it taught people how to think, and was therefore essential for the elite guardians and for the less intelligent auxiliaries and workers.

> And what about those who are naturally good at calculation or reasoning? Have you already noticed that they're naturally sharp, so to speak, in all subjects, and that those who are slow at it, if they're educated and exercised in it, even if they're benefited in no other way, nonetheless improve and become generally sharper than they were?[35]

However, his views on dialectic were rather different. He considered that it was the subject which revealed ultimate truths, but should not be taught to everyone, since only the most able were capable of it.

> And mustn't we also insist that the power of dialectic could reveal it [i.e. truth] only to someone experienced in the subjects we've described and that it cannot reveal it in any other way?[36]

Dialectic was the ultimate skill, because it enabled its practitioners to seek out truth and thus to be philosophers, the most important trait of guardians.

> So let's now also dare to say that those who are to be made our guardians in the most exact sense of the term must be philosophers.[37]

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[33]*Republic* 424 E-425 A.
[34]*Republic* 503 E.
[35]*Republic* 526 B.
[36]*Republic* 533 A.

Dialectic was to be taught only to those who were most able. Since ability was revealed by education, dialectic was to be the culmination of education, and hence taught last of all. Plato was completely opposed to the situation in Athens, where dialectic was taught early, because he believed it could be harmful to those who learned it before they were ready.

> I don't suppose it has escaped your notice that, when young people get their first taste of arguments, they misuse it by treating it as a kind of contradiction. They imitate those who've refuted them by refuting others themselves, and, like puppies, they enjoy dragging and tearing those around them with their arguments.[38]

This is clearly inspired by one of the charges against Socrates, which was that he 'makes the worse argument the stronger.'[39] The passage from the *Republic* shows Plato's disapproval of such behaviour and, by expressing the disapproval in Socrates' name, makes it clear that he himself disapproved of such sophistry. The behaviour of Socrates' accusers also echoes the action of bad dialecticians in the *Republic*.

> Moreover, these accusers are numerous and have been at it a long time; also, they spoke to you at an age when you would most readily believe them, some of you being children and adolescents, and they won their case by default, as there was no defence.[40]

It is clear that Plato believed that dialectic should be reserved only for those who were sufficiently mature and well educated to cope with its intricacies.

Plato's method of education would have been startling for his Athenian audience, where children were compelled to learn for fear of punishment. Plato took the much more modern view that information learned for pleasure was that which the brain retained most readily, at any rate in childhood. Furthermore, this technique meant that children learnt what they wanted to learn, thus displaying their natural talents, which education should then develop.

> Socrates: Therefore, calculation, geometry, and all the preliminary education required for dialectic must be offered to the future rulers in childhood, and not in the shape of compulsory learning either.
> Glaucon: Why's that?
> Socrates: Because no free person should learn anything like a slave. Forced bodily labour does no harm to the body, but nothing taught by force stays in the soul.

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[37]*Republic* 503 B.
[38]*Republic* 539 A-B.
[39]*Apology* 18 C.
[40]*Apology* 18 C.

> Glaucon: That's true.
> Socrates: Then don't use force to train the children in these subjects; use play instead. That way you'll also see better what each of them is naturally fitted for.[41]

Plato's education system seems designed to turn out physically fit, well educated individuals capable of independent thought, which makes one wonder why he was so determined to remove all artistic portrayal of misdeeds and unhappy events from his society. Surely such people would be able to decide for themselves that they did not wish to copy such behaviour, but Plato resolved not to give them even the chance to do so. This suggests a fear that his system of education was not powerful enough to enable his citizens to reject malign influences of their own accord.

The purpose of education in the *Laws*

Education in the *Laws* was, as in the *Republic*, designed to enable the citizens to support the city to the best of their ability, whatever that ability might be.

> The good education they have received will make them good men, and being good they will achieve success in other ways, and even conquer their enemies in battle.[42]

Thus if women really were inferior to men in virtue, a good education was even more essential for them than it was for men, to make them into good citizens.[43] In the *Laws*, Plato did claim that women were morally weaker than men, but rather than using this as a reason to keep women secluded and repressed, he deemed it necessary to bring them into the open to combat their moral inferiority.

> You see, leaving women to do what they like is not just to lose half the battle (as it may seem): a woman's natural potential for virtue is inferior to a man's, so she's proportionately a greater danger, perhaps even twice as great. So the happiness of the state will be better served if we reconsider the point and put things right, by providing that all our arrangements apply to men and women alike.[44]

It is not clear why Plato considered women to be morally weaker than men, but this may have been due to the silly, uneducated women he saw around him in Athens. This passage also makes it very plain that Plato's insistence upon women being brought into public life was primarily for the good of the state as a whole, and only coincidentally for the benefit of the women

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[41]*Republic* 536 D-E.
[42]*Laws* 641 B-C.
[43]Adam (1913) p 127.

themselves. The institution of communal meals, upon which Plato insisted and which he mentioned several times because he believed it would cause considerable dissent, applied equally to men and women, before and after marriage, in the *Republic* and the *Laws*.

> And since they have common dwellings and meals, rather than private ones, and live together and mix together both in physical training and in the rest of their upbringing, they will, I suppose, be driven by innate necessity to have sex with one another.
> It's because we are going to assert that our newly-marrieds ought to attend communal meals no more and no less than they did before their wedding.[45]

It is interesting that this aspect of communal life was retained in the *Laws*, which rejected many other aspects of the *Republic*, to the extent that families were reinstated. Plato's stated motive for these communal meals was control of the populace.

> Well, if he excludes private life from his legislation, and expects that the citizens will be prepared to be law-abiding in their public life as a community, he's making a big mistake.[46]

This invasion of privacy had a major impact upon the lives of women in the *Laws*, in that it enabled them to participate in public life by forcing them to partake in communal meals, thus releasing them from their ties to home and family. In this way women were included in the life of the state in a way in which slaves were not. As I discussed in the last chapter, slaves were to be kept in their place by a language barrier which was to exist between them and other slaves. Women on the other hand, although their first duty had become the rearing of children, were still included in public life by the institution of communal meals. The basic purpose of education in the *Laws* was, as in the *Republic*, to produce the best possible citizens.

> I take it we were justified in asserting that if an education is to qualify as 'correct', it simply must show that it is capable of making our souls and bodies as fine and handsome as they can be?[47]

Plato went into considerable detail about how an education system was to achieve this, but his aim was quite simple, though hard to accomplish.

Examples of bad education systems

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[44]*Laws* 781 B.
[45]*Republic* 458 D & *Laws* 780 B.
[46]*Laws* 780 A.
[47]*Laws* 788 C.

Perhaps surprisingly, given his approval and adoption of some aspects of their system, Plato did not approve wholeheartedly of the Spartan education. While he approved of their system of physical training for both sexes and all ages, he considered that their mental education left a good deal to be desired, being better suited to soldiers than to guardians; and the same was true of Cretan education. In short, neither race excelled in using its intellect to the same level as its strength, as Clinias admitted.

> Well, sir, we Cretans, at any rate - and the same goes for the Spartans - would hardly be up to singing any song except those we learned to sing by growing familiar with them in our choruses.[48]

The end result of this was not sufficient for Plato's needs, since such people could fight but were unable to govern well.

> You entirely fail to lavish proper care on an education which will turn him out not merely a good soldier but a capable administrator of a state and its towns.[49]

It is clear from the *Republic* that Plato considered such timocrats to be philistines and boorish, generally uncultured.

> He'd be more obstinate and less well trained in music and poetry, though he's a lover of it, and he'd love to listen to speeches and arguments, though he's by no means a rhetorician.[50]

Thus the Spartans and Cretans were criticised for paying too much attention to physical development and not enough to intellectual training. At the other end of the scale was the education given to the royal sons of Cyrus, king of Persia.

> I mean that he probably spent his entire life after infancy on campaign, and handed over his children to the women to bring up. These women reared them from their earliest years as though they were already Heaven's special favourites and darlings, endowed with all the blessings that implies. They wouldn't allow anyone to thwart 'their Beatitudes' in anything, and they forced everybody to rhapsodise about what the children said or did.[51]

Thus encouraged and unrestrained, Cyrus' unfortunate children turned out disastrously badly.

> So, when they succeeded to their inheritance on the death of Cyrus, they were living in a riot of unrestrained debauchery. First, unwilling to tolerate an equal, one of them killed the other; next, he himself, driven out of his senses by liquor and lack of self-control, was

[48]*Laws* 666 D.
[49]*Laws* 666 E.
[50]*Republic* 548 E.
[51]*Laws* 694 D.

> deprived of his dominions by the Medes and 'the Eunuch' (as he was then called) to whom the idiot Cambyses was an object of contempt.[52]

Having thus discussed two imperfect types of education, Plato endeavoured to produce a system which would steer a middle course to produce the best possible citizens. He saw that an over emphasis on military ability by the Spartans was as bad for the development of the character as the over indulgence of Cyrus' children, in that it left the character unequally developed towards military matters without the balance of an artistic training.

The extent and limitations of education in the *Laws*

As in the *Republic*, education in the state described by the *Laws* began very early. Childhood was a very important time, since during this period the foundations of character were laid down.

> I call 'education' the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred, that well up in his soul are channelled in the right courses before he can understand the reason why. Then when he does understand, his reason and his emotions agree in telling him that he has been properly trained by inculcation of appropriate habits.[53]

Physical training began even earlier than this, however, since Plato believed firmly that babies were influenced by events while still in the womb. Mothers and nurses were to be responsible for the early development of children and for beginning the exercise regime which would continue for the rest of the child's life, a responsibility which began for mothers during pregnancy.

> A pregnant woman should go for regular walks, and when her child is born she should mould it like wax while it is still supple, and keep it well wrapped up for the first two years of its life. The nurses must be compelled under legal penalty to contrive that the children are always being carried to the country or temples or relatives, until they are sturdy enough to stand on their own feet. Even then the nurses should persist in carrying the child around until it's three, to keep from distorting its young limbs by subjecting them to too much pressure.[54]

They were also to be responsible for very early development of the child's soul towards courage and rationality by calming babies' tempers while they were too young to do it for themselves.

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[52]*Laws* 695 B. See Herodotus *The Histories* book 3 for a more detailed and lengthy discussion of Cyrus and Cambyses.

[53]*Laws* 653 B.

[54]*Laws* 789 E and Chanteur (1980) pp 150 - 151.

> So we can say that exercising very young children by keeping them in motion contributes a great deal towards the perfection of one aspect of the soul's virtue.[55]

Since Plato believed that babies were affected by events in the womb, it is not surprising that he also believed that the temperament and experiences of the mother could affect, for good or ill, the character of the baby she was carrying. Mothers therefore bore a heavy responsibility to the state, since by their actions they could influence the virtue of subsequent generations.

> All expectant mothers, during the year of their pregnancy, should be supervised more closely than other women, to ensure they don't experience frequent and excessive pleasures, or pains either. An expectant mother should think it important to keep calm and cheerful and sweet-tempered throughout her pregnancy.[56]

It is interesting that Plato attributed such influence to the mother. From his views on the importance of education, it is clear that he gave great credence to the influence of nurture on a personality, and this concern for motherly behaviour is an extension of this, as the existence of the female ovum was not known. However, basic nature was also very important, as can be seen from his advice to potential fathers, discussed in the previous chapter. To attribute equal importance to maternal as well as paternal behaviour was unusual, and lies at the heart of Plato's reasons for insisting upon education for both sexes, as his aim was always to produce the best possible citizens for his state.

Throughout a child's life, its education was to consist of two distinct but equally essential halves, 'physical training for the body, and cultural education to perfect the personality.'[57] The stated aim of physical education can be taken as a metaphor for education in general, since neither the body nor the mind was to be overdeveloped at the expense of the other.

> They must see that every boy and girl grows up versatile in the use of both hands and both feet, so that they don't ruin their natural abilities by acquired habits, so far as they can be prevented.[58]

This education was to be compulsory, because the state had prior claim on its citizens' lives.

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[55]*Laws* 791 C and Chanteur (1980) p 151.
[56]*Laws* 792 E.
[57]*Laws* 795 D.
[58]*Laws* 795 D.

> Children must not be allowed to attend or not attend school at the whim of their father; as far as possible education must be compulsory for 'every man and boy' (as the saying is), because they belong to the state first and their parents second.[59]

Education was not to be restricted to boys, but extended to girls too, so it seems probable that Plato was thinking of fathers of girls, who might consider education unnecessary for their daughters, when he wrote this passage. Plato certainly realised the need to emphasise this point, and said 'Let me stress that this law of mine will apply just as much to girls as to boys'.[60] However, there is a shift away from the *Republic* here, since parents were to be allowed to know and live with their own children, whereas in the *Republic*, 'no mother knows her own child', and we must assume that this applied to fathers too, otherwise the idea would not work.[61] Plato's concern for the education of children caused him to go into astonishing detail as to its contents and exclusions. He clearly believed that childhood was a supremely important phase in the development of a human.

As in the *Republic*, the *Laws* instituted strict regulations for all the arts. Plato was still concerned about the effect which ill-advised words, music and images might have on his citizens, and considered that it would be best to ban all such pernicious influences, rather than giving people the tools to form their own judgements.

> So, in a society where the laws relating to culture, education and recreation are, or will be in future, properly established, do we imagine that authors will be given a free hand? The choruses will be composed of the young children of law-abiding citizens: will the composer be free to teach them anything by way of rhythm, tune and words that amuses him when he composes, without bothering what effect he may have on them as regards virtue and vice?[62]

Plato seems to have been so strict about the arts because he regarded them, especially music, dance and drama, as particularly strong influences upon the human soul. They needed, therefore, to be carefully controlled to ensure that their influence was used for good rather than ill.

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[59]*Laws* 804 D.
[60]*Laws* 804 D.
[61]*Republic* 460 C.
[62]*Laws* 656C.

Portrayals of bad people and misdeeds could turn a weak soul towards bad things itself, or prevent a strong soul from reaching its full potential.

> We have an analogy in the sick and ailing; those in charge of feeding them try to administer the proper diet in tasty foods and drinks, and offer them unwholesome items in revolting foods, so that the patients may get into the desirable habit of welcoming the one kind and loathing the other. That is just what the true legislator will persuade (or, failing persuasion, compel) the man with a creative flair to do with his grand and marvellous language: to compose correctly by portraying, with appropriate choreography and musical setting, men who are moderate, courageous and good in every way.[63]

When he wrote the *Laws*, Plato clearly had no conception of the idea that audiences could learn from watching plays and observing the fate of characters who behaved in morally upright or dubious ways, any more than he did when he wrote the *Republic*. He believed the only way in which people could be affected by watching morally weak behaviour was adversely, and did not think that the fate which befell Orestes, for example, who was pursued by the Fates for killing his mother, would warn his citizens that matricide was not to be recommended. As in the *Republic*, this suggests a weakness in the education provided by the state, since Plato did not trust it to equip his citizens to make their own moral judgements about the behaviour even of fictional characters. Furthermore, there was none of Aristotle's idea that watching emotionally disturbing theatrical performances could be in any way cathartic, and thus beneficial to the audience. However, it should be remembered that ancient Greek plays were always performed as part of a religious festival. Since Plato denied strongly the idea that the gods and heroes could behave maliciously or wrongly, or in any way have a malign influence upon humans, it is possible that Plato considered it sacrilegious to write plays about such behaviour, even performed by mere mortals, at festivals in honour of the gods. This may go some way to explaining his restrictions upon the arts, but his greatest fear seems to have been that the citizens might be adversely affected.

However, Plato believed that good types of music and drama were gifts of the gods, and should therefore form part of the citizens' education.

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[63] *Laws* 660 A.

> The gods, however, took pity on the human race, born to suffer as it was, and gave it relief in the form of religious festivals to serve as periods of rest from its labours.[64]

Participation in these religious festivals was, therefore, an essential part of life, and the ability to do so enabled citizens to contribute fully to municipal life. Thus anyone not trained to do so would not be fully educated.

> So by an 'uneducated' man we shall mean a man who has not been trained to take part in a chorus; and we must say that if a man has been sufficiently trained, he is 'educated.'[65]

Unlike in Athens, where only men took part in theatrical performances, women would also perform in these choruses. This would have astonished Plato's contemporaries, since Greek women did not appear in public and certainly didn't appear on the stage. Instead, men dressed up as women to perform female parts. However, Plato decreed that women should share men's education, and chorus performances were part of this.

> We are not going to withdraw our recommendation that so far as possible, in education and everything else, the female sex should be on the same footing as the male.[66]

Physical training would consist not only of chorus dancing and singing. Children were to learn to ride and to fight, girls as well as boys, as in the *Republic*.

> The girls must be trained in precisely the same way, and I'd like to make this proposal without any reservations whatever about horse-riding or athletics being suitable activities for males but not for females.[67]

Plato seems to have considered children to be potentially very dangerous both to themselves and to the city, so he decreed that they must be supervised from sunrise to sunset. This fear of what unsupervised children might do suggests a conviction that basic human nature was bad, and had to be channelled in the right directions since it would not naturally turn to the good. This is an extension of Plato's certainty expressed in the *Laws* that women were morally weaker than men, but it is interesting that he did not say that girls needed closer supervision than boys. Instead he regarded all children with equal distrust.

> When dawn comes up and brings another day, the children must be sent off to their teachers. Children must not be left without teachers, nor slaves without masters, any more than flocks and herds must be allowed to live without attendants. Of all wild things, the child is the most unmanageable: an unusually powerful spring of reason,

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[64]*Laws* 653 D.
[65]*Laws* 654 A-B.
[66]*Laws* 805 C.
[67]*Laws* 804 E.

> whose waters are not yet canalised in the right direction, makes him sharp and sly, the most unruly animal there is.[68]

This juxtaposition of children needing teachers as slaves need masters supports the idea, raised in the last chapter, that Plato considered slaves to be permanent children, incapable of an adult's level of reason.

For academic work, Plato adhered to his idea that children should not be forced to learn, which he had expounded in the *Republic*.

> Well, the children must work at their letters until they are able to read and write, but any whose natural abilities have not developed sufficiently by the end of the prescribed time to make them into quick or polished performers should not be pressed.[69]

Furthermore, much the same subjects were prescribed in the curriculum for the *Laws* as for the *Republic*, namely literature, music and mathematics, with the addition of astronomy. All these subjects were deemed to be of practical use in war, government or housekeeping, and were taught to boys and girls alike.

> Of course, we've told you what military skills they must practice and learn, but what about literature, playing the lyre and arithmetic? We stipulated that they must each understand enough of these subjects to fight a war and run a house and administer a state; for the same reasons they must acquire such knowledge about the heavenly bodies in their courses - sun, moon and stars - as will help them with the arrangements that every state is forced to make in this respect.[70]

The ultimate aim of education in the *Laws* was, as in the *Republic*, to make the guardians into philosophers.

> If our guardians are going to be genuine guardians of the laws they must have genuine knowledge of their real nature; they must be articulate enough to explain the real difference between good actions and bad, and capable of sticking to the distinction in practice.[71]

Given this goal, it seems very strange that Plato went to such lengths to exclude all bad influences from the arts in both his ideal states. Surely people as well educated as this could not be detrimentally affected by watching tragedies, for example. In the *Laws*, the study of

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[68]*Laws* 808 D-E.
[69]*Laws* 810 B.
[70]*Laws* 809 C-D.
[71]*Laws* 966 B.

philosophy was replaced by the study of theology, though in Plato's mind the two were similar. The ascent to the Good, so important in the *Republic*, was replaced by a realisation

> That the soul is far older than any created thing, and that it is immortal and controls the entire world of matter; and second (a doctrine we've expounded often enough before) that reason is the supreme power among the heavenly bodies.[72]

After stipulating the need for a certain religious conviction, Plato provided a useful definition of other qualities required for the perfect guardian.

> He also has to master the essential preliminary studies, survey with the eye of a philosopher what they have in common, and use them to frame consistent rules of moral action; and finally, when a reasoned explanation is possible, he must be able to provide it.[73]

Allowing for the absence of any need to ascend to knowledge of the Good and the lack of a Cave, this description also applies to guardians in the *Republic*. In the *Republic* there is an acknowledgement of the fact that such people, who combine ability with stability, would be difficult to find.

> You know that ease of learning, good memory, quick wits, smartness, youthful passion, high-mindedness, and all the other things that go along with these are rarely willing to grow together in a mind that will choose an orderly life that is quiet and completely stable, for the people who possess the former traits are carried by their quick wits wherever chance leads them and have no stability at all.[74]

However, stability of mind was not sufficient alone: it had to be combined with flexibility and enthusiasm.

> On the other hand, people with stable characters, who don't change easily, who aren't easily frightened in battle, and whom one would employ because of their greater reliability, exhibit similar traits when it comes to learning: they are as hard to move and teach as people whose brains have become numb, and they are filled with sleep and yawning whenever they have to learn anything.[75]

Plato clearly realised that people tended to be 'tortoises' or 'hares' and that those who combined the best of both character types were rare. One of the chief duties of those in charge of the mating lottery in the *Republic* and of marriage in the *Laws* would be to produce such people, since they were the ones best suited to a guardian's education and status.

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[72]*Laws* 967 D.
[73]*Laws* 967 E.
[74]*Republic* 503 C.
[75]*Republic* 503 C-D.

Conclusions

Physical education was to be undertaken by both sexes in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, so that the state was as well defended as possible.

> In all these subjects there must be public instructors paid out of public funds; their lessons must be attended by the boys and men of the state, and the girls and women as well, because they too have to master all these techniques. While still girls, they must practice every kind of dancing and fighting in armour; when grown women, they must play their part in manoeuvring, getting into battle formation and taking off and putting on weapons, if only to ensure that if it ever proves necessary for the whole army to leave the state and take to field abroad, so that the children and the rest of the population are left unprotected, the women will at least be able to defend them.[76]

Academic education was also essential for everyone, to levels dependent upon their abilities. In the *Republic* this, coupled with the abolition of the family, meant that women were free to compete with men on equal terms and could become guardians if they were sufficiently able. In the *Laws*, because the family was reinstated and women were required to be housewives, their role in government became somewhat restricted. However, education was still essential for three main reasons. Firstly, women were not expected to spend their whole lives looking after their families, but were allowed to enter government once their children had grown up. Secondly, women were responsible for the early education of their children, and Plato realised the folly of allowing such influential people to be uneducated. Thirdly, and from Plato's point of view perhaps most importantly, he considered that women were morally weaker than men and therefore in greater need of the correction and guidance which only a good education could provide.

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[76]*Laws* 813 E-814 A.

Chapter 8

Augustine's attitudes to women and slaves in society and their place in creation

In this chapter I shall examine Augustine's attitude to women's role in society and their eventual salvation, both as displayed in his teachings and as evinced by his behaviour to actual women, among them his mother St Monica and his concubine, whose name is unknown. Following St Paul, Augustine believed that, during their earthly lives, women were subordinate to men unless they became consecrated virgins, 'married' to God. I shall discuss the reasons for this subordination, in particular the effects of original sin and Eve's part in the Fall. However, I shall explore Augustine's views on sin only in so far as they relate to his prescriptions for women's position in society and the reasons for subordination. To discuss sin at great length is not the purpose of this thesis. I shall also examine Augustine's teachings on sexual intercourse, both within and without the bond of marriage. I hope to show that he considered virginity to be the ideal condition for those Christians who were capable of it, though he also approved of marriage as a good condition for those not capable of celibacy. He regarded sex as a hindrance to true dedication to God, even for married Christians, and extra-marital sex was beyond the pale. His views on slavery were conventional for his time, in that he did not disapprove of the institution, though he did teach that both masters and slaves should live according to Christian doctrine. In Augustine's early Christian life and writings, it is clear that he regarded marriage and celibacy as antithetical, as can be seen in his renunciation of the former and adoption of the latter on his conversion.

> You converted me to yourself, so that I no longer desired a wife or placed any hope in this world but stood firmly upon the rule of faith.[1]

However, due in part to the need to combat heresies which opposed marriage, the two ways of life became much closer in his thought, and acquired the same goals and ambiguities, so that he

[1] *Confessions* 8: 12.

found it difficult to praise one without also praising the other.[2] Indeed, in his work on marriage, he praised virginity, saying that 'the chastity of celibacy is superior to the chastity of marriage.'[3] However, in his work on virginity he was still at pains to assure his readers of the good status of marriage, saying 'let the women of faith who are married hold on to the good thing that is theirs.'[4] Thus a conflict developed between an admiration of celibacy and an acceptance also of marriage, which was unresolved. It would have been easier for Augustine to say unequivocally that celibacy was good and marriage utterly inferior to it, but he could not do so because of the pressures of heresies which exalted celibacy and condemned marriage.

The women in Augustine's life

Much has been written of Augustine's relationship with his mother, and it is clear that it was somewhat complex. St Monica was a devout, though uneducated, Christian whom her son credited with his conversion to Christianity and hence with his hope of salvation.

> In the flesh she brought me to birth in this world: in her heart she brought me to birth in your eternal light.[5]

Monica was admired by Augustine because she had and held fast to the faith which had so long eluded him, and because he considered her to be a good model of Christian womanhood.[6] Augustine portrayed her as highly virtuous, praying that her pagan husband might become a Christian and yet living with him when this seemed impossible, and not endeavouring to coerce either Patricius or her son into faith.

> She never ceased to try to gain him for you as a convert, for the virtues with which you had adorned her, and for which he respected, loved and admired her, were like so many voices constantly speaking to him of you.[7]

This tactic of leading by example rather than argument which Monica practised is according to the teachings of St Paul, who, as I discussed in chapter 4, at one point discouraged Christians from

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[2]Harrison, C. *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (2000) p 159.
[3]*The Excellence of Marriage* 23: 28.
[4]*On Holy Virginity* 10: 10.
[5]*Confessions* 9: 8.
[6]Borresen, K.E., *Subordination and Equivalence* (1981) p 4.
[7]*Confessions* 9: 9.

leaving their pagan spouses, and also advocated the idea that Christian behaviour could be more effective than argument in winning converts. Monica may have been inspired by the remark 'Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband?'.[8] However, Monica was not afraid to take positive action if her son's behaviour really offended her. When Augustine became a Manichee, she was furious, and refused to have anything to do with him.

> You heard her, for how else can I explain the dream with which you consoled her, so that she agreed to live with me and eat at the same table in our home? Lately she had refused to do this, because she loathed and shunned the blasphemy of my false beliefs.[9]

The dream which showed Monica her son's salvation caused her to revert to her customary practice of tolerantly leading by example. Describing this change of approach is as close as Augustine came to criticising his mother; in this instance she abandoned her usual approach for a more active, less 'feminine' method and was reproved for doing so by her dream. Thus, Augustine implied, should women follow Paul's teaching not by argument but by example. In only one episode was Monica advocating the wrong course to her son; namely his marriage.

> I was being urged incessantly to marry, and had already made my proposal and been accepted. My mother had done all that she could to help, for it was her hope that, once I was married, I should be washed clean of my sins by the saving waters of baptism.[10]

A young professor of rhetoric, as Augustine was at that time, could make many good connexions through an advantageous marriage. Since there was then no thought of him becoming a celibate Christian bishop, Monica doubtless wished to further her son's career by marriage as well as hoping that it would lead him to baptism. Power contends that Monica's experience of her husband's infidelity may have prompted her to discourage Augustine from marriage until he could be faithful to one woman.[11] I think that this is rather too modern an interpretation. Firstly, Augustine proved himself capable of fidelity in his relationship with his concubine, with whom he lived for more than ten years. Secondly, marital infidelity was acceptable for men in pagan Roman society, although not for women, as I discussed in chapter 3. Although Christianity demanded monogamy or celibacy for its followers, I think that it is rather far-fetched to say that

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[8] *I Corinthians* 7: 16.
[9] *Confessions* 3: 11.
[10] *Confessions* 6: 13.

Monica wanted Augustine to be faithful for his wife's sake, as Power's interpretation suggests. Monica was always more concerned for her son's spiritual salvation than for anything else. Furthermore, it is evident from Augustine's writings that his mother considered infidelity to be a normal occurrence which women should accept as part of marriage.

> Her manner was light but her meaning serious when she told them [other women] that ever since they had heard the marriage deed read over to them, they ought to have regarded it as a contract which bound them to serve their husbands, and from that time onward they should remember their condition and not defy their masters.[12]

This passage also echoes Paul's demands that wives should 'be subject in everything to their husbands,' though he did not condone adultery by either spouse.[13] Monica's views on marriage will have influenced her son, and since they coincided with those of Paul, upon which Augustine based so much of his thought, it is perhaps unsurprising that he also demanded subordination from women in marriage, as I shall discuss later.

Augustine accepted his mother's intelligence and had lengthy spiritual discussions with her both alone and in groups. Perhaps the most important of these took place at Ostia shortly before Monica's death.

> For we were talking alone together and our conversation was serene and joyful. We had forgotten what we had left behind and were intent on what lay before us. In the presence of Truth, which is yourself, we were wondering what the eternal life of the saints would be like.[14]

This description of ascent to the Truth has markedly Platonic overtones and is indicative of the influence which Platonism had on Augustine. The participants in the conversation have left behind what they knew in the physical world and moved to contemplation of things intangible, just as Socrates and Diotima did in the *Symposium*, which was another conversation between a man and a woman. Admittedly they were pondering the afterlife rather than the Form of Good as would be the case in a Platonic dialogue, but the Christian afterlife is closely related to contemplation of God, who is the ultimate Good, so the difference is slight. Furthermore it is

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[11]Power, K., *Veiled Desire: Augustine's writings on women* (1995) p 79.
[12]*Confessions* 9: 9.
[13]*Ephesians* 5: 24.

interesting that Augustine had this conversation with his mother rather than Adeodatus, and this circumstance is indicative of the esteem in which he held her intelligence and also shows that he considered some women to be capable of reasoning, just as Plato did. Monica's intelligence gave her a quasi-masculine status in the group of Augustine's friends and enabled her to join their discussions.[15] It was also combined with strong, straightforward Christian faith and devotion, which Augustine respected because he believed it to be divinely inspired. She also moved with them to the house at Cassiciacum, which must have been a somewhat unusual arrangement as there was no other woman present.

> I was a catechumen living at leisure in that country house with Alypius, a catechumen like myself, and my mother, who never left us. She had the weak body of a woman but the strong faith of a man, the composure of her years, a mother's love for her son, and the devotion of a Christian.[16]

This example set by Monica of the heights to which an intelligent woman, assisted by grace, could rise in faith and wisdom paved the way for Augustine's correspondence in later life with other intelligent Christian women. I shall discuss these relationships later in this chapter. It is certain that Augustine was very close to his mother, and yet he persistently refused to be influenced by her in the matter of religion and in his relationship with his concubine. Perhaps this was due to a deeply rooted aversion, acquired from society, to taking the advice of a woman, though it could also have been a case of rebellion against parental beliefs, since offspring are notoriously averse to heeding their parents.

Augustine had a stable, long lasting relationship with his concubine. Although it was not legally recognised as marriage was, concubinage was a socially acceptable relationship. From his account of her departure it is clear that he loved her, although he admitted this only fleetingly and rather grudgingly.

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[14]*Confessions* 9: 10.
[15]Power (1995) p 89.
[16]*Confessions* 9: 4.

> The woman with whom I had been living was torn from my side as an obstacle to my marriage and this was a blow which crushed my heart to bleeding, because I loved her dearly.[17]

The loving nature of this relationship was never referred to before or after this passage, probably because Augustine wished to promote the bad aspects of physical love in order to discourage his audience, rather than to encourage them with accounts of love.[18] Although forced to promote marriage as a viable alternative status for Christians, because of the onslaughts of heresies, Augustine continued to consider, with Paul, that 'it is well for them to remain single as I do.'[19] I shall discuss Augustine's teachings on marriage and celibacy later in this chapter. It has been suggested that because Monica did not oppose Augustine when he took his concubine, the woman must have been acceptable and would have become respectable on the birth of Adeodatus, her son.[20] This seems unlikely. Concubinage was, as I have said, an acceptable arrangement in pagan Roman society, and Monica is more likely to have been thankful that her son was not having numerous affairs. The woman would never have achieved the respectability due to a married woman, even after her son was born. Furthermore, no respectable woman would have embarked upon a life as a concubine: she and her family would have insisted upon marriage. Augustine made no mention of any protest.

> In those days I lived with a woman, not my lawful wedded wife but a mistress whom I had chosen for no special reason but that my restless passions had alighted on her.[21]

As I have said, Monica tended to take the line of leading by example rather than argument. Since having a mistress would not make her fear for her son's soul to the extent that his adherence to Manichaeism did, it is not surprising that, according to Augustine, she took no action to oppose the arrangement, especially since the woman was 'the only one and I was faithful to her.'[22] Augustine and his concubine had a son, Adeodatus, who seems to have inherited all his father's

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[17]*Confessions* 6: 15.
[18]Borresen (1981) p 10.
[19]*I Corinthians* 7 :8.
[20]Power (1995) p 97.
[21]*Confessions* 4: 2.
[22]*Confessions* 4: 2.

intellectual ability and more. Even allowing for a father's pride, it is clear that the boy was unusually clever.

> There is a book of mine called *De magistro*, which consists of a dialogue between Adeodatus and myself. You know that all the ideas expressed by the second speaker in the discussion are his, although he was only sixteen when it took place, and I learned for myself that he had many other talents even more remarkable than this.[23]

This passage proves that Augustine had experience of the circumstances he described when he described extra-marital relationships.

> A bargain struck for lust, in which the birth of children is begrudged, though, if they come, we cannot help but love them.[24]

It would seem from this that Adeodatus himself was initially unwanted, but much loved once he had been born.

When she was dismissed to make way for a future wife, Augustine's concubine gave him a lesson in how to behave after such treatment. Augustine admitted that he failed to live up to her example.

> She went back to Africa, vowing never to give herself to any other man, and left me with the son whom she had borne me. But I was too unhappy and too weak to imitate this example set me by a woman...I took another mistress.[25]

This is an unsavoury episode in Augustine's life, and one of which he was clearly ashamed. However, the behaviour of his concubine contributed much to his thought on how women in her situation should act. When he wrote *The Excellence of Marriage* he concluded that women who behaved as his mistress had done acted correctly, in spite of not having been married.

> Nevertheless, if she is faithful to him, and when he takes a wife she does not also think about marrying, but sets herself entirely against such a course of action, then I would not dare to call her an adulteress, easy enough though it might be to do so.[26]

This is an interesting example of Augustine demanding the same behaviour of men as of women, since he decreed that men who married another woman after living with a mistress were adulterers, but were not if they became celibate. In this instance it appears that he disapproved of impermanent sexual relationships, particularly outside marriage.

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[23]*Confessions* 9: 6. The person addressed as 'you' throughout *Confessions* is God.
[24]*Confessions* 4: 2.
[25]*Confessions* 6: 15.

> If a man makes use of a woman for a time, until he finds someone else more suited to his wealth and social standing to take as his partner, that state of mind makes him an adulterer, not with regard to the woman he is on the lookout for but with regard to the one he is sleeping with without being married to her.[27]

This is, of course, what Augustine intended to do to his own concubine. She was an interim measure, although he loved her, and was dismissed to make way for Augustine's socially acceptable young fiancee. It is remarkable that Augustine was so condemnatory of men who behaved as he had intended to do before his conversion, and suggests that he was disgusted by his own behaviour and wished to prevent others from making the same mistake. Power contends that Augustine's disapproval of concubinage and support for marriage may have been grounded in his personal experience of the exploitation of women entailed in concubinage.[28] This seems highly unlikely. Augustine was concerned with saving souls, not with saving women from exploitation. He may have been ashamed of his treatment of his concubine, though what really seems to shame him is that he took another mistress after her dismissal and while he was waiting to be married. It also seems highly unlikely that he would have married his concubine if she had not already left by the time he converted to Christianity. After all, he could have recalled her. Furthermore, he countenanced stable unmarried relationships, on certain conditions.

> It is not absurd, perhaps, to call this a marriage, provided they maintain the arrangement until the death of one or other of them, and provided they do not avoid having children either by being unwilling to have children or even by doing something wrong to prevent the birth of children.[29]

This passage also shows two of what Augustine considered to be the three goods of marriage; namely the birth of children and the sacramental bond, broken only by death. The third good was that marriage prevents fornication. I shall discuss Augustine's teachings on these goods later in this chapter. By the time Augustine returned to Africa, he had no close relationships with women. His mother was dead; his marriage had been cancelled; and his mistresses had been dismissed. Henceforth he had only epistolary contact with women.

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[26]*The Excellence of Marriage* 5: 5 and Borresen (1981) p 105.
[27]*The Excellence of Marriage* 5: 5.
[28]Power (1995) p 106.

Augustine corresponded with several women during his time as Bishop of Hippo, and these letters reveal much about his developing theology and his attitudes to individual intelligent women as well as his demands for correct female behaviour. It is interesting that none of Augustine's female correspondents seem to have needed any basic instruction about Christianity. This may have been because they had all been baptised, and had thus been through the lengthy education, given to catechumens of both sexes, which preceded baptism.[30] For example, in his letter to Florentina Augustine agreed to help her with her studies, which were evidently quite advanced.

> I have, therefore, thought fit in this letter to exhort you to ask what you will, within the above-mentioned range of choice, so that I may not be useless to you by attempting to teach you what you know.[31]

However, this level of education among Christian women could lead to trouble, since many of Pelagius' followers were women of high social status, who were more likely to be educated.[32] This is reflected in Augustine's letters, particularly those to Maxima and Seleuciana. Both these women appear to have come into contact with heresies, and Augustine was at pains to save them from error.

> I wholly approve and praise you, honourable servant of God, worthy of praise in Christ, for the sorrow over such persons and the watchfulness and care against them which you expressed in your letter.[33]

Maxima had obtained written works by these heretics, which Augustine requested her to send to him. This is an interesting request, as it clearly had two purposes. Augustine wished to make sure that Maxima did not keep and brood over these texts and so risk becoming converted to heresy. However, he also wished to read them himself in the interests of research, which suggests that it was not easy for bishops to obtain concrete evidence about the specific details of the heresies they encountered.

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[29]*The Excellence of Marriage* 5: 5.
[30]McKechnie, P., '"Women's Religion" and Second Century Christianity' in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* vol. 47 (1996) p 420.
[31]*Letter* 266.
[32]Bonner, G. *Church and Faith in the Patristic Tradition* (1996) p 39.
[33]*Letter* 264.

> But if you have any of their writings in which they affirm what is contrary to this belief, be so kind as to send it to me so that we may not only profess our belief, but also, as far as possible, refute their unbelief.[34]

Seleuciana had come into contact with Novatianism, and was at risk of becoming heretical on the subject of baptism. Augustine's letter to her was quite lengthy, and full of biblical references attempting to convince her that the Apostles were baptised by water and the Holy Spirit. This is a somewhat arcane subject, which it is difficult to imagine an ignorant person being concerned about, but it is clear both that Seleuciana herself had raised it and that Augustine considered it important.

> But if we say that they were not baptised with water, it is to be feared that we may put them seriously in the wrong and may give men some ground for despising baptism, which is so far from deserving contempt that the apostolic teaching commends it, and the centurion Cornelius and those who were with him were baptised, even though they had already received the Holy Spirit.[35]

These letters are interesting in that they illustrate Augustine's ability to respect individual women's intellectual capacity. He seems to have addressed those men who were in holy orders of some kind as 'brother', while addressing lay men as 'son'. For example, *Letter* 204 is to 'his honoured son, Dulcitius', who was a civil servant; *Letter* 207 is to 'his saintly brother and fellow bishop, Claudius'. Since women could not then become priests, they were addressed as 'daughter', except in the case of women in charge of a convent, whose mode of address is demonstrated by *Letter* 210, which is to 'the beloved and holy Mother Felicitas'. Power suggests that these letters indicate that Augustine considered women to be subordinate to him in the Church.[36] However, on closer examination it becomes clear that Augustine regarded all lay people as his congregation of spiritual children, and all clergy as his spiritual brothers. It is not clear whether he regarded monks who were not ordained as 'brothers' or as 'sons' but the former seems likely, since *Letter* 210 refers to 'the sisters who are with you'. If nuns were addressed as sisters, monks were probably brothers.

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[34]*Letter* 264.
[35]*Letter* 265.
[36]Power (1995) p 109.

Letter 262, to Ecdicia, illustrates another difficulty; that of the over zealous woman who, though already married, tried to embark upon a life of sexual continence. Ecdicia was clearly a woman of forceful personality who paid little heed to anyone else, so Augustine was forthright in his criticism of her actions.

> I felt a very deep regret that you had chosen to act so to your husband that the edifice of continence which he had begun to rear should have collapsed into the melancholy downfall of adultery by his failure to persevere.

Ecdicia's actions are compared to those of Monica, who tolerated her husband's adultery and eventually led him to Christianity. Monica was, as I have discussed, praised for her submission to Patricius, but Ecdicia was rebuked for her impetuous lack of servility. For Monica, her husband was 'a man whom she served as her lord'.[37] In Augustine's eyes, this made her a role model for other Christian married women.[38] Ecdicia's husband had been coerced into continence by his wife, which displeased Augustine since it should have been a mutual decision.

> I know you undertook this state of continence, contrary to sound doctrine, before he gave consent. He should not have been defrauded of the debt you owed him of your body before his will joined yours in seeking that good which surpasses conjugal chastity.

Augustine quoted Paul in his remonstrance with Ecdicia, using the passage of *I Corinthians* which decreed that both husbands and wives owed each other sexual rights.[39] As I discussed in chapter 4, this was a striking instigation of sexual equality by Paul, since previously husbands had owned their wives' bodies without any notion of reciprocity. Augustine was vociferous in his support for Paul's teaching on this matter, particularly in the *Letter* to Ecdicia.

> According to these words of the Apostle, if he had wished to practice continence and you had not, he would have been obliged to render you the debt, and God would have given him credit for continence if he had not refused you marital intercourse, out of consideration for your weakness, not his own, in order to prevent you from falling into the damnable sin of adultery. How much more fitting would it have been for you, to whom subjection was more appropriate, to yield to his will in rendering him the debt in this way, since God would have taken account of your intention to observe continence which you gave up to save your husband from destruction!

It is interesting that from this passage it would seem that Augustine considered continence to be primarily a state of mind, so that a spouse who had marital sex out of duty, in response to the other's desire, rather than out of desire would still be continent, and would indeed be doing right in

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[37]*Confessions* 9: 9.

[38]Clark, E.A., *St Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality* (1996) p 21.

preventing the incontinent spouse from seeking gratification elsewhere. Also noteworthy, and firmly based in the Pauline teaching of reciprocity cited above, is that this mental view of continence applied to women as well as men. This view of continence as a mental state is echoed in Augustine's teaching on raped virgins. As I shall discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, he said that such women remained chaste and virginal in mind and spirit provided they felt no lust during their ordeal. This could also be seen as an attempt by Augustine to make chastity and celibacy more accessible, by saying that they were states of mind rather than necessarily of the body. This would reduce the status of consecrated virgins, and raise that of married people, so that there was less of a divide between them.

However, imposing sexual continence unilaterally upon her marriage was not Ecdicia's greatest mistake, nor the one which ultimately drove her husband to adultery. Ecdicia wished to prove her devotion to God yet more obviously, and it was this action which Augustine regarded as her real error.

> But there is a point which, I am sorry to say, you did not observe, because you should have given way to him all the more humbly and submissively in your domestic relationship since he had so devotedly yielded to you in so important a matter, even to the point of imitating you.

Having more or less coerced her husband into a continent marriage, Ecdicia then decided to give away their valuables, regardless of their son's fate.

> And what wonder that a father did not wish the son of both of you to be stripped of his means of support in this life, not knowing what state of life he would follow when he began to be a little older?

Ecdicia's final mistake was perhaps her oddest and most extreme. So sincere was she in her desire for continence that she began to dress as though she were a widow in the special dark dress which widows wore but to which she, as a married woman with a living husband, had no right. As Augustine pointed out, it was perfectly possible for married women to dress demurely without going to such extremes as Ecdicia did.

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[39] *I Corinthians* 7: 1-5.

> But there is a certain matronly costume, appropriate to one's position in life, distinct from the widow's garb, which may be fitting for married women of the faith and which does not offend religious decorum.

Augustine accused Ecdicia of pride and of wanting to flaunt her piety by giving away their possessions and dressing as though she were a widow. His concern was that she should try to win back her husband by humbly submitting to him.

> You must now think very seriously about reclaiming him if you truly want to belong to Christ. Clothe yourself with lowliness of mind and, that God may keep you in constancy, do not scorn your husband.

The whole letter is concerned with three things. The first is Ecdicia's pride in her own piety and abstention, for which Augustine rebuked her severely.

> For, what is more incongruous than for a woman to act haughtily toward her husband about a humble dress, when it would have been more profitable for you to display beauty in your conduct rather than stand out against him in a matter of mourning garb?

Secondly, the effect which her actions had upon her husband was very bad, since they drove him to adultery. Thirdly, and perhaps most interestingly, Augustine was convinced that by her actions Ecdicia could win her husband back to piety just as she had driven him away. This is an echo of Monica again, who converted Patricius to Christianity by her behaviour.

> For the virtues with which you had adorned her, and for which he respected, loved, and admired her, were like so many voices constantly speaking to him of you.[40]

Thus it is clear that Augustine considered that pious wives could and should be highly effective in converting their husbands to Christianity, provided they went about it the right way, as exemplified by Monica, rather than the wrong way as Ecdicia did. Sadly there is no further correspondence preserved between Ecdicia and Augustine, so we do not know how she reacted to his advice.

Augustine's views on sex and marriage

Augustine's views on marital sex, and indeed on marriage itself, were highly complex. He was torn between conflicting desires, since he believed that celibacy was the best state for all Christians, while being compelled as a Catholic Bishop to counter the onslaughts of Jovinian, Jerome, Pelagius and the Manichees, who taught that marriage was evil. As in many things,

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[40]*Confessions* 9: 9.

Augustine was guided by Paul, who also strove to strike a balance between wishing Christians to be celibate and acknowledging that not everyone is capable of it.

> To the unmarried and to widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.[41]

However, Augustine also promoted a third option: that of the sexless marriage, such as that which Ecdicia wished to undertake. In this he opposed Paul, who was adamant that married people should not refrain from sexual intercourse in the long term.

> Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control.[42]

In this passage Paul seems to be more realistic than Augustine, since it would be easier for married couples to embark upon a fixed period of sexual abstinence rather than the indefinite period of a lifetime. Perhaps if Augustine had advocated Paul's approach, Ecdicia and her husband would not have got into such difficulty.

Augustine's views on marriage were unlike those of some other Fathers of the Church, among them Jerome, who taught that sexual intercourse did not and could not have happened in the sinless Eden before the Fall.[43] Augustine believed that sex was possible in Eden, and that Adam and Eve would have had children even if they had not sinned.

> When the state of things for mankind was one of such ease and felicity, then, God forbid that we should suppose that it was impossible for the seed of offspring to be sown without unwholesome lust. Rather, the sexual organs would have been moved by the same command of the will as the other members are.[44]

Augustine seems to have realised that his audience would find this control of the will over the genitals hard to understand, so he detailed other parts of the body which some people are already able to control at will.

> We know, moreover, that there are certain men who have natural abilities very different from their fellows and marvellous by their very rarity. Such people can at will do things with their bodies which are quite impossible for others, and hardly believed when heard.

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[41] *I Corinthians* 7: 8-9.
[42] *I Corinthians* 7: 5.
[43] Clark, E.A. (1996) p 72.
[44] *City of God* 14: 26.

> There are those who can move their ears, either singly or both at once. There are those who, without moving their head, can bring all that part of the scalp which is covered with hair down towards the forehead and bring it back again at will.[45]

Augustine's point here is that since empirical evidence tells us that some elements of fallen humanity can move seemingly uncontrollable body parts at will, there is no reason to disbelieve that humans in their perfect condition would be unable to move their genitals at will. However, Augustine agreed with the other Fathers that sinless sex did not actually take place, though he said that this was because of the brief length of time between the Creation and the Fall.

> In any case, the possibility of which I am speaking was not experienced by those who might have experienced it. For their sin happened first, and so they were dismissed from Paradise before they could come together in the task of procreation as a tranquil act of will.[46]

Having declared that sexual intercourse was not of itself sinful, Augustine needed to find another object of blame in his attempt to prevent fornication among his congregation. He decided that lust, which is uncontrollable by the will, was at fault for its ability to overthrow intellectual capacity and restraint.

> This lust triumphs not only over the whole body, and not only outwardly, but inwardly also. When the emotion of the mind is united with the craving of the flesh, it convulses the whole man, so that there follows a pleasure greater than any other: a bodily pleasure so great that, at the moment of time when he achieves his climax, the alertness and, so to speak, vigilance of a man's mind is almost entirely overwhelmed.[47]

This passage is revealing about Augustine's sex life with his concubine, which seems to have been good, from his pre-conversion perspective at least. It is remarkable that a man who had experienced sex so that he was able to describe it in such terms as a source of immense pleasure could renounce it utterly and become a celibate. However, converts from one way of life to another, as Augustine was, are apt to regard their actions in their previous mode of life in a particularly unfavourable light, and to be evangelical about their new beliefs. This is certainly true of Augustine. He declared that sex would be much better if it were only for procreation and involved no lust.

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[45]*City of God* 14: 24.
[46]*City of God* 14: 26.
[47]*City of God* 14: 16.

> Any friend of wisdom and holy joys who lives a married life but knows how 'to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour' as the apostle admonishes - surely such a one would prefer to beget children without lust of this kind, if such a thing were possible.[48]

There are two important points illustrated in this passage. Firstly, it is clear that Augustine considered that the main, and indeed only, good object of marital sex was procreation.[49] As he showed in the preceding passage, he did not regard sexual pleasure as a good thing at all, as it was driven by lust rather than the will. Secondly, although Augustine believed lust to be sinful, and as such a result of the Fall, he did not regard it as the sin which led to the Fall.[50] His horror of lust was due to the fact that it could not be controlled by reason and the will, and instead took control of them. It was therefore seen by Augustine as a symbol of man's inability to obey God. For Augustine and for Christianity, the first sin, which caused the Fall, was Adam and Eve's disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit.

> Also, where there was so great an abundance of other foods, the command prohibiting the eating of one kind of food was as easy to observe as it was simple to remember, and it was given at a time when desire was not in opposition to the will; such opposition arose later, as a punishment of the transgression.[51]

This is supported by the Biblical account of the Fall, where the injunction and the result of disobedience are very clear.

> And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.[52]

Adam and Eve did not die physically, but they were cut off from God's grace as a result of the Fall, as I discussed in chapter 5.

As he showed in the *Letter* to Ecdicia, Augustine followed Paul in allocating equal rights to each other's bodies to married couple. He considered this to be the mainstay of marital fidelity. The faithful nature of marriage also brought order and acceptability to sexual intercourse which was not motivated by a desire for children.

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[48]*City of God* 14: 16.
[49]Clark, E.A. (1996) p 5.
[50]Borresen (1981) p 55.
[51]*City of God* 14: 12.
[52]*Genesis* 2: 16-17.

> Furthermore, in performing their duty to each other, even if this is claimed somewhat excessively and without restraint, husband and wife also have a duty of fidelity to each other.[53]

Thus sexual relationships within marriage brought order to the disorder of sexual lust.[54] Like Paul, he wished to make it clear that women and men were equal in their duty of marital fidelity, so he decreed that the rules were the same for both sexes.[55] This was completely at odds with pagan culture, in which respectable women were expected to be virgins when they married and subsequently faithful to their husbands while men were allowed, if not actually encouraged, to have affairs both before and during marriage. By the fourth century AD, Roman law allowed both husbands and wives to initiate divorce proceedings.[56] Following Christian doctrine, Augustine forbade divorce and remarriage, but he did allow separation on grounds of adultery. Interestingly, he allowed both spouses to demand such separation.

> Nevertheless, I do not see how a man can be allowed to marry someone else, if he leaves a wife who has committed adultery, while a woman is not allowed to marry someone else, if she leaves a husband who has committed adultery.[57]

However, adultery was the only permitted reason for separation.

> He would not have given the commandment to stay unmarried, if she leaves her husband, except to a woman who has the right to leave her husband, which is only in the case of adultery...When speaking about a man divorcing his wife, God our master made this reason the only exception.[58]

In this insistence upon equal marital rights and duties Augustine developed a conflict in his thought between demanding that women be subordinate to their husbands in everything other than sexual fidelity, and his conviction that in that one area women were equal to men. This is a conflict which he never quite resolved, since he did not think it possible, or indeed right, for men and women to be friends of equal status. Women were for childbirth, not because they were the ideal companion for a man.

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[53]*The Excellence of Marriage* 4:4.
[54]Harrison (2000) p 163.
[55]Borresen (1981) p 100.
[56]Clark, E.A. (1996) p 6.
[57]*The Excellence of Marriage* 7: 7.
[58]*On Adulterous Marriages* 5: 5.

> Then, He also made a wife for the man, to assist him in the task of procreation, and he formed her from a bone taken out of the man's side.[59]

This was due to his belief that woman, because she was created from man, was inferior to him physically and mentally. There is a further conflict here, which lies at the heart of all Augustine's writing on women, namely that Christianity taught that women were equal to men spiritually, though inferior to them in all else. This duality was caused by the two accounts of Creation in the *Book of Genesis*, one of which states that man and woman were created together.

> So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.[60]

This account was taken by Augustine to mean that the male and female souls were created equal. However, the second account of Creation was deemed to determine the relative merits of male and female bodies and minds.

> And the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.[61]

Owing to the belief that Eve was dependent upon Adam for the material of her body, it was decreed that women should be dependent upon and subordinate to men in society.

> It is certain, then, that, in the beginning, male and female were constituted just as we see and know that two human beings of different sex are now, and that they are said to be 'one' either because they are united, or because of the woman's origin; for she was created from the side of the man.[62]

The issue was further complicated by Augustine's belief that bodies would still retain their earthly genders after the resurrection, but lose all lust and vice associated with the Fall.

> But it seems to me that the better opinion is that of those who do not doubt that both sexes are to rise. For then there will be no lust, which is now the cause of confusion. For before they sinned, the man and the woman were both naked, and were not ashamed. Vice will be taken away from those bodies, therefore, and nature preserved. And the sex of a woman is not a vice, but nature.[63]

This passage confirms Augustine's belief that God intended there to be two genders of humanity, even in Paradise. Augustine also believed that woman was made from man by God so that all humanity should be descended from one person, Adam, rather than having two common ancestors.

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[59]*City of God* 12: 24.
[60]*Genesis* 1: 27.
[61]*Genesis* 2: 22.
[62]*City of God* 14: 22. See also Borresen (1981) p 20.

> Indeed, God did not even create the woman who was to be united with the man in the same way as He created the man. Rather, it pleased him to create her out of the man, so that the human race might derive entirely from the one man.[64]

This belief was compounded by lack of scientific knowledge in Augustine's period, since the existence of the human ovum was not known, and therefore it was believed that the woman only nurtured the foetus in her womb, rather than providing an egg for fertilisation. Thus woman's passivity, which was believed to be her role in procreation, was easily extended to her societal role. However, Augustine was adamant that procreation was not the only purpose of marriage.

> It seems to me to be not only because of the procreation of children, but also because of the natural sociability that exists between the sexes.[65]

This is an interesting passage, since it seems at odds with Augustine's remark in his *Commentary on Genesis* that men would be better companions for each other, and that the only way in which woman could help man was that she bore children.

> Now, if the woman was not made for the man to be his helper in begetting children, in what was she to help him? She was not to till the earth with him, for there was not yet any toil to make help necessary. If there was any such need, a male helper would be better, and the same could be said of the comfort of another's presence if Adam were perhaps weary of solitude. How much more agreeably could two male friends, rather than a man and woman, enjoy companionship and conversation in a life shared together.[66]

Furthermore it is curious that Augustine refused to accept the possibility that women might be equal companions to men given his close relationship with his mother, with whom he enjoyed philosophical and theological discussions, most notably the one described in book 9 of *Confessions*.

> But we laid the lips of our hearts to the heavenly stream that flows from your fountain, the source of all life which is in you, so that as far as it was in our power to do so we might be sprinkled with its waters and in some sense reach an understanding of this great mystery.[67]

It seems that while Augustine could acknowledge the intellect of a specific woman, he could not accept that women in general might provide more than children to men. This was probably grounded in his belief that sex and marriage distracted men from serious thought. He also

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[63]*City of God* 22: 17.
[64]*City of God* 12: 22.
[65]*The Excellence of Marriage* 3: 3.
[66]*The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 9: 5.
[67]*Confessions* 9: 10.

extended this to say that women who were married could not concentrate fully on serving God, because they were distracted by their husbands and families.

> It is not that a woman of faith who maintains conjugal chastity does not think about how to please the Lord, but she certainly does it less, because she also thinks about affairs of the world and how to please her husband.[68]

Augustine believed that the first duty of a Christian was to 'please the Lord', which is why he advocated consecrated virginity as a way of life, because he believed that celibacy enabled people to devote themselves wholeheartedly to God. He was himself celibate after his conversion, thus practising what he preached. However, Augustine maintained that a childless marriage could not be dissolved any more than one which had produced children.

> The marriage bond remains, even if because of evident infertility no children result, despite the fact that this was the reason for entering into the marriage. Although the husband and wife now know that they will not have children, they are still not allowed to divorce and enter a relationship with someone else, not even for the purpose of having children.[69]

This is a major difference between Augustine and Plato, since the latter insisted in the *Laws* that marriages which were childless after ten years should be dissolved and both parties married to other people, as I discussed in chapter 6. In this instance Augustine was more humane that Plato, since he allowed for the development of friendship between married people and accepted that this was one of the benefits of marriage. However, it should be said that Plato and Augustine had very different aims. Plato's primary aim in this matter was to secure the future of the city; while Augustine wished to save souls, and considered that there were already enough people in the world.

> But I know what they are muttering: 'What if everyone chose to abstain from all sexual union', they say, 'how would the human race survive?' Would that everyone did want this, provided it is based on a love that comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith! Then the city of God would reach fulfilment much sooner and the end of the world would come more quickly.[70]

This was why Augustine could promote continence, with marriage as a guard against fornication for those not called to celibacy, which was exactly what Paul had advised.

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[68]*The Excellence of Marriage* 11: 12.
[69]*The Excellence of Marriage* 15.
[70]*The Excellence of Marriage* 10: 10.

> Marriages also have the benefit that sensual or youthful incontinence, even though it is wrong, is redirected to the honourable purpose of having children, and so out of the evil of lust sexual union in marriage achieves something good.[71]

For Augustine, then, the three goods of marriage were the friendship which arose between the couple; that it produced children; and that it was a sacramental bond which could not be dissolved except by death.

The friendship aspect of marriage was important to Augustine's work, and something of a break from Paul, who, as I have said, tended to advocate a very one-sided relationship in which all the love came from the husband and all the respect from the wife. Augustine, on the other hand, acknowledged the possibility of a relationship based upon mutual love and respect.

> As it is, however, in a good marriage, even with older people, although the passion of youth between man and woman has waned, the relationship of love between husband and wife continues strong, and the better persons they are, the earlier they begin by mutual consent to abstain from carnal union.[72]

This theory that marriage could be based upon companionship rather than sexual lust was overshadowed by the need to defend reproduction against heretics, including the Manichees, who condemned it.[73] In response to this condemnation, Augustine referred to married couples' 'honourable purpose of having children.' However, Augustine's vision of a marriage based on companionship was inspired by his belief that the Virgin Mary was a perpetual virgin, even after the birth of Christ and when she was married to Joseph,

> an upright man, one who would not take away by force what she had already vowed to God.[74]

I shall discuss Mary's virginity shortly, but here the point is that Augustine needed to find some grounds upon which to base his belief that Mary and Joseph were truly married. This led to his development of the doctrine of celibate marriages for Christians, since he believed that sex was not a vital part of marriage. Fidelity and the indissoluble sacramental bond were the primary goods of marriage, with procreation and sex a poor third.

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[71] *The Excellence of Marriage* 3: 3.

[72] *The Excellence of Marriage* 3: 3.

[73] Clark, E.A., 'Adam's Only Companion: Augustine and the early Christian debate on marriage' in *Recherches Augustiniennes* vol. 21 (1986) p 139.

Augustine's views on virginity, widowhood and sexual continence

As he showed in his advice to Ecdicia, Augustine expected wives to be submissive to their husbands, although this submission did not extend to having to tolerate adultery. However, he considered celibacy to be the best state for Christians of both sexes. Indeed, most of his writings in which he advocated virginity were addressed to women. Furthermore, consecrated virginity offered an escape from the subordination of human marriage by way of sacred marriage to Christ.

> May Christ help us, the son of the Virgin and the spouse of virgins, born in the flesh from a virgin womb and married spiritually in a virginal matrimony.[75]

The reference in this passage to the Virgin Mary gives a clue to Augustine's support for virginity. He taught that she had been a consecrated virgin before she ever knew that she was to bear Christ, although this was against Jewish custom.

> This is implied by the words of Mary's answer to the angel who brought her the message that she would bear a child. 'How is that to be,' she said, 'seeing I know not man?' She surely would not have said this, if she had not already made a vow consecrating herself to God as a virgin.[76]

This seems highly unlikely. Jewish girls were expected to be virgins before they married, and could be rejected if their future husbands even suspected that they were not. Since Mary was unmarried when she was told of the impending birth, it seems more likely that the Gospel writer wished to confirm her status as a virtuous woman by having her emphasise her virginal condition. Furthermore it seems a reasonable response from a young unmarried woman who has just been told that she is going to have a baby, along the lines of 'You must be joking'. However, by declaring that Mary had been a consecrated virgin before the Annunciation, Augustine created divine precedence for his support for virginity.

> In this way, by being born from a virgin who had decided to remain a virgin before she knew who would be born from her, Christ chose to approve of holy virginity rather than

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[74]*On Holy Virginity* 4: 4.
[75]*On Holy Virginity* 2: 2.
[76]*On Holy Virginity* 4: 4.

> command it. Even in the woman in whom he took the form of a slave, he wanted virginity to be voluntary.[77]

Describing Mary's virginity as a voluntary act also helped Augustine in his efforts to promote both marriage and virginity as viable ways of life, since he could not be accused of forcing people to do something which he taught that God had made voluntary.

Consecrated virginity also offered women an escape from male domination, if the woman joined a convent, since nuns were not under the direct control of any man. A male priest would be attached to the convent to celebrate Mass and carry out other priestly duties, but the Mother Superior was in charge of the regular running of the convent.

> It is primarily up to the superior to see that all that has been said here is put into practice and that infringements are not carelessly overlooked. It is her duty to point out abuses and to correct them. If something is beyond her competence and power, she should put the matter before the priest, whose authority in some respects is greater than her own.[78]

This might seem to imply that a woman could not even have ultimate authority over a group of women, were it not that the masculine version of the *Rule* has exactly the same instruction about obeying the chief monk and the priest who has oversight of the monastery.[79] It is also clear that Augustine envisaged his convent or monastery as a community of equals, where the 'superior' had authority without in fact being elevated in status.

> Because of your esteem for her she shall be superior to you; because of her responsibility to God she shall realise that she is the very least of all the sisters.[80]

Once again, the same instruction was given to monks. Indeed, the two versions of the *Rule* are the same in all respects. However, in his desire to make sure that monks were above suspicion of sexual misconduct, Augustine declared that no woman should be allowed to visit a monastery, in order to protect the reputation as well as the virtue of the monks. He was clearly concerned only about sexual temptation, and considered that monks would be able to resist any other form of temptation, since any man, however worldly or disreputable, could claim sanctuary in the

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[77]*On Holy Virginity* 4: 4.
[78]*The Rule of St Augustine* (feminine version) 7: 2.
[79]*The Rule of St Augustine* (masculine version) 7: 2.
[80]*The Rule of St Augustine* (feminine version) 7: 3.

monastery.[81] Augustine also issued strict instructions on how people following his *Rule* should behave towards the opposite sex.

> When you see a woman, do not keep provocatively looking at her. Of course, no one can forbid you to see women when you go out, but it is wrong to desire a woman or to want her to desire you. For it is not only by affectionate embraces that desire between man and woman is awakened, but also by looks. You cannot say that your inner attitude is good if with your eyes you desire to possess a woman, for the eye is the herald of the heart. And if people allow their impure intentions to appear, albeit without words but just by looking at each other and finding pleasure in each other's passion, even though not in each other's arms, we cannot speak any longer of true chastity which is precisely that of the heart.[82]

Once again, allowing for a gender change in those addressed and referred to, the instructions to women are exactly the same. Since Augustine was so conscious of the temptations of the secular world to those consecrated to the religious life, it seems likely that, in prohibiting the presence of women in monasteries and of men in convents, he intended to create the religious houses as oases free from at least one kind of temptation where initiates could be sure that they would not be afflicted by sexual desire. This was because he believed that it was worse to break a vow of virginity and chastity than never to have made the vow, as he showed in his *Letter* to Armentarius and Paulina, a married couple who had taken a vow of continence and wished to dissolve it.

> If you do not keep what you have vowed, you will not be the same as you would have been if you had not made the vow. For, in that case, you would have been less perfect, not worse; whereas now - which God forbid! - you will be as much worse off if you break your word to God as you will be more blessed if you keep it.[83]

He was also severe in his condemnation of those who considered undertaking celibacy, continence, or indeed any form of religiously controlled life, whether or not they entered a religious order, and then relinquished the intention. This was demonstrated in his letter to Boniface, a layman who had changed his mind about becoming a monk.

> While we were rejoicing over this proposal of yours, you sailed away and you married a wife. Your voyage was a matter of obedience, which, according to the Apostle, you owed to higher authority, but you would not have married a wife if you had not been overcome by concupiscence and given up the continence you had undertaken to keep.[84]

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[81]Zumkeller, A., *Augustine's Ideal of the Religious Life* (1986) p 43.
[82]*The Rule of St Augustine* (masculine version) 4: 4.
[83]*Letter* 127.
[84]*Letter* 220.

This letter also proves that Augustine's rule that married people should not embark unilaterally upon sexual continence, which he mentioned in his *Letter* to Ecdicia, applied equally to husbands and wives.

> I cannot now urge you to that life, for your wife is an obstacle to it, and without her consent it is not allowable for you to live in continence, because, although you should not have married her after what you said at Tubunae, she nevertheless married you in all innocence and sincerity, knowing nothing of all that.[85]

This passage, when taken with the *Letter* to Ecdicia, is interesting proof of the genuine nature of Augustine's call for equality of conjugal rights since he insisted that Boniface had no more right to impose continence upon his wife than Ecdicia had to force it upon her husband.

Augustine's horror of broken vows also informed his views on consecrated virgins and respectable matrons who were raped. He taught that such women did no wrong provided they felt no lust during their ordeal, and that suicide was not a permissible action for such women.

> There is, however, the fear that lust will defile even when it is another's. It will not defile, if it is another's, and if it defiles, it is not another's...Who of sane mind, therefore, will suppose that purity is lost if it so happens that the flesh is seized and overpowered, and another's lust exercised and satisfied on it?[86]

This was not believed to be the case in pagan Rome, where raped women often committed suicide in shame, and were regarded as right in doing so.

> Certainly, they extol with great praise the modesty of Lucretia, that noble woman of ancient Rome. When the son of Tarquin the king overcame her with violence and lustfully enjoyed her body, she made known the crime of that most deplorable young man to her husband Collatinus and her kinsman Brutus. These were men of the highest distinction and courage, whom she adjured to avenge her. Then, sick with the shame of what had been done to her, and unable to bear it, she slew herself.[87]

Augustine considered that this was supremely unjust, since the innocent victim Lucretia died, while her assailant who was the criminal was merely exiled. He did, however, make it quite clear that Lucretia was innocent only if she felt no lust.

> If it was not through any impurity on her part that she was taken against her will, then it was not justice by which, being innocent, she was punished.[88]

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[85]*Letter* 220.
[86]*City of God* 1: 18.
[87]*City of God* 1: 19.
[88]*City of God* 1: 19.

This, together with Augustine's view that married people who have sex with their spouses because the spouse demands it rather than out of lust still maintain their state of continence indicates that he believed that continence and chastity were primarily states of mind rather than the body. This is underlined by his description of 'true chastity which is precisely that of the heart' in his *Rule* cited above. He also declared that, far from being sinful, giving sexual gratification to one's spouse was a good deed.

> And insofar as you are paying what you are not also demanding, you are performing a work of mercy.[89]

However, he never explained how a man was to have sex without the stimulus of desire for his wife. It seems from his lamentations that the genitals no longer obey the will, which would be preferable to their present obedience to lust, that he did not expect husbands to be able to have sex with their wives purely as an act of will, which would suggest that they must still be governed by lust. Since continence and lust were incompatible, it would be difficult for men to fulfil their marital duty without losing their continent state to lust. By sheer physical fact it would be perfectly possible for women to submit to sexual intercourse out of duty, although one suspects that it would not be terribly satisfactory for their husbands! However, Augustine was adamant that marital continence had to be a reciprocal arrangement.

> But now some married man is all on fire to make a vow of sexual abstinence; let him look to his better half, let him see if she is following, and if she is, let him lead on; but if she isn't following, he mustn't put her away. Perhaps he is able to do this and she isn't, or she is able and he isn't; they must understand that they are one flesh.[90]

This was in an attempt to raise the status of marital fidelity in his congregation's mind, since he was saying that marital sex could be holy if undertaken out of duty rather than desire.[91] However, this might be all right in theory, but one wonders how such reciprocity could work in practice. Perhaps men were to be excused some degree of lust provided it was in response to an initial move by their wives. Given Augustine's horror of lust in any degree, this seems unlikely. It seems plausible that Augustine never explained how men were to perform their marital duty

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[89]*Sermon* 354A: 13.
[90]*Sermon* 354A: 3.

without lust because, having insisted upon complete equality of sexual rights and duties in marriage for both sexes, he did not want to admit that the biological facts were rather different.

> However, in this matter in which both sexes come together, while in all others the woman should be the man's servant, in this matter, I'm telling you, their status is equal.[92]

Furthermore, such an admission would be tantamount to saying that it was easier for women to be sexually continent and dedicated to God than it was for men. Augustine's emphasis on his belief that chastity was a state of mind is interesting in the light of his attempts to promote both consecrated virginity and marriage as valid ways of life for Christians, since it implies that marriage, even if it were not celibate, need not entail loss of chastity. However, it is still not clear how men were to achieve 'chastity of the heart' if they were not in celibate marriages.

Women who decided after marriage that they wished to become sexually continent could become consecrated widows on their husbands' death. Since childbirth was then a major cause of female mortality, those women who persuaded their husbands or were persuaded themselves into marital continence will have been much more likely to survive into widowhood than women who were not in continent marriages. There were clearly many such widows, since Augustine's work *The Excellence of Widowhood*, although addressed to one woman, was intended for many.

> Although I have addressed this letter to you, I have not written it only for you, and I have not overlooked the possibility that through you it might also be of benefit to others.[93]

As with his support of virginity, Augustine had to tread very carefully when advocating celibacy on widowhood, in order to avoid being accused of disparaging marriage. He even condoned second marriages, though as a less satisfactory alternative to chaste widowhood.

> The first thing for you to note, then, is that the excellence of what you have chosen does not mean that marrying again is condemned, but that it is honoured less.[94]

Once again this passage illustrates Augustine's reliance upon Paul for his doctrine, since Paul said something very similar to the Church at Corinth.

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[91]Hunter, D.G. 'Augustine, *Sermon* 354A: its place in his thought on marriage and sexuality' in *Augustinian Studies* vol. 25 (2002) pp 48&50.
[92]*Sermon* 354A: 4.
[93]*The Excellence of Widowhood* 1: 1.
[94]*The Excellence of Widowhood* 6.

> A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgement she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I have the Spirit of God.[95]

As with consecrated virgins, Augustine believed that holy widows should serve God, and could do it better than married women whose minds were distracted by husbands. This is an interesting piece of equality in Augustine's thought, since he also believed that men were distracted from heavenly thoughts by their wives. It is striking that Augustine was prepared to accord women sufficient intelligence to serve God by their mental capacity, and also to accept that they could think better without husbands. Clearly he did not expect women's only form of divine service to be preserving their chastity.

> Devote your whole mind, therefore, entirely to pleasing him who is *the most handsome of men*. You please him by means of his own grace, which is *spread on his lips*. Please him also with that part of your thoughts that would be absorbed with the world in order to please your husband.[96]

Clearly the contact with Monica, Maxima, Florentina and others had forced Augustine to realise that some women were intelligent and could think about theology and philosophy. He seems to have encouraged their enquiries, judging by his willingness to help Florentina. This is somewhat at odds with Paul, who adjured women to keep silent, and rely on their husbands for their education.

> If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.[97]

Augustine, however, seems to have expected consecrated widows to be intelligent. He certainly drew up a list of activities for them which would encourage intellectual and spiritual development.

> With holy chastity, therefore, let spiritual pleasures take the place of carnal ones: reading, prayer, the psalms, good thoughts, being occupied with good works, looking forward to the next life, having one's heart on high, and giving thanks for all these things to the Father of lights, from whom undoubtedly, as the scripture attests, every excellent thing we receive and every perfect gift comes to us.[98]

He was not so explicit about how consecrated virgins should spend their time, but it is safe to assume that their activities will have been similar. In that case there will have been a

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[95]*I Corinthians* 7: 39-40.

[96]*The Excellence of Widowhood* 19: 23. The phrases in italics refer to God and are Augustine's quotations from Psalm 45.

[97]*I Corinthians* 14: 35.

[98]*The Excellence of Widowhood* 21: 26.

considerable number of chaste, well informed, devout women in the early Church, whose existence is largely ignored because they left little trace apart from their letters to eminent men such as Augustine.

Augustine's views on slavery

Augustine had little to say about the condition or treatment of slaves. He believed that slavery had been inflicted upon humanity as punishment for the Fall, and that all levels of human existence were bound by slavery to sin, as I discussed in chapter 5. As a result of this view, he did not believe that the slavery of one human to another was a situation which should be avoided, since slavery to sin was common to all.

> By nature, then, in the condition in which God first created man, no man is the slave either of another man or of sin. But it is also true that servitude itself is ordained as a punishment by that law which enjoins the preservation of the order of nature, and forbids its disruption.[99]

He also believed that slaves could make their own servitude more tolerable by their behaviour to other people and their attitude to slavery.

> They can do this by serving not with cunning fear, but in faithful love, until all unrighteousness shall cease, and all authority and power be put down, that God may be all in all.[100]

This attitude of acceptance has its roots, as so often with Augustine, in Paul's teachings. Paul also taught that slaves who had become Christians should not seek freedom.

> Every one should remain in the state in which he was called. Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.[101]

This teaching probably grew out of a desire not to cause trouble in wider society, since Paul would have caused widespread disruption were he to have said that slavery was wrong and that Christians should neither have nor be slaves. An additional factor in Paul's failure to call for the

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[99]*City of God* 19: 15.
[100]*City of God* 19: 15.
[101]*I Corinthians* 7: 20-21.

abolition of slavery was his indifference to the conditions of the temporal world, which was rooted in his conviction that Christians were 'all one in Christ Jesus.'[102] Augustine's lack of condemnation for slavery is an example of his reluctance to question social conditions which were not incompatible with a Christian way of life.[103] He forbade adultery because he believed it to be morally wrong, but slavery to another human he regarded as an external condition and therefore not worthy of challenge. However, Augustine was strongly reminiscent of Plato when he described the ideal family.

> A man's household, then, ought to be the beginning, or a little part, of the city; and every beginning has reference to some end proper to itself, and every part has reference to the integrity of the whole of which it is part.[104]

This is very similar to Plato's belief that the state was dependent upon its individual citizens for its character, and vice versa. As a result of this, Augustine taught that slaves should be treated well.

> But those who are truly 'fathers of their families' are as much concerned for the welfare of all their households, in respect of the worship and service of God, as if they were all their children.[105]

Thus slavery was permitted in this life, but both slaves and masters were to live justly.

Conclusions

Augustine was concerned primarily with restoration of the soul and body to their perfect, prelapsarian condition by the grace of God through death and resurrection, so he was more interested in the next life than in improving conditions for either slaves or women in this life. Augustine's belief that the bodily resurrection meant that bodies of both sexes would be raised from the dead, coupled with his conviction that Adam and Eve could have had sexual intercourse in Paradise before the Fall, can be seen as part of his attempt to rehabilitate marital sex as intrinsically good, though now contaminated by lust brought about by the Fall. For women, there was an alternative to subordination to men, in that they could become consecrated virgins if they had not married; or after the death of their husbands they could become consecrated widows. In

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[102]*Galatians* 3: 28.
[103]Dyson (2001) p110.
[104]*City of God* 19: 16.

marriage, Augustine demanded equal conjugal rights for men and women. This, together with his insistence upon marital fidelity for both sexes, is the limit of his demands for equality, so that they could be said to be limited to sexual equality rather than equality of the sexes. Husbands and wives had the same rights, duties and restrictions imposed upon their sexual activities, which was a major difference from Greek and Roman custom; but equality stopped at the bedroom door. In all other aspects of married life, women were expected to be submissive to their husbands.

Throughout Augustine's writing on women and marriage there is a tension between his desire to promote celibacy as the ideal way of life for all Christians; and the necessity, brought about by heretical sects which undermined marriage, to promote marriage as a viable alternative, good in itself. He never satisfactorily resolved this difficulty, since even in his work *The Excellence of Marriage* he attested that virginity was preferable.

> If, therefore, we compare the actual reality in each case, there can be no doubt that the chastity of celibacy is superior to the chastity of marriage, although both are good.[106]

One can almost hear his frustration at having to promote something he believed to be second best. However, he overcame his difficulty to some extent by acknowledging that the celibate life was open to temptation, and that marriage could to some extent guard against this. His development, albeit incomplete, of a notion of marriage based on companionship rather than sex and reproduction also enabled him to praise marriage, and to promote the ideal of a celibate marriage dedicated to God. This notion remained incomplete because it was, as so often in Augustine's thought, obstructed by heretical doctrines from outside that marriage should be condemned because of its role in reproduction. Such doctrines had to be opposed, and compelled Augustine to exalt the good of reproduction and to play down his ideal of celibate marriage lest he, too, be branded heretical. Furthermore, he was hampered by his own inability to accept women as intelligent beings, in spite of the many instances he knew of clever women.

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[105]*City of God* 19: 16.
[106]*The Excellence of Marriage* 23: 28.

For married women and for slaves he offered no earthly escape from subordination. Even women in chaste, sexless marriages were expected to submit to their husbands in everything else, as he reminded Ecdicia. Slaves had to wait until their resurrection before they would be freed; while women could be liberated if they were widowed or never married.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

As I discussed in the first two chapters, women in pagan Greek and Roman and pre-Christian Jewish society were generally regarded as other, in relation to a male norm. They had no overt political power and could not hold office, though they could become influential through the men they married or gave birth to, as in the cases of Esther and Roman imperial women. Religious restrictions imposed upon women were considerable, both in pagan and Jewish society, though Jewish religion was more restrictive, since women could not become priests at all, while in pagan society there were several cults which had priestesses. For example, women were not permitted to speak or to sing individually in the synagogue, though men could do both, a rule which clearly influenced Paul's views on female participation in worship.

> As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.[1]

These two verses sum up Pauline and subsequent Christian teaching on female participation. Thus Paul's Jewish background, which shows itself in much of his writing, had a profound effect upon Christian doctrine, including that developed by Augustine.

Paul and Augustine both followed the custom, acquired in Paul's case from his contemporary social background combined with his earlier religious beliefs, and in Augustine's case from his social background and his knowledge of Paul's works, of regarding women in general as inferior to men. Both of them were nevertheless prepared to accept individual examples of intelligent, relatively liberated women, among them Phoebe, who was an official in her church and free to travel to Rome as Paul's envoy; and the women with whom Augustine corresponded on religious subjects. However, they were both adamant that married women

should be subject to their husbands in everything other than sexual rights and obligations, in which they both insisted firmly upon equality.

> For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.[2]
> However, in this matter in which both sexes come together, while in all others the woman should be the man's servant, in this matter, I'm telling you, their status is equal.[3]

Paul's writings were the source of the tension which exists in all Augustine's writing about and to women, between an insistence upon sexual equality within marriage; and a demand for the subordination of women to men in all other circumstances, including every other aspect of married life. This tension is evident in Paul's own writings, since he insisted in his advice to married couples that a husband's duty was to love his wife, and a wife's was to respect, or fear, her husband.

> Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.[4]

However, on the matter of sexual rights and duties, Paul flouted convention in that he insisted upon equality for both parties. Greek, Roman and Jewish society generally ascribed rights to the husband and duties to the wife, so that men could have affairs while women could not. Paul regarded marriage as a cure for adultery rather than an excuse for it.

> But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.[5]

This tension was compounded by Paul's belief, derived from his interpretation on *Genesis*, that woman was the cause of the Fall, and therefore all women were by nature inferior to men.

> For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.[6]

Augustine likewise regarded women as inferior to men and the cause of the Fall, and also morally weaker.

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[1]*I Corinthians* 14: 34-35.
[2]*I Corinthians* 7: 4.
[3]*Sermon* 354 A: 4.
[4]*Ephesians* 5: 33.
[5]*I Corinthians* 7: 2.
[6]*I Timothy* 2: 12-14.

> No doubt he began with the weaker of the human couple in order to achieve the whole of his purpose by degrees, supposing that the man would not be so easily deluded, or could not be trapped by his own error, but would succumb to the error of another.[7]

In this way, Augustine and Paul both followed the custom of society in regarding woman as other: for them she was weaker, more sinful, and had to be subdued.

Plato, however, flouted the convention of contemporary society, most notably in the *Republic* but also, though to a lesser extent, in the *Laws*. He believed that women, and indeed everyone, should be judged on grounds of intellectual merit rather than what he regarded as accidents of birth such as gender or societal status.

> Then there is no way of life concerned with the management of the city that belongs to a woman because she's a woman or to a man because he's a man, but the various natures are distributed in the same way in both creatures.[8]

In the *Laws*, Plato's stance was rather different. He had reinstated the family as the basic unit of society, and thus needed people to run households. He maintained in all his writing that a citizen's first duty was to the state, and it therefore made sense to him to demand that the chief responsibility of adults in the *Laws* was to marry and have a family. Although he insisted in the *Republic* that all citizens should fulfil the role in society to which they were best suited, he did not entirely support this idea in the *Laws*. Women were to be allowed to participate in government, but only after they had fulfilled their familial obligations.

> The age limits for marriage shall be: for a girl, from sixteen to twenty (these will be the extreme limits specified), and for a man, from thirty to thirty-five. A woman may hold office from the age of forty, a man from thirty.[9]

Plato never suggested, in the *Laws*, that men should be allowed to stay at home and look after the children while their wives went out to work, even if that were the natural inclination of both parents. This was in contrast to the *Republic*, in which, as I argued in chapter 6, Plato allowed men to be nurses if they wished to do so, 'since our offices are open to both sexes.'[10] This is the most obvious example of Plato's restriction of equality of the sexes in the *Laws*, though it must be

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[7]*City of God* 14: 11.
[8]*Republic* 455 D.
[9]*Laws* 785 B.
[10]*Republic* 460 B.

said that at no point in either work did he advocate an adoption of Athenian practice. Perhaps his most dramatic reform was his insistence upon universal education according to ability for both sexes and all classes, and this was a point upon which he insisted in both works. He was convinced that the failure to educate the female half of the population was a serious mistake.

> The state of affairs in our corner of Greece, where men and women do hot have a common purpose and do not throw all their energies into the same activities, is absolutely stupid. Almost every state, under present conditions, is only half a state and develops only half its potentialities, whereas with the same cost and effort, it could double its achievement.[11]

It is noteworthy that this passage comes not from the liberal *Republic* but from the more restrictive *Laws*, which shows the depth of Plato's conviction that women should be educated. This rule would have had a considerable impact upon citizens' lives, since intelligent women would no longer be condemned to a life of ignorance and drudgery, but would instead receive the same education as intelligent men and thus be able to develop their abilities.

Repression was ingrained in ancient social practice, towards both women and slaves. Plato was the first person to have the courage to imagine a society based not on repression of the weak by the strong, but on equality according to ability regardless of gender. He was not totally egalitarian, in that he did not believe that all humans were completely equal in all respects, since he acknowledged that differing intellectual ability made some people fit to rule and others to be ruled, and invented the myth of the metals to explain this difference. However, he decreed that such fitness should be decided upon grounds of ability alone. Augustine never envisaged an earthly society of equals, though he accepted that distinctions on grounds of gender would not obtain in the perfect society of heaven.

> When the body is made incorruptible, all the members and inward parts which we now see assigned to their various necessary offices will join together in praising God; for there will then be no necessity, but only full, certain, secure and everlasting felicity. For all those elements of the body's harmony of which I have already spoken, those harmonies which are now hidden, will then be hidden no longer.[12]

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[11] *Laws* 805 A.
[12] *City of God* 22: 30.

This difference in attitude may have been because Plato never expected all the principles of the *Republic* to be put into practice, while Augustine wanted his audience to reform their behaviour immediately according to his dicta. Plato's more realistic ideas were expressed in the *Laws*, which was framed as a feasible solution to the question how should a state be governed, and it is in this document that his ideas on the position of women and slaves became restricted somewhat. Augustine's eyes were firmly fixed on the goal of achieving eternal salvation, so he was not concerned with social practices in this life. He believed that social injustices in this life would be rectified by God in heaven, where all Christians would be equal on account of the divine grace they had received, although there would be higher honour accorded to martyrs and virgins. The temporal world was fleeting, and had no bearing upon the eternal world, so its conditions did not matter. Justice would only be restored by God. Furthermore, it would have caused outrage among pagans to demand universal equality of the sexes and the abolition of slavery, so he may have thought it safer to maintain the status quo. His insistence upon sexual equality in human marriage suggests that he knew that the social subordination of women was wrong, and shows that, when he believed something to be totally wrong, he opposed it vociferously, as was the case with sexual inequality. This theory is borne out by his promise of total equality in heaven. Plato had abolished the old order of slavery and subordinate women, and therefore had to find roles for these newly emancipated people. Much of the *Republic* was devoted to this task. Augustine relieved himself of the burden of this problem by leaving social reform to God's heavenly society. The emancipation Plato brought about gave new duties as well as new rights to women and former slaves. They could expect protection from their government; but they also owed it their support and loyalty.

Plato was not a feminist in that he did not insist that some roles in government had to be filled by women. If there were no women intellectually capable of being guardians, then all the guardians would be male. However, he did not believe that the essential fact of their gender made women unfit to govern. He did not share the view of his contemporaries that men were the

only citizens of a state.[13] His concern for the state made Plato want to develop the best possible citizen body. Matters which are not in the public domain are difficult for a government to control, and Plato wanted all aspects of life to be controlled by the state. To that end, most actions had to have a public aspect, and women had to join the public life of the community in order to be overseen. The institution of communal meals was one way in which Plato ensured this in the *Laws*. Things were rather different in the *Republic*, where all property was held in common and private life did not exist. There were no private houses in the *Republic*, so all meals were communal, as opposed to only some in the *Laws*. Furthermore, in both societies but especially in the *Laws*, women were to be responsible for the early development of children. Plato was convinced that childhood was a supremely important phase of life, so it was necessary that the early educators of future citizens should themselves be well educated. The *Republic* abolished the traditionally female roles of wife and mother when it abolished the family unit. Women were thus left redundant, apart from their role in childbirth. The details of this are preposterous, but the aim, of enabling women to participate in other spheres of life, is a good one. Plato used an extreme method to try to achieve a difficult aim. Plato therefore needed to find a role for them to fill in society. He could have insisted that all women were capable of was bringing up children, but he held fast to his theory that distinctions should be made and tasks allocated on grounds of ability rather than gender or social status. In this way able women were to be encouraged to join able men in government, and men with a strong nurturing instinct would be able to become children's nurses. This was a continuation of the 'myth of the metals' which decreed that children of different abilities should be treated according to ability rather than depending upon their parentage.

Augustine believed that after the Fall all humanity was damned, apart from those fortunate individuals who received God's ultimate gift of grace. This belief in the eternally

[13]The citizen body of Athens in Plato's day comprised about 5,000 men; while the total population was nearer 20,000, the others being women, children, slaves and metics.

condemned status of creation meant that he was not concerned with liberating either women or slaves from their temporary earthly oppression. He believed that all souls redeemed by grace would after death be accorded new status regardless of their gender or social position upon earth. Instead, this new status depended upon how they had lived their lives upon earth.

> In this way, because actual eternal life will be the same for all the saints, all receive the equal payment of a denarius; but because in that eternal life the brilliance of their merits will shine out differently, in the Father's house there are many rooms. So it will be that with the equal denarius no one will live more lavishly than anyone else; but with the many rooms some will be honoured with greater distinction than others.[14]

This passage refers to the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, who were all paid a denarius each regardless of how long they had worked.[15] In this passage the denarius seems to betoken the gift of grace, which does not vary in the degree to which it is bestowed, while the greater honour which some souls will attain is the result of their earthly behaviour. Martyrs and consecrated virgins would have the highest status, but could be of either sex, slave or free.

> Whether the hundredfold fruitfulness refers to virginity dedicated to God, or whether those different degrees of fruitfulness are to be understood in some other way, which we may not have mentioned, it remains true, as I had begun to say, that no one, it seems to me, would dare to consider virginity superior to martyrdom, and no one would doubt that martyrdom is a gift that remains hidden if it is not put to the test.[16]

Augustine was ultimately concerned with eternal rather than earthly life, and so concerned himself with helping his audience to achieve spiritual liberation through faith in Christ rather than gaining physical emancipation.

Plato was also concerned with spiritual liberation, but believed that it could be achieved in this life by an ascent to knowledge of the Good. In the *Republic* and to a lesser extent in the *Laws* he taught that humans should be judged according to intellectual criteria rather than on grounds of gender or birth status. The soul was believed to be immortal, but its destiny after death depended entirely upon its behaviour during life, as Socrates explained in the *Crito* when he decided not to escape his death sentence.

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[14]*On Holy Virginity* 26: 26.
[15]*Matthew* 20.
[16]*On Holy Virginity* 47.

> But if you depart after shamefully returning wrong for wrong and injury for injury, after breaking your agreements and commitments with us, after injuring those you should injure least - yourself, your friends, your country and us - we shall be angry with you while you are still alive, and our brothers, the laws of the underworld, will not receive you kindly, knowing that you tried to destroy us as far as you could.[17]

The chief difference between the Platonic rule for the salvation of the soul and Christian attempts, including those by Augustine, to secure the same thing, was that Christian salvation was performed by divine grace, an external force acting upon the soul, to which Plato had no equivalent. For Plato, souls were awarded life after death according to how they had lived. Education helped, but this was not a truly external force, since it merely developed existing qualities rather than creating a new condition. In the *Republic*, those in the Cave were able to save themselves if they were correctly educated, either by themselves or the state, and then had a duty to go back and free other souls. Plato's view of spiritual liberation both in this life and for eternity was entirely self-deterministic. For Augustine, liberation depended entirely upon God's grace, which was a purely external force over which the recipient had no control.

The *Laws* was a development of Plato's views that one of the chief purposes of a state was to secure its survival by producing future generations of citizens, and as a result its rules were rather more restrictive than those formulated in the *Republic*, whose chief concern was that its citizens should be as good as possible for the sake of the state, since superior citizens would lead to a superior state. In the *Laws* this was altered slightly to a belief that a well ordered state would produce good citizens, though clearly such a state could not exist without such citizens. It is very difficult to say whether Plato regarded the state or the individual as of supreme importance, since the state was the individual enlarged, but the individual was also the state in miniature. However, he was always willing to sacrifice individual interests to those of the state, as in the case of restricting women's activities in the *Laws* and reinstituting slavery because he thought it would benefit the state, but he was not prepared to sacrifice the interests of the state to those of the individual. Another reason for the reinstitution of slavery in the *Laws* was that the

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[17]*Crito* 54 C.

family unit had been brought back as the basic societal unit, and no respectable household in ancient Greece could function without slaves. This was an aspect of his social conditioning which Plato could not overcome: he had been brought up with families and slaves, and could not divorce the two. The gender barrier, which had been removed in the *Republic*, existed in the *Laws*, but was nonetheless greatly reduced in comparison with Plato's contemporary society, in that women were permitted a role in government, albeit after their childbearing and nurturing years were over. Thus the desire for women to be able to fulfil their abilities was partially subsumed in the greater need of the state for children, but was not totally neglected. This was also true of the institution of slavery. Private households needed slaves to run them, but those slaves should be well treated and trained, perhaps with a view to progressing towards the abolition of slavery, as I argued in chapter 6. The class barrier was also removed in the *Republic*, since children of gold, silver, bronze or iron could be born to any parents. There is nothing akin to the 'myth of the metals' in the *Laws*, but since slavery had been reinstated to fulfil the needs of the state, it would seem likely that social mobility was not envisaged as being quite so fluid as it was to have been in the *Republic*. However, I believe that the ambiguities and inconsistencies surrounding some of the legislation in the *Laws*, particularly concerning slavery, indicate that Plato intended that state to be a starting point for a society which would eventually evolve into the ideal of the *Republic*. He never actually said this, but I think it is clear from his evident reluctance to allow slavery. Furthermore, the level of education would be such that citizens under the *Laws* would themselves be drawn towards the ideals of the *Republic*.

Plato and Augustine both advocated an intellectual and spiritual ascent from attention to things of this world to knowledge of the ultimate Truth, which Plato called the Good and Augustine knew as God. However, Plato was the only one to say that anyone who was intellectually capable of this ascent could make it regardless of their gender. Augustine accepted that some exceptional women were capable of it, especially if they were consecrated virgins, but in general a married woman would be 'concerned about the affairs of the world and how to please her

husband.'[18] There is a similarity here to Plato's reasons for abolishing property and the family in the *Republic*.

> But if they acquire private land, houses and currency themselves, they'll be household managers and farmers instead of guardians.[19]

In both cases worldly things were seen as a hindrance to the ideal life of contemplation, though Plato did not advocate celibacy because he needed to secure the future of his city. It is ironic that Plato was the only one to allow any woman the potential for knowledge, since he is the one about whom it is not absolutely certain that he had intelligent female associates, though there was probably at least one female student at the Academy. Augustine had several female correspondents, and Paul also knew intelligent women, but they tended to regard such women as exceptions rather than exemplars to the female sex. The both neglected the Jewish tradition of respect for Wisdom as female, and for wisdom in women, as exemplified in the Proverbs: 'she opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.'[20] Paul will have known this passage and others like it, but he ignored it and indeed reacted against it to say that women might not teach. Owing to the Christian doctrine of Eve's involvement in humanity's fall from Paradise, Paul and Augustine became distracted by women's physical otherness and could not acknowledge their mental similarities to men as Plato had done.

> Furthermore, isn't one woman philosophical or a lover of wisdom, while another hates wisdom? And isn't one spirited and another spiritless?...So one woman may have a guardian nature and another not, for wasn't it qualities of this sort that we looked for in the natures of the men we selected as guardians?[21]

Augustine would never have agreed with this, since although he conceded that there was a 'natural sociability that exists between the different sexes,' he was also convinced that woman's primary purpose was to assist in procreation.[22]

> I do not see in what sense the woman was made as a helper for the man if not for the sake of bearing children.[23]

This conviction left little room for the establishment of any kind of equality.

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[18]*The Excellence of Marriage* 10: 10, quoting *I Corinthians* 7: 34.
[19]*Republic* 417 A.
[20]*Proverbs* 31: 26.
[21]*Republic* 456 A.
[22]*The Excellence of Marriage* 3.

It is interesting that, although Plato, Paul and Augustine all believed that the soul was ungendered, Plato was the only one to conclude that mental ability was not affected by gender. Paul and Augustine were too heavily influenced by their predecessors to be able to look past physical outer seeming to the truth beneath. Paul's Jewish background taught him that women were responsible for the Fall, and Augustine followed Paul. They could both accept that the souls of all Christians were 'all one in Christ Jesus,'[24] but they were sure that physical nature also mattered and affected how women should be treated. Thus there is a considerable conflict evident in the writings of Paul and Augustine between the belief in ungendered souls, and of their equality under Christ, against their conviction of woman's inferiority to man in the human condition. The only exception to the rule that women should be subordinate to men was their insistence upon sexual equality within marriage, but this could never extend to equality of the sexes in other spheres. Plato was the only one capable of arriving at the logical conclusion that, if women's souls were not gendered and were equal in quality to those of men, they should be educated equally and treated as equals on grounds of intellect rather than gender. This was probably because Plato did not have to contend with the theological doctrine of the Fall. Neither Paul nor Augustine entertained the possibility that education might cure the 'weakness' of women, as Plato did. They decreed that this weakness made women unsuitable for public life, and justified their subordination. Plato, on the other hand, considered education to be even more important for women, precisely because of their 'weakness'. Women in early Christianity who became educated did so in spite of the system, like Socrates in Athens. Plato would have encouraged them to do so, for their own good and that of society in general.

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[23]*Literal Commentary on Genesis* 5: 9.
[24]*Galatians* 3: 28.

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